COMMITTEE REPORTS - CONSIDERATION

Committee

The Chairman of Committees (Hon George Cash) in the chair.

Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission - Twelfth Report - Annual Report 2005-2006" - Motion

Resumed from 7 June on the following motion moved by Hon Ray Halligan -

That the report be noted.

Hon GRAHAM GIFFARD: I last spoke on the "Annual Report 2005-2006" prior to the recess on 7 June. I made some comments about this annual report and the reporting period that it covers. My attention was drawn to one comment in the third paragraph of the chairman's foreword of the report, which states -

> Our frank and transparent acknowledgment of inconsistencies and problems with the *Corruption and Crime Commission Act, 2003* has led to a general shared view as to how to improve the legislation.

I read further on in the report and noted that there were, in fact, 10 separate reports tabled during that reporting period. I have looked through some of those reports following a train of thought about the identified reforms to the legislation under which the CCC operates that might be required. The purpose of my commentary on this report was to examine during this reporting period how the CCC and the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission have dealt with the challenge of processing an identified need and coming up with a solution for legislative reform. I was focusing particularly on the offence of misconduct.

I am not sure when the new Corruption and Crime Commissioner, Mr Len Roberts-Smith, RFD, QC, commenced his term; it would have been on or about 7 June this year. This therefore might be the second occasion that I have spoken about this report since he commenced his term, but I have not commented before on his appointment. I note that I have fewer than 30 seconds left, which gives me the opportunity to welcome his appointment. I have read a little about his background and he appears to me to be a most suitable appointment. I welcome his appointment and I am sure he is enjoying settling into his new job. I note that he is the second of the commissioners at the new CCC, and a second very appropriate appointment in my view.

The CHAIRMAN: Members, the question is that the report be noted. Hon Graham Giffard in continuation.

Hon GRAHAM GIFFARD: I was commenting on the Corruption and Crime Commission's 2004-05 annual report, which was tabled during the reporting period and referred to in the joint standing committee's annual report on the Business Program that we are dealing with now. Essentially, the comments I made previously in summary were that the CCC must satisfy itself that a public officer has acted dishonestly, has breached trust, has misused information and has committed an offence under any law or has committed a disciplinary offence under the Public Sector Management Act. Having satisfied itself of those elements, the CCC then moves to investigate persons for misconduct. Following that thread, we see from the third, fifth and 2004-05 annual reports that the CCC has expressed a desire to have what it terms a cleaner definition of misconduct. In seeking this, my characterisation of the definition is that the CCC is endeavouring to remove the second, and in my view critical, element of the definition that would effectively render the definition of misconduct to be a much wider ranging definition, and would capture significantly greater types of activities or misdemeanours that might come to the attention of the CCC. Essentially, the CCC is saying that that part of the definition refers to someone who has committed an offence under any law, which could be quite a minor offence, or a disciplinary offence under the Public Sector Management Act. A disciplinary offence would be an offence for which people might be disciplined but for which they would not necessarily lose their job. They might incur no greater penalty than a caution or something similar, which would be for a disciplinary offence at the lower end of the scale under the Public Sector Management Act. An offence of misconduct would then come under the purview of the CCC, which would then be able to exercise its powers of investigation and make a finding of misconduct. That, in my view, would broaden the definition of misconduct significantly.

If the CCC is seeking to significantly broaden the definition of misconduct, what is the basis for that and why are we being asked to think about it? Why are we being asked to act in that way? For example, another way that one might react would be to say that maybe the Parliament might express the view that it wants the Corruption and Crime Commission to investigate more serious matters rather than less serious matters. Therefore, rather than having this regime of corruption, serious misconduct and misconduct, one might seek to constrain the misconduct matters and have the Corruption and Crime Commission concentrate on corruption and serious misconduct. That is an alternative way of responding to what is perceived as a difficulty - which, frankly, I do not necessarily accept - with the definition as it stands. Indeed, did the CCC and the joint standing committee consider that? Those are the sorts of questions that I had in my mind when I was looking through these reports and following the thread of the argument.

Within this reporting period the issue of amendments to the act was dealt with in the committee's tenth report "Interim Report on Amendments to the Corruption and Crime Commission Act, 2003", which was tabled on 26 June 2006. Chapter 2 of that report simply deals with all the amendments that are sought by the Corruption and Crime Commission. Unfortunately, some of the amendments are dealt with quite superficially by this report, particularly the "misconduct" definition that I have been talking about. The report devotes four lines of explanation to it and simply states -

> Section 4 of the Act defines "misconduct" and sets out various categories of misconduct. The CCC claims that s.4(d)(v) and (vi) are overly complex provisions that notifying authorities find difficult to apply.

