



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL  
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE  
AND COMMUNITY SAFETY**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2021-2022](#))

**Members:**

**MR P CAIN (Chair)  
DR M PATERSON (Deputy Chair)  
MR A BRADDOCK**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**THURSDAY, 3 NOVEMBER 2022**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Ms K de Kleuver (Ph: 620 70524)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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## **Privilege statement**

The Assembly has authorised the recording, broadcasting and re-broadcasting of these proceedings.

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 8.45 am.**

Gentleman, Mr Mick, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Justice and Community Safety Directorate  
Glenn, Mr Richard, Director-General

ACT Emergency Services Agency  
Phillips, Mr Wayne, Acting Commissioner  
Jones, Mr Jason, Assistant Commissioner, Operations  
Wren, Mr Howard, Chief Officer, ACT Ambulance Service  
Scott, Mr Rohan, Chief Officer, ACT Rural Fire Service

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning and welcome to the public hearings of the annual and financial reports 2021-22 by the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety. The proceedings today will examine the annual and financial reports for the Justice and Community Safety Directorate. The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. Proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used these words: "I will take that as a question taken on notice."

In this first session we will hear from the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, on emergency services matters. Welcome, Minister Gentleman and officials. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement. Could you all confirm for the record you understand privilege implications of the statement?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, thank you, Chair, we do understand the statement.

**THE CHAIR:** As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed to questions.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, in the 2020-2021 financial year there were 381 SES volunteers, yet in 2021-22 there were only 331 SES volunteers, so a 13 per cent decrease. While SES volunteers are required now, more than ever, why has there been such a drop in volunteers?

**Mr Gentleman:** Thank you, Mr Milligan. Can I, firstly, thank our state emergency service and our volunteers for the incredible work they do and thank their families and friends for supporting them when they go to do that work for us. Our volunteers, of course, are well resourced and well trained. That is not by chance; that is by the work of our senior officers and our trainers as well.

I will ask Mr Phillips to give you some details on those numbers. We have had some issues trying to recruit, particularly during the COVID times, but we are trying our best to keep those numbers up.

**Mr Phillips:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. I also want to acknowledge and thank our SES volunteers, particularly over the last few months with the ongoing La Nina weather event. Coincidentally, we are coming up to a volunteer recruitment weekend for our state emergency services for the attraction of more volunteers.

I will acknowledge that we have lost a number of volunteers. The actual reasons and causes of a drop in volunteer numbers I will take as a question on notice and get some details to you and do some analysis for you. We are always endeavouring to attract volunteers across both the SES and RFS. I can say, from a national perspective, the attraction of volunteers has been a challenge for all emergency services. I could only hazard a guess on why that is an issue. I will take that on notice to get you better details around that.

**MR MILLIGAN:** What is the government doing in regard to burn out of volunteers?

**Mr Gentleman:** As the Acting Commissioner has said, we are doing our very best to support our volunteers, and we do get challenges with the amount of work they have been doing, particularly during this storm season. It has been an incredible pressure on volunteers to keep up the good work.

What we are doing is supporting them where we can with wellbeing services and going through the new recruitment processes. We did get a lot of applicants for volunteer work for SES, and RFS as well, so we hope to get those numbers up shortly.

**MR MILLIGAN:** What exactly are the wellbeing services? What do you focus on and how do you support them?

**Mr Gentleman:** Supporting them and their families by way of assisting them in a peer related manner. We have shed talks, and those sorts of things—social barbeques. In fact, just the other week, last weekend, we had some open sheds across the ACT, inviting people to come and see how our SES works, and how our RFS works as well. That was a really good get together for the volunteers.

We have now included a new wellbeing support dog for ESA as well. He is an ex-guide dog, and it brings quite a bit of cheer to the sheds when he comes to visit the volunteers.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Are there one-on-one services that are offered to volunteers, particularly volunteers that may be struggling or going through a burn out period?

**Mr Gentleman:** I will ask Mr Phillips to give you detail on that.

**Mr Phillips:** I can say that being a volunteer has an added complexity: these people have daytime jobs as well, so daytime jobs and the complexity of being a volunteer too. I want to acknowledge that. There is a wholistic framework that we try to implement through the ESA to prevent PTSD, in particular, or burn out. We have the chaplaincy services that frequently visit our SES units and the RFS sheds, and a peer support

network. Also, importantly, training and engagement via the chief officer and other senior officers is an important part of preparing people for events and preventing burn out. I acknowledge the dog. Thanks, Minister; that is a new initiative for the ESA.

