

Ian Henderson (MC): There's that wonderful phrase 'when constabulary duty's to be done, to be done, a policeman's lot is not a happy one'. When Gilbert & Sullivan penned that memorable phrase for the Pirates of Penzance 120 years ago, they obviously hadn't met anyone quite like Victoria's new Chief Commissioner of Police, Christine Nixon. Judging by her trademark smile, which she has been flashing liberally around the head table today, she always seems to be happy. But then in her 30-year police career, she has a lot to be happy about. Some of her accomplishments include being one of the first women to break into general policing in the New South Wales police force back in the 70s. She was New South Wales' youngest Police Assistant Commissioner, appointed at the age of 41. She has not one, but three degrees to her credit, including a Master of Public Administration from Harvard and of course she is Australia's first female Police Chief. That of course, has rightly attracted a lot of attention. But it seems to me Christine Nixon's appointment signifies not only a change of gender at the top, but also a change of generation – and a terrific generation it is too, the school of '53, if I don't say so myself.

By all accounts she's not big on formality or pulling rank. She's at home with rank and file coppers and she likes to lead by example. She is also something of a groundbreaker, a standard bearer for women in the force and committed to recruiting more of them as well as more police from minority backgrounds. But the thing that strikes you most about our new top cop is that she's a real "people" person who inspires great loyalty from those who work with her.

Detectives from her command in Sydney were said to be grieving when she left. The New South Wales Police Association observed that their loss was Victoria's gain.

Since her appointment earlier this year, she's rolled up her sleeves and met officers from all around the State, reportedly filling whiteboards with their complaints and observations about the job. She says she has learnt a lot and is here to tell us about some of it today. Please make her very welcome.

Christine Nixon: Thank you for your kind words and also for the invitation to come along today. What I want to do, I think, is just talk a little about a range of issues and then at the end open up for questions if you wish.

One of the institutions in Melbourne that I have come to be a little surprised by on occasions and a little shocked since I've been here is, "The Rumour File". And it seems to exist both in the written media, obviously, as well as on radio. So what I thought I'd do today, to start with, is conduct my own edition of "The Rumour File", and so that you might like to hear some accurate rumours rather than just getting half the story. To start with, I have had my office painted yellow so that perhaps the current enterprise bargains might become. I have a new boardroom table and it cost \$2,142.65 including GST. No. I didn't spend \$1.5 million on a new house in a bayside Melbourne suburb. Actually I live with my husband and not the previous Premier.

I haven't decided which football team to follow. With 10 Melbourne clubs boasting 4.1 million fans, I am sure to upset somebody, so I am taking my time to choose. But I have been pursued by several clubs. Why would one football team offer me an interstate flight to a game? I suggested that was corruption to them and they were surprised. And then we have Collingwood, which has been aggressively pursuing me: a trait I understand is part of the club's history. And I am wondering whether I should charge Eddie McGuire with stalking.

I don't go to the police gym and I'm not looking for a gym partner. But I am looking for a good spot to swim in Melbourne in a heated pool. The Chief Commissioner's position has obviously made me far more recognised to many people. I was shopping in the famous Bridge Road recently and a woman rushed up to me to say 'I was only dreaming about you last night'.

And no I didn't direct traffic in Wollongong. I did buy an \$800 bottle of champagne at a charity auction but I didn't drink it. I donated it to the Blue Ribbon Foundation along with a Collingwood jumper given to me by a very attractive young man who was trying to woo me to Magpie land. So it's nice to get in early with a few rumours because it seems to be part of Melbourne's behaviour. I feel that I know many of you. And as I came in today I noticed that some of you had interviewed me or I have had the chance of meeting you within the community. And I think that probably some of you know more about Christine Nixon than I know about myself. I was interviewed by one journalist, who interviewed me – and as best I can tell – 15 other people I know, and then wrote two columns. I wondered what she did with the rest of the material.

I have been asked also, along the way, to do a range of things... The Westgate Bridge: As I was coming to work one day I was asked would I like to give a traffic report. The traffic report went on for 10 minutes and the Westgate Bridge doesn't.

Police work and the media: Something that's obvious to all of us really is they're very close to each other. Last week, for instance, there were 224 stories on radio involving the Victoria Police and more than 200 articles in newspapers and 58 TV news stories in Melbourne alone. I often wonder what would happen if the police had nothing to offer the media and how many other organisations operate under such intense media focus as we do.

I actually have a very strong interest in the fourth estate and have for many, many years. As you heard I went to Harvard University and whilst there shared a room with a friend who was a journalist with CNN and I came to understand from her perspective the issues around the media. It has always been of interest to me with the relationships with the media and I think that although occasionally there is conflict. And it seems to me since I have been here I can't win all the newspapers, but I do occasionally win one or the other.

