

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE STANDING COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO THE PROTECTION OF CROWDED PLACES FROM TERRORIST ACTS



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 14 FEBRUARY 2018**

**SESSION ONE
VENUESWEST**

Members

**Mr P.A. Katsambanis (Chairman)
Mr M.J. Folkard (Deputy Chairman)
Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup
Mr A. Krsticevic
Mr D.T. Punch**

Hearing commenced at 10.15 am**Mr DAVID EHERTON****Chief Executive Officer, examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: Good morning everyone and welcome today. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for agreeing to appear today to provide evidence in relation to the inquiry into the protection of crowded places in Western Australia from terrorism. My name is Peter Katsambanis and I am the Chair of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee. I would like to introduce the other members of the committee. We have the Deputy Chair, Mark Folkard, member for Burns Beach; Mr Zak Kirkup, member for Dawesville; Mr Don Punch, member for Bunbury; and Mr Tony Krsticevic, who is the member for Carine. It is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of this committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. Some of the questions that we ask today may require answers that contain sensitive or confidential information. If this is the case, the committee is able to take evidence in a closed session. Hansard will continue to make a transcript of the session but the transcript will not be publicly available unless the committee or the Legislative Assembly resolves to authorise its release. Your evidence is protected by parliamentary privilege. However, this privilege does not apply to anything that you might say outside of today's proceedings. Before we begin with our questions, do you have any questions about your attendance today or the procedure that we are about to embark on?

Mr EHERTON: I think you have answered the main one for me, which is in relation to questions you might ask and whether the response is not in the public interest to be released from a safety or security perspective. I look forward to seeing how we handle that one.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have a brief opening statement that you would like to make before we start asking questions?

Mr EHERTON: Yes. I welcome the inquiry. It is obviously very important. VenuesWest will have five million visitors to our venues next year, which is a lot of the public of Western Australia coming into crowded places. Security, unfortunately, and counterterrorism has become a more important part of what we do and who we are, so I welcome the inquiry and look forward to talking to you about it.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. I will open it up to questions from our various committee members, but, at the outset, how do you as a venue identify potential terrorism risks and which agencies do you deal with on a regular basis to assess your preparedness for dealing with any of those risks?

Mr EHERTON: Short question with probably a long answer. We start with a set of plans called incident response plans. Those incident response plans look at the various risks that are facing us in terms of incidents that happen in our venues. Sitting underneath those incident response plans you have emergency management plans, and I will talk about the changes that we have done in the emergency management planning space as a result of the unfortunate rise of terrorism in the last three to five years. You then have business continuity plans and crisis management plans as well. In the olden days—I say the olden days; I have been at VenuesWest for 10 years now—prior to terrorism becoming an unfortunate, regular part of our thinking and prior to the national threat assessment getting to its current status, there was a little bit in those about bomb threats because that was something that happened irregularly, but something that happened. Now what has happened is that we have split our emergency management plans into two separate plans. We have the traditional fire, flood and heart attack responses that we need to respond to and then we have

security management plans, which focus on the stuff that we are talking about today, so how do we respond to security risks and how do we respond to knife attacks et cetera? The principal way that we identify the risk is that we go through planning for every single venue that we have and we look at the incidents that are there and that are likely to occur. We go through a risk management process and then we plan how we would respond to those.

“Who do we interact with?” was the second part of your question. In this space, particularly in the last three years there has been a substantial increase in the interaction between our services and law enforcement agencies, and that has probably reached its crescendo in the last month with the user-pays policing legislation that has recently gone through. But we interact regularly with the WA police and various bits of the WA police. I can go through those if you want to, but it is WA police and various arms in the WA police. We interact regularly with ASIO and there is a crowded places forum that happens in WA and has happened regularly again for the last three or four years. Last year, VenuesWest in our facility hosted two of the crowded places forums for Western Australia and we are about to host our third in a couple of weeks. Those forums are where the people involved in crowded places and the protection of crowded places get together and discuss the current trends, the current responses and the current learnings that are in place. You get information about the current threat levels, information about current responses and what other people are doing and you share information as an industry. Crowded places is obviously a lot bigger than just VenuesWest’s sporting and entertainment venues.

