



VICTORIA POLICE

Press Club Lunch Speech – Chief Commissioner Simon Overland - 20 April 2009

It is a pleasure to be here with you today, 7 weeks into my new role as Chief Commissioner.

When the Premier contacted me on Friday, 27 February and offered me the position, I knew I had big shoes to fill.

Not only because of Christine Nixon's leadership and the significant change for the better that she has brought to Victoria Police, but more importantly because of her prominence over time in the Rumour File!

The good news...I hope...is that the Rumour File has already carried pretty much anything you would like to mention...

Equally, the nicknames have been kicking around for many years – Simon the Likable and my personal favourite – The Lantern!

And, of course I have spent many hours in the past talking to (or being interrogated by!) most of you in this room in one form or the other about issues directly relating to Victoria Police.

There is a serious note to all of this – there is an expectation quite rightly, that having been with Victoria Police for more than 6 years, I should just “get on with the job”.

And, that is exactly what I have been doing over the past 7 weeks – talking to our members, talking to the community and talking to government about what is important to them as we head into the future. At the same time, however I have started moving forward in relation to a number of areas which I will come to later.

I was asked many times during my first week in the job, how I compared to Christine. In terms of philosophy and approach my views are very similar to Christine’s, but I have my own style and I am my own person. You will see differences, but the important

similarity is that I will continue to be available to both the community and my employees.

In fact, I have already started to do this by embracing the digital media age! I go online for an hour once a fortnight to take questions and enter into discussions with the members and I plan on being available regularly to the public through an online forum, part of a new website I will come to shortly. We also have a presence on Facebook and we regularly twitter! Sadly that is about as far as my technical knowledge will take me – so no questions on the intricate details of our online presence please!

Many people have also asked me why I wanted the job of leading Victoria Police. For me it was about the privilege of leading such a fantastic organisation. It was also about the many challenges we will face in the future.

As a result, in my application for the role I developed a framework to focus on what we can achieve over the next five years and what the organisation might look like in 2014. It is really a touch stone for me over the next five years and it will continue to evolve. Importantly the framework complements the organisation's five

year strategic plan, The Way Ahead, which I am still strongly committed to.

The framework has five keys areas of focus:

- A safe and inclusive Victorian community
- Effective and innovative management of crime, public safety and road safety
- A flexible, dynamic and responsive police organisation
- Strong leadership and effective management; and
- A healthy, engaged, well educated and equipped workforce

I would like to take some time today to discuss these areas of focus with you, to assist in understanding the direction and vision I have for the organisation. Time won't allow me to touch on each of the areas in detail – however I will concentrate on the issues that have been a priority for me during my first 7 weeks.

The first of these areas of focus, **a safe and inclusive Victorian community**, relates to the key theme of mutual responsibility.

My commitment to the community is that we will work with them to continue to reduce crime, cut the road toll and be there with them in both the good times and bad. We will continue to connect with the community at all levels. The partnerships already developed, will continue to grow as we find ways of tackling new problems, new crimes into the future.

But importantly, this is not something we can do on our own. Effective policing does not stop at just the police. It is my belief that every person in the community has a role to play in keeping themselves and each other safe. Policing is everyone's business. We all have responsibilities.

That is why today, I have launched a new website, www.vicpolicenews.com which will aim to keep the community informed of crime in their local area and policing issues impacting on their lives.

As part of the website, we have included a new section called 'My Place' which will provide the community with quarterly crime statistics for their local area.

People will be able to enter their postcode and find out the latest crime and road safety statistics affecting their local neighbourhood. It is important to stress that these will be provisional figures – in other words it will be raw data and the figures may change throughout the year. For instance a crime may happen during that period, but it may not be reported until later in the year. Equally, Victoria Police has in the past released its crime statistics per 100,000 population. This will not be possible for these quarterly crime statistics, instead as I have said, we are releasing the number of raw offences. We hope to release the rate for PSA statistics in the future.

I am strongly committed to more regularly providing crime statistics to the community. For them to become involved in helping us reduce crime, they need to be more aware of what is happening in their local area so they can take preventative measures.