I think the media within Melbourne is quite different to the media in Sydney. I can't quite figure out what that looks like but it seems to be that somewhat it's more about responsible journalism and a little less sensational than your Sydney colleagues.

Today is my 60th day in the organisation and, as you heard, I have been travelling around meeting with members all over the metropolitan and country areas. It has been a pretty fast learning curve for me. Not because I don't understand policing but because I am taking, and trying to take the time to understand policing in this state.

I have met 2500 members so far, which has been a very terrific experience for me. When I came here, as many of you know, there was great speculation about how would a woman be accepted and there was also great speculation, probably a little more about why would you hire someone from New South Wales. But it seems to me that the point was about hiring someone from outside of policing in this State. And the sense I get from the members and members of the community...that people were at a point in time where having someone come from outside was in fact the right thing to do.

The response from the members when I met with them – when I sent them an e-mail, when I had been in stations as I was the other night – have been incredibly positive and supportive so far, as has the community.

So far the people I have met have come from over 200 police stations and by the time I finish the tour, which will be the end of July, I will have met over 5000 members of the organisation.

As you would have seen, we have been running a major campaign within Victoria Police to attract people to join us. So far 40,000 people have responded to those ads which I think are wonderful ads and not only inspiring for the community but also for the members of the police organisation.

Now what we'll do is convert those 800 into members, hopefully, so we can bring the 800 additional police on board.

One of the surprises I got when I came to Victoria was to look at the way the numbers of police had declined. People make the comment to me they don't see many police on the street any more – 890 members were not replaced when they left the Victoria Police over the last few years. And given most of those came out of operational policing it makes a great impact on the field and on the way they do their job and on our capacity to actually actively do our work.

As I look around this room I wonder if any of you might be interested in joining the police. A new force for a new century: we would be very happy to have you.

I do today want to take time to talk about something a bit serious and that's a review that I intend to conduct fairly shortly.

On arriving in Victoria and commencing to talk with various people and study different issues, I came to have some concerns about the Victorian Police crime statistics. And what I announce today is I intend to conduct a review which will be run by the Australian Institute of Criminology of the issues surrounding the selection of crime data in this State. The review will look at policies and procedures relating to collection and storage of our data, how this data is recorded on the Law Enforcement Assistance Program, [our LEAP system], the reliability of the data collection...to

examine the rules in respect of the clearance of crime and how the information meets the needs of Victoria Police, external agencies and the community.

This review will start next month and will be completed before the end of the year. What I want to say is Victoria is a very safe place to live. The review will ensure our crime data is accurate and reliable and meets national standards.

Another decision I have made recently as you will have heard, is to ask senior police officers to get back to the street. I myself have spent some time at Footscray the other night and will spend time at Sunshine next week. But other officers have also found this a valuable and enriching experience and for those of you who are in senior positions in your organisation, it might be a very interesting experience to do what we've been doing. To go out, ride around in cars, do jobs, a whole range of things.

One particular commander decided that he was pretty young and fit and knew the law and ended up driving and working on the divisional van, which most of you would know is our prime response car. While he was on the van he did 17 jobs. He had no dinner and had four or five outstanding jobs when he finished. I think he probably did a bit more than his share. But the members who did work with him thought it was very important and were really impressed by what he did and how he did his work.

In another instance, the Deputy Commissioner of Police worked out with a shift at Preston. And they came across a drug-affected driver and the young constables were a bit concerned about what they were supposed to do but the Deputy Commissioner knew exactly what to do and that impressed them.

So what has it come out to be? It's come out to be a very valuable experience for all members – the senior members and the junior members. And I think what I've been trying to do as I talk across the State is to kind of break the myths of the way policing is operated.

Some of you know my background. I come from a police family. I joined when I was 19 years old. My registered number in New South Wales was 173 and women had been in policing since 1915 in New South Wales. When I joined there were only 130 women. So it was a place that was different in the 70s and then into the 80s. But I come from a place where it is no different to where many police officers come from and I try to make that point. You see I say I'm no better and they're no different or they're no less than I am, and I think that's an important thing for many of us to remember.

My job is as valuable as theirs is. They have the power to support you. They have the power to work with you as I do. And I think that what members are appreciating from me is I don't see myself as any different to them. I have a job to do. I have skills. They know what I earn, thanks to the media, and I know what they earn. And the point is that we are all together in this process.