The CHAIRMAN: Who coordinates this crowded places forum?

Mr ETHERTON: WAPOL.

The CHAIRMAN: It is WAPOL—okay, great.

Mr ETHERTON: There is a CT—counterterrorism—part of the WA Police Force. I would probably get its name wrong but that section coordinates those forums and partners with crowded places to get together.

The CHAIRMAN: In your operational plans, have you incorporated or applied the national crowded places strategy in your operations?

Mr ETHERTON: Yes. In the national crowded places strategy there is a checklist and we have been through that with every single one of our venues and assessed our compliance and performance against that checklist. Absolutely, we have incorporated the findings, the information and the recommendations from that into our security management plans exclusively and a little bit into our incident response plans as well.

The CHAIRMAN: Some venues across Australia—I noticed it particularly recently at the Sydney Cricket Ground during the test and also during the Melbourne Spring Racing Carnival at Flemington, have employed facial recognition cameras that every patron needs to walk through prior to entering the venue. Have you considered or applied that sort of technology here in Western Australia and do you think in the future it is likely to be necessary?

Mr ETHERTON: I am just contemplating, Peter, whether to answer that in camera or in open forum. The first bit of your question was: have we considered and contemplated it? Yes, absolutely, and we have the technical capability to be able to do that at Optus Stadium. Just some software and a few little changes are required to execute that.

The CHAIRMAN: Would there be any legal impediments in the Western Australian legislation that would hinder or prohibit you from utilising that sort of technology?

Mr ETHERTON: Not that I am aware of, Peter.

The CHAIRMAN: Would it be technically feasible or affordably feasible if the technical capacity is not there at the moment, to apply it to other venues that you operate?

Mr ETHERTON: In planning your investment in systems, people, infrastructure, processes and venues in responding to the terrorism threat, it is about a risk-based approach and the likelihood of those events occurring. It is not particularly expensive given that CCTV infrastructure exists in our most regularly attended venues. Yes, it is potentially affordable. It is a risk-based assessment that needs to be undertaken.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I notice that at Perth Arena, VenuesWest is the governance agency and AEG Ogden is the operator. Security Consulting Group prepared your security-risk assessments and management plans, and then Secure Events and Assets provides security for the arena on an event-by-event basis, as I understand it. It is four individual organisations and third parties that operate in that environment to secure one facility; that is, Perth Arena. Can you explain to us the interactions of those four organisations and why that is not being dealt with by a single organisation or third party, and any challenges that might exist there? I think anyone would know that the more layers you add to a response or a preparedness issue, or the more third parties you have, I guess, the more solid things can become. I am curious to get your understanding of how that operates in Perth Arena.

Mr ETHERTON: Can you just repeat the four. I got three of them in my head.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: VenuesWest, AEG Ogden, Security Consulting Group and Secure Events and Assets.

Mr ETHERTON: On a day-to-day event basis—I went into the control room on Sunday for the mixed martial arts event, the UFC event, that was there. On an event day there are only three organisations involved. There is AEG Ogden, the venue manager; there is the security company; and then there is the police. The consultant who developed the plan just developed the plan —

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: And then gave it across.

Mr ETHERTON: — and then handed it across to AEG Ogden to implement. Then there will be bits of that that will need to be implemented by the security company and bits of that that need to be implemented by the police, but mostly by the security company. Then the interaction between the police and the security company and the staff on the ground is an absolutely vital part of how people are protected in crowded places, not just from security incidents, but from all sorts of things that might happen in a crowded place, not just terrorism incidents, but other security-related incidents. The reason we have control rooms and the reason we have the parties represented in those control rooms and the reason that we have radios for the ushers and the senior ushers and radios for the police and radios for the security people and we have people coordinating in the control room, is to make sure that that interface and that integration works. Everyone has clearly defined responsibilities, so there are things that security will do that the police will not do. There are things that police can do that security cannot do, and ushers are not to get into security-related incidents and sort them out; they are there to make sure that the security people are aware of it. The three organisations functioning well together is a regular occurrence. VenuesWest does not have a day-to-day role at Perth Arena or at Optus Stadium. Our role is to see and approve the plan and make sure that that meets our requirements.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: That is the security plan?

