

POLICING — CAPEL REGION

Grievance

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston) [9.14 am]: Today I rise to grieve about the lack of policing resources in the Capel region. I recently received many phone calls and emails about the lack of policing in the Capel region and the carry-ons of hooning, petty theft and other antisocial behaviour in that area. Subsequently, I decided to run a public meeting, to which I had an overwhelming response from the small community, with 150 people turning up to the meeting. I did invite the district superintendent of police, Mr Panaia, to the meeting but he declined the offer. I then asked if he would send a representative to the meeting, but I never got an answer from that email—not at all. So much for community policing in the regions; it seems to be a bygone era. Subsequently after the meeting, Mr Panaia decided to have a meeting with the shire council. That meeting was not pre-arranged; it was organised after the meeting that I had organised. That also disappointed me that it takes a public meeting of 150 people to get the district superintendent to take things seriously. But according to Mr Panaia, there are no public works budgeted for the next five years for police in the south west—five years without a budget for the police.

Capel is the fastest growing shire in the state, at around six per cent per year. People have underestimated the number and different mix of people moving into those areas. Repeated requests for police assistance in the area have at times gone unanswered due to the severity of other cases that police were attending. We know that there have been some other problems down in Bunbury, with murders et cetera. We cannot expect the police to walk away from those jobs and to prioritise some of the issues that happen in the Capel region, such as petty thefts and hooning. That means they go without. Besides that, it takes between 20 and 30 minutes before a police car, even in an emergency, can get from the Bunbury station to the Capel community. That is not good enough in anyone's language, especially when places such as Yarloop, Waroona and Harvey have police stations. Smaller communities such as those do have policing in their areas. Here we have a growing community that had been bonding together because of the extremely fast growth that has been happening, but now fingers are starting to be pointed, with people saying, "It's your kids; it's that guy." That starts to split a country community. We cannot afford to do that in our society. We want policing out there so that we can have peace of mind and a community that will work together. That is why I was so disappointed about no police attending that public meeting.

In reply to a petition that was presented to the upper house, Minister Johnson said that the superintendent does not believe that there is a necessity for police out there. The community differs very strongly on that. The community believes that it should be treated like every other community in this state; that is, with respect and by having proper policing. That is not being done at the moment. I call on the minister, who is not very interested in this grievance at the moment, to really use his political influence to talk to the commissioner and the district superintendent and find out those problems, rather than wiping them off, as he did by saying on local ABC radio that I was playing a political stunt. Far from it! The people who turned up to the meeting were disgusted when they got a letter back from the police commissioner that said that, at this moment, there are no problems in Capel. I will get back to the issues there.

I would like to read out a letter that I think says it all, which is from Matthew Taylor of Forrest Road, Capel, and reads —

To Whom it concerns or Minister of Police,

As a very concerned Ratepayer of the Shire of Capel, I have seen a very sharp decline in the behaviour of youth and some adults in this community. My home is in the main business st and I would be very lucky if I saw a police presence once in three weeks. This is how bad it is. This st is 50 ks but they go through here at 100 + in the evenings from 4.30–7 pm, but nobody seems interested in getting these Hoons of the street. On Sat night 14.4.12 from about 12–2.30 AM Hoons wrecked and drove through a family garden. When did the Police get there. 9.30 AM on Sat morn.

I think that is consistent with what is happening with policing in WA. The letter continues —

Would you call this good Police protection. Where has all the Police gone that was trained for CHOGM, they must be still in Perth. If its good enough to take kids of the streets of Northbridge at night, come down here and take the kids home the are out at midnight, if they have a home. If a bit less money was spent on Perth River Front or Government offices and diverted towards country Police. Can we Please get police back on the beat, meet people and get to know the community. The police force seems to be in a pretty bad state of affairs.

...

Matthew Taylor

That sums up the problem exactly. People want to see their local policeman. They want a police presence. One of the things that happens in Capel is that the police come down and sit on the main road with their speed guns and knock a few people off, and say they have done their job. That does not help the person who has someone banging on their door or doing burnouts in their street at two o'clock in the morning. That does not help the community at all, and the minister is not justified in saying there is a police presence because they are knocking off people who are doing five or 10 kilometres over the speed limit. The people of Capel are asking for a police presence at all hours and for strong consideration to be given to a police station in this region. This is a problem down there. Let us forget the politics and think about the people who live in this region.

If there was a police presence in Capel, it could service other areas. There were break-ins at Dardanup recently, in which the front door of the local store was smashed down, and also the bus stop was burned. I really ask the Minister for Police to consider this seriously.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys — Minister for Police) [9.21 am]: The member for Collie–Preston said we should take the politics out of this. I want to tell members that the member called the public meeting, organised it and then thought about asking Superintendent Laurie Panaia to come to the meeting.

Mr M.P. Murray: Absolute bull!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I did not interject on the member. I could have done many times.

Mrs M.H. Roberts: But he told the truth.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I am telling the truth.

Mr M.P. Murray: How many police do you have down there? One policeman would suffice—a community policeman.

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston, the house listened to you in silence.

Mr M.P. Murray: Point taken; I will be silent and listen to him.