I have been talking and planning and consulting and I am doing that now, not only with the police but also with the community. And I will meet with a range of women's groups. Also with a range of people from the Gay and Lesbian community, with Aboriginal community groups, with the Councils, all those people so I understand what it is they want the Victoria Police to do.

The Government has been keen and told me what they want me to do and I think all of that, coming together with the members' opinions, means we'll have a plan for the future. That isn't my plan.

When I applied for this job I applied for one reason only and that was that the Victoria Police in my opinion has always been an outstanding institution. But it was one where I felt I had some skills that at this point in time might be useful. I had no idea that I would actually get the job. I know that you are supposed to be optimistic when you apply for a position and I was, but I understood there were many other barriers in the way.

It wasn't since 1955 that anybody from outside the Victoria Police had ever been given a position within and in fact many members of the Victoria Police had gone to run other people's police forces.

When I got through the first stage [and again was told by the Herald Sun who else was in that first stage], which I thought was very nice actually, I got to know what my competition looked like. Then I thought I was surprised I got to that stage. And then again I got to the second stage with an interview with the Premier, the Police Minister, Lyn Kosky and the head of the Department of Justice. And when I got to that stage I said something that I think probably says something about the way I intend to manage the Victoria Police. I'd years ago been told by an old superintendent that when you want a job you should tell the panel what they want to hear and it's actually good advice. But in this case I didn't do that. I told them what I thought because it's a job that I think is incredibly significant and if I'd got it, I needed the Government to know what I thought of that issue. What I thought about my relationship with the Government; what I thought about what policing should be doing, and perhaps more importantly what I thought the issues were for the Victoria Police. But I came to one point during the interview with Steve Bracks and he asked me what was my vision for the Victoria Police and I said to him, "Well I could tell you what a really good police organisation looks like. I have lived overseas, I've travelled in many parts of the world, I've worked the London Met. I have been to Northern Ireland, I've been to Sweden, I could tell you all about that, but that wouldn't be the point because the vision has to come from the people within the organisation. I have a fundamental belief that the people who do the job know what's wrong with it and know how to fix it and all we have to do, people like me who are managers, is listen to those people about how you fix the job".

And so I said to him that's what I would do and I would listen to the community and the Government and that would be my vision. And I think Steve Bracks looked up at me and he had a pen ready. He was supposed to tick off, I think, what I was supposed to say, but I didn't say it. And I thought, well that was

good. I've obviously missed out. And I walked outside and my husband, who has been a great support to me during this process, who had walked at least 14 kilometres by then...I said, "Oh, look I'm sorry but I think I've stuffed it. I think I told him what I wanted to tell them, not necessarily what they wanted to hear."

But as it turns out after ASIO checks and ASIC checks and 57 other things were done, I got the job.

Another interesting thing I've done since I've been in is to write an email to all of the members of the Victoria Police. It simply said 'Good morning all, I am just writing to say I've been in the job for a week or two and that I wanted to tell you about some of the things that I think are important. And I told them that I think fair process is important: that all policies should be underpinned by a clear open process. You see we can live with anything if fair process is underpinning the policies. So I told them that and I also talked about recognition and about wanting to work with them about progressing to the future and out I sent it to 12,000 members.

I hadn't quite contemplated what would happen when they replied. And in fact I then got a little surprise that not many more did, but [with] the ones who did reply I then came to understand the problem.

One particular fellow, a senior sergeant who I am sure would frighten most criminals in this State, wrote to me and said: "One of the most courageous things that I have done is write to you today." And I was really quite surprised at that process.

Another one wrote and said, "I know I will have my e-mail access cut off for having written to you" and I wrote back and said, "you could be so lucky" and then I talked and they told me the issues they wanted to raise.

But since I have been travelling around and meeting members, I have come to understand that that kind of behaviour from someone in my position is not something they had come to expect. The reason they didn't reply, they told me, was because it's a disciplinary offence to write to the Chief Commissioner. So I told them I was in charge of discipline now and it would be all right and they have in some cases. What happens if the flood continues? I am not sure. But what I am trying to do is open the organisation up and have people in it understand that we need all to be able to be the best that we can be and we have to identify the barriers that stop us from doing that. So my energy and time and meeting people has all gone into trying to understand the issues and draw on the well of creativity that is within the Victoria Police. You, as the community they work in, have very high expectations of the Victoria Police. You also have very high beliefs in what they can do and I think that's important to have a community that supports the police. And what we want to do is make sure the Victoria Police are the best police force in this country – because they really are.

I asked a member a while ago, "How come you call yourself and always have in Victoria, the best police force in the country given, mind you I came from another police force?" And they said, "Well Mick Miller told us so in 1977." And I thought Mick's a really terrific bloke but I think what I would like to do is get to a point where all of us know that's the case.