I have said before that if the notifying authorities have difficulty applying the definition of "misconduct", perhaps the CCC should marshal its efforts into assisting those notifying authorities and helping them to comply. After all, one of the CCC's functions is to raise awareness and educate people on their obligations. Maybe they should fix the problem rather than have the legislation changed. The report then states -

> The CCC recommends that s.4(d) be simplified by deleting subparagraphs (v) and (vi), -

Which is the second element of the act of misconduct -

> and amending subparagraph (iv) accordingly.

It is certainly a simplification; it is the removal of half the definition. I suppose in that sense it is a simplification. The report does not deal in any great detail with why; it simply says that the CCC reported to the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission and it agrees with that. I have a problem with that. I would love to see a greater body of work from the committee on this. I would like to see some critical analysis by the committee and some investigation of alternative ways that it might respond. However, all we get is a four-line explanation in the report.

The issue of misconduct has been referred to in three other reports. In one report, the committee spends two pages discussing misconduct, but not misconduct in the context of the shortcomings of the definition as identified by the CCC; it discusses misconduct in a more general sense and deals with how it might arise and be dealt with. It is an interesting discussion but it does not go to this very question about the complexity or the simplicity that is required by the Corruption and Crime Commission.

I note that the committee also wrote to a number of stakeholders and received some feedback. I would be interested to know whom it wrote to. In the report I did not see whom the committee wrote to; I saw only the parties they got submissions from. They were essentially crime and corruption bodies, courts, police and the Western Australian Bar Association. It did not receive submissions from, and I am not sure whether it wrote to, for example, the Law Reform Commission, people interested in civil liberties or, indeed, organisations that might represent people who work in the public sector - I think we still call them unions. Those bodies would obviously have an interest in how these things are carried out. I would be interested to know whether the committee wrote to the unions that represent workers in the public sector because I note that it did not receive submissions from any of them. That is a question I am interested in knowing the answer to.

Interestingly, this discussion about misconduct is one of a regime of proposed changes. The justification for the need for reform relates to the law dealing with organised crime and the law dealing with contempt. Very early on in the piece they are identified as two areas for which the Corruption and Crime Commission Act needs to be reformed. It is very interesting because, at the conclusion of this report, the standing committee notes that those areas are currently too difficult to deal with and it will not proceed with them although it will proceed with all this other stuff.

I think that it is interesting that we start off on this journey to deal with two key issues and a lot of minor issues, but towards the end of the journey the committee says that the two key issues are too hard for it to deal with; therefore, the committee will not deal with the key issues, but it will put all these minor issues through. However, there is no analysis about why the committee is putting the minor issues through. I am still looking for a reason that we should agree with what has been proposed. If a body of work exists that has been done by the committee, I would love to see it, if it is available, so that we could have some discussion about what sort of misconduct we intend the Corruption and Crime Commission to investigate. Granted, there is an argument about what it means; however, I think we should be able to clarify that without making wholesale changes to the definition. However, my concern is that the standing committee, which is an oversight committee, has recommended changes that might not initially appear to have any great consequences, but, when we think about it, have potentially quite significant consequences for the types of inquiries or activities that the CCC would be involved in. We need to satisfy ourselves that the standing committee has actually behaved like an oversight committee. "Oversight" has two meanings: one is to supervise and the other is to overlook. My view is that when we look at the analysis that has been produced by the standing committee on the question of whether we

should amend the definition of "misconduct", it appears that it has fallen into the definition of "oversight" that means to overlook, rather than to supervise. I urge the committee to turn its attention to the more supervisory role that it needs to play in scrutinising not only the major changes that the CCC might suggest, but also the minor ones, because they might have quite significant implications.

Essentially, my contention is that for the 12 months of this reporting period this issue of misconduct has been surfacing, and it will probably continue to do so, and that the CCC has advised the standing committee that it thinks there are difficulties with it. In my view, the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission has not undertaken any rigorous assessment of that proposition, but has simply regurgitated or rubber-stamped the desire of the CCC to have that definition changed, because that would obviously be easier to do. I suppose that in the fullness of time, we, as a Parliament, will be asked to adopt the recommendations of the standing committee. In summary, I see no case for changing the definition of "misconduct". We need to have a proper discussion about what we expect the CCC to do about the misconduct and serious misconduct functions, and we need to examine whether the CCC has placed the proper emphasis on its educative function in assisting the reporting authorities to carry out their duties.