Mr ETHERTON: The security plan and then to make sure that they are executing on that plan.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Just on that plan, I realise that you are custodian of the facility on behalf of the state in this case. You have seen the plan and you have signed off on the plan, I imagine. Does that plan ever go to the ministers or cabinet for approval?

Mr ETHERTON: No.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: How does VenuesWest assure the government of the day that they have got things under control in that respect if they do not see that security plan and the checklist and your progress about meeting the requirements there attached to the security plan?

Mr ETHERTON: What expertise is in place in the minister's office or in cabinet in relation to security of venues that would help them assess that plan, I am not sure.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: So because there is no counterterrorism expert in cabinet, you do not think—your view is that they should not be apprised of that information.

Mr ETHERTON: The plans are developed by experts, assessed by experts, modified by experts and approved by experts in the industry. I am not sure of the value, but if the minister's office ever asked for it, we would provide it.

The CHAIRMAN: But there is no formal reporting process that you are aware of that makes government, or Parliament for that matter, aware of either these plans or any issues that may arise.

Mr ETHERTON: There is a statutory obligation to have the plans in place, but are they sent to cabinet or Parliament? No.

The CHAIRMAN: Does anyone else audit them or oversee them? Is there a particular agency that knocks on your door and says, "Can we see that you've got this plan and that the plan is appropriate?"

Mr ETHERTON: No.

The CHAIRMAN: How often is it reviewed?

Mr ETHERTON: Each of the plans have a review date. Generally, they are reviewed every two years, but if incidents occur, so like when the France stadium incident occurred, you review your systems and your operations and infrastructure in response to that.

[10.30 am]

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: David, it concerns me a little bit that it is almost like a "She'll be right, mate" attitude towards it. I would be interested in your opinion in relation to that. Because you have had experts involved, how do we know that it has been reviewed and how do we know that the correct oversight is in place? The key to this inquiry is to see how we sit with parliamentary oversight in this particular space.

Mr ETHERTON: The contractual arrangement between us and AEG Ogden has a requirement for them to share those and the same at Optus Stadium so I am speaking generically here. At our partner-managed venues where someone manages them on our behalf, there are obligations for them to provide the plans and obligations for them to comply with the Australian standard in regard to risk management. VenuesWest nearly a year ago now commissioned a review by an external consultant into our compliance with the standard. We got an independent expert to go back and look at our processes and our systems. They came up with a set of recommendations for us to evolve those processes and recommendations. But at the moment I am not aware of any requirement to report to Parliament in regard to those requirements.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: The simple answer is that we have to be satisfied. You were saying you have had experts look at them. We cannot just have this oversight; we just have to be reassured that you have the right information based on what is put in front of you. Am I correct in saying that?

Mr ETHERTON: The oversight is compliant with the legislation and compliant with the Australian standard. That is the oversight. But who actually comes and checks that—we have an internal audit program, which comes and checks our compliance with that. Again, the results of that internal audit program are not shared with the minister—I presume that is your next question. We have an internal audit program and we are required to regularly assess all our systems and processes, and those are assessed as part of that on a cyclical basis.

The CHAIRMAN: We are all vitally interested in this. It is really probably the reason why we are holding this inquiry. As Mr Kirkup rightly said, there seems to be a “leave it to the experts and she’ll be right, mate” attitude.

Mr ETHERTON: Can I say I have heard that three times now—“she’ll be right.” That never came out of my mouth —

The CHAIRMAN: I understand that.

Mr ETHERTON: — and I do not agree with it in any way, shape or form.

