

**POLICE — MORALE AND OPERATIONAL STRENGTH**

*Matter of Public Interest*

**THE SPEAKER (Mrs M.H. Roberts)** informed the Assembly that she was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Leader of the Liberal Party seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

**MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [2.52 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Minister for Police for his refusal to accept there is plummeting morale amongst —

**Dr A.D. Buti** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister for Education, those interjections are unruly. The member has barely had 20 seconds on her feet.

**Ms L. METTAM:** I move —

That this house condemns the Minister for Police for his refusal to accept there is plummeting morale amongst the WA Police Force and for overseeing an exodus of police leaving the force.

Before I speak to this motion, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my condolences on behalf of the opposition to the family, friends and colleagues of Senior Constable Liam Trimmer who died in an off-duty accident over the weekend. It is a heartbreaking tragedy that will undoubtedly have a devastating impact on those who were close to him, and also the wider police family. Our support and thoughts go out to all members of the WA Police Force as they grapple with the loss of one of their own.

I would also like to reinforce that this motion is about the performance of the Minister for Police, not the WA Police Force. As the opposition has consistently said, we, along with every member in this house, certainly support the extraordinary efforts of our frontline services, including WA police and the incredible efforts they make and what they achieve. We have a longstanding support and admiration for the work the WA police do. I am sure that I am joined by every member in this place on that matter.

However, this motion is not about that; it is about the minister, and some realities that the police force face and significant issues that put this extraordinary cohort of workers under incredible pressure. The minister has made many great statements in and outside this place about what he wants to do to build his force, but it is quite clear that this minister has no idea how to do that—he is certainly no closer to delivering it as well. This minister continues to resort to Labor’s nothing-to-see-here approach of diverting and deflecting when it comes to significant issues happening under its watch. That is a script that we have often seen under the Cook Labor government. It has failed to address or allay any of the real concerns across this workforce. It gives the same lines that only serve to show how out of touch this government has become on significant issues affecting the morale of some of our most respected workers.

The reality is that there is an exodus of officers from the police force; it is unlike anything we have ever seen before. In the last two years, we have seen 1 051 officers leave the force—either resigning or retiring. Last year alone, there were 403 resignations. In 2022, there were 473 resignations, which is about three times the average number. This raises the question: what legacy will this police minister and the Cook Labor government leave?

In 2023, there were 377 graduates. In 2022, there were 446 graduates. The graduates are not even keeping pace with attrition. That does not include the 46 resignations and retirements in January this year—and those in February as well. Officers are leaving the force in droves, and the government does not know how to stem the flow. That is quite clear. A force facing record levels of violent crime in the community has one hand tied behind its back. It is a workforce that is continually doing more with less as it tries to fill gaps as a stream of officers make the decision to resign. Instead of taking a look behind the curtains to see what is happening and why these issues remain and continue, we see a nothing-to-see-here approach from the Minister for Police in particular. The minister even denies that there is a problem, and at the same time spins that the government’s election pledge for an extra 950 officers above attrition is apparently on track when it is quite clearly not. It would be laughable, except this endemic issue is very serious and is putting extraordinary pressure on our WA police and has broader impacts in the community as well. Despite the rhetoric, the resignation rate has not slowed to normal levels, as claimed by the minister. I am not sure what figures the minister is grasping at, but from a resignation rate of 143 in 2017 to 403 last year, it is hardly at a normal level. The minister is out of touch with reality. The purpose of our motion today is to ensure that the government puts greater focus on this issue and actually realises what is happening. We are seeing escalating levels of burnout, fatigue and low morale plaguing this workforce. It is quite a feat given that these issues have been raised again and again for a number of years.

In 2022, at a time when police recorded the highest number of resignations in WA's history, the minister dismissed claims about morale. I quote —

Police Minister ... dismissed claims that morale amongst rank and file officers was at an all-time low saying he had not “encountered” such views and questioned the motive behind a survey that made the claims.

...

Mr Papalia said he had been to “every police district” in the past year where he talked directly with rank and file officers and had “not encountered the claims made in that survey”.

This time last year, we heard in this place a similar response from the minister when he said —

... we suffer attrition beyond anything that has been seen before because we have the best economy in the world and there are greater opportunities for people ...

The minister also suggested that perhaps they were all leaving because they are hitting 10 years spent in the force. I again quote the minister from *Hansard* —

They might have started as a single person and now have a family ... It might be the time that suits people to leave.