I will focus on the issues that people want us to focus on. And they're about crime control and safer homes and about public places and reduction of violence in the streets. I said when I was sworn in at Parliament House, [a place that I had actually asked to be sworn in there]...you see I think taking an oath as a police constable [and I did in the sense and as Chief Commissioner as well] is an incredibly significant thing to do. You see I have the power to take your life. I have the power to take your liberty. I have the power to disrupt you in your business every day and that's an important and incredibly significant power. Police recruits at the Academy now take their oath in front of the community who is there to hear them take their oath and swear that oath. And I am very, very, very much committed to us being an accountable and open organisation in more ways than perhaps we've been so far.

I think that if you have people trust you as the senior officer and senior manager, then people can trust in the systems as well, and they make a commitment. And that trust produces voluntary cooperation, and from that drives performance. It encourages people to go the extra mile to share their knowledge to be creative and innovative and that's what I wish the Victoria Police to be. It's about developing the skills of our people improving their conditions, having a flexible environment, welcoming others to become members.

So that's where I come from, that's what I stand for and I hope that's what I can deliver. You see, for a person in my position, the most fatal mistake I could make, is to make some commitments and then not deliver. So what I have also done when I met with the police officers, is said that I'll come back in six months time to see them, and I'm sure I won't be going back to say, "I haven't been able to deliver".

That's enough from me. Thank you.

MC: The Chief Commissioner has agreed to stick around for another 10 minutes or so and take questions. So those of you with bullets loaded in your guns...any questions out there?

Geoff Wilkinson, Herald Sun (GW): Speaking of disciplinary offences, could you tell us whether, under your management, Victoria Police command will continue to use telephone call charge records to establish which police phones have been used to make calls to the media and continue to investigate and intimidate police suspected of committing that heinous crime.

Police Commissioner (PC): No they won't.

GW: Good, thank you.

PC: And let me just add a little to that. I have had a career that often was in conflict with the administration and management of the New South Wales police – at different times during my career. And often with an enormous sense of frustration there has been only one group I could have gone to, to have people hear the kind of issues that I thought were important and that was in fact the media. And that's a background I come from and understand that frustration. What I would hope happens to members of Victoria Police, is they feel like you can be open and ask questions, and not be harmed for it. And so that would

be what I hope underpins that decision. But I have never been one to follow leaks, I think it's a wasteful use of resources and it undermines the organisation.

Darren Linton, 7 News: On October 3 & 4 there is the Business Forum prior to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and S11 which became M1 is going to become O3. [I am amazed I got that out]. Given the Ombudsman's report in the last week or so, will the police take the same line in getting delegates in and out of that meeting?

PC: What we are doing at the moment is planning for that meeting. We are collecting a range of information about what's expected to happen and how strategies then should be put in place to manage that situation. I think the trend of recent times across this country of violence in protests is actually one to be greatly concerned about. It's the history I think in Australia over the last 20 years really, has been one where in fact protests have operated peacefully and not disturbed peoples businesses and the way people go about their daily lives and I think that's a strength of a democracy. What concerns me having sort of come from the State of New South Wales where people weren't allowed to march and then in fact come to a place where the police defended peoples rights to march and then see the kind of violence. I think it's up to the police to try and understand what the situation is about to facilitate peoples rights, but also facilitate the citizen's rights to go about their business. So we will do our planning hopefully, well, as the Ombudsman said we did and then in the execution I hope we can carry that out using the least force that is necessary.

Alan Johnson, Deakin University: I wonder if you could tell me something about what your aspirations are for training police in the modern world.

PC: Thank you. I think I should start by saying a Police Minister said to me a while ago, "Why would you have educated police?" And I said to him, "why wouldn't you?" I have a long history of involvement in police education and in encouraging the New South Wales police to pay for police to be educated. And obviously I have taken my own advice in that regard. I think within New South Wales they have progressed academically to a great degree because of that support. In terms of Victoria, and perhaps even the rest of Australia, in some ways, I think policing needs to continue its role towards the profession of policing, to have the profession recognised as journalism is, as many others who are trained at university and go through that process of understanding the issues around their powers, around the laws, around the community. And I think that eventual move, which will be a big step for policing to take, will allow us to the full blossom of our professionalism, which then should allow us to move between States, to be nationally registered and to allow that move that has been brewing for some time to finally come to fruition. I think there is a couple of issues. The universities have to be willing to share some of their EFT positions and put them into policing and take them from some other professions I think and then we have to find ways to encourage people to proceed through the university stream into policing.