The CHAIRMAN: I am not making the suggestion that that is the attitude of your organisation or yourself. It just seems to be the oversight; that is what the gap looks like at the moment. You seem to have your plans in place and know what you are doing and comparing yourself to best practice around the world and learning from other events. That is fantastic, but from an oversight point of view, if you were required to regularly report on this preparedness to a parliamentary or governmental body of the executive government, would it be an onerous obligation on you?

Mr ETHERTON: I think, given the environment that we currently live in, the changed environment, that this has evolved over the last decade but particularly in the last five years. The terrorism environment has evolved substantially and the threat to crowded places has changed significantly. The Australian national threat level has increased, so I do not think it would be onerous, Peter. It depends on the framework and the arrangements put in place, but I am sure we could do it, so it is not onerous.

The CHAIRMAN: No problem.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I wanted to focus on people, process and complacency. We have seen plenty of examples around the world where there is a high level of security, and even recently it has been reported in Parliament House here in Western Australia, where people are being let in through side doors and passes have been shared between people. VenuesWest, obviously, has many thousands of employees, probably lots of part-time people involved, maybe students even, and obviously in terms of people being conscious of what the potential threats are, what are your training processes? How do you make sure people stay focused? How do you make sure that people who a lot of people are uncomfortable with, are challenged in each and every situation? Even if it looks like it is all good, you still need to make sure you have ticked those boxes, checked those balances, checked the passes and checked the accesses and do not take anybody on their word because a lot of that goes on. I have no doubt about that. I am really interested in the staffing side of it, what is the ongoing training and do you have covert operations to see if people can break your security?

Mr ETHERTON: Can I just give you a handout of just one slide—one bit of paper—that talks about the interrelationship? I think you have picked up three of the five important areas, but there are just two others that are worth talking about as well. I will come back to that question about staff.

Security preparedness is at the top of that pyramid and is a function of five things. The last one, which is really what you folks want to know about, is safety and security culture, but there is a “trained and prepared staff” there in number 3. The first one is “venue design and hardening” and the second one is “venue systems and processes”. Peter, where your question started was about systems and processes. The third one is “trained and prepared staff”, the fourth one is “police and security presence and quality” and the last one is the interaction with the hirer who comes into the venue. The UFC had their own security arrangements and their own interaction with security and police. They are the five pillars of preparedness, and underpinning all of those is a safety and security culture, and that is about the “trained and prepared staff”. I will just go to my notes on trained and prepared staff. The first thing is, again, five years ago our regular drills—we have a statutory obligation to conduct drills in our venues—were fire drills, in essence, and very rarely anything else. I can go into a bit more detail about what those drills are currently, but I think that it is not in the public interest to do that in an open forum. If you want to defer that until later and we talk about the nature of those drills, what we do, what we test, how often we do it and all that sort of stuff, I am happy to do that. I just do not think it is in the interest of the security of the venues to do that in a public forum.

The CHAIRMAN: I think it may be useful to continue with the hearing, take it as read at the moment that you conduct these drills, and after the hearing, as we undertake the inquiry, perhaps it may be beneficial to have a private briefing at one of the venues where you can walk us through these steps. That is just me thinking out loud, but it may well be beneficial for all of us to come along and get a quick overview of your operation centre and all of those other issues, and that is where we can discuss some of the specifics of the drills to better inform us.

Mr ETHERTON: I am happy to do that. Nothing improves the staff preparedness and the staff alertness and the safety culture better than doing a review of a drill and saying, “We lost people because you did the wrong thing. We lost people because you were not prepared. We lost people because you were not prepared to challenge the mock individual that we sent into the venue and we did not take the appropriate steps.” In terms of getting a security culture, those drills, the debriefs on those drills, the conversations with the staff about those drills and the communications about those drills are a really important part of our preparedness. It is a lot easier to react in a crisis situation when you have been through it before. Whether that is in a drill or in reality, it is always a lot easier to react. Repetition is the mother of skill, so that is why we do that. We have a counterterrorism training schedule in place at VenuesWest. Again, I will not go into the detail of that. I will say it is in line with the Australian strategy for protecting crowded places ANZCTC topics, but I will not go into the details of that training. As you would expect, it covers things like counterterrorism awareness, active shooter, dynamic lockdowns, IED, chemical weapons —

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Dynamic lockdowns? Sorry; can you clarify that?