Again, that is inconsistent with the extraordinary numbers we are seeing, which backs up the argument that has been raised about low morale and the need to provide better support to our frontline officers. That was an ignorant response to some very real concerns. If it is not an attractive workplace for people of all ages and experiences, the question is: why not, and what can the government do to ensure that it is? If the minister wants an insight into the reasons that so many of his officers are hitting the exit button and leaving the force, he does not need to look far because when he dismissed the 2022 union survey results about low morale as being nothing more than discontent, he could have looked at his own government's survey results to get a picture of how WA police officers are feeling in their workplace. I am happy to give a very brief version of what the survey results stated. In summary, officers were disillusioned and undervalued. The government would not release the census results publicly, so we had to FOI them. Is it any wonder? Less than half of those surveyed by the public sector census of the WA Police Force would recommend it as a place to work—less than half. Only 47 per cent would recommend it, as opposed to an average of 70 per cent across the public sector, yet the minister does not think there is an issue with morale. As I said, we talk about being out of touch. That is one of the lowest approval ratings of any agency. I think, on average, it was about 70 per cent across the public sector. That shows that this is a workforce that is clearly at a crisis point. The police officers want to be heard and they deserve more support from this government.

This is about the government continually failing to recognise and acknowledge the difficult role the police play in protecting our community. The government has consistently taken this workforce for granted and refuses to acknowledge the very real morale issues within the WA Police Force. The government's defence is that there is nothing to see here, as I have touched on. The government continues to divert and deflect attention from the very real issues of discontent within one of our key public sector workforces, and dodges accountability and transparency. Clearly, there are real morale issues in our police force that the minister refuses to accept. The officers are feeling undervalued and ignored. That is why they are resigning in record numbers. According to the police union, police officers are working within an unrelenting environment. They are being assaulted, spat on, kicked, punched and psychologically harmed. They are also scrutinised by the public and their own employer for every word spoken and every action taken. They are under incredible pressure. In the words of the Western Australian Police Union, this government “has been overpromising and underdelivering for a prolonged period now.” The sad reality is that the fewer boots on the ground we have in our force, the greater we see pressure on those officers and the impact it has on crime and antisocial behaviour. The last WA crime statistics show —

*Point of Order*

**Mr R.S. LOVE:** I am having trouble hearing the member through all the chatter in the chamber.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** There is no point of order, but if ministers want to have a conversation, please keep it down a little.

*Debate Resumed*

**Ms L. METTAM:** The latest WA crime statistics show that non-family threatening behaviour is up by 32 per cent from last year while family-related threatening behaviour is up by 38 per cent. Assaults are also escalating, as many members would be aware, with family-related incidents up by 15 per cent in the last 12 months. The regions are especially suffering with this surge in crime and antisocial and violent behaviour, particularly as they struggle to fill job vacancies. At the same time, rather than addressing any of the cultural issues within the workforce, what has the Minister for Police done? In March 2023, he jumped on a plane to the UK for a photo-op to unashamedly raid workers from there. The minister spent a lot of time filling UK pubs with beach sand and selling WA as being

about safety, stability and sunshine. That was backed by a \$300 000 campaign under the “Western Australia — it’s like no other.” branding.

There were fewer police graduates last year than the year before, with 377 last year and 446 the year before. Let us not forget that this was on top of the so-called blitz in 2021. After making a big pledge for an extra 950 officers on the overall headcount, the government went out all guns blazing with the \$1.8 million advertising campaign “Let’s Join Forces”. It started from a base of 6 637 officers in 2020 and the aim was to have 7 587 by December 2024. The results were underwhelming, to say the least. Although it is difficult to ever get a net accurate headcount from WA Police, at the last count in November, before the final resignations had come through, it was 6 923. That is a good 500 officers short of the big election pledge.

This government does not know how to govern. It is out of touch with the people it represents and with the concerns that we are hearing on the ground. We heard a great deal of frustration from the WA Police Force about the great work they are doing on the ground and the revolving door and the light-touch approach we are seeing reflected in the court system as well, which is another significant issue. Officers are continually telling us that they feel undervalued and ignored. It is for those reasons that we are seeing a record number of resignations. It is also why we are bringing this matter to the house and urging the Minister for Police to take this motion seriously and listen to our concerns on behalf of our dedicated police force, which does an outstanding job.