There is no question that reporting authorities will have difficulty understanding their obligations. That is the nature of things; people will from time to time have difficulty understanding that. It is quite particularly a role of the CCC to assist them with and educate them on those obligations. Rather than changing the act, which is the simple, easy and cheaper option, we need to put the CCC to the test and say that it is the CCC's job to help these reporting authorities understand that. I would prefer to see some evidence that the standing committee has explored the various options available to it, rather than simply saying that if that is what the CCC wants, the committee will recommend it. That in a nutshell is the conclusion that I have drawn about the 2005-06 annual report.

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: I thank Hon Graham Giffard for the information, dialogue and concerns he has expressed about some of the issues associated with the Corruption and Crime Commission. There is no doubt that the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission is an oversight committee. The definition of "oversight" is most definitely important. Both houses of Parliament have been given the responsibility to ensure that the act is being complied with, and that of course is done through the parliamentary inspector. The act rightly states that the committee members are not in a position to consider operational matters for a variety of reasons, but it is certainly a situation that I totally agree with.

We can consider at a later date whether the issue of misconduct and serious misconduct needs to be the subject of a report by the committee. In fact, if I recall correctly, it was the CCC itself that brought this matter and the difficulties it was having with the definition in the act to the committee's attention. I suggest to members that in developing this legislation, as we have done on many occasions, we believed it was quite clear and unambiguous and fulfilled our required intentions. Of course, it is only when it is out there in the real world, if I can put it that way, and has to be acted upon that deficiencies, if any, are found.

If the persons responsible for the operation of the legislation believe that there may well be difficulties, they can have a test case to determine how the courts will view the legislation. In other instances, of course, people are taken to court under the legislation and, on occasion, the justices have interpreted that law in a manner different from that intended by members of Parliament. However, that is the normal process, and I believe there is nothing wrong with that process. Sometimes committees becomes a little overexuberant and enthusiastic and try to present a little of the information to Parliament too frequently. This can create some difficulties with any committee, but probably more so with the Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission. One could call that drip-feeding information, and that can be a problem because sometimes the issue that the committee is looking at is much broader than can be contained in one report. On occasion, one may have to look at half a dozen different reports to try to see the bigger picture. The then chairman of the committee said in his foreword to report 12, the annual report 2005-06 -

> Much of our arduous work is done confidentially, without the benefit of sharing the more technical aspects with non-committee colleagues. Our ability to debrief on quite major incidents is curtailed by the need to wait until an investigation with a finding has meandered its way through our courts and exhausted natural justice.

That type of thing can certainly happen. It is possible for the committee, often with most definitely no malice aforethought and certainly no intent to mislead, to go down a particular path and, having read just one report, get the wrong picture. I refer members to the Petrelis case. A number of reports were presented on that mater, but they formed only a very small part of the overall picture.

I understand what Hon Graham Giffard has said. In the main, it is the belief of the committee that any amendments to the act will be made by the Attorney General and that any amendment that the committee might believe worthy of consideration should be brought to the attention of the Attorney General. There have been a

number of issues. I would need to check some of this recollection, but certainly the committee has inquired into, and asked a number of organisations and operatives about their thoughts on, witness protection, responsibility for which, as members would know, currently resides with the WA Police. The question is whether there is in fact a need for another organisation such as the CCC to also have a witness protection element. It would seem simple enough, without any investigation or analysis, to say, "Yes; let us have as many people as possible undertake that task." However, it is a much more complex question than it first appears. That is why I spoke about the overexuberance of having too many reports containing too little information. Such reports might whet one's appetite but certainly do not satisfy it. Personally, I believe that it is important for the committee to provide as much information as possible to the Parliament - one might call it appropriate information - and as frequently as it believes it has need.

