

**IN THE MATTER OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION  
INTO FAMILY VIOLENCE**

**STATEMENT OF ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER WENDY MAREE STEENDAM**

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Filed on behalf of: State of Victoria  
Prepared by:  
Victorian Government Solicitor's Office  
Level 33  
80 Collins Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000

I, WENDY MAREE STEENDAM, Assistant Commissioner of Victoria Police, Information, Systems and Security Command, SAY AS FOLLOWS:

1. I am an Assistant Commissioner of Victoria Police. I have held the position of Assistant Commissioner since July 2010. I have been a member of Victoria Police since 1984 and I have over 30 years of policing experience. During my career with Victoria Police, I have occupied a diverse range of operational and leadership roles. Among other things, I have had extensive involvement in the ongoing response of Victoria Police and the Victorian Government to family violence.
2. I have received a notice from the Royal Commission into Family Violence pursuant to s 17(1)(d) of the *Inquiries Act 2014* (Vic) requiring me to attend to give evidence at the Royal Commission and to provide a witness statement.

**CURRICULUM VITAE**

3. I am presently the Assistant Commissioner of Victoria Police, Information Systems and Security Command and also the Victoria Police Chief Information Officer. I have held these positions since 1 July 2013. In these roles I am responsible for ensuring the effective governance, development and implementation of our organisation's information management and security strategy, policy and compliance, working across our national partners with respect to information exchange and progression of major projects in support of these requirements. I am also a member of the Victoria Police Executive Command and the Agency Executive Security Advisor.

- 2 -

4. Prior to holding my current positions, for a 3 year period (from 2010 to 2013) I was the Assistant Commissioner in charge of Eastern Region and responsible for the provision of policing services in that geographical location.
5. For a five year period (from November 2005 to July 2010), I was a Detective Superintendent attached to the Crime Department of Victoria Police. In that role I had leadership responsibility for a number of operational investigative work groups. Those work groups included the Sexual Crimes Squad and the Homicide Squad. I also had management oversight of and responsibility for Victoria Police's Violence against Women and Children Strategy Group and the Sexual Offence and Child Abuse Investigation Team (**SOCIT**) Project.
6. I have worked in the area of sexual assault and child abuse investigation extensively throughout my career, in both leadership and management roles, as well as an investigating police officer.
7. I have been actively involved in the development and implementation of the Victoria Police responses to family violence and sexual assault since 2001. From November 2005 to July 2010, I was the Victoria Police corporate sponsor and portfolio holder for the crime theme of 'Violence against Women and Children'. This role required me to oversee Victoria Police's organisational policies and operational responses to this crime theme. I have represented Victoria Police on this issue and in the Government governance arrangements and associated reforms. I have been involved with the statewide advisory committee for family violence since 2002. For the past 10 years I have been the co-chair of this forum. Since 2002, I have been involved in cross-government discussions and whole of government policy development in relation to family violence.
8. In 2010, I left the Crime Department to take up my role in Eastern Region. From then onwards, I have not had direct management responsibility within Victoria Police for the crime theme of 'Violence against Women and Children'. I have however remained actively involved in this work through participation in our own internal governance arrangements and through representation on various government committees, including as co-chair on the Statewide Family Violence Advisory Committee and as part of the National Domestic Violence Order Information Sharing System Executive Steering Committee. Overall, I have worked for Victoria Police in relation to reforms involving the crime theme of "Violence against Women and Children" for the past 15 years.

- 3 -

9. In the Violence against Women and Children portfolio holder role, I was also the management conduit between Victoria Police and the Department of Health and Human Services on key issues relating to sexual offences, family violence and child abuse. During my time at the Crime Department, I was the co-chair of the Collaborative Responses Steering Committee of Victoria Police and the Department of Health and Human Services. This committee was formed in 2008 to support improvement in collaborative responses between the two agencies and to provide a forum to discuss identified system issues at a strategic level.
10. I hold a Graduate Certificate in Applied Management and Executive Masters of Public Administration. I have been awarded an Australasian Council for Women and Policing Award, a Chief Commissioner Commendation for the implementation of the 2002-2007 *Violence against Women Strategy – A Way Forward*, an Australian Police Medal, an Australian Federal Police Service Medal and I have recently been inducted as a Victorian Fellow of the Institute of Public Administration Australia (Victorian Division).