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition)** [3.08 pm]: I would like to contribute to the motion brought to the chamber by the member for Vasse. In doing so, I would like to highlight that about a year ago there was a very similar discussion in the Parliament on a motion, again brought by the member for Vasse. It stated —

That this house calls for the Minister for Police to address the impacts of poor morale and challenges facing WA police men and women, and be honest about the lagging police numbers.

We know from that debate, as happened today, about the shocking statistics that were highlighted around this government’s lack of success in prosecuting the case for achieving the recruitment targets that it set itself and also in stemming the tide of police leaving the force. The exodus of police has caused the minister to cast far and wide to recruit police to make up for those that he is losing day by day. As we know, despite the statistics that were apparent then, the minister denied that there was a problem. As the member for Vasse has pointed out, the problems have escalated in the last year. I wonder whether the same blasé responses will be provided by the minister as those that we received last year. Last year, for instance, he gloated about how good things were looking for the recruitment of officers —

... things are looking good with recruiting. Not only are there more than 2 000 local applicants, the police have established a recruiting centre. If members go down Hay Street past the 6PR building to the east towards the WACA, on the corner they will see a dedicated recruiting centre ...

He then talked about the effect of his trips away and the effect he could have on collapsing morale in the Western Australia Police Force. He actually said something that was quite right —

If we rely on the Minister for Police —

This particular minister at least —

to establish, maintain and elevate morale at unit level in the police force around the state, we might be asking too much.

Well, that is very true. In fact, we have seen a collapse in morale right across the state. We know that police feel undervalued and overwhelmed in many communities across Western Australia in which they are forced to try to curb what is an escalating crime problem.

We will turn to the Kimberley, for instance. In 2022, the ABC reported on a Kimberley juvenile crime spike that led to the development of Operation Regional Shield that brought in 24 additional police officers to the Kimberley in a bid to target key offenders. In the initial response, 63 arrests were made, more than 100 charges were laid and crime trailed off in Broome and Derby. But we know that crime did not trail off in Broome because a stream of newspaper reports from that community through to late last year told of the devastating crime wave that was impacting the Kimberley, in particular Broome and how it was turning that holiday hotspot into a war zone. This minister may wish to deny that there is a problem in policing, but there certainly has been a spike in crime and he seems to be doing nothing about it. He cannot achieve the recruitment levels that are required to staff the police force at the level that he has said is appropriate, and he has had to respond by putting additional officers into towns on a rolling basis through Operation Regional Shield.

The Broome situation brought an angry response from the member for Kimberley and denials from the Minister for Police and another minister who attended Broome at the time, but I am not sure in what capacity; she is now the Minister for Training and Workforce Development. Back then she denied that the statistics showed a spiralling crime problem in that town, particularly around alcohol. According to the numbers, in 2022 the total alcohol-related

offences in Broome were 22 times higher than the metropolitan rate, 3.7 times higher than the regional average and 11 times higher than the state as a whole over the same period. Alcohol-related family assault figures were even worse with Broome having 28 times the metropolitan rate of offences, four times the regional rate, and 12 times the rate of the state as a whole, and these members of Parliament and ministers are denying there is an issue in this community. The total offences for the town over the same period were also 15 times higher than the metropolitan area, 3.4 times higher than the regional rate and 12 times higher than the state as a whole.

The crisis in that area is impacting the morale of the police force in regional areas as they battle with a lack of resources and a minister who seems to deny that there are problems in those communities. We need solutions, minister. We need the minister to provide the number of police that he promised so that we can work against those statistics that are playing out in not just the Kimberley. The same issues were raised in the goldfields in Kalgoorlie at least a year ago. What has the police minister done about that? Not very much, because there have been further spikes in crime in Kalgoorlie in recent times. Regional shield officers were deployed there, but that happened only after negative publicity with the minister being dragged up there to try to patch up the situation. The minister is not getting about and doing his job of being proactive and ensuring that the police have the resources that they need.

I know that police officers have been involved in negotiations around their remuneration and that the government put them in a pretty difficult and hard-bargaining position in the last round. Many police were disgruntled about the way in which they were treated in that negotiation process and with the very miserable approach taken by the Labor government towards the police, which it claims it supports. It must have been particularly galling for the police when the State Administrative Tribunal gave their boss a big payout that was much bigger in percentage terms than what they were entitled to, according to the government. I am not saying that that huge payout could be afforded across the entire public sector, but it was very galling for the police to see that disparity. I know there is a difference in the way that payout is set and that the Salaries and Allowances Tribunal is involved, but nonetheless, it will probably leave the police feeling unrewarded.