Mr ETHERTON: Dynamic lockdown is—can I do that in camera?

[10.40 am]

The CHAIRMAN: I think I am starting to lean towards perhaps coming out and having a look and we may be able to deal with it there. I have some background of understanding of what it means. But, yes, I think there are levels of information, and that is the issue that we are grappling with as a committee. There are levels of information that are important to know, but the specific details may actually compromise rather than assist security.

Mr ETHERTON: In broad terms, it is a strategy in response to a particular type of incident.

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: The concern for us is that we need to know that you, as an organisation, and others out there are getting oversight to make sure that you have those in place. Although there is a requirement for that security—we have no doubt about it—one of the key issues for this inquiry is to have a look at how we, as a Parliament, can actually assure the community of Western Australia that we do have that oversight. These plans are not just plans on paper; they are actually how you do business. Does that make sense?

The CHAIRMAN: Can I focus on pillar 1 of this handout, where you talk about venue design and hardening. I understand you are not responsible for venue design in many cases. You are told to manage the venue. Sometimes you get input into the venue design. Specifically focusing on Optus Stadium, do you believe that the predominance of stairs rather than ramps as the method of moving people between levels from the train station all the way through the stadium is a heightened risk if there is a requirement for a mass evacuation?

Mr ETHERTON: No, and I am happy to go into detail, again, in camera as to why I do not believe that is the case.

The CHAIRMAN: We will just leave it on the record at the moment that you do not think it is an added risk. Had those stairs and ramps not been there in many instances, it would have made for a safer venue for a quick evacuation? No.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I realise the member for Bunbury is —

The CHAIRMAN: It is his turn; sorry. I just wanted to finish off this area.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I want to take you back to some of the earlier discussion on the lines of accountability. Within the framework and the system for preparedness that you have, which position is the end-point deciding position that the systems and processes are actually satisfactory or at best practice?

Mr ETHERTON: In our governance arrangement, we have a board of VenuesWest. Ultimately, the board is the accountable authority and the board is responsible for it.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Are any of those counterterrorism experts?

Mr ETHERTON: We have significant crowded places experience and significant event-related experience on that board. Are they counterterrorism experts? I would say probably not.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Just on that point, they may not need to be counterterrorism experts, but what degree of knowledge exists at that level in regard to the management and oversight of these sorts of systems and processes?

Mr ETHERTON: Extensive is the answer to that. Some of the biggest and highest risk events that have occurred in Western Australia have been overseen by our chairman in his role previously in regards to CHOGM, Richard Muirhead and his experience in that regard. There is a whole different layer when you start bringing Queens and Presidents out to Australia, and that experience is really well utilised on the group. What I did not say is that we have a risk and governance committee as well, and the risk and governance committee's role with regard to this area is to oversee the more detailed analysis of the work that we do. As a committee of the board, they go into more depth than the board does and the board takes recommendations from them.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: So the responsibility stops with the board and presumably with the board chair; it does not extend to the minister?

Mr ETHERTON: Yes, I would say the board is our accountable authority.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Now there is a system of contracts that sit below this in terms of the rollout of the operational management of security systems. To what extent does the board satisfy itself with the quality of systems that actually exist within each of those bodies, particularly when it gets down to the level of contracting, for example, of security personnel on-site?

Mr ETHERTON: The board approved the appointment of security companies to VenuesWest. In 2015, maybe 2016, we entered into a tender arrangement to get the appropriate security people in place. The board approved that tender going out. The board approved the appointments to that. The board delegated authority to me to finalise the contracts with them based on State Solicitor's Office advice, so we obviously used the State Solicitor's Office to ensure that we had the appropriate contracts in place. But the board did not read—I am going from memory here, Don—those contracts.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: There is certainly an emphasis on commercial due diligence that I am hearing there. Is there a process of confirming evidence around the ability of those operations, those organisations, to manage security systems to an acceptable quality standard?