#### **SCOPE OF STATEMENT**

11. I make this statement in response to a request by the Royal Commission into Family Violence for information regarding matters the subject of the public hearing for Module 1 (Introduction: What is family violence and who experiences it? Causes and contributory factors).
12. On behalf of Victoria Police I would like to firstly acknowledge and pay my respects to all victim/survivors of family violence and pass on my deepest sympathy to those who have been affected and impacted by family violence. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of those who work in this field on a daily basis in support of those affected by family violence.
13. I understand that the Royal Commission is interested in an overview of changes over the last 10-15 years to the way in which Victoria Police and, more broadly, the Victorian Government has responded to family violence in both practice and policy terms. My experience largely relates to the role of Victoria Police and, as such, the information in this statement is given from that perspective.

## OVERVIEW OF RESPONSE TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

### *Introduction*

14. In Victoria Police's submission to the Royal Commission, a brief history of the relevant reforms and responses undertaken by Victoria Police is contained in Appendix C. A copy of Appendix C is attached to this statement at **Attachment WS-1**. As noted in Appendix C, Victoria Police has undertaken the following key steps, many of which I was involved in, over the past 15 years to improve its response to family violence:
- 14.1 since 2004, the development, implementation and regular updating of the *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence (Code of Practice)*;
  - 14.2 the introduction in 2004 and ongoing use of the family violence risk assessment and risk management report (**L17 report**) for all reported incidents of family violence;
  - 14.3 the creation of specialist family violence roles, including Family Violence Advisors (in 2004) and Family Violence Liaison Officers (from 2004 onwards) – as at February 2015, there were 17 Family Violence Advisors across the state and Family Violence Liaison Officers in every 24-hour police station (approximately 180 such officers);
  - 14.4 the introduction of Family Violence Teams (from 2007 onwards) – there are currently 32 such teams across Victoria;
  - 14.5 in order to strengthen responses to sexual assault and child abuse, the introduction of the SOCIT model and Multidisciplinary Centres (from 2006 onwards);
  - 14.6 the development of referral protocols with the Department of Health and Human Services for family violence (in 2005);
  - 14.7 seeking and implementing additional legislative powers in the form of holding powers (in 2006) and family violence safety notices (in 2008);
  - 14.8 conducting force-wide training on family violence in 2004 and 2008 in addition to the training at the Police Academy and through various promotional courses;

- 5 -

- 14.9 the development of Violence Against Women and Children Strategies (in 2002 and 2009);
  - 14.10 the launch and implementation of the Enhanced Family Violence Service Delivery Model (from 2011 to 2014);
  - 14.11 the incorporation of family violence as a key Blueprint Priority item for Victoria Police for the period from 2012 to 2015;
  - 14.12 Victoria Police's commitment to be the co-chair of the roll out of Risk Assessment and Risk Management panels (**RAMPs**) across Victoria (in 2015);
  - 14.13 establishment of the Victoria Police Family Violence Command and of the Office of the Family Violence Assistant Commissioner.
15. Some details of these and other developments over the past 15 years are set out below.

***Key events in 2001 and 2002***

- 16. In 2001, Christine Nixon was appointed as the Chief Commissioner for Victoria Police. Soon after her appointment, Christine made it clear that responding to violence against women was to be one of her top three priorities. She asked then Commander Leigh Gassner to undertake a review of Victoria Police's responses to violence against women (primarily family violence and sexual assault).
- 17. As a result of this request, Victoria Police undertook its first comprehensive review of police responses to violence against women in 2001. Commander Gassner formed a small team of two senior sergeants and himself to conduct the review, of which I was a part. A summary of the report and key recommendations that resulted from this review was published in 2002 in Victoria Police's first *Violence Against Women Strategy – A Way Forward*, a copy of which is attached to this statement at **Attachment WS-2**.
- 18. Two of the key recommendations included the development of a new policy and practice approach to family violence through the development of a specific Code of Practice and the establishment of a joint government and community steering committee to assist in the development of strategy to achieve system-wide change.
- 19. In 2002, the Office of Women's Policy released the *Women's Safety Strategy 2002-2007* (**Attachment WS-3**), which was the Government's key policy document for