I also want to raise the matter of post-traumatic stress disorder presumptive protection, which the Premier announced would be put in place. Can the minister directly respond to this question, if possible: what is the status of that promised protection? We cannot see that it has been put in place anywhere. Can the minister in his response verify exactly where we are with PTSD presumptive protection, which has been promised, but, as far as I am aware, has not yet come to light? Those things need to be addressed if we are to ensure that our police service feels supported and that its priorities and needs are being taken care of by the minister and the Labor government.

**MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe — Deputy Leader of the Opposition)** [3.18 pm]: I will back up to the member for Vasse's motion —

That this house condemns the Minister for Police for his refusal to accept that there is plummeting morale amongst the Western Australia Police Force and for overseeing an exodus of police leaving the force.

First, I want to thank our police who are doing a great job under trying conditions, including dealing with this minister and the way the balance has gone in relation to pay scale, morale and many other things. Quite frankly, the people of Western Australia have actually had enough of the failures of this government in law and order. The Western Australian Police Union has also had enough. As the member for Vasse pointed out, the light-touch approach is not working and more needs to be done. The same applies to the education system; the light-touch approach is not working. This minister is refusing to look at the plummeting morale in the police force that lacks resources in many sectors. This minister is dealing with legislation that affects 90 000 law-abiding people who own a licensed firearm, when we have a police force that is lacking in morale. There is no better example than the other day—I have had the letter sent out—“Peter James Rundle, Katanning: We are wanting to update and ensure your personal accuracy and personal details. Please give us a call on this number.” What did I do? I rang up three times, and three times the phone was not answered. Eventually we got through to an answering machine. I left my details to call back, but there was no call back. This is the sort of stuff that we are dealing with. We have a police minister who wants to revise the whole firearms system but he does not have the resources in place. I refer to an article from late 2022 by former Commissioner of Police Karl O’Callaghan. He stated —

Police officers are resigning at three times the rate of a decade ago when resignations were, on average about 20 officers per month. At current projections the WA Police is set to lose 500 police officers a year and only a few are moving to the resources sector.

A significant number of those resigning are from the more senior ranks of the force, a warning sign that things are not as the Government and police hierarchy would have us believe.

A workplace health and member services survey completed just two months ago found that more than 64 per cent of police officers rated morale as poor, a significant increase over a previous survey conducted in 2016.

...

The survey really reads like a cry for help but was inexplicably and unceremoniously dismissed by Police Minister Papalia as partly being a ruse to enhance the current police wage negotiations.

The minister might have been better served by asking what has changed in policing in the past few years.

This is a cry for help from the police union. The survey showed that 76.8 per cent of police union members were dissatisfied with the Western Australia police management and culture. Where does that stop? That stops with the Minister for Police. That stops with the minister, who needs to look a bit harder, stop turning up at Westminster saying, “We need more officers”. He should take responsibility.

**MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro — Minister for Police)** [3.22 pm]: I refer at the outset to the tragic loss of Liam Trimmer in recent days. I extend my deepest condolences and those of the entire government to his fiancée and family. It is very sad to reflect upon what has happened.

I also reflect on the insensitive and inappropriate nature of this motion in light of that. It is extraordinary that this ridiculous motion, which, as we heard from the Leader of the Opposition, is a repeat of one moved last year, was brought into this place on this day so proximate to the loss of Liam. It is disgraceful and insensitive and inappropriate that the Leader of the Liberal Party would move this motion and have the gall to stand and reflect on the fact that Liam has just died. It is unbelievable.