All I can ask of members is that they trust members of the committee, who will be advised, by the way, by people much more learned than them on what might be appropriate. It would not be a matter of not providing information to Parliament, but of trying to ensure that the information that is provided to Parliament by way of a report allows members to paint a picture or to more readily understand what is presented. That would hopefully then place Hon Graham Giffard and any other member in a position in which they could query anything in the report. Hon Graham Giffard has previously asked about reports and their conclusions or lack of conclusions and, on previous occasions, I have explained that subsequent reports would provide additional information. I do not necessarily believe that that is the best way in which to approach these things. I hope that some changes will be made to that manner of reporting in the future, which may allay the fears that Hon Graham Giffard currently has.

Hon GRAHAM GIFFARD: I want to make a couple more comments on matters arising from what Hon Ray Halligan has just said. Hon Ray Halligan mentioned that the Corruption and Crime Commission had brought to the attention of the standing committee the difficulties it was having with the definition of "misconduct". I thought that the thrust of the difficulties that the CCC had identified were not so much its own difficulties but those of notifying authorities in understanding their obligations under this definition. I did not get a sense that the CCC itself misunderstood the definition but that notifying persons within the public sector were having difficulty with it, and that it thought that to assist them, it might be easier to change the definition. I would not want my comments to be taken as claiming that the CCC does not understand the definition. I think that its view is that it has a clear understanding of it. I wanted to make that distinction.

I agree with the comment Hon Ray Halligan made that a general observation or criticism of committee reports is that they contain too little, too often. However, my point was that if the standing committee were to make recommendations, as it has done in this report, to make changes to legislation that have quite significant implications, it is up to the standing committee to provide reasons in support of those changes. I do not ask for a moment that the standing committee expose itself or the CCC by providing information to us that it should not. However, the standing committee should provide reasons, explanations and justifications for wanting changes. This house must go through a process to justify any change that is proposed to legislation. We must ask why we should make such a change. I say that the 10 reports that were tabled within this reporting period do not attach any substance to the recommendation about changing the definition of "misconduct". It is just that the CCC would like that change to be made, so the committee supports it. That is it. It is a significant change, so that is not good enough. Oversight does not mean to overlook; it means to supervise and to bring some critical analysis to what is going on. None of that is shown in any of these reports, and I think it should be.

Hon Ray Halligan also made the comment that those on the committee believed that the Attorney General would bring about changes to the act. One would expect that to be the case in the ordinary course of events. Hon Ray Halligan mentioned that the committee believed that those matters needed to be brought to the attention of the Attorney General. I was not clear about what the member was saying. If the member was saying that the standing committee had acted on that and had brought these matters to the attention of the Attorney General, I have not read that in any of these reports. I would be interested to know whether the standing committee has communicated not to this Parliament but to the Attorney General the changes that it supports to the legislation. If it has done that, there does not appear to be any reference to that in any of these reports. Does the standing committee intend to advise the Parliament that it has done that or does it regard it as being within its purview to have dialogue with the Attorney General in that way? I would have thought that if a standing committee of the Parliament were to make those sorts of recommendations to the executive, it ought, at the very least, advise Parliament that it has made those recommendations. I have not seen that in any of the reports.

HON RAY HALLIGAN: I take Hon Graham Giffard's point. I was alluding to the fact that there has been some dialogue with the Attorney General and vice versa, but that no conclusions have been drawn. I believe that that is the way in which things should progress, at least initially. The committee is, of course, an arm of Parliament. During the normal course of events, acts and their sections are analysed and put under the microscope to determine whether changes need to be made. Arguments can be made both for and against such changes. Someone might initially say that some change should be made, only to be alerted at some later stage to

some unintended consequences of such a change, so further changes are made. It would be inappropriate to continually come back to Parliament with all this toing and froing without any conclusions. I can only reiterate what I said earlier about there being too many reports with too little information. In fact, whilst it is not misleading information, it places members of this place in the invidious position of not knowing exactly what is happening. That is unfortunate. That was certainly not the intent of the committee when these reports were first presented. I will be guided by the house on what the house wants, but I expect the committee to continue down the path of, for want of a better term, negotiating with the Attorney General. In fact, we are creating dialogue with and providing information to the Attorney General, thereby allowing the Attorney General to bring forward to this place, where a full debate can then take place, any amendments that the Attorney General sees fit. If the committee believed that some important matters were brought to the attention of the Attorney General that were ignored - I will simply leave it at that at this point in time without trying to go any further - I believe it would be incumbent upon the committee to bring those matters to the attention of the house if the committee believed the matters were so important that they should not have been ignored. The house could then make a decision about what or was not done with the information.