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston, there is no need to make any comment at all at this point. I will call you to order for the first time today.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Normally, if a member wants to hold a public forum they have the courtesy to write to me, phone me or talk to me and ask me to ensure that a police officer can attend a public meeting to discuss this.

Ms M.M. Quirk: I think he did that, minister, by the looks of it.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Let me say that the member did not write to me. I have letters from other members of Parliament in that area, but nothing from the member for Collie–Preston. I cannot find anything on record from the member for Collie–Preston asking for police attendance at a public meeting. I will give members the facts of the case.

Mr M.P. Murray: I wrote to the appropriate authorities—the police.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The member is supposed to come through the Minister for Police, as we had to when you were in government. If the member really wanted someone to attend —

Mr M.P. Murray: So you are telling me not to contact the police at all!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I always give permission for a police officer to attend a public forum if I am asked to do so. I always allow members of Parliament —

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Girrawheen, I am formally going to call you to order for the second time this morning.

Minister for Police, if you refer to members in this place, I think you should expect, to a certain extent, some interjections coming back.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I was referring to the member who is accusing me of things that I believe are untrue, and I want to qualify when the member was supposed to have contacted me in some way. The fact is that the member did not contact me, and that is part of the problem. Superintendent Laurie Panaia, who is an excellent police officer, and works extremely hard and well with the whole community in the south west district, is a very, very competent and very, very good officer who certainly does ensure there is always a 24-hour patrol within that area, which takes in Capel. There are other areas that need —

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I listened to the member in silence. He should give me that courtesy, even if he does not agree with what I am saying. I totally disagreed with what the member for Collie–Preston was saying, but at least I heard him in silence. I gave him that opportunity, now I want to give the truthful account of what goes on.

Mr M.P. Murray: Get on with it!

The SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston, we have a grievance process in this place; you were able to put your grievance. I suggest to you that at this point you listen to the minister. If you are not happy with what you hear, I suggest you take it up in other ways after the minister's response to your grievance.

Point of Order

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I have a point of order, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: It better not be a frivolous point of order, member for Collie–Preston.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Mr Speaker, just minutes ago you were talking to the minister saying that if he is going to bait people, he should expect a response. That is what will happen.

Grievance Resumed

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I will give some facts on police attendance in Capel. Quite frankly, to suggest that Capel is under-serviced by the south west police district is total nonsense. The facts are that to date 129 tasks have been recorded this year for Capel. Police attended 106 of those tasks, and a review of the unattended tasks indicated they consisted mainly of multiple calls for the same attended task or were information reports. They are the facts. Tasking in Capel represents 2.7 per cent of the total tasking in the Bunbury subdistrict. Capel is serviced by the Bunbury subdistrict. Locating a very small police station in Capel would not address the issues that the member is complaining about in his grievance—not at all! Every police car is a mobile police station these days; they have all the equipment on board. If we responded every time somebody called for another small police station where it was not actually desperately needed, we would take police officers off patrol and put them behind desks to run the police station. That is what would happen. That is not the policy of this government or the Commissioner of Police. We want to see more police officers out on patrol doing the job they are trained to do, not doing clerical work behind desks in police stations. A police station of that nature would be open probably between nine and four o'clock in the day, and the only purpose would be to deal with people who want to come into the police station. Everybody can access police data now. They can lodge their firearm applications through Australia Post and accident reports online. They can do all these things online, which they could not do years ago, and many people are taking this option. It is better to do those things online than it is to go to a police station and wait in line. If we had a police station at Capel, it would only be a one or two-man station and we would have a police officer behind that counter dealing with that sort of thing, and the police officer cannot work 24 hours a day. But Capel really does not warrant it. I have been convinced by the commissioner that Capel does not warrant a police station. Dalyellup is an area more in need.

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Exactly, and if the police consider locating a new police station, that is probably where it will go, and certainly before they consider Capel, because Capel does not warrant a police station; it warrants good police patrolling and good police attendance.

Ms M.M. Quirk: That is what he is asking for.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: That is exactly what they get. I have already told members the number of tasks recorded, and that the response time is good. A police officer will never be able to respond to every single task within a few minutes, particularly in country areas. It will not happen. However, by having police in cars patrolling the area 24 hours a day, seven days a week, which is what they do, they are quick to respond because they do not always have to come from Bunbury station or one of the other stations. We put more police officers in Australind, so basically another six officers have been allocated to that area. Australind is part of the subdistrict. We have put extra police officers in Busselton.

A government member interjected.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Yes, the member has! We can never have enough police officers, doctors and nurses; everybody wants more. Everybody wants a high level of service and, of course, they deserve the best service that they can get. However, I assure you, Mr Speaker, and members of the house that —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, members!

Mr M.P. Murray: The question was about capital works. Are there any capital works in the next five years? If there are no capital works in the next five years, that is in the salaries line.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: How does the member know that?

Ms M.M. Quirk: He is asking.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Is he asking or —

Mr M.P. Murray: That is what the district superintendent said.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Is the member making a statement or is he asking a question? If the member wants to know the answer to those sorts of questions, I suggest he wait until budget estimates, when he will find out exactly what is happening in the south west as far as capital infrastructure goes.