That aside, I will respond to the shambolic and appalling cabal of ridiculous statements that were made by the members opposite. Helpfully, the member for Roe referred to a two-year-old opinion piece. Much of what the opposition has said today refers to a two-year-old opinion piece by the former Commissioner of Police Karl O’Callaghan in which he said that the attrition rate for the police force 10 years ago was 20 officers per month. Does the member know what the average rate has been over the past six months? It was 25.5 officers. I know that the member is referring to the high numbers that were experienced in May and June 2022. That is a consequence, as I reflected upon last year and many times subsequently, of the moment in history that we confronted. The member refers to attrition rates in 2019. I refer to between then and 2017, when we inherited the worst financial books in the history of Western Australia. We had gone through a boom and the economy was trashed; the Liberal and National Parties trashed the economy. That is what they do when they occupy the government benches—they destroy the economy. It was the biggest debt and deficit in history. How many people does the opposition think would leave the public sector in that environment? The economy was suffering enormous unemployment. There were no opportunities. Of course people were going to stay in the security of a public sector job. That is what happened when we inherited the disaster that the opposition had imposed on the Western Australian public and economy. That is what happened. People were not leaving, because they had a secure job, and those were few and far between.

In 2020, there was the COVID pandemic. I do not know whether the member noticed, but for two years during the COVID pandemic, no one left any job. If someone had a public sector job, they stayed there, because that meant security. The environment outside the public sector was far from secure. Western Australia was a good place in comparison to the rest of the world, because this government dealt with COVID better than any other jurisdiction on the planet. That is a fact. People in the public sector remained in the public sector because they knew they had a secure job.

By 2022, there was a pent-up number of people who had intentionally delayed departure. There was another reason they delayed departure. When I became the minister in 2021, the previous minister and the Premier had promised that we would deliver better conditions for people who would be medically retired. As a consequence, we told those people who were going to be medically retired to wait until we got the legislation through. It took until 2021 to get that through; therefore, in 2022 we had those people plus people who had been waiting at least four years—we were in recession for the last year or two of the previous government. All those people who had not left in that period were considering departure. They found themselves in the best place on earth for employment opportunities. It was the strongest economy with the greatest demand for workers, and Western Australian police officers are exceptional people. I will say it because the Liberals and the Nationals never do. Western Australian police officers are exceptional people; they are incredibly attractive to employers in an environment in which people are desperately seeking good people to employ. There is undeniable opportunity. We are losing people because all of those people who had forgone the opportunity to depart when security was required and was offered in the form of a public sector job could now consider it. They were confronting probably the best opportunity in the employment landscape that had been seen at least since World War II, in terms of opportunities and demand for skilled labour and recognition of the quality of our Western Australian police officers. It is a fact that Western Australian police officers are the most respected in the country. The community in Western Australia appreciates the quality of our police officers. They are a commodity that is in demand. Yes, people have been leaving, but as I said, the number of departures has been declining since the May and June 2022 peak.

I am increasingly fearful that the number of departures will not diminish back to pre-COVID levels; I do not think it will. That is not surprising because in the meantime, apart from the fact that the economy has improved and that there are greater opportunities, there has been a shift in the demographics of people who join the Western Australia

Police Force—or, for that matter, who do any other job. We increasingly see younger people from a different generation who do not, as a matter of course, sign up for a career spanning 20 or more years, as the member for Darling Range and I did. People do not do that anymore. Increasingly, a greater proportion of the police force and of the workforce in general are from a younger generation who, on average, stay in a career for between five and seven years before shifting on.

We may be confronting a complete shift in the workforce dynamic. The Leader of the Opposition said that I should be doing something, that I should be assessing; what was it I was accused of? I was accused of being a “light touch” by the member for Roe and the member for Vasse. I do not know what that means. It is not something that I am normally accused of in my portfolios, but I assume they are suggesting that somehow I should be driving the operational practices of the police. If that is the case, they are urging me to break the law, and I do not think I will do that. But if they mean I should be looking at how the circumstances and the environment have shifted, I am doing that. I have asked the Commissioner of Police to carry out an analysis of the workforce in terms of the current environment and the likely irreversible demographic shift. It is very likely that, as a consequence of changing demographics and the changing expectations of people entering the workforce, the vast majority of people will not work in one career for 20 years or more, like they used to.

I regularly go to police graduations, where I witness good morale—exceptional morale—in the Western Australia Police Force. I am still waiting for the shadow Minister for Police to stand up at one of those functions and berate the people who are joining the police force over their bad, plummeting morale. It is not true. The Western Australia Police Force is the best in the country and, I think, one of the best on the planet, and I say that regularly for a reason. We are very, very fortunate in Western Australia to be the beneficiaries of service from a police force that is exceptional. Our police officers are exceptional; they are high quality, but they do a tough job. That is undeniable.