One of my key priorities as part of creating a safer Victoria, is to continue to find ways of tackling alcohol related violence. I have no doubt that alcohol is a factor in public safety. It is also a factor in the road toll, in family violence and in sexual assaults.

We will continue to address alcohol related violence across the state. Specifically, from a policing perspective we are looking at ways of maintaining increased resources in the city on a Friday and Saturday night.

But this is not just about enforcement and I am keen to play a key role in leading future public discussion to find out why the violence happens in the first place to get to the core of the problem. As part of this, I have already started meeting with those involved in this issue both from a community and government perspective.

Any shift will need a change in culture and attitude – that is, the community saying that being drunk in public is just not on. We have managed to change behaviours in issues such as the wearing of seat belts, drink driving and even smoking. We should use these learnings to help us in the future.

Finally, as part of this key focus area, I want to ensure we police for all Victorians – I have already started meeting regularly with leaders from multicultural areas, as well as representatives from other minority groups. All Victorians, irrespective of their background or views should be treated equally and I am

determined to ensure they receive the service they deserve from Victoria Police. I am aware that every interaction with police gives people strong signals; about whether they 'belong'; about whether they can be expected to be dealt with fairly; about whether they will be safe in our hands; about whether they will be treated with respect and dignity.

This means that how we do things is as important as what we do.

The second key focus from my framework relates to **effective and innovative management of crime, public safety and road safety.**

As I said when I accepted the job, there are some who suggest policing today is soft or new and that we should get back to the 'good old days'. I would argue that our style of policing shown in the success of Purana tackling organised crime is anything but soft or new. It is effective policing using intelligence and all our available resources in a flexible way to combat a significant issue. We need to both find ways to prevent crime and road trauma and respond with strong enforcement. It is not about being soft or hard, but about finding effective solutions.

Which brings me to the concept of zero tolerance. I know a great deal has already been written about my view that zero tolerance in its purest form does not have a place in our community. I will be tough on those people who break the law without regard for the impact they have on the community – they will be dealt with in the strongest possible terms. Unfortunately many people do not understand what true zero tolerance actually means – it means every single indiscretion is treated with the strongest hand of the law. There is no room for police discretion, one of the great advantages of policing.

Importantly, I will continue to find ways to reduce the crime rate even further. We have experienced an incredible 23% reduction in crime since 2000. I honestly believe it will require a joint effort to continue this trend into the future.

The economic downturn has already started to create significant issues from a policing perspective – we are seeing an increase in shop steal and burglary crimes for example which we are constantly monitoring to ensure we are one step ahead. Other high volume crime such as theft from motor vehicle and robbery will

continue to require our attention, but equally require a commitment and change in behaviour from the community.

We also cannot forget the impact of climate change. Whatever the scientific debate, there is no doubt that we are experiencing a change in climate that will create more natural disasters as we head into the future. Sadly, predictions are that the extreme weather that we experienced earlier this year that led to the Black Saturday bushfires may become more common. Victoria Police is already leading discussions with other emergency services to look at ways of adapting to these challenges.

The road toll is another major focus for the organisation over the next five years. I believe we can make significant inroads to build on last year's record road toll. Although we achieved the lowest on record, 303 is still far too many lives needlessly lost. This year, we are still seeing the deaths of vulnerable road users such as pedestrian and motorcyclists.

We are also seeing a marked increase in the number of people driving, who are clearly affected by drugs.

In fact, you will recall I was recently involved myself with removing a drug-impaired driver from our roads - who despite his situation seemed quite happy to meet me! There is a serious message in this – I expect every police member to be involved in detecting traffic offences. Every police car, including the Chief Commissioners is a booze bus or a speed trap. I make no apologies for the fact that we intend to crack down even further on motorists who do the wrong thing – ultimately we are helping save their lives or the lives of other innocent bystanders. The bottom line is, if you don't speed or drink or drug drive – you won't get caught.

The third key area of focus relates to **a flexible, dynamic and responsive police organisation.**

One of my key challenges is to continue to find ways of using our resources in the most effective way.

For some there never has been enough and never will be enough police.