improving the response to violence against women. This was the first time there had been a whole of government response to the issue of violence against women in Victoria. The *Women's Safety Strategy* also included recommendations for the development of advisory committees to improve the response to family violence and sexual assault by all service providers.

20. As a result of these developments, two Statewide Steering Committees were established, one to provide advice on family violence and the other to provide advice on sexual assault, with Victoria Police and the Office of Women's Policy co-chairing both committees. This was the first time that Victoria Police had, in partnership with the Office of Women's Policy, taken the lead on such issues. In fact, it was the Victoria Police response to family violence that had been most criticised by the public and partner services. This was the beginning of Victoria Police's social leadership role on preventing and reducing family violence and other forms of violence against women and children.
21. The Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence held its first meeting on 1 August 2002, with the then Chief Commissioner Christine Nixon co-chairing the first meeting. The original terms of reference of the Steering Committee, an early membership list and two later versions of the terms of reference are attached to this statement at **Attachment WS-4**. The Steering Committee was co-chaired by Victoria Police and the Office of Women's Policy.
22. The Steering Committee continues to function today, although its name has changed from time to time. It is presently known as the Violence Against Women and Children Forum. Other government agencies and non-government organisations were, and continue to be, represented on the Steering Committee.

#### ***Code of Practice for the Investigation of Family Violence***

23. The Code of Practice was launched on 1 September 2004. It was not only intended as a practice document for members of Victoria Police, but was also developed for the public in order that Victoria Police would be accountable to the community.
24. Since then, the Code of Practice has been the subject of two revisions. The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition was issued in December 2010. The current version of the Code of Practice is the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, which was issued in March 2014. The Code of Practice, together with applicable legislation and the Victoria Police Manual, governs the police response to an investigation of family violence. A copy of the current version of the Code of Practice is attached to this statement at **Attachment WS-5**.

25. The public launch of the Code of Practice was accompanied by a broad communication and implementation strategy and was supported by the development of a comprehensive risk assessment and management process and compulsory training for all operational members. Within the first 18 months after the introduction of the Code of Practice, 6,500 members of Victoria Police received this training.
26. The introduction of the Code of Practice was considered the first step in the development of a multi-agency integrated response to family violence. One of the key requirements of the police response was a compulsory referral of incidents of family violence to family violence services, regardless of what other action needed to be taken by police.
27. During the period from June to December 2005, Victoria Police was involved in the development and dissemination of comprehensive referral pathways between Victoria Police and family violence services funded by the Department of Health and Human Services to support the referral pathways articulated in the Code. This culminated in the 2006-2008 DHHS and Victoria Police Family Violence Referral Protocol and the subsequent 2012-2014 Protocol and 2015 Protocol (**Attachment WS-6**). The protocol provides guidance for Victoria Police members on where and how to make referrals to DHHS specialist family violence agencies. Each referral protocol document was designed to ensure that victims and perpetrators of family violence were connected with the most appropriate services to ensure support was being provided. Significant increases in the numbers of referrals to agencies resulted from the implementation of the Code of Practice and the referral protocols.
28. The Code of Practice also strongly focussed on the fact that family violence was a crime and that members should investigate and gather evidence accordingly. It was a pro-arrest and pro-prosecution policy that still left members with the necessary discretion to make decisions based on individual circumstances.