The member for Vasse referred to the results of a census of the public sector workforce and berated and chastised me for the low number of police officers who responded to the census who would recommend their workforce to other people. I can only respond with one question for the member for Vasse: what was the response under her government? I know the answer to that question; there was no census under her government because the previous government was not game enough to conduct a census. This is the very first one. The Public Sector Commissioner initiated it as a first response, because no other government had done it. If we compare the responses to that question by police officers in this state with those of other jurisdictions in which similar censuses have been carried out for a while, the results are commensurate. They are probably actually better, but they do not recommend that career to everybody. That is not exceptional or beyond understanding; it is a tough gig. One would not recommend being a police officer to just anybody; that is why we have such high quality people doing that job. Having said that, it is a good thing that we have so many people who want to do it.

I know it somehow triggers the opposition that the state government’s campaign to attract experienced police officers from the UK, Ireland, New Zealand and interstate has been so successful; I know the opposition does not like that. If morale was so bad and plummeting in the Western Australia Police Force, do members opposite not think that someone contemplating coming here to join the police might interrogate that issue a little? Do members opposite not think that they might reach out and seek advice from people who had been in a similar position and had already trodden that path? Do they not think that they might have found it was not something that they would want to do—to join a police force with low morale? I think the evidence suggests that morale is not plummeting, because officers from the UK, Ireland, New Zealand and interstate are rushing to join the Western Australia Police Force. There has been an update on those numbers since the last time the opposition received them from me: as of 6 February, there had been 1 654 applications from overseas officers to join our police force. We need to bear in mind that there are only around 7 000 police officers in the Western Australia Police Force; members opposite should contemplate that little fact, then add to it the fact that there have been well over 2 000 local applicants. We have only around 7 000 officers in the Western Australia Police Force, and we have more than 3 000 applications to join.

In my capacity as Minister for Defence Industry I regularly speak to the chiefs of the Army and Navy—I have not cracked the Air Force yet, but I will have to get hold of that bloke some time—the chief of the Defence Force and the federal Minister for Defence, Minister for Defence Industry and Minister for Veterans’ Affairs. I can tell members that they are green with envy over the success of our recruiting campaign. They would give anything for the sorts of numbers we are attracting, bearing in mind that they are looking for very similar cohorts. They are trying to attract a group of people to put on a uniform, sacrifice self-interest in the service of others, be away from family and friends and sacrifice time with them, confront danger and put themselves in harm’s way on behalf of their colleagues and the community. They are after the same sort of people, but they cannot attract these sorts of numbers. Their recruiting campaigns are abysmal in comparison with ours. I am pretty sure that our campaign is the most successful of any of the police jurisdictions, but it is absolutely outstanding in comparison with similar campaigns to attract people to the ADF.

We would not attract people to an organisation that has terrible morale. We would not attract people to an organisation that has a poor reputation. It is disgraceful for members opposite to come in here and make pitiful attempts to criticise. I do not mind if they criticise me; that is pretty much par for the course—and, by the way, their criticisms are pretty amateurish in comparison with those of some of the outlandish individuals the member for Roe has associated himself with in criticising the Firearms Act. There are some interesting people out there, and they are engaging in all manner of criticism of me. That is fine. I know that none of the members opposite has served, but when they criticise the morale of a uniformed service, they are also attacking the leadership—not just at the top, but also all the way down, because the people with the most immediate impact on the morale of a uniformed service unit are the leaders who are right at the coalface—the sergeants and the senior constables who are out there on the front line. When members opposite say that police morale is terrible and plummeting, those are the people they are criticising. Those are the people whom members opposite are putting down.