Mr ETHERTON: Absolutely. That is what the tender process is all about. If you look at the selection criteria—I do not have it in my head—the top-ranked selection criteria will be the capacity to perform the services to the extent required.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: If I may, what evidence do you look for to support meeting that criteria?

Mr ETHERTON: In the tender document, which I have here—I do not, I only have the evaluation report—the selection criteria revolve around specified purposes, so suitability of proposed services, specified personnel, so getting the right people in place with the right licences that are required, organisational capacity and demonstrated experience. They are the three areas that we focused on. Do they have the right people? Do they have the right systems? Do they have the right experience? Have they done it before?

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am suggesting that those sort of criteria could apply to many different forms of contract. We are in a particularly specialised area here in regard to the safety of the public in crowded places. Is there anything further that you can give us that gives comfort to a thorough, detailed evidence-gathering process in relation to the organisation's ability to provide effective services? Is there anything specialised in the criteria that recognises we are dealing with a particular set of circumstances?

Mr ETHERTON: The licensing of security personnel—Don, excuse me; I will get the terminology wrong, but there is a statutory obligation for licensed security professionals, whatever they are called, and our tender required people to submit people who were those licensed security professionals.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Your system relies on the ability of a licensing body—I presume it is WA Police —

Mr ETHERTON: I think it is WA Police.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: — in terms of their oversight of that licensing process.

The CHAIRMAN: I think at some level you have to rely on your contractual arrangements with third parties. Again, from a committee point of view, I think one of the real question marks that we have is: how do we deal with the potential threat of infiltration, for want of a better word, of a third party security agency who in good faith are providing services? I think that is something beyond your control.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I think that we as a committee need to establish what the lines of responsibility are and how decisions are made in relation to the various contracts and how the contracts are supervised.

The CHAIRMAN: Definitely. Just reversing one of the earlier questions Mr Punch had, if you identify an issue—a cooperation issue or in your plans, you identify that another agency—I will use WAPOL as an example; I am not suggesting that they are doing any of this. But if you think there are chinks in their armour, for want of a better term, how do you report it up?

Mr ETHERTON: There are two responses to that. The first response is to go to the top of the tree, so you go to the commissioner. The Commissioner for Police has agreed to come and address the VenuesWest board to have a conversation about how we work together. Again, Richard Muirhead worked closely with him in regard to the previous major events that he worked on and they had a conversation not long after the new commissioner's appointment and the commissioner has agreed to come to a board meeting of VenuesWest. The first thing is to establish appropriate dialogue between the agencies at the highest possible level. The second thing is if there was an incident like you mentioned, we would raise it with our minister and expect the minister to raise it with the police minister.

[10.50 am]

The CHAIRMAN: Do you rate the level of threat by venue? I am not going to ask you to identify which venues you have identified, but do you actually walk through and say this venue has a higher risk or a higher threat than the other venue?

Mr ETHERTON: Absolutely; there are different risk assessments for each venue and on every event. A venue that has a particular event in—combat sports is an example—and the same venue that has netball in it have a different risk profile during that event. A risk management plan is required that reflects the nature of the hirer and the nature of the attendees who are coming to that event.

The CHAIRMAN: Again, without disclosing specifics of venues, in your operational plans, have you identified any risks at any of your venues in relation to mass evacuation—the need to get lots of people out really quickly?

Mr ETHERTON: Have we identified risks if we need to get people out? That is a response rather than a risk generally, unless there is a problem with the evac capability.

The CHAIRMAN: That is my question.