For the confidential conversations and burn out, we offer EAP. Converge is the company we use that people can make confidential phone calls to. We often promote that through the agencies—that people can have that confidential conversation with trained people about how they are feeling about work or the pressures they have.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Okay, thank you.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, I am aware there is a new Australian fire danger rating system that has been implemented across the country, and it is about re-designing, forecasting of fire danger. I am wondering: has the ACT government, or ACT services, been involved in that process?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, thanks Dr Paterson, we have been involved with AFAC and the design of the new fire danger rating system as well. It now has four quadrants. This is a national system that is recognised across Australia. It is easier to read, easier to understand, but, more importantly, it is really based on bushfire risk. Previously, we have looked at the consideration of fire danger where we have seen drying grasses and drying woods—those sorts of things—and hot summers and lightning strikes.

This is looking at a whole algorithm, which looks at not only the risk of drying grasslands but winds, hot temperatures and other incidents that may have occurred in the region as well. It is a very good opportunity to remind Canberrans that we are on the front foot when it comes to bushfire preparedness, and, of course, all our people have been trained in the new system as well.

I am pleased to say, at the moment, that our level is sitting right down on the lower level, but we will see some curing of grass later on—perhaps in January and February—and we will be prepared for that. Our RFS people are well prepared; they are well trained for the coming season. RFS, SES and ESA in total are well trained for not just the bushfire season but the storm season we see coming as well.

I might ask Jason Jones to give you some more information about how we collaborated with AFAC and the other governments on the rating system.

**Mr Jones:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. What I might do is refer that to the Chief Officer of the rural fire brigade, the reason being that there is a significant amount of work he has personally done in that space, and I would not then take his thunder. I will refer that to Rohan Scott, if you do not mind.

**Mr Scott:** Good morning, I acknowledge the privilege statement. As the minister mentioned, this is a national project which has been going on for many years and has been led by the AFAC group. The four new quadrants are a result of a significant social survey as to what the community thought of the past system and what they wanted to see in the new system.

The four systems are now very simple, with clear messaging as to what to do on a

particular rating. Also, no matter where you go in Australia, the messaging and the quarter actions are the same. The previous system only used grass and wooded areas for the fuel types, but now we have eight different fuel types and they have subsets behind them; so, there is a better science with the fuel types, using historical data for fire behaviour and footprint, and that better collection of the weather data, which uses those algorithms behind the new system.

On Monday we also launched the new mobile fire danger rating signs, which will be placed around the ACT in areas of high risk, and that has been supported by government with the purchase of those. Also, we have got the fixed signs, which are being replaced as we speak in the coming weeks.

**DR PATERSON:** Thank you. How will Canberrans be educated in the new rating system?

**Mr Scott:** In the launch of the fire season we have been mentioning the new fire danger rating system. There is a link on the ESA website. We have been quite heavily promoting the new fire danger rating system on social media, and we had a Be Emergency Ready weekend, last weekend, which had four locations that were very well attended by the ACT community. We had flyers that we were handing out there giving them information.

Any opportunity we do have, we spruik the new fire danger rating system to the community. So far the positive comments that we are getting have shown that the years of hard work are actually starting to pay off. It is a simplified system, which is better protecting the community not only in the event of fire but also in that preparation phase as well.

**DR PATERSON:** Fantastic, thank you very much.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Just to confirm: the fire danger rating system is a part of the Australian Warning System? Recommendation 13.3 of the royal commission called for all states and territories to urgently deliver and implement this system for all hazards. According to the JACS annual report, the AWS has yet to be implemented for all hazards such as floods, storms, extreme heat and severe weather. Why has the government not implemented this for all conditions?

**Mr Gentleman:** We have certainly implemented an all-hazards approach to ESA, and I mentioned earlier our work across the RFS and SES in storm season. Of course, training our staff and volunteers for an all-hazards approach has occurred as well. We have also now moved our Bushfire Council to an all-hazards council, so they are able to give us detailed advice on all hazards we will see across the territory that emergency services, or ESA, would be involved in. We have moved that way. In regard to the reporting on floods and other incidents, we are doing that through our broadcast system—so, through our social pages and through our media responses as well.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Is this in line with the AWS and the suggestions on handling and broadcasting events?

