COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE AUSTRALIAN CRIME COMMISSION

Reference: Future impact of serious and organised crime on Australian society

MONDAY, 13 AUGUST 2007

CANBERRA

Members: Senator Ian Macdonald *(Chair)*, Mr Kerr *(Deputy Chair)*, Senators Bartlett, Mark Bishop, Parry and Polley and Mrs Gash, Mr Hayes, Mr Richardson and Mr Wood

Members in attendance: Senators Mark Bishop, Parry and Polley and Mrs Gash, Mr Hayes and Mr Wood

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The future impact of serious and organised crime on Australian society.

With particular reference to:

a. Future trends in serious and organised crime activities, practices and methods and their impact on Australian society;

b. Strategies for countering future serious and organised crime;

c. The economic cost of countering future organised crime at a national and state and territory level; and

d. The adequacy of legislative and administrative arrangements, including the adequacy of cross-jurisdictional databases, to meet future needs.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 5.32 pm

BICKERTON, Mr Peter, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Operations, CrimTrac

CAHILL, Mr Matthew, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Support, CrimTrac

McDEVITT, Mr Ben, Chief Executive Officer, CrimTrac

McLAY, Ms Nicole, Chief Financial Officer, CrimTrac

CHAIR (Senator Ian Macdonald)—I welcome the witnesses from CrimTrac for this public hearing of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission. Today's hearing is for the committee's inquiry into the future impact of serious and organised crime. The terms of reference direct the committee to do certain things. Our guests have been with us before and we have asked them to come back, so I will not go through the formalities. This is your second appearance and we are particularly grateful to you for coming back to clarify some issues. The secretary might have indicated to you the sorts of things we are looking at. So do you want to make a short opening statement or will we tell you what we are looking for and you can go from there?

Mr McDevitt—I spoke with the secretariat in relation to our first appearance and then had the call to come back before the committee to try to assist with clarifying the status of the various databases that are maintained by CrimTrac. We have put together a folder of four documents for the committee. One is an overview of CrimTrac and each of our systems. The second is a PowerPoint presentation that we had been preparing in anticipation of a visit by the committee. We are hoping that that might still occur at some point in the future. The third is a copy of the strategic plan and the fourth is a one-page chart which gives you some detail on each of our systems. I am more than happy to hand those across.

CHAIR—Thank you. I apologise to you for messing you about regarding our visit. We had arranged to come and see you but then things happened and we have had to put it off. I am reluctant to do it if only one or two members are available because I know you go to a bit of trouble and it is a considerable impost on your time. From our side running into an election, people are not as free as they might otherwise be. We will try and work through to that.

Mr McDevitt—We will make ourselves available any time that you and the committee are able to visit.

CHAIR—Did you want to say anything else?

Mr McDevitt—My understanding, from our last appearance and from reading some of the questions that were asked of us and of other organisations that appeared before the committee, is that there has been some confusion in relation to a number of databases and the information they provide. I was going to try to clarify that as best I could for the committee in terms of the types of databases that are out there. For example, we have a database called the minimum nationwide person profile, which is a database which assembles factual information—not intelligence but factual information—around persons of interest. I just ask you to have a look at page 10 of the PowerPoint presentation pages which gives a description of the MNPP. This is a system which

was approved by police ministers late last year for rollout across the country—and it will be rolled out fully across the country by the end of July next year. I think some confusion has been created in relation to discussion about information sets relating to persons of interest. For example, there has been some discussion about ASICs and MSICs or the holders of explosives licences or pilots licences and whether that information could or should be held centrally. If you see the slides on page 10 you will see that on the MNPP at the moment a person is listed on that database and information is held on that database in relation to one of 11 reasons as to why a person is a person of interest on that database. You can see there that there are warnings, warrants, wanted, offence history, firearms, orders, bail—they are an unidentified person or body, they are a missing person, they are an escapee or they are listed on the ANCOR database. I guess the point that I wanted to make is that this is—

CHAIR—What is ANCOR?

Mr McDevitt—ANCOR is the child sex offender register. Those 11 involvements are the 11 reasons why police jurisdictions around the country have agreed to share information on persons of interest for any one of those 11 reasons.