### ***Specialist roles within Victoria Police***

29. Other action taken by Victoria Police in 2004 included the appointment of 10 sergeants as full-time Regional Family Violence Advisors and making Family Violence Liaison Officers available at all 24-hour police stations. The number of specialist family violence roles within Victoria Police has increased over time. Over time, the following working teams and positions have been introduced:

29.1 Family Violence Teams;

29.2 Family Violence Advisors;

- 29.3 Family Violence Liaison Officers;
  - 29.4 Family Violence Court Liaison Officers.
30. Victoria Police currently has:
- 30.1 32 Family Violence Teams;
  - 30.2 17 Family Violence Advisors;
  - 30.3 a Family Violence Liaison Officers at each 24-hour police station; and
  - 30.4 15 Family Violence Court Liaison Officers.
31. While the roles of Family Violence Teams vary across the State, their core roles remain the same. They include:
- 31.1 providing an immediate specialist response to a family violence incident;
  - 31.2 providing a secondary response in support of primary units;
  - 31.3 investigating and case managing recidivist offenders, repeat victims of family violence and high risk clients; and
  - 31.4 investigating criminal offences, including breaches of intervention orders.
32. The role of Family Violence Advisors is, among other things, to:
- 32.1 act as an interface between operational police, Family Violence Liaison Officers and family support agencies;
  - 32.2 ensure operational police are aware of the issues and impact of family violence and violence against women on victims and the general community;
  - 32.3 establish and maintain formal consultative community networks and represent Victoria Police at appropriate forums relating to family violence;
  - 32.4 coordinate, develop and conduct training workshops for operational police in consultation with the Family Violence Command and Divisional Training Officers;



- 32.5 maintain a relationship with the Family Violence Command, Executive Crime Command and Family Violence Command governance structures; and
  - 32.6 research and identify local issues, trends and incidents of family violence in the community and develop initiatives and strategies to break the cycle of family violence.
33. Family Violence Liaison Officers are responsible for, within their station or group of stations:
- 33.1 providing a consistent and coordinated approach to family violence;
  - 33.2 monitoring and reporting on family violence, including adherence by members to the Code of Practice;
  - 33.3 providing a station contact point for local referral agencies;
  - 33.4 maintaining relationships between police and other agencies; and
  - 33.5 coordinating further responses for victims who are the subject of repeated incidents of family violence.
34. The role of a Family Violence Court Liaison Officer includes:
- 34.1 acting on behalf of the police informant in police-initiated intervention order applications;
  - 34.2 case managing and continuing to risk assess on all police applications; and
  - 34.3 acting as an interface between operational police and the Courts.
35. In addition, attending officers ranked Leading Senior Constable or below are supervised in their response to family violence incidents by their respective supervisor ranked Sergeant or above. Supervisors ensure that:
- 35.1 a thorough investigation has been or is being conducted of all incidents of family violence;
  - 35.2 a risk assessment, including an L17 report, has been completed thoroughly and accurately;
  - 35.3 the action taken or proposed is commensurate with the level of risk identified;

- 35.4 appropriate action has been or is being taken;
  - 35.5 briefs of evidence are submitted in a timely fashion;
  - 35.6 victims are updated on the progress of the case concerning them; and
  - 35.7 appropriate consideration has been or is being given to circumstances involving children and other vulnerable groups.
36. The introduction of these changes over time has reflected Victoria Police's ongoing commitment to the creation of specialist family violence roles and units throughout the organisation.

### ***Victorian Government responses***

37. In 2004, the Victorian Government acknowledged the non-government sector's expertise in this field and recognised the value of including non-government organisations in the membership of the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence. The terms of reference for the Steering Committee included the provision of advice to the Victorian Government on a multi-agency or integrated response to family violence.
38. Consequently, the Steering Committee, under the leadership provided by both Victoria Police and the Office of Women's Policy, developed a document entitled *Reforming the Family Violence System in Victoria (Attachment WS-7)*. This document outlined the key principles and elements of a best practice approach to responding to family violence throughout the State of Victoria. It included a consistent and easily accessible response by police, the courts and support services who would all work together to provide the appropriate response to families. This document informed the Victorian Government response in May 2005, *Changing lives: a new approach to family violence in Victoria (Attachment WS-8)* and resulted in the allocation of \$35.1 million in 2005-2006 over four years to begin reforming the broader family violence system in Victoria to better respond to family violence.
39. The reform package was intended to strengthen police, court and support services. The reforms also involved the re-funding of family violence services, including prescribing the need to form partnerships to achieve the goals of the new Integrated Family Violence System in Victoria.
40. New family violence related services were also funded during this time, including men's behaviour change programs. A range of services for men who use violence