**Mr Gentleman:** I might ask Mr Phillips.

**Mr Phillips:** In regard to the AWS implementation by the ESA, I will take that on notice and get you some more details.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Excellent, thank you.

**MR BRADDOCK:** According to the ESA website, the organisation structure of the ComCen has one clinician from the ambulance service. Is that still the case and, if so, what is the contingency when that officer needs to take a break?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, 24 hours a day service in the ComCen from those agencies is quite important. We ensure, of course, they are well supported. I will ask our chief ambulance officer to give you that detail.

**Mr Wren:** I have read and acknowledge the Assembly privilege statement. Across 24 hours it is true that we have one paramedic clinician in the communications centre, but to allow some breaks in the peak period, the demand period of the day, starting at 10 am and finishing at 10 pm, there is a second clinician in the communications centre.

It does allow the capacity for some breaks, and people are encouraged to have breaks in that time. As we move forward, there is a substantial amount of work being done on the function and the role of the clinician, and in the foreseeable future there will be two people in there 24 hours a day.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Can you give me an indication of when that foreseeable future might be realised?

**Mr Wren:** That would be speculative.

**Mr Gentleman:** We are still going through the ComCen reform—ensuring that we can provide the best opportunities to support the ACT community with advice as well as in response to their calls. That is being funded through our government budget process too.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Okay. So, currently between 10 pm and 10 am there is not a contingency capacity to allow that officer to take a break?

**Mr Wren:** That would be correct.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, the *State of the Service Report 2021-2022*, page 40, shows that there were at least 524 incidents of bullying in the public service. We know that many of these matters are under-reported. We have heard from a constituent that this is also rife in the emergency services. One of the members of the services told us that her complaint was dismissed without being heard or passed on to the appropriate authorities, as it was just a management style. How many incidents of bullying have been reported within emergency services such as ambulance, fire services and SES?

**Mr Gentleman:** Mr Milligan, I am very surprised to hear that. We encourage people to



report any incidents that may occur in the workplace, and we have support for those people to report. Certainly, we look at all of those instances that may occur. I might ask the Director-General to give you some detail on how we work through those processes.

**Mr Glenn:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. Mr Milligan, we have a range of mechanisms to enable staff to raise issues they have, be it allegations of bullying or other concerns they have about the workplace: firstly, immediately through their supervisor, if they wish; also, there is a network of respect, equity and diversity officers across the organisation that allows people to talk about their concerns. That is not a mechanism for formal complaint; that is a check-in with a person—to be able to have a conversation.

Mechanisms for formal complaint can go through our people and workplace strategy area. We would deal with those, depending on the nature of the complaint, either through discussion between the parties, because one can have circumstances where there is interpersonal conflict that requires some assistance in order to be able to be resolved, or, if there are complaints of misconduct, we would initiate the normal investigation processes to be able to address that.

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is: do you have figures of the number of complaints reported to emergency services—ambulance, fire services and SES—in terms of bullying? Is that recorded anywhere?

**Mr Glenn:** I think we would need to take that on notice?

**Mr Phillips:** Yes. We will take that on notice, Mr Milligan.

**MR MILLIGAN:** And what are you doing to address this form of bullying within these services? I know you have mentioned the workplace strategy area—that is internal, within the department and services. Are there other options to report bullying or to get counselling outside of that? Depending on relationships, people might find it difficult to report this within their own workplace. Are there other options available for them to report bullying that are not through their own department?

**Mr Glenn:** Yes, certainly. There are mechanisms through the Chief Minister's department and the professional standards unit for people to be able to report concerns about the activities of public servants, and that takes it outside of the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, if that is the individual's desire. That happens from time to time.

**MR MILLIGAN:** And is any support offered? They make the report about bullying, but then is there any support offered to them, either through advice or a counsellor or anything to work through that process?

**Mr Glenn:** All staff members have access to our EAP provider, so there is an external party to be able to speak to.

**MR MILLIGAN:** So, it is external?

**Mr Glenn:** Yes. Staff members can speak to those people about any issue that concerns

them, be it professionally or otherwise. And if there are circumstances for particular individuals, we can initiate bespoke support, be it a temporary move or some other form of assistance if that is necessary. And, variously, people ask for different things to support them through a process, and we seek to accommodate them in the best interests of all parties to a dispute.