Ian Bushby, Driver Education Centre: I am interested in your views on the road toll. Each day I pick up the Herald Sun and they list the number of people who died of heroin, the number of people who have died on the roads. The ratio is more than 8:1 and yet there doesn't seem to be the emphasis on road toll that perhaps there ought to be.

PC: I think that Victoria actually has a fairly outstanding reputation for having focused on this through a range of ways. And my contribution will be to continue, but perhaps even I suppose encourage it more with the TAC and with VicRoads and the police and the RACV and a whole of the people who should have a say in what we do. I mean there are a range of ways you work on reducing the road toll and I think if you watch the death rates and as they decline through the implementation of random breath testing, of speed limits with cameras, etc, we have to continue working on that process. Also, roads and peoples' capacity to drive appropriately, and all the challenges that face us. It's one of focus and one of focusing our resources. And once the numbers of police come back to a reasonable sort of level and we don't have to just continue to react to the 1.4 million calls we get a year for service, then we can start to put perhaps more resources in that area as well.

Retired Policeman (RP): Commissioner, I'm a retired cop so I'm going to call you Christine, you don't mind that do you?

PC: Please do.

RP: Look Christine, I can quote you the role and function of the police just like anyone else can in the command situation. But to my way of thinking and I may be an old dinosaur to some degree, but the role and function of the police in history was to help people in need. Whether that be that they have had a serious crime committed on them just recently, or whether it's a little old lady that's lost her cat up the tree or her car keys. And I have a real serious problem with the fact that policing is getting away from assisting the public in times of need, whatever that need may be, because you and I both know that the public needs the police as much as the police need the public.

PC: I think I agree. I think the point is that if you were to analyse the calls for service that we actually answer then somewhere near 60% would be described as not crime-related. What the community has done is that it's lost many other services. It has turned to the police. Twenty four hours a day, 365 days of the year, people call us for the most amazing range. So when you analyse the calls for service data 60% of it is not crime related and in some communities there is actually even more non-crime related because they're calling us just simply for a whole range of reasons about the dysfunction in the community. So, I certainly don't intend to take policing away from that. There was a stream of thinking that suggests we need to move in to a kind of a more of a corporate role I suppose and the fraud and those sorts of major crimes. But I think what policing is about is answering people's calls on the street everyday for whatever it is they want, because no one else will do it.

Bob Kearsley, Channel 9 News: What has led you to institute the review of crime statistics that you mentioned and what do you expect to get from it?

PC: What I have had is a range of people including people in the media, who have raised the accuracy of the crime statistics. Members have raised the accuracy of the crime statistics as well. So, it seems to me as someone coming in that it was up to me to look a number of issues within the organisation and crime statistics is one that I have identified. There are others that need to have an external advice for once and for all to try and put this issue either in the case that they have been manipulated or they are inaccurate or, in fact, that they are fine and they are accurate. And that's what I want to know.

MC: Perhaps, one more question.

Richard Bluck, Leadership Victoria: Drawing on your observations of all forces and not Victoria specific, if you could have the proverbial magic wand, in the next three years what would be the thing you would most like to change about policing in Australia that would give you the greatest satisfaction?

PC: Can I have two wishes, would that be all right? One, I would like to see it better funded to start with and that would then allow us to do a whole range of things that we want to do and do them better. Some one said to me the other day, "What was the finance like within Victoria Police?" And I hate to say it but it's incredibly thin and I'm not just saying that. I mean I don't have a vested interest here, I've got the job already. So, the point is now I have to manage it. And it's incredibly thinly funded and so was New South Wales and so is Queensland. So if we could have money that would allow many things to be done.

I think it's also that meeting the community's expectations is another part of it. To try and actually live up to the idea that people do want to see police on the streets, and the research says they feel much better when they do. There's that sort of way that I would like to move. And maybe the third wish would be for the members of the organisation to be valued and to understand what an incredibly significant role they play in the community and to have that from within and without the policing supported and responded to.

MC: Chief Commissioner if you would just stay for a minute we have something we've really got to give you. I just want to say on behalf of all of you and on behalf of the Club how much we have appreciated your time. This is part of the process of getting to know you. We trust it's going to be a long a fruitful relationship on both sides and we certainly look forward to having you back again. But for the moment in appreciation for your efforts today, we would like to present you with some flowers from The Big Pansy, and a special one to equip you for the job ahead. If you can't see it up the back, it's got Christine Nixon as Princess Leia and it reads "May the force be with you" and may it protect you from the Phantom Menace.

That's about it from all us, I hope you have enjoyed today. Thank you for your continuing support and we will see you next time.