have been introduced or strengthened since 2005. Examples include emergency accommodation and case management support for perpetrators, after-hours telephone response, enhanced intake services for men's behaviour change programs, counselling and referral services, and behaviour change programs.

41. Several statewide and regional advisory structures were established to facilitate the implementation of the Government's integrated reform agenda. At regional and sub-regional levels, Integrated Family Violence Committees were established, with membership comprising a wide range of community-based family violence services and representatives from police (through Family Violence Advisors), child protection, courts, health services and schools.
42. Also, during this reform period in 2005, court reforms commenced, including the establishment of the Family Violence Court Division (FVCD) at Heidelberg and Ballarat Magistrates' Courts. This was followed by the establishment of the Specialist Family Violence Service (SFVS) in 2005 in Melbourne, and in 2006 in Sunshine, Werribee and Frankston Magistrates' Courts. A number of new positions were established in these specialist courts.
43. The FVCD courts have specialist family violence registrars, applicant support workers, respondent workers, specially-funded duty lawyer services, private security officers and outreach services. The SFVS courts have funded specialist family violence registrars and applicant support workers. The SFVS and some other courts have duty lawyer services for intervention order applicants and respondents and local arrangements have resulted in the presence of outreach services and respondent workers on some days. Some courts also have police/court liaison officers.
44. In May 2009, the Victorian Government allocated \$10.8 million over four years to continue the operation of the FVCD at the Ballarat and Heidelberg Magistrates' Courts.

### ***Risk assessment and risk management***

45. In addition to the reform to date, including Victoria Police reforms and broad system change, the other significant item of work introduced to the system was the Victorian Common Risk Assessment Framework, otherwise known as the CRAF, in 2007. This was an important Statewide initiative managed by Office of Women's Policy. The CRAF provides community-based agencies with a consistent framework for assessing risk. Victoria Police's L17 report form is consistent with the preliminary

risk assessment in the CRAF. This common understanding of risk assessment is seen as critical to improving risk management across the system and identifying risk to women and children more effectively.

46. Victoria Police specifically introduced the L17 report form in conjunction with the Code of Practice in 2004. In particular, the Code of Practice required, and requires, that, in respect of any reported incident of family violence, police collect information necessary for them to complete the L17 report. The L17 report was designed to assist police to assess the future risk of family violence and resulting harm and to provide them with a guide to asking victims about relevant risk factors. It was also designed to help police formulate a strategy for each victim to minimise the risk of any future harm or escalation in violence. The L17 report form was accompanied by a guidance note for members using it. All operational members receive training on the use of the L17 report form.

### **Legislative change**

47. In 2006, the Victorian Law Reform Commission released its *Review of Family Violence Laws Final Report on the Crimes Family Violence Act 1987 (Vic)*. The report recommended sweeping changes to the legislative framework responding to family violence and the introduction of a new Act. Consultation by the Department of Justice with the family violence sector, government departments, Victoria Police and the courts commenced immediately on the development of new family violence legislation. This work continued up until 2008.
48. In the interim whilst consultation commenced, the Victorian Government announced new 'holding powers' for Victoria Police as recommended by the Law Reform Commission's interim report *Family Violence Police Holding Powers*. These new powers allowed police to direct, and detain if necessary, a perpetrator of family violence for the purposes of applying for a family violence intervention order. This was significant for Victoria Police as it addressed a gap in being able to respond to family violence incidents and assisted in the cultural change by police members as they were being provided with tools that assisted them to do their jobs more effectively.
49. The 'holding powers' legislation precludes police from interviewing the person who is under direction or detained for family violence offences for any other offences. If a power of arrest exists, police must arrest the person under that power and not rely on the holding powers, which can only be used to direct or detain a person for the purposes of making a complaint.