**THE CHAIR:** I will pass my substantive question to Mr Milligan.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, in the 2021-22 budget, a priority was to purchase 51 standard vehicles and nine low-emission vehicles as part of the ESA's vehicle replacement program. In the JACS annual report of 2021-22, only seven new vehicles were added to the JACS assets. At this stage, it would take over eight years to complete that promise, that priority, so when does the government expect to complete that promise?

**Mr Gentleman:** Thanks, Mr Milligan. Yes, we are going forward with our vehicle replacement program. It is very important for frontline services to have these new vehicles, and we have been looking at low-emission and electric vehicles too. We have a partnership, now, with Volvo Australia. They are constructing vehicles in Queensland for us. And, of course, our first fully electric fire truck will be delivered soon.

Our chief officers have been working with Rosenbauer in Germany to have the very first—I think it is the first for Australia, as well—fully-electric fire truck. Interestingly, this particular vehicle, designed and built by Rosenbauer, was not built simply because it is low emission or electric; it was built for the comfort and accessibility of the staff crewing the vehicle. As you would be aware, in the current big fire trucks, crews that wear a lot of gear have to climb up into the cabin above the engine on the fire trucks. These new Rosenbauer trucks will mean that the crews can enter from the ground level, basically—just walk into the vehicle with all of their equipment. There has been some delay, Mr Milligan, because of vehicle delays across Australia—and across the world, indeed. We are working through that. I might ask directorate officials to give you some update as to where we are on the replacement program.

**Mr Phillips:** Thanks, Minister. I will refer to Assistant Commissioner Jason Jones, who has carriage of our sustainability and vehicle replacement program.

**Mr Jones:** Thank you, Minister. And thank you, Mr Milligan, for the question. In relation to the low-emission vehicles you refer to, as the minister said, we have currently signed a contract with Volvo Australia to supply those seven vehicles. The work groups have met several times now, working out the specifications and the suitability for the support vehicles that they will replace. In relation to the vehicle replacement program, it is a replacement program; there are no new vehicles in that fleet other than what is in the ACTAS business case. So those seven low-emissions vehicles will replace the current diesel engine vehicles in our fleet. As I said, they are well on the way with a selection, and once we have worked that through with the stakeholder groups, we will be able to identify which of the seven of those vehicles there are.

In relation to the further two, in the same business case there were two additional frontline fire pumpers. We are about to go out to the market shortly as they will ask for specifically low- or zero-emission vehicles, similar to the other ones turning up later

this year.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Okay. And with the electric fire trucks, what conditions can they operate under?

**Mr Jones:** The fire truck the minister referred to is a frontline operational fire truck. It will go to a station, being Acton, and it will respond just like a frontline fire truck and do every single thing the frontline fire trucks currently do. The seven low-emission vehicles we referred to, that we are working through now, will serve several purposes in our support fleet, ranging from logistics and support. They are not frontline trucks, but they are support vehicles that support the frontline services.

We are still working through, as I said, with the stakeholder groups, but some of the things that have been identified are the hook trucks, tankers, logistic support vehicles and SES storm support vehicles. We are still working through the user groups about what they will be like, but they will be support frontline vehicles, so they will be badged and have lights and sirens, and respond to support frontline vehicles.

**MR MILLIGAN:** So they can actually attend in the heart of the fire? The electric fire trucks—can they go into the heart of the fire without any threat of—

**Mr Gentleman:** I do not know that the trucks actually dive into the heart of the fire, Mr Milligan! We go to the frontline staging area.

**MR MILLIGAN:** You know that the fire trucks do go into the hearts of the fires, right?

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, yes, we—

**MR MILLIGAN:** So I am asking if the electric vehicles are able to do that without risk of combustion, without risk of the battery exploding, compared to a diesel.

**Mr Gentleman:** Yes, certainly. They are, of course, compatible with Australian design rules except for some modifications that we might make that then have an engineer certificate of compliance. Of course, they will drive to the staging areas that we currently use to address those fire matters. We are looking at those for the Fire and Rescue services for the ACT but also, we are looking at what we can do for our Rural Fire Service as well. So we want to support them at the same time.

**THE CHAIR:** We might draw that line to a close.

**DR PATERSON:** I note in the annual report the increase of investment into ACT ambulance services, including our major incident response capabilities. We have just seen what happened over in Seoul with the stampede and multiple people killed. I am just wondering: are we equipped to deal with an incident like that in the ACT?