Senator PARRY—Does that mean a person—say if you have a warrant issued for your arrest, or a money warrant or anything—then automatically becomes a person of interest?

Mr McDevitt—A person of interest on that database. I hasten to add that a person of interest is not necessarily a criminal. As you can see, missing persons are on the database. Persons who are linked to firearms are on the database.

CHAIR—If you have got a firearms licence you would be on the database?

Mr McDevitt—There would be a flag on this database to say that you have an involvement with firearms and then the relevant police could go searching beyond that and find the licence details and so on. This is factual information which is assembled on individuals. The committee asked a question of DOTARS during their appearance—I cannot recall which of you asked it— along the lines of whether there is any reason why ASIC information for example could not be held centrally? My answer to the committee is that there is a number of issues here in terms of demonstrating a need and there obviously needs to be a policy position taken that we want to be able to hold that ASIC information centrally. I do not believe there would be any significant hurdles technically in being able to create an additional involvement, for ASIC for example, on this database.

Mr HAYES—Then with the ASIC, as opposed to simply going through the AFP—which seems to be a long process according to DOTARS and they are trying to streamline that—would that streamline the process?

Mr McDevitt—There are two separate issues. If someone at the moment is applying for an ASIC they will go through the AFP and the AFP will then send the requests to us or the name and basic biodata to CrimTrac. What we will do is a check on whether or not that person has a criminal background. That will actually be drawn from this particular involvement called offence history essentially—it is the sort of information that they will see. Although it comes from another system at the moment, it is the sort of information that would be contained in offence

history. It would be conviction based information. That would go back and be utilised by decision makers about whether or not they would grant an ASIC—airport security identification card. That is a slightly separate process from the fact that once they are granted an ASIC there is a list held by AusCheck of people who hold an ASIC. At the moment, those names and that detail do not sit within the MNPP. My point is that it could, as could a range of other information sets. I am not personally pushing for ASIC information to be held on the MNPP. My point is that we collectively need to resist building additional databases when in actual fact what it is that law enforcement might be after is just a capability to bring together information sets.

Mr HAYES—The fact that someone has an explosive licence or something like that, would that also not be significant for the MNPP—capturing that information as well?

Mr McDevitt—Again, at the moment my understanding in relation to explosives licences is that the state and territory jurisdictions maintain records of who is issued with an explosive licence or a licence to hold fertilisers or whatever within the jurisdictions. At the moment my understanding is that that information is not centrally located.

Mr HAYES—Not only not located but not flagged anywhere. So unless you have the wherewithal to go about and just conduct further inquiries interstate or in other jurisdictions, you may still not know that unless it is captured somewhere.

Mr McDevitt—That is exactly right. The relevant police officer or the investigators would have to conduct those inquiries around the separate jurisdictions to be able to determine whether or not somebody had an explosives licence.

Mr WOOD—They are actually stored within the departments in the various states so the police do not have access to them at all unless they deliberately make a specific request. It is the same thing with the airport security card and also explosives. You mentioned ammonium nitrate fertiliser. That has been my great concern and also has been supported through questioning with the majority of police commissioners who have come before the inquiry so far. As a committee, we would like to know whether the ASIC and explosives and maritime cards and ammonium nitrite fertiliser information can be stored on CrimTrac so when the police actually undertake their checks on the person, who may be involved in potential terrorist activity or who could even be a career criminal, they immediately find the information. Rather than going through the convoluted process of contacting departments in particular, or even having the situation where they may have a licence in Queensland and be in the Queensland police computer but have no idea—

CHAIR—I think we have got the question. What is the answer?

Mr McDevitt—The answer is that the MNPP certainly provides a platform whereby that could occur. At the moment there are 11 involvements. That could be, and I suspect will be, increased in the future.

CHAIR—So we could put on the ASIC explosives, maritime, ammonium nitrate et cetera. What needs to be done to do that?

Mr McDevitt—At the moment those involvements are determined by the jurisdictions. The police commissioners have agreed that these are the sets of information that we want to share amongst ourselves.

CHAIR—The 11 you have got there?

Mr McDevitt—Those 11.