50. Following the commencement of this legislation, training in holding powers was rolled out across Victoria Police as an e-learning package across the State.
51. In May 2008, the Victorian Government invested \$24.7 million over four years in a range of measures that built on the reforms introduced previously as a result of the funding in 2005 and in response to the pending enactment of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)*. The focus of this funding was to continue to address critical service gaps within the reformed system and significantly strengthen prevention efforts.
52. The introduction of the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)* in 2008 saw the next major wave of reform in the Government's response to family violence. The new legislation led to a number of changes to policies and programs in government departments. Considerable resources were invested in implementing the new legislation, and associated programs, including training and professional development and updating various policies, procedures, guidelines and other documentation.
53. Major changes introduced by the Act included the expansion of the definition of a 'family member', the provision of clear definitions about what behaviour constituted family violence, an emphasis on children as victims of family violence in their own right and the removal of 'aid and abet' provisions. Importantly, the Act also provided Victoria Police with the power to issue family violence safety notices, which provided police with an additional tool to ensure that immediate protection was available to victims of family violence.
54. Family violence safety notices do three things – they enable police to exclude the perpetrator from the premises and ensure the victim's safety for up to 72 hours; they are an application to the Court for a family violence intervention order; and they are a summons for the respondent to come to court for the hearing of the application for the intervention order. Police can issue family violence safety notices on the spot or at the police station with a Sergeant's approval.
55. Originally, family violence safety notices were the subject of a sunset clause in the Act upon the expiry of a two-year period. They were also initially only valid for up to 72 hours and to be issued outside of the hours of 9.00 am to 5.00 pm. Following an evaluation and as a result of various legislative changes over the last few years, family violence safety notices have continued to be available and their availability has been extended so that police can issue them at any time and they can continue in effect for up to five working days. Family violence safety notices have contributed

to increases in applications by police for intervention orders (as shown by Magistrates' Courts figures over a number of years, which are attached to this statement at **Attachment WS-9**).

56. In September 2012, the Victorian Government announced the introduction of new indictable offences for contraventions of family violence safety notices and intervention orders. The new offences are designed to work alongside the existing summary offences contained in the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*. The new offences came into effect on 17 April 2013.
57. The three new offences were as follows:
- 57.1 section 125A - persistent contravention of family violence safety notices or intervention orders;
  - 57.2 section 37A - contravention of a notice intending to cause harm or fear for safety;
  - 57.3 section 123A - contravention of an order intending to cause harm or fear for safety.

#### ***Indigenous family violence strategy***

58. 2008 was also the year in which the *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 10 year plan 2008-2018* was launched (**Attachment WS-10**) and, as part of the commitments the subject of this strategy, Victoria Police commenced its Koori Police Protocols Pilot.
59. The Koori Family Violence Police Protocols (**KFVPP**) were developed, which are agreements between local Aboriginal communities and Victoria Police that document the local police response to Aboriginal family violence. The aim of the protocols is to strengthen the police response to incidents of family violence in Aboriginal communities with the longer term goal of reducing both the number of family violence incidents, and the rates of families experiencing repeated incidents of family violence. The protocols are aimed at a holistic, improved response for all parties, including victims, children and perpetrators.
60. The KFVPP were developed and agreed locally in selected police areas. In 2008 six sites were selected, based on levels of reported family violence incidents, to pilot the protocols. These sites were Mildura, Ballarat, Darebin, Bairnsdale, Dandenong and

Shepparton. The KVVPP have been launched in three of the pilot sites – Mildura (2011), Darebin (2013) and Ballarat (2013).

61. An evaluation of the KVVPP has recently been undertaken and a copy of the evaluation is attached at **Attachment WS-11**. This evaluation will inform the ongoing project work in this area.