**Mr Gentleman:** Thanks, Dr Paterson. We use all of our services—ESA and ACT Policing and the federal counterpart of AFP as well—in these sorts of circumstances. All of them are well trained. We have had large numbers of people at demonstrations, for example, recently. I think AFP and our ESA teams have been able to manage that. That has been quite a challenge for us, but we are learning all the time about how we

can manage larger numbers, and we are working on how we can train our frontline responders for those numbers, too.

**DR PATERSON:** After, those protests last year—or were those mass protests this year?—have we done some work on looking back at what lessons have been learned?

**Mr Gentleman:** Most certainly; yes. One of the key concerns from policing was about our legislative structure to deal with those protestors. We still have some protestors now that are operating within the ACT. We do not really have an understanding of what their protest is about. If we could understand that better it would be easier to address, and police are trying to work through their intelligence areas to understand why that is occurring, and how we can deal with them.

But police have, I think, done pretty well up until now. They have used some interesting resources to identify the protestors. We now have some new tech that AFP ACT has developed, working with our CCTV cameras to identify people and understand where they are going and where they have been, as well. It is a challenge for us, as the community changes. That has been happening since COVID, of course, and there is a bit of community anger, I think—not necessarily from the ACT, though; these people seem to have come from interstate. We are certainly learning as we go.

**MR BRADDOCK:** I am interested in the ESA's role in handling drownings in inland waterways. How does the ESA work to be able to respond to such situations or maybe even prevent those in the first place?

**Mr Gentleman:** Thanks, Mr Braddock for the question. There are a couple of things that we focus on. One is education, of course. When we have these big storm events, we do provide public information to people not to go near the waterways, and to stay out of our parks areas, particularly, where we see these incidents occurring. "Do not go over flooded crossings." We put out those sorts of important information prospects, but we also do quite a lot of training for SES and our other ESA personnel to deal with flooded waterways and how they work.

I have actually been out to the one at Guises Creek. The process was about a challenge that we have across SES in Australia. We have challenge days, and we go out and compete against other services to improve the skills of our volunteers. One of the aspects of the training day was recovering people from flooding waterways. We do a bit of a scenario, where we have an area that looks like a flooded waterway, and we rescue people as they are sliding down through the waterway. I do not, but they certainly do! So there is a fair bit of training happening.

**Mr Phillips:** In particular, the management of the risk of people in flood waters is a joint approach between SES, RFS and Fire and Rescue, but the legislative responsibility in water rescue in the ACT is with the Australian Federal Police. So we work with the Australian Federal Police in building a holistic capability across Canberra with regard to the dangers of people in fast-flowing water—basically water flowing after a rain event through the gutters. I live near Sullivans Creek in Turner, so I understand the dangers of that.

But the most important part of those events is the messaging we put out before storm

events. You will have noticed that, coming up to the recent storm or rain event we had on Monday night, in particular—and another one on Tuesday, when I know that Sullivans Creek was overflowing at the back of the RUC—the messaging we put out was to keep away from those waters and do not drive through flood waters. I think that is a more important message that, as an emergency services agency, we can send.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you. I appreciate that. I suppose my question—and I will come back to it—is more about, say, Cotter River and people just swimming and getting into trouble. Is there a role for the ESA in terms of how to respond, how to treat the persons and respond in an adequate timeframe?

**Mr Phillips:** It is certainly a role for government. Whether it is ESA or our Parks and Conservation people, we want to ensure that we can respond to those sorts of situations. We have unfortunately had some drownings in the past, so, again, it is about messaging and education for the public, whilst being able to provide that response as well.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Thank you.

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is in relation to the number of firefighters. In 2020-21, there were 348 male firefighters, but only 22 female firefighters. The following financial year there were 372 men, yet still only 22 women firefighters. My question is in relation to what the government is doing to attract women firefighters? What are some of the barriers, or reasons that the number is as low as it is?

**Mr Gentleman:** Thanks, Mr Milligan; it is a good question. We are trying to do our very best to attract more women, both in emergency services but across government as well, on our frontline responses. We have been working with new applicants to ensure that they can get their physical fitness up. That is generally one of the challenges for women firefighters getting into the structure. What we are saying to people in their first application is to be prepared for these physical challenges and physical tests that occur. Women tend to be just as smart as men, if not smarter, when it comes to working through the application, but the physicality of it is a little bit different sometimes.