CHAIR—So you would need all the police commissioners to agree if you were to put on ASIC information or explosives information?

Mr McDevitt—That would be correct, and we would have to identify whether or not there are any legislative—

Mr KERR—For the police to agree you would need to have the whole of jurisdictions to agree because the access to the source material would be essential.

CHAIR—You are saying it is technically doable but it requires policy decisions of whoever is holding the information to make it available to you?

Mr McDevitt—That is correct.

CHAIR—You are going to tell us about some others, but while we are on MNPPs does anybody else have clarifications?

Mr HAYES—In terms of the example that was used in the course of this inquiry where a police officer pulls over somebody in Port Hedland for not paying a petrol bill on a drive-through and not discovering that that person is wanted on a murder charge in Victoria and the next thing the copper gets shot. How is it that that information does not come through in terms of what that police officer accessed?

Mr McDevitt—That is just a slightly different issue. The one sort of database that we have been talking about at the moment is a database which holds information on persons of interest. The other type of database which would give you the answer to the question that you are looking for is a database on national case management for police across the country. At the moment those Victorian police officers in the example that you have given who have gone to an investigation in the first place, they have set up an investigation—and in that case it was a double murder I think—they would create an incident on their case management system. The problem at the moment is that their case management system is the Victoria Police LEAP system which does not, as a matter of course, talk to the Western Australian system or to the South Australian system, or to any of the other systems. So what we have in this country at the moment in terms of case management systems—so if a police officer goes to a burglary, goes to a murder, goes to whatever job, they create a job on their case management system and they then manage the information on that case—is that we have seven separate case management systems. I think the lack of a single national case management system has been identified. In fact in the strategic plan which was approved by ministers last year you will see that national case management is listed as a potential opportunity. On page 6 of that plan it talks about case management and whether or not we should actually—

Mr HAYES—Is this an opportunity or a priority?

Mr McDevitt—I think it is a high priority. I think that at the moment criminals in this country take advantage of the fact that we do utilise different case management systems.

Senator MARK BISHOP—In this case, the thing that Chris is referring to, in Victoria the person involved would have been wanted, he would have an offence history, he would have firearm records—he has been involved in a double murder in Victoria. I understand that information is on the case management system. Why would it not also have been on the MNPP, because I presume he fitted some of those 11 categories there?

Mr McDevitt—If he had an involvement with firearms, then you are right, it should actually show that individual as having a link to firearms if that had been picked up and that had been put on to the database.

Senator MARK BISHOP—Or a warrant would have been issued for his arrest arising from that.

Mr McDevitt—I am not sure if that had occurred. I suspect that it would probably be more likely to have been a warning rather than a warrant. But your point is right that there would possibly be a warning issued in relation to that individual. We maintain the database but we rely on data being put on by investigators. So there is a reliance there. The other thing about a case management system, and where things become difficult, is that the whole idea of the systems that we build, whether they are around persons of interest, fingerprints, vehicles or whatever, is that they support operational police to do their job and be able to share information. I guess what I am saying is that no matter where it is in Australia, when a police officer goes to a burglary, for example, they go to an address and they will want certain information. There are vehicles in the driveway and they will want to do checks on those vehicles. They will want to know who lives at that house. They will want to know if anyone is wanted on a warrant, whether there are warnings, whether there are firearms at the house and so on. If you have a single case or incident management system then that provides the backbone by which all these other systems just connect into that. At the moment, every time CrimTrac builds a system to assist police to share information, we have got to find seven different ways of plugging that in because they all have their own—

CHAIR—Can I just interrupt you. Why is it not there? Is it that the Victorian police, in this instance, did not put it on the MNPP?

Mr McDevitt—I am not sure if in that particular—

CHAIR—Say this is a hypothetical. If that happened, would that be the only reason?

Mr McDevitt—Yes. The system is reliant on people putting information—

CHAIR—If it could be on the MNPP, why do you need a national case management system for police central database? Could it not go into here?

Mr HAYES—I will give part of it—and I am not answering the question for you, of course. He has rung to find out about this bloke who has not paid his petrol bill. He has contacted the Western Australian police and they have gone through their case management, and they have not got anything on this guy there. They have not interrogated further to find out that he probably would have been on the MNPP as a person of interest in a double homicide in Victoria. They did not find that out. All they got was that there was nothing on him. So he goes and pulls him over and gets shot.