***Victoria Police's second Violence Against Women Strategy***

62. On 25 November 2009, then Chief Commissioner Simon Overland launched Victoria Police's second violence against women strategy, which extended Victoria Police's proposed family violence reforms to children. The document setting out the strategy was entitled *Living Free from Violence: Upholding the Right – Victoria Police's strategy to reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2009-2014*. A copy of this strategy document is attached to this statement at **Attachment WS-12**.

63. The strategy set clear performance measures for Victoria Police over the five-year period from 2009 to 2014. The strategy outlined a number of performance measures for Victoria Police to meet within the 5 years covered by the strategy. These performance measures included:

- 63.1 increase family violence reports to Victoria Police by 10%;
- 63.2 increase sexual assault reports to Victoria Police by 15%;
- 63.3 increase charges laid for family violence by Victoria Police by 5%;
- 63.4 increase applications by Victoria Police for intervention orders by 10%;
- 63.5 increase referrals by Victoria Police to family violence services by 15%;
- 63.6 increase reports for child physical assault (family related) by 10%; and
- 63.7 demonstrated increase in members' understanding of violence against women and children.

64. The strategy provided a clear direction for Victoria Police to continue its work in improving responses to family violence, sexual assault and child abuse. The performance objectives also provided a framework for accountability within the organisation in order to drive and ensure focus on the key initiatives outlined in the strategy.

65. In early 2010, Victoria Police established the Victoria Police Violence against Women and Children Steering Committee to oversee the implementation of this strategy internally. The key initiatives of the strategy have been implemented and, in early 2015, the Victoria Police Violence Against Women and Children Steering Committee approved the continuation of the strategy until the end of 2015. It is envisaged that the Family Violence Command will commence work on a new strategy in early 2016.

**Reforms from 2010 onwards**

66. In November 2009, the Victorian Government published *A Right to Respect – Victoria’s Plan to Prevent Violence against Women 2010-2020*. A copy of this policy document is attached to this statement at **Attachment WS-13**. It contained a 10-year framework to promote respectful, gender-equitable relationships in Victorian communities and homes and was again a whole of government piece of work.
67. In May 2010, the Victorian Government allocated:
- 67.1 \$14 million over four years to implement the first phase of the policy agenda set out in *A Right to Respect: Victoria’s Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women* with a focus on delivering an integrated approach across a range of settings such as work, sport, education, community and the media; and
- 67.2 funding to expand existing services for victims of sexual assault in the Multidisciplinary Centres in Frankston and Mildura and to establish a new Multidisciplinary Centre in Geelong.
68. In November 2011, Victoria Police launched internally the Enhanced Family Violence Service Delivery Model. A copy of a document describing this model is attached to this statement at **Attachment WS-14**. Among other things, the document set out strategies for dealing with repeat victims and recidivist offenders. The enhanced model also provided for the expansion of Family Violence Teams and greater consistency of service and practice across Victoria Police in its response to family violence. This document formed the basis for the expansion of the number of Family Violence Teams. There were 9 teams in November 2011 and, as I have stated above, there are currently 32 teams. Victoria Police is currently examining ways in which to determine the most effective models for Family Violence Teams.



- 17 -

69. In October 2012, the Victorian Government published *Victoria's Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children 2012-2015*. A copy of this document is attached to this statement at **Attachment WS-15**.
70. On 30 May 2014, the Victorian Government announced an additional \$30 million investment over four years to strengthen the statewide response to family violence. This investment will be used in order to, among other things, establish RAMPs across Victoria. Victoria Police has made a commitment to co-chair the RAMPs across the state.
71. In December 2014, Chief Commissioner Ken Lay announced the establishment of a Family Violence Command in Victoria Police and the appointment of a dedicated Family Violence Assistant Commissioner. In March 2015, Assistant Commissioner Dean McWhirter was appointed to that position.
72. The Family Violence Command is the first of **its** kind in Australia and signifies Victoria Police's commitment to continue to improve responses to family violence, sexual assault and child abuse. It is also evidence of the significant priority that Victoria Police places on this crime theme and also the recognition that there is still much work to be done to continue to evolve the system to keep women and children safe.