One of the challenges I found when I was doing my recruiting course was the beep test, and the ability to keep that rhythm and speed up. So we are saying to people, to be prepared, and we are actually assisting them to train for that physicality. If a woman, for example, is not successful in the first application, we are encouraging them to stay fit and help train for the next year, when we might do recruiting. With that, I might pass again to directorate officials to give you some more information.

**Mr Phillips:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr Milligan, for a great question. Personally, I am involved in the AFAC body with regard to how we can attract and better represent women within urban fire services across Australia. It is a challenge that every urban fire service is finding difficult. To give you the exact answer would be speculative at this stage, but let us say that the number of women applying across Australia for urban fire services is approximately 25 per cent, give or take some percentages depending on the state, and all fire services would like that to be raised.

Attraction is the first hurdle we have to address with regard to bringing a better gender diversity into fire services. Currently Fire and Rescue ACT is undergoing a recruitment

process, and it would be unfair to speculate on the numbers and let you know numbers right now in respect of that process because we have applicants who are in the middle of the process. But as those numbers come out regarding how many women we attract, how many women get through the process, and eventually how many women we recruit, we would be happy to share those numbers. But at this stage there are people sitting on the sideline waiting for the next stage of how they are going. Further details around the national champions of change, with regard to how we attract and retain woman, I can take on notice and give you more detail about that if you would like.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Yes, that would be great, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Any other supplementary questions?

**DR PATERSON:** I am interested to hear about the 21 new paramedics that have been recruited for the ambulance service. Have they all started?

**Mr Gentleman:** Thanks, Dr Paterson, I will ask Howard Wren to provide that detail for you.

**Mr Wren:** Yes, we have a robust recruitment process, which goes on pretty well all the time. Over the last two years we have had an augmentation of our paramedic workforce. As well, we still have the challenges of meeting normal attrition. So, currently we have interviewed five qualified paramedics this week for direct entry positions, and we are running a selection process currently and are just about to progress 60 people to the next stage in the selection process, which is the interview for graduate paramedic positions.

**DR PATERSON:** In terms of comparing now to where we were at the height of the pandemic, how is the ambulance service faring?

**Mr Wren:** It would be fair to say that we still have some challenges, in terms of our response times. These are not unique to us; they are challenges for every ambulance service in the country. For a range of reasons, the impact here has not been quite as great as some of the other capital cities, so we are still able to maintain what we believe is an acceptable level of service. However, by objective measures you would have to say that our performance has slipped. Our response times are not as good, and there are a range of strategies in place to address that. These are things that are affecting every ambulance service in the country, dramatically.

**DR PATERSON:** Do you think the new recruits and the new staff will have an impact in that respect?

**Mr Wren:** Yes, they will. It is very hard to predict exactly what that is, though.

**DR PATERSON:** Thank you.

**MR BRADDOCK:** I have a question about PACER, and the level of demand for that particular service. Does it outstrip the ability of those teams to provide that service?

**Mr Gentleman:** Thanks, Mr Braddock, for the question. It is a very good service and

what it is doing is helping us address those people that have mental health issues in the community on a clinical level as well as responding, as you are aware, with police officers and paramedics. We have increased the funding for PACER, and we have put some extra crews on, which is really good, but in regard to demand, I will ask the chief officer to give you some more information.

**Mr Wren:** The original PACER program ran only four evenings a week on an evening shift. You would have to acknowledge that that probably did not meet demand. Very early in the pandemic response that was increased to seven evenings a week, and then, further down the track in the following year, there was funding to imbed that seven-day-a-week service for the foreseeable future. Then a further augmentation, as the minister has referred to, is a second crew that has been put on, so now we cover from eight in the morning until midnight, which has had a significant impact on meeting demand. You could say that at the moment we are meeting the apparent demand.

**THE CHAIR:** We are finishing slightly early. The committee's hearing for today is now adjourned. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank the minister and the officials who have appeared throughout the day. And on behalf of the committee, I would certainly like to thank and pass on our appreciation to the Ambulance Service, Fire and Rescue, the Rural Fire Service, the SES and the new communications centre for the work you do to benefit our community, keep us safe, and help us recover from the dramas that life brings us.

If witnesses have taken any questions on notice today, could you please get those answers to the committee secretary within five working days of the receipt of the uncorrected proof. If members wish to lodge questions on notice, please get those to the committee support secretariat within five working days of the hearing.

**The committee adjourned at 9.25 am**