Mr WOOD—Could I give the members a bit of insight, as a former Victorian police officer. I would be absolutely amazed if the Victoria Police LEAP database did not have this guy as wanted. I am sure he would have been wanted and that it would have come up. If anyone had checked, it would have come up with lights and bells that this guy was wanted for murder or whatever else. You are saying that they would have to actually re-enter that data to put it on the CrimTrac system. Is that the problem or not? I think the committee members are trying to find out. If he is on LEAP, why is he not automatically on CrimTrac?

Mr McDevitt—He probably would be. Part of the problem here is that the MNPP at the moment actually is not rolled out across the country, but will be as of July next year. That does not mean that we do not have the system that you would be familiar with which is the national names index, which should hold some of that information in terms of warnings for a particular individual or so on. The MNPP, however, will give much richer information. It will say, 'Yes, there's a warning and the warning is because of this additional information in relation to the particular individual.'

Mr HAYES—Will it become the national crime management database?

Mr McDevitt—The MNPP will merely give you police factual information on persons of interest. They then need in addition to that a national incident management system by which they actually manage the incidents.

Mr HAYES—That is the crucial bit. In all the discussion that has gone on with A-Gs, AFP and all the rest of it, jurisdiction by jurisdiction, this is not what we are really picking up. MNPP and a national incidence management database are two different things.

Mr McDevitt—Absolutely. They are two different types of databases altogether.

Mr HAYES—So it will provide an effective tool for a police officer, say, in Albury to find out that a bloke who is picked up on the other side of Wodonga is actually wanted for a burglary somewhere?

Mr McDevitt—That is right. The vulnerability at the moment is that if you have a single burglar who lives on a border—it could be Albury-Wodonga or somewhere up north, Tweed Heads-Coolangatta—they could be moving back and forth across the state border committing crimes. Despite the best efforts of police, particularly at borders to ensure that they are sharing information—they are doing some really good things—there is not a single case management system nationally which automatically would ensure that that information was shared.

CHAIR—Again, if they are wanted it would be on the MNPP. Why do you then need in addition to the MNPP a national case management police system?

Mr McDevitt—It would make sure that you had connectivity around the country in terms of offenders who were moving across borders. You would then start to be able to do—

CHAIR—But the MNPP is rolled out—as of July next year—and if someone is wanted in Victoria he will appear on the MNPP.

Mr KERR—There is a difference with a case management system which is much more information rich. In other words, I think it means that, for example, if you are living in New South Wales and skipping over to Queensland to do your burglaries, Queensland will probably have the management of it because the offence is occurring in Queensland, but the fellow is living in New South Wales and the local police—

CHAIR—That is a different thing. First of all, we just want to know that if someone does not pay for his petrol in Western Australia and the Western Australian police look up the MNPP they will say, 'This guy, according to the MNPP, is wanted for double murder in Victoria.' Will that be the case in July of next year?

Mr McDevitt—The framework will be in place to allow exactly that to occur as of July next year. It is dependent on the officers making the decision to actually make sure that that information does go on.

Mr WOOD—If it is on LEAP or on a state's own database you are saying that after July next year that it will automatically also go on to the central one?

Mr Bickerton—For Victoria it is already there—and New South Wales. I think it was from May this year that the 8,500 operational police in Victoria all have access to MNPP by default.

Senator MARK BISHOP—The information is going to be available Australia-wide from July next year and the information is already available on the various state systems. Are there any restrictions on access by the constable in Port Hedland seeking information of a factual nature about a person he thinks has committed an offence in that state? Is he limited to where he can go into the system to get information?

CHAIR—Can a copper in Broome get into the MNPP?

Mr McDevitt—A copper in Broome will be able to get on to the MNPP. Providing all jurisdictions are uploading as per this agreed framework then yes, the police officer in WA should be able to see information against everybody who is wanted on a warning—in theory they should be able to see everybody in the country who has got a warning on them.

Senator MARK BISHOP—The fact that is he a junior officer does not prevent him from having the access to more critical information that is on the system?