The committee is conscious of its role as far as the education process of the Corruption and Crime Commission is concerned. I failed to make mention of this aspect. The committee believes that it is particularly important that it makes contact with as many agencies as possible in this regard. Our understanding is that that has been the case. The committee has been provided with a timetable of what the CCC is doing and the centres around Western Australia that it is visiting. The committee went to Geraldton - I cannot remember the exact date - where a public meeting was held. A number of witnesses advised the committee on what the CCC had been doing in Geraldton, and commented on the quantity, quality and breadth of information provided, and outlined whether the information was of benefit to them. The committee was satisfied at that point that the Corruption and Crime Commission was undertaking that role as intended under the act.

Question put and passed.

Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation - Nineteenth Report - "Oaths, Affidavits and Statutory Declarations (Act Amendment) Regulations 2006"

Resumed from 21 September 2006.

Motion

Hon RAY HALLIGAN: I move -

That the report be noted.

The purpose of this report was purely to bring to the general attention of all members something that had been done, not for one moment underhandedly, but in the normal course of events. As a result of the issues associated with the amendment, and because it was something very near and dear to all members of Parliament - namely, electoral and research officers - the committee felt that it was necessary to write this very short report to bring this information to the attention of members.

The report outlines which of members' staff are able to witness documents. Initially, my understanding was that members of Parliament felt that only their electoral officers were able to witness documents of constituents and that research officers were excluded. The committee decided to bring the issue to the attention of the Attorney General and asked for clarification. Within the report is a copy of the letter to the committee from the Attorney General dated 1 September 2006. The letter clarifies the situation. Members now know that under the act their research officers or those they classify as research officers are, in fact, electoral officers undertaking a different role. Those people employed in offices as an electoral officer under the Parliamentary and Electorate Staff (Employment) Act 1992 are able to witness documents under the Oaths, Affidavits and Statutory Declarations Act 2005, as are research officers. As I said, this was purely a matter of information to clarify a situation that I understand a number of members were unsure of.

Question put and passed.

Standing Committee on Public Administration - Second Report - "Compliance of the Department of Health with Recommendations of the Auditor General's 2001 Report on Life Matters: Management of Deliberate Self-harm in Young People"

Resumed from 21 September 2006.

Motion

Hon BARRY HOUSE: I move -

That the report be noted.

In moving that the report be noted, I outline to the house the methodology used by the Standing Committee on Public Administration in putting this report to the Legislative Council. As we all know, the history is that the Standing Committee on Public Administration and the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations were established after the 2005 election to fulfil slightly different roles. In brief, the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations follows the dollars and the Standing Committee on Public Administration follows the structures and processes of public administration. In doing so, the Standing Committee on Public Administration has some established responsibilities and ways of going about its business, but it also, in a sense, had a role in carving out its own role and responsibilities. Under the committee's terms of reference it has the responsibility of liaising with parliamentary officers, of which there are five statutory officeholders who are responsible to the Parliament - namely, the Auditor General, the Commissioner for Public Sector Standards, the Information Commissioner, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations and the Inspector of Custodial Services. As a matter of course the committee had, previous to 2005, adopted this role in an ad hoc way and semi-formal way. The committee heard from the Auditor General, the Ombudsman, the Inspector of Custodial Services and the others by way of private briefings from time to time. There was not an established program but, from time to time, there were briefings to better understand each other's work. There was constant liaison between the staff of the various organisations.

From 2005 the committee adopted a slightly more formalised role. The committee determined to more closely scrutinise reports to Parliament from the five statutory officeholders and follow up when the committee thought it was necessary. The follow-up is done through either contact with the officeholders themselves initially or contact with the departments involved in the reports seeking explanations for some of the recommendations and issues pointed out, and for the committee to pursue issues, if necessary. That is where a lot of our work will start and end. However, we may decide to hold a more comprehensive inquiry. This report to Parliament is the result of a more comprehensive inquiry that arose out of the Office of the Auditor General. In other words, the Standing Committee on Public Administration is adopting a more proactive oversight role for the five statutory officeholders to the Parliament. This is an involved process, and members will hear more about it in future reports that the committee will present to the house.