Mr ETHERTON: The health department has some very clear regulations in regard to the requirements you have to evacuate a venue, how many doors per 1 000 people in the venue, the width of those doors, the unobstructed width, the pinch points, the corners—all that sort of stuff. When our venues are assessed—you earlier talked about our involvement in the design—I am not sure about the first four venues in our portfolio but in the last nine since I have been the CEO there, we have been involved in the design of eight of those nine venues. The one at Champion Lakes was already built before we got involved in that venue. We do have involvement in the design, sometimes as a client and sometimes as a quasi-client. There are very clear requirements in regard to egress and the planning and the infrastructure required to allow egress in an appropriate time frame. You do not get your occupancy certificate if you do not meet those requirements.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Just on the design very quickly, noting the time, all of us have noticed that Perth Arena has recently—in the last year or so—had bollards installed around the perimeter. I noticed—this is the micro part of the design but is of interest to me—there are about four metres of unprotected pathway, I suppose, between Wellington Street and the bollard perimeter. Why is that four metres still exposed? When I go to an event there, that is still full. To me, there are a number

of easy ways to get up. There are ramps that can go onto that path. I am just curious to understand why that is not entirely covered given that the arena and, I assume, VenuesWest has gone to the point of protecting and harbouring that environment because of the likelihood or possibility of a rogue vehicle attack. I am curious as to why there is still an extended portion of the footpath that is not covered.

Mr ETHERTON: I would love to answer that question in detail, but I would like to do it in private.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there a particular reason why it needs to be in private?

Mr ETHERTON: Because to answer that question, I would be explaining the risk analysis that we undertake and the risks attached with that and then potentially making it more likely that someone could exploit that risk analysis.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: I note that the member for Cowan, Dr Aly, previously came out criticising the security at Perth Arena. Was that not raising the ire of risk for you guys in any case? That was surely a concern as well from a VenuesWest perspective.

Mr ETHERTON: Yes, and I spoke to her.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Previously or after?

Mr ETHERTON: After. Twice.

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Had the member for Cowan previously raised those concerns with VenuesWest?

Mr ETHERTON: No.

The CHAIRMAN: After your discussion with the member for Cowan, did you take any further action—again, you do not have to tell us what that was—to enhance security at your venue or was it simply an education process?

Mr ETHERTON: A fair bit of it was an education process. One of the statements made publicly was that everyone comes out of Perth Arena from one set of doors. There were six sets of doors open on that particular night—about 30 doors. So part of it was an education process. In response to some statements that she made, we looked at the tentacles of movement around Perth Arena and how many people go out those other doors. Whenever we get new information or whenever someone makes a statement, of course we look at it. Public safety is at the top of our list. I do not want to avoid any of these questions. I am really happy to go into this detail; I just do not want to do it publicly.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: On that staffing issue again, and training and process, I would be interested at some point in time to get more details about exactly what you do and the refresher, because, as I said, with the turnover of your staff and the part-time nature of a lot of them, I find that it would be difficult to have them at the right level of awareness unless you have some really good processes or procedures in place that they have to follow as a matter of course, rather than just leaving it up to, “We’ve had a chat” or “We’ve done a drill.” You really almost need to tick boxes on a bit of paper to say, “Check the pass, this, that or the other. It might be my brother or my cousin, but that doesn’t matter, I’ve got to make sure that I’ve frisked them down” and no-one gets through, because in a lot of the attacks around the world, it is relatives and people that no-one would have ever picked. I guarantee you that human nature is such that, “she’ll be right” does unfortunately occasionally come into the equation and we need strict processes to make sure that does not take place. I am sure you try your best, but I would really be interested to know —

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Just to clarify, though, not all those people that the member is talking about would be your staff; they would be staff of the other agencies.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: That is correct. I suppose the other question, which was mentioned before, was on the security companies and other providers. Have we got the right level of checks and balances there or can anybody more or less get a security licence by ticking a few boxes?

The CHAIRMAN: That is for other agencies; we are right at the start of the process.

Mr A. KRSTICEVIC: I think it is dangerous. I know you are sort of saying, “They’re approved; tick the box”, but the question is: how well have they been approved and how secure are their processes?