Why? – because we will never be able to be on every corner, in every street and nor should we. Thankfully we don't live in that type of society.

Yes, we will continue to talk to the Police Association and the Government about future resourcing, but in these economic times, this will become more difficult with many other sectors also vying for scarcer resources. I cannot stress enough the impact this will have on policing.

I therefore believe we need to be smarter about the way we do business...internally this is a significant issue and we are working hard to ensure we allocate our resources more efficiently, through better rostering as well as ensuring that every police member can be deployed operationally. We are also contemplating the issue of flexibility across the organisation – how can we ensure our resources can be deployed at short notice to problem areas?

In a sense we did this effectively during the bushfires – this type of flexible deployment of resources is a great example of what we can achieve in the future.

A key priority into the future will be building on the significant work already undertaken to deal with corruption and ultimately improve the ethical health of the organisation.

For me, part of those changes relate to the reforms I am seeking to the Police Regulations Act. As I have said in the past I believe these reforms are vital for me to do my job properly. Victoria Police needs a modern and appropriate employment framework that gives us the same rights as any other employer, in terms of dealing with poor performance or misconduct.

The Police Regulations Act reforms would strengthen and streamline the dismissal process for misconduct and consistent poor performance – it is an issue I am extremely passionate about.

Another aspect of providing a better organisation relates to the support we provide our supervisors to properly carry out their duties. I have made no secret of the fact internally that I am keen to bring back exams for members progressing through to the positions of Sergeant and Senior Sergeant. In fact I am looking at the whole way we deliver education to ensure that we better support our people as they move up through the ranks.

This leads me to my fourth key area of focus – **strong leadership and effective management**. In other words - a highly visible and supportive leadership team.

I have already begun making changes to the executive team structure – I have advertised for an additional two Deputy Commissioners, which will provide me with three Deputies focusing on the organisation's three key priority areas - public safety, crime and road toll policing. They will have functional responsibility for these areas of the organisation and will support me in delivering results. I have already appointed Kieran Walshe to the position of Deputy Commissioner Public Safety and we will be interviewing for the other two positions shortly.

In addition, I will be shortly advertising two Executive Director positions focusing on HR and infrastructure, including IT – to help focus our efforts in these areas into the future.

My final focus is to ensure we have **a healthy, engaged, well educated and equipped workforce**.

The key theme here relates to improving esteem. How can we improve morale and importantly improve the self-esteem of our members, who unfortunately often view themselves more critically than the community.

Chief Commissioner Nixon spent some time before her departure talking to police about where we have come over the last 8 years. She has shared that with me and I plan to continue to find better ways of doing our job.

One of the other key aspects of this focus relates to use of force. You will recall that Project Beacon addressed many issues in the mid 90s. I now believe it is timely to review our practices around command and control and our operational response to critical incidents, particularly with the introduction of semi-automatics and the need to consider the expanded use of conducted energy devices. I do not shy away from the fact that anyone in this community, who thinks they can break the law, should understand that we will not tolerate their behaviour. And if there is a need for us to use force, we will do so. The community however should understand that use of force will be a last option and won't be taken lightly.

So it has already been a whirlwind 7 weeks as I have consulted widely on our future. Of course that has included what seems like hundreds of media interviews – including an interesting obsession by the Sunday Age with the fact I am folkily challenged and of course any angle you could mention of me promoting the mighty Hawks!

I said when accepting the job, that it will be my duty to speak up when I see things happening – I will at all times be fully accountable. The community can be assured that I will continue to be available to talk about any issues or problems as they emerge. I won't be afraid to deal with the controversial issues.

Perhaps the most effective description of policing came to me during a trip to Eildon. I was on the road above the dam, talking to the sergeant in charge of the small police station there. He said to me: *“my role is to look after the community and keep it safe”*. As simple and profound as that – our role as police, relates arguably to our most fundamental concern: our safety.

Our role is to look after everyone in this state and keep them safe.
If you are in trouble, you need to know that we will drop everything
at any time day of night and come running as fast as we can.

Thank you for listening and I look forward to working with you in
the future.

QUESTIONS