It was a pretty low blow from the Leader of the Opposition to have a crack at the Commissioner of Police. He does not get to choose when he gets a pay rise, and she knows that. He does not get to choose what they give him, and he is worth every cent of it, by the way. At a press conference on the day that it was announced, they asked me whether the Commissioner of Police was worth three times Paul Papalia. I said he was worth 10 times! That commissioner is exceptional. He is the best in the country, easily. I see the other commissioners and there are some good people around, but he is quality. For the member to throw in that low blow is very disappointing. I am sorry he did that and I imagine he is regretting having done it. I think our police officers are outstanding. The Leader of the Opposition referred to Operation Regional Shield. Operation Regional Shield is an operation; by definition, it was created and executed by the police force. The police do that. The government provides resources to enable operations. We might ask for a police effect of the Commissioner of Police and his command team. They will execute an operation to deliver the effect. That is what Operation Regional Shield is. It is a means of delivering a police effect. It is not about a number of cops showing up in some location. It was originally in response to acute juvenile offending. Police looked at the challenge—quality people like Assistant Commissioner for Regional Western Australia Darryl Gaunt, an exceptional police officer who is probably one of the most experienced regional officers in the state, if not the country. He brought in Commander Brad Sorrell. They brought together analysts and other specialists and they delivered a police effect. It was initially in the Kimberley and the Pilbara but was subsequently rolled out in other regions where necessary. As the member reflected, it has been very effectively implemented in the eastern goldfields in the goldfields–Esperance police district. The whole intent is to deliver a police effect in response to an acute problem. In this case, the most recent one the member referred to was in Kalgoorlie. Some antisocial behaviour was peaking so the police responded. They were already responding and the member knows there was far more police activity in Kalgoorlie before that as a consequence of operations to smash illegal bokie operations’ amateur refining of gold, which poisoned the community and threatened everyone. The member knows there were dozens more police in town than the normal policing effort to achieve that outcome. That was before Operation Regional Shield, which was a response to in this case —

**Mr R.S. Love:** In a parallel universe. I think we were attacked by the Minister for Education for raising that issue and that you are lauding it.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Sorry?

**Mr R.S. Love:** We were attacked by the Minister for Education for raising that issue, which you are now lauding.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Which issue?

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Yes, okay. I get you now. Sorry, I did not understand what the member was saying. The Minister for Education was criticising opposition for scaremongering about the potential contamination, right?

**Mr R.S. Love** interjected.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Yes, he was scaremongering. There was a response. The school was provided with all the support, kids were kept away and everything was addressed. My point was that dozens of police were involved in an operation for an extensive period to effect that outcome, quite apart from Operation Regional Shield and quite apart from normal policing in Kalgoorlie. That is how operations work. Police put resources and capabilities wherever they are required to address a particular matter. In this case, in the most recent one that the member was reflecting upon, it was elevated antisocial behaviour, which as the member suggested, is a regular event every summer. That is why police have the summer response strategy. It is a local initiative involving the council and the very effective mayor they have now—very effective and collaborative, and works well with police and other agencies to ensure there is a response every summer to the challenge of people coming off lands and not having accommodation, hanging around the streets and often engaging in antisocial behaviour. That was a normal summer-type response. It was elevated so the police responded further with Operation Regional Shield. Regional Shield in the eastern goldfields response consisted of regional investigation unit officers, regional operation group officers, Aboriginal Affairs division officers, and officers from the licensing and enforcement division all going to Kalgoorlie to address the challenge

associated with that spike in antisocial behaviour. They were really successful. Again, Assistant Commissioner Gaunt and Commander Sorrell were both there. They worked with the local command and insured that that challenge was confronted and dealt with. They did an exceptional job.

The Leader of the Opposition has subsequently come out and claimed that there is somehow a failure of police in addressing antisocial behaviour. That was his response to their exceptional work. The member for Vasse has repeatedly stated that morale is terrible and that there is a problem with the police force that I am not addressing. My question to the Leader of the Opposition and to the member for Vasse is: exactly what is this issue they are talking about? Why are they criticising the police? What are they saying the police are failing at? What exactly is it the police are failing at? The Leader of the Opposition just said that Assistant Commissioner Gaunt and Commander Sorrell have failed to address the problem of crime in Kalgoorlie and to address the problem of crime in Broome. The member for Vasse just said that the commissioner and his command team have completely failed in caring for their officers.

Several members interjected.