This report is significant in many ways not only for its content, which I am sure other committee members will speak about at length, but also for its methodology. The methodology adopted was the focal point of a presentation that I made on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Administration to the Australasian Study of Parliament Group conference that was held in Wellington, New Zealand last year. I remember it vividly because it was held on the Saturday morning of the AFL grand final. I cannot forget that date. Some of us wished that we were in Melbourne rather than Wellington! The presentation was unique. Our committee does not have a direct parallel in any other jurisdiction but it is carving out its own role to a certain extent. In adopting the methodology of providing an oversight function to the statutory officeholders, we can perform a very important role for this Parliament and the community.

I will not go into the content of the report because I know that other members will do that in much more detail. In 2001 the Auditor General conducted a performance examination of the Department of Health's management of deliberate self-harm of young people. Members will be aware that mental health is a very topical issue now, just as it had a prominent role two years ago. The report from 2001 entitled "Life Matters: Management of Deliberate Self-Harm in Young People" was tabled in Parliament on 28 November 2001. This performance examination compared the care given by hospital emergency departments and community mental health services against guidelines developed in 2000 by the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists for the management of deliberate self-harm by young people. Four years later - this attracted our attention - the Auditor General audited the Department of Health's compliance with the six recommendations made in the 2001 performance examination. The follow-up examination, which was reported in the Auditor General's second public sector performance report of 2005, concluded that the Department of Health had made limited progress in addressing the committee's six recommendations. In some areas it was quite critical that the progress had been very limited, to put it diplomatically. The committee noted that conclusion and considered that further scrutiny of the Department of Health's actions in the four years following the 2001 performance examination was warranted. Initially, the committee scrutinised the specific actions taken by the Department of Health by examining witnesses from the Office of the Auditor General and the Department of Health. We provided both agencies with an opportunity to put forward their respective views on the level of progress that had been made. We also sought to examine the progress of the Department of Health from a health consumers' perspective. We heard from Mr Keith Wilson, who is a former Minister for Health in this state and who is also the former chair of the Mental Health Council of Australia. For a research policy perspective, we also heard from Professor Sven Silburn, the chair of the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention. I am pleased to say that the committee's inquiry was welcomed by the Auditor General. I must report that the committee's involvement in playing an oversight role of the five

statutory parliamentary officeholders has been welcomed by all of those organisations. They see it as a very valuable adjunct to their responsibilities to Parliament.

The committee identified specific improvements that had been made and specific improvements that were required to enhance the clinical management of young people at risk of deliberate self-harm, particularly in the context of providing more effective and efficient administrative practices. Members will see eight recommendations in the report. The government, as is the case, duly responded to those recommendations in a follow-up report to Parliament tabled on 20 December 2006. Members will see when they read that report that satisfactory progress has been made in some areas but that more work must be done in other areas. The committee continues to have a watching brief on these aspects and will revisit the issue if that is warranted. I just wanted to introduce the report by explaining the methodology of the committee. I note that other members of the committee considered this to be a very interesting topic that is very worthy of further investigation. In particular, Hon Helen Morton, who was on or committee at that stage but who has now deserted us, has a particular interest in this area, as does Hon Ed Dermer. I will leave it to other members to take up some of the specific issues contained in the report.

HON HELEN MORTON: Most members are probably aware that more people die from suicide each year than from road crashes. That has always been the case. Suicide is now the largest cause of injury death in Western Australia. For every person who commits suicide, another 10 make a serious suicide attempt. Many more men than women die as a result of suicide. Although women attempt suicide more frequently, men use more deadly means. Recently we have heard about a growing trend in the number of teenage girls who have committed suicide. Contrary to what most people think, about 35 per cent of men suicide following a relationship breakdown, rather than as a result of having a mental illness. Other precipitating factors include financial stress. More than 50 per cent of the women who commit suicide do so when it is precipitated by a mental illness that has followed a relationship problem. The number of suicides is highest among 24 to 35-year-olds. Essentially, this is a very serious problem for young people. The situation for people of that age group who live in the city has stabilised over recent years, but it has not stabilised in regional areas. The rate of suicide has continued to grow in the country and in Aboriginal communities twice the number of people commit suicide than is the case elsewhere. This is happening when the incidence of most other illnesses is being reduced on a global scale. Mental illness is increasing globally.

People have talked about the three oncoming worldwide epidemics as the three Ds - depression, diabetes and dementia. By 2020, depression will be the leading cause of disability globally. Against this backdrop, the committee became concerned that the Department of Health was not taking seriously the Auditor General's 2001 performance examination comparing hospital emergency departments.

Progress reported and leave granted to sit again, pursuant to standing orders.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 to 2.00 pm