Mr WOOD—That would not go on to the system, though. They only put the bare bones on there—wanted for burglary or whatever else. If it were a rape, it would not have all the circumstances of the rape or anything.

CHAIR—No, but it would alert—

Mr WOOD—Yes, that he is involved in a serious crime.

CHAIR——that he is wanted for murder in Victoria.

Senator PARRY—How simple is it to use from the officer in the field? Is it a simple matter of a radio communication back to wherever their radio base is? Or is it a telephone call by mobile? Is it a two- or three-stage process or is it direct from the officer in the field to CrimTrac?

Mr McDevitt—Ideally, what I hope will be the case in most jurisdictions is that they will be able to access this information through their in-car computer. So they should be able to go in through their own front door, their own case management system because we do not have a national one, but then behind the scenes they would get this.

Senator PARRY—They would do a registration check, find out the owner is Joe Bloggs and then they do a Joe Bloggs CrimTrac check and find out he is wanted for murder in Victoria. That is how it will work in practice?

Mr McDevitt—In theory that is how it would work.

Mr WOOD—When this is in operation are there additional costs to the states or Commonwealth, or has this already been agreed upon?

Mr McDevitt—What we have got there at the moment is agreement on the 11 information sets that are going to be shared, and we have got funding to roll out that base model by July next year. If we wanted to add additional involvements, there would be costs.

Mr WOOD—With the additional involvement—so we know for recommendations down the track—to include things like the ASIC and explosives, the maritime and ammonium nitrate fertiliser licences on your system, how much extra funding is required to get the development and the upgrading—forgetting about what the states need to do to hand the money over?

Mr McDevitt—I am not sure about specific moneys or costs. For example, for the ASICs we would set up some sort of web based system whereby we could move the ASIC information or copy the ASIC information on to the MNPP as an involvement and then have a daily update or a daily refresh of that information. So the original information would continue to reside with the agency, say AusCheck or whatever, but we would actually maintain a copy of it which would be refreshed on a daily basis.

Mr WOOD—Have you got any figures at all to supply to the committee—as that is happening every day and as there may be 30,000 ASIC licences for example—as to what the maintenance cost is?

Mr McDevitt—No, we would have to—

Mr WOOD—Is it possible for someone to get that cost figure if we are looking at this as a committee for recommendations?

Mr McDevitt—We would have to go and scope out—

CHAIR—More importantly, what we need to recommend is that the jurisdictions agree to have a wider input of things on it, such as ASICs, explosives, maritime, and if the jurisdictions agreed to that they would come to some decision on cost and—

Mr WOOD—It is also the pilots licences and—

CHAIR—You are saying that all of that, in a brief form, could go on the MNPP. If you want to know where the murder occurred and what calibre gun they used, you would have to go to the national case management for the police national database.

Mr Bickerton—There is a great page here in the presentation. It is on MNPP.

CHAIR—Show us where we look. While we are doing that just so we can try to manage our time, what other databases are you going to talk to us about?

Mr HAYES—Can I ask one question before that. Will a police officer in the field be able to just give you one name and, having established who the person is, will that one name scour all the databases, or does it have to enter so many different databases? Operationally no matter what we add, if we add aircraft licences and we know—

Mr McDevitt—If you look at page 11 of the presentation, you will see this is the system itself. In the top slide there in the box on the right, you will see those 11 involvements. A police officer can put the person's name in and it will straightaway bring up any involvement in any jurisdiction. So if you see the slide below—in our example we have put in Michael Corleone—it shows that there are four jurisdictions which have holdings against Michael Corleone and those holdings relate to one of those five involvements or more that you see on the right-hand side. So it is an incredibly powerful tool in terms of persons of interest. It is factual information.

Mr Bickerton—Victoria Police have access to this now.

Senator PARRY—So you are reliant upon the jurisdictions giving you the information in a timely manner?

Mr McDevitt—They load the information on against the categories that they have agreed to share with each other.

Senator POLLEY—How up to date is its operation? Relating it to my office and trying to keep up to date, databases sometimes can get out of date very quickly.

