

SENATE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL LEGISLATION COMMITTEE
AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE

Question No. 136

Senator MacDonald asked the following question at the hearing on 17 February 2006:

Cooperation between AFP and WA Police: Please provide a copy of the statement made by former Police Minister for Western Australia, the Hon Michelle Roberts MLA.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

The following Question without Notice was asked in the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia on 23 November 2005.

767. Mr M.J. COWPER to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services:

I refer to the latest figures to November showing that the number of officers leaving the Police Service has worsened by 49 per cent over the same period last year and that about 305 officers are expected to quit by the end of this year.

- (1) Is the minister aware that the academy can train only up to 350 officers annually?
- (2) Is the minister aware that the actual enrolment rates are under this level, with the current enrolments for December and January standing at just 18 and nine respectively?
- (3) What does the minister plan to do to reverse this drain on the Western Australia Police Service?
- (4) Does the minister concede that the government is not on target to recruit the extra 350 police officers, with attrition virtually matching recruitment?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS replied:

I thank the member for Murray for asking this question.

(1)-(4) Recruiting 350 police officers will be a challenge for government for a number of reasons. One is that a number of additional police officers are leaving the service for a variety of reasons. Some may be leaving because of the Commissioner of Police's emphasis on the Frontline First policy and their need to be fit, able and up to the job. Some, no doubt, are reassessing their future in that regard. However, it is of more concern that a large number of officers have been poached by the Australian **Federal Police**. In the past decade the AFP has not increased its recruitment by training its own officers. All jurisdictions around Australia have the same issue with the AFP. It allows the state police services to conduct all the recruitment and training of officers and then poaches those officers by offering them a higher wage to attract them. We have, therefore, lost an unprecedented number of officers to the AFP in the past couple of years, as have other state police services. We have also lost police officers to lucrative overseas employment deals. Some of those are in areas of the world in which many of us would not like to live, but they offer very lucrative wage deals that are sometimes well more than double the current pay of police officers and vastly different tax arrangements; therefore, that is a concern. However, we have implemented plans to ensure we are able to recruit 350 officers above the attrition rate. Among the various plans is an increase in police

recruitment advertising campaigns, which I am sure members of this house will have noted. We have also commenced a recruitment drive in both the United Kingdom and Ireland. I understand that interviews of officers will take place in both the UK and Ireland in December. We therefore anticipate that some of our recruitment will be from overseas. We have also put in place recruitment strategies in other states of Australia to attract police officers from other state police services to come to Western Australia. This is a very big change from the situation during the former government's term, when there was essentially no recognition of the status of any police officer in another police service above the level of constable who wanted to transfer to the Western Australia Police. As opposition spokesperson for police, I recall receiving correspondence from officers in other states about that issue. I remember quite clearly correspondence from a woman sergeant in South Australia, whose husband had been offered a good job in the mining industry in Western Australia, asking whether she could transfer across at sergeant's level. I wrote to the Commissioner of Police of the day about that and the request was declined. She was advised that she would have to start again at the police academy. The standard response then was that she should do six months' training at the Western Australia police academy, graduate as a constable and her previous service would be taken into account when she applied for promotion. That is really not good enough.

The member for Hillarys would have noted at the last police graduation that a number of officers were brought in more directly after a very limited amount of training. It depends on how much training is appropriate to bring them up to speed to be operational within the WA Police. Sometimes they need to spend as little as two weeks on additional training and advice at the academy before they become fully operational.

Rest assured, Mr Speaker, that the Western Australia Police Service and the Western Australian government are absolutely committed to getting 350 police officers above attrition, and the government has put in place strategies to ensure that will occur.