Mr ETHERTON: And I welcome any feedback on that.

I will talk about an event basis, because that is obviously where the risk is at its highest. I mentioned before that every event has a risk analysis undertaken for it. An event management plan actually occurs on an event-by-event basis. If it is 12 Wildcats games in a row, that event management plan is, in essence, a copy of the previous one, but, depending. Sometimes you will get a particular player coming over who has caused the ire of the crowd previously, so the event management plan varies. The event management plan goes through and talks about all the risks, talks about all the responses and talks about the responsibilities. In the case of something like the Foo Fighters, it is a 50 or 60-page document going through, right from start to finish, who is doing what, what are the risks, how are we going to mitigate those risks and who has what responsibilities, what are the phone numbers of all the people if the radios fail, what radio channel should everyone be on—all that sort of stuff. In that, you have talked a lot about casuals—people right at the end of the chain—and the people who know the most about that and who developed that risk management plan and understand it back to front are obviously those in the control room. As you go down the chain of responsibility, yes, there is less knowledge about what needs to happen, but in response to a crisis incident, there needs to be someone in charge. People need to be directed and told what to do, whether that is patrons or staff.

We then have briefings. Starting as far as two days out, all the agencies involved—the police, the security company, the caterer and whoever else is involved—will be involved in a briefing. They will be sent a copy of that event management plan. They will be involved in a briefing in regard to that event management plan. Then it goes down to the subcontractors, whether they are usher staff—sometimes they are our usher staff. They will be briefed. This 50-page plan is locked down into a one-page summary that they carry with them which is what they need to do. Then as part of their pre-event briefing, when they come in an hour before gates open or doors open, whichever the scenario is, their supervisor in their area who will be responsible if things go wrong—responsible for mitigating the risk—will brief them on their responsibilities in that cut-down version and then they will be required to read and carry with them that cut-down version of the plan. That is about customer service and a variety of different things about who the acts are and all that sort of stuff, but it is also about their responses to security-related incidents. At an event, it cascades down and the planning and preparation is really very, very good, but, yes, people with less responsibility have less information, and I think that is normal in any operations.

The CHAIRMAN: We are going to fast run out of time, but it looks like we are going to need to have a continuing dialogue. Just to close off, you talked about that 50-page contract —

Mr ETHERTON: Event management plan.

The CHAIRMAN: Event management plan and contract. It gives rise to that infamous story about the band Van Halen inserting a clause that there should be no brown M&Ms and if there were brown M&Ms in the dressing room, they then instructed their people to do a complete and utter total line check for safety across the venue. It was written by the singer’s father, who was a senior entertainment lawyer in Los Angeles. You would think they would know what they were doing. Who

is ultimately responsible at your venues from VenuesWest for compliance with that plan or contract?

[11.00 am]

Mr ETHERTON: In any event, or in daily operations, we have a chief warden assigned in the venue. In the control room, the chief warden is the person responsible for compliance with the event management plan. The chief warden is responsible for telling everyone what to do when things go wrong. The chief warden is generally not the general manager of the facility; it is generally an operations manager sitting underneath the general manager of the facility, and they have an explicit responsibility to be in the control room and to manage what happens in an event-related scenario. In non-event related scenarios, we also have a chief warden, and, again, that is not me or the general manager of the facility; it is someone whose responsibility is to take on chief warden responsibilities.

The CHAIRMAN: Thank you. As I said, we are time limited because we cannot meet while Parliament is sitting. We thank you for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 working days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added through the corrections; we do not want you to change the sense of your evidence, but if you want to provide any additional material or elaborate on any particular points, we are very keen to hear from you, so please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence.

As I said, it sounds like we are going to have a little bit more communication.

Mr ETHERTON: I am happy for the committee to come to a control room and be involved in an event and see what happens and talk through those intricate details.

The CHAIRMAN: All right. Thank you. I think we will take you up on that kind offer.

Hearing concluded at 11.02 pm