Mr McDevitt—The way that we are setting up at the moment—and I hasten to add that it is not rolled out fully across the country—is the same as what happens with Victoria that does have

the rollout, and that is that it will refresh nightly. It is almost as if we hold a copy of all the information in the middle here and you imagine hitting a refresh button on your website—it will refresh the information that we hold in the middle.

CHAIR—In addition to the MNPP, what other databases were you going to talk to us about?

Mr McDevitt—I was going to make mention of the scoping study that we are doing in relation to automatic number plate recognition, which is a new delivery opportunity there.

CHAIR—What else would you have spoken to us about?

Mr McDevitt—I am happy to answer any questions about any of the other databases. The information that you have gives you a snapshot of each of the databases and what it does at the moment.

CHAIR—Did anyone have any other specific databases you want to talk about?

Mr HAYES—I would like to put on notice that I still want to talk about a single case management system. I know it has been listed as something of interest, but I would like to see how far we are going to be exploring that and what the issues are. Perhaps that could be taken on notice.

CHAIR—Are we all finished with MNPPs? Yes. Let us go on to that now, Chris.

Mr HAYES—It is there and it is listed now as something of some interest amongst all police commissioners and, I think, most policing organisations. I do not know how it is listed in a priority sense. I do not know how it has been costed. It just seems to me that, for police officers in New South Wales, they will know if someone is actually being investigated for a burglary in Albury-Wodonga—that is, every police officer from Albury through to Tweed Heads can access that; whereas, if they cross over into Wodonga, five minutes away, they will not have that information.

CHAIR—Except on the MNPP.

Mr HAYES—Unless there is a warrant out for him—but not on the basis that he is just a person of interest in terms of case management. Every police officer—there are 14,000—in New South Wales could access that, and yet you can be a suburb away and you go through under the net. The same applies in Queensland. That is using the extreme.

CHAIR—Let us have the answer to that.

Mr McDevitt—I will try to clarify this a little more, because I know it is confusing. If you think of the MNPP, it gives you the full information around an individual—factual information. The case management system gives you the information around the offence itself. The two are almost inextricably linked. The problem as I see it, sitting in the middle and trying to provide a service to all of the jurisdictions in this country, is that what we have at the moment is seven separate case management systems. The reason you have seven is that the AFP have PROMIS, which is the system that they utilise for their national role. They have provided a version of that

for ACT policing and a separate modified version for the Northern Territory Police. When you take that into account, you have seven separate systems.

The problems are multiple. One is that you have tens of millions of dollars going into upgrades, refreshes and so on of these various systems that do not as a matter of course talk to each other. A second element of this is that it makes it very difficult to be able to ascertain things like, for example, the impact or effect of crime management and prevention strategies across the country because of the disparate databases in the way that they hold information.

To have a single case management system would not be an easy thing. It would require, firstly commitment. It would require a lot of technical work to be able to actually do it and there would need to be some customisation in various jurisdictions. Some of the jurisdictions, for example, want their case management system to be able to talk to their courts and their prisons and so on. But I think the concept of having a single incident management system across the country is a very sound one, and I would like to see us at least scope that out and start to identify all of the associated issues that might be involved.

CHAIR—So if we recommended that someone should scope out a national case management—you said incident management; do not confuse us by using different words—system for police, who should scope it out?

Mr McDevitt—It is already written into the CrimTrac strategic plan as an opportunity to be scoped out.

CHAIR—So you should scope it out?

Mr McDevitt—I think we would be ideally placed. I think that is why we have CrimTrac—to share information.

Mr KERR—One of the underlying issues, of course, is that the attempt at one stage to have common rules of evidence and common substantive criminal law was not followed up. The definitional nature of offences even varies between jurisdictions. It is very difficult to get benchmarking across jurisdictions when offences are not even routinely described in the same terms.

Mr McDevitt—Yes.

CHAIR—From what you have seen of the evidence, is there anything else where you think the committee has been confused with what you do and the intelligence databases that we have confused?

Mr McDevitt—I think the committee is well aware that the CrimTrac systems are very structured systems around factual information—whether that be around individual DNA, fingerprints or whatever. We do not do intelligence work in relation to our systems. We do not have intelligence databases. All of the information we have is factual.