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Members opposite cannot have it both ways! They cannot walk in here and say morale is terrible in the police and not expect me to suggest the people they are criticising are the leadership of the Western Australia Police Force, from the commissioner all the way down to senior constable because they are the ones who are delivering morale. That is how morale works in a uniformed service! It is not some bloody politician in Parliament who gets to decide what morale is like. It is not; I am sorry. I have served in a uniform. I know that the Minister for Defence had very little impact on morale, other than that we all thought Kim Beazley was probably the best one ever. Apart from that, the minister has very little day-to-day impact on morale. The actual impact on morale at unit level is absolutely resident with the leadership provided to that team. At a team level, we are talking senior constables and sergeants. The sergeants in our police force are doing an extraordinary job. They do hard yards. I know a lot of demands are being placed on people. There have been changes in operational practice to ensure we meet the demands of the family and domestic violence rates that so appal the community, that we get out there and tackle the challenges around juvenile crime and reoffending, and that we look at breaking the impact of organised criminals—outlaw motorcycle gangs who live off the pain and misery of others by bringing illicit drugs into this state and distributing them around the state. All those things demand a 24/7 police service. The force has to be with us 24/7. That means we put demands on our officers that we do not put on other public servants, so I am not surprised that other public servants might be more comfortable in their jobs than police officers. I will always absolutely stand up for that our police officers are second to none. They are extraordinary. They have been delivering an incredible service to us. We should be so thankful that, right through COVID, we all benefited. It was not just because of the police, but they delivered their command and control knowledge and capabilities to all of us and we are all benefiting further. They are going on to be recruited everywhere, to set up SHICCs and SHOCs—the state health incident coordination centre and the state health operations centre—and all sorts of things. They are going into the health response because they have that command and control knowledge and they know how to set up operations. They have been recruited into other public sector agencies. They have been recruited into the private sector. There are constantly targeted for a reason—because they are high quality. It is not surprising that they are sought after. I think they are exceptional.

But I will go back to the observation I made. Does the member not think it would be difficult to attract people to a force that was suffering plummeting morale and was poorly led, and somehow had all manner of issues that are not being addressed by the minister—for whatever role I am supposed to have had in all this? Does the member not think that all that would have moved out of the confines of this place, beyond his little group, and confronted people who might be contemplating joining the Western Australia Police Force? Does he not think that would have had an impact by now? I tell members that the Let's Join Forces campaign began two years ago, and it is, as I said, incredibly successful. People are desperate to join our police force.

**Mr R.S. Love:** Why haven't you made the targets?

**Mr P. PAPALIA:** Police officers are rejoining; 923 police officers rejoined the Western Australia Police Force in recent times. There are police officers joining us from the east coast. Police officers from the UK and Ireland are lining up to get the opportunity to join. Right now, 84 of those overseas officers have commenced and 655 are going through the joining process. There are 400 officers at the academy. We are going to pass 1 000 through the academy this year. I wish I could pass a law to stop them leaving, but that would not be right, because a lot of sectors out there should be benefiting from having those quality people come and join them and lift their performance.

As I said, I suspect that we are now in a different world in which people will not do those long careers that they used to do. The member is right in that I should do something. I should get the police to do a deep analysis of where we are at. We are not going to get to the 950 above attrition this year; we might, but not in the time frame that we hoped. That is because we had that massive impact in 2022. It set us back on our heels. Attrition is diminishing.



**Extract from *Hansard***  
[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 12 March 2024]  
p659c-667a

Ms Libby Mettam; Speaker; Mr Shane Love; Mr Peter Rundle; Mr Paul Papalia

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Recruiting is growing. The numbers of the police force are growing. There are more than 500 officers more today than when members opposite were in government.

*Division*

Question put and a division taken, the Deputy Speaker casting his vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (6)

Ms M. Beard	Mr R.S. Love	Mr P.J. Rundle
Dr D.J. Honey	Ms L. Mettam	Ms M.J. Davies ( <i>Teller</i> )

Noes (46)

Mr S.N. Aubrey	Ms K.E. Giddens	Mr P. Lilburne	Ms R. Saffioti
Mr G. Baker	Ms E.L. Hamilton	Ms S.F. McGurk	Ms A. Sanderson
Ms L.L. Baker	Ms M.J. Hammat	Mr D.R. Michael	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Ms H.M. Beazley	Ms J.L. Hanns	Mr K.J.J. Michel	Dr K. Stratton
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr T.J. Healy	Mr S.A. Millman	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr M. Hughes	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Mr P.C. Tinley
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke	Mr W.J. Johnston	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Ms C.M. Tonkin
Ms C.M. Collins	Mr H.T. Jones	Mr P. Papalia	Mr R.R. Whitby
Mr R.H. Cook	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr S.J. Price	Ms S.E. Winton
Ms L. Dalton	Ms E.J. Kelsbie	Mr D.T. Punch	Ms C.M. Rowe ( <i>Teller</i> )
Ms D.G. D'Anna	Ms A.E. Kent	Mr J.R. Quigley	
Mr M.J. Folkard	Dr J. Krishnan	Ms M.M. Quirk	

Question thus negatived.