CHAIR—The intelligence bases are held by the ACC?

Mr McDevitt—That is correct. They hold the ACID database and they rely on police jurisdictions to put intelligence information onto that database, and they then apply intelligence tools, search tools and so on to that intelligence information.

Mr WOOD—Could I throw up a scenario? Say, for instance, that you have a person who may be on your system, and the average police officer would not know but he is actually a terror suspect for, say, Victoria and New South Wales. Then say, for instance, that we get on CrimTrac pilots licences or explosives and then he goes and applies for one of those. Is it possible for the technology then to bounce back to that authority and say—only so they know—'Guess what? Your target has just put an application in to get a pilots licence or an explosives licence'? Could CrimTrac handle that, or would that be back in the state jurisdiction?

Mr McDevitt—What you would have to do is establish the need for it and then get agreement on it. If you think of it in two ways, you have got provision and consumption of the information. I think you said a pilots licence or an explosives licence. Someone provides that information to CrimTrac to the system and it is then copied on and held there against that individual. Then it is a matter of who can consume that information. We have sort of a customer base, which at the moment includes all of the police jurisdictions and, to a limited extent, organisations like the Australian Crime Commission, the PIC—those sorts of other agencies, non-police law enforcement agencies. I guess the long answer to your question is: if they established a need to be a consumer of the information and the jurisdictions agreed to that, then technically that would be possible.

Mr WOOD—So it would be like, for example, when I was in the crime squads, if anyone checked our suspects, our office would get an email and alert that someone had checked; and you could do the same thing if your target has applied for an aviation card or something else like that. So surely the technology would be able to handle that.

Mr McDevitt—You could do that.

Mr Bickerton—It is simply a general search. It would have to be the individual.

Mr WOOD—Yes, that is what I am saying.

CHAIR—You wanted to talk about the motor vehicle registration, did you?

Mr McDevitt—Yes, because I think that when a couple of agencies spoke about the scenario of the person moving from Victoria across to WA, there was mention of ANPR—automatic number plate recognition. Police ministers have tasked us to do a scoping study on that technology by the end of next year. We are to go back to them with a scoping study on the possibilities or feasibility of having a national automated number plate recognition system. The way that would work would be that each police jurisdiction would put up vehicles of interest—

CHAIR—As there is now a division in the Senate, some of us have to leave the hearing and Mr Kerr will take over as acting chair.

Mr McDevitt—The way the automatic number plate recognition system would work—and it is on page 15 of the little slide show that I have given you—is that a set of cameras would be set

up. It is the same technology that is utilised at the moment by a number of the roads departments in terms of safety cam where trucks move between point A and point B too quickly and then get identified through their number plates. The way this technology works in places like the UK—and you will see on page 16 a map of the United Kingdom showing the fixed sites in the UK—is that each organisation would put up a list of vehicles of interest to them and, the same as you were talking about in terms of a flag system, when a vehicle of interest to them crossed one of these sites it would raise a flag. So in the example that we gave where the person travelled from Victoria across to WA, if you had an automatic number plate recognition system across the country, that vehicle would have pinged that system numerous times and—

Mr WOOD—So you are just using the existing cameras out there and you just tap into that system.

Mr McDevitt—The scoping study will look at existing technology and what additional technology would be required to be able to establish such a system. It will also look at privacy implications. It will include a full privacy impact assessment of the technology and our required uses of it. It will include a legislative assessment. It will look at the technical issues and so on around an automatic number plate recognition system.

Mr HAYES—So this is what the British have just implemented.

Mr McDevitt—Yes. This has extraordinary benefits for crime prevention, detection and reduction across the country and I think it also has real opportunities in terms of national security intelligence applicability and so on.

Mr WOOD—That is what is used in the UK?

Mr McDevitt—Yes.

Mr Cahill—I hasten to add that there are Commonwealth agencies that have looked at it and all the jurisdictions are, at various levels, looking at expanding their program and there is an opportunity to get joint procurement and some real purchasing benefits in Australia as well.

ACTING CHAIR (Mr Kerr)—As there are no more questions, I thank you all very much for your presence and for the information you have given us today.

Committee adjourned at 6.17 pm