### **RAMPS**

73. In late 2011, Victoria Police partnered with other government agencies and non-government organisations to establish a Risk Assessment and Management Panel in each of the City of Hume and the Greater City of Geelong. In each area, the RAMP's core membership included senior representatives from the pilot auspice agency (Berry Street and Bethany Community Services), Victoria Police, the Department of Health and Human Services, Corrections and other relevant agencies and service providers. In each area, the RAMP generally meets monthly to share information, **assess** the level of risk of referred cases, and to develop and coordinate risk management action plans for women and children who have been referred to the RAMP. The RAMPs provide an integrated response to women and children at high risk of severe harm and/or lethality.
74. The two RAMPs were independently evaluated in 2013 by Thomson Goodall Associates Pty Ltd in a report entitled *Evaluation of the family violence Strengthening Risk Management Demonstration Projects in Victoria*. A copy of this document is attached at **Attachment WS-16**. The RAMPs were found to have

made a contribution to keeping safe those women and children who were at high risk. The RAMPs were found to have contributed to greater coordination and service system integration, particularly among RAMP members. In addition, the RAMPs contributed to increased accountability of men who use violence, through sharing information about perpetrator whereabouts and circumstances, and through coordination of responses involving Victoria Police and other RAMP members.

### ***Sexual assault and Multidisciplinary Centres***

75. Victoria Police has made significant structural, practice and cultural reforms to improve its response to sexual assault and child abuse over the last ten years. The key driver of these reforms was the Victorian Law Reform Commission's 2004 report *Sexual Offences: Law and Procedure Final Report*, in which the Law Reform Commission found that the police response to sexual assault was undermined by a culture of disbelief and a lack of transparency in process.
76. The Law Reform Commission recommended the establishment of specialist sexual assault investigative units, the development of specialist training for sexual offence investigators, more transparent processes for brief authorisation and better data collection.
77. These findings and recommendations were critical in driving the development and implementation of a specialist approach by Victoria Police to sexual offending and child abuse. This approach encompassed a fundamental shift in police structure, practice and culture in the area of sexual offending. The Victoria Police reforms were characterised by three key components:
  - 77.1 the development of specialist detectives to investigate sexual offence cases through the establishment of SOCITs;
  - 77.2 a new training program for SOCIT detectives; and
  - 77.3 the development of Multidisciplinary Centres (**MDCs**).
78. In 2005, Victoria Police released its third edition of the *Code of Practice for the Investigation of Sexual Assault*, which had first been introduced in 1992 to ensure a co-ordinated and efficient response from all services including police, sexual assault counsellors and forensic medical officers.
79. As a result of recommendations made by the Victorian Law Reform Commission, and issues identified by the Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Sexual Assault and by Centres Against Sexual Assault, an extensive evaluation of the Code

had been undertaken by Victoria Police in 2004. The evaluation resulted in the publication of the 2005 edition of the Code, which includes information on responding appropriately to victims from Indigenous communities, non-English speaking backgrounds, victims with a physical or cognitive impairment and children.

80. A new edition of the Code will be released later this year to reflect the significant reforms that have been made to Victoria Police's response to sexual offences and child abuse over the last 10 years, including the establishment of SOCITs and MDCs. Training on the Code is included in a mandatory four-week course attended by all SOCIT members.
81. The fundamental basis of the SOCIT model is the specialist investigation of sexual offences and child abuse. This means that investigations are undertaken by members who are specifically selected and trained to work exclusively on sexual offending and child abuse. They undertake the entire investigation, from taking the victim's first report to the finalisation of court proceedings, which means victims deal with the same members for the whole investigation. Previously, under the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Unit (SOCAU) model, victim liaison and criminal investigations were undertaken by separate units of the organisation, the latter by generalist detectives without specialist knowledge or experience in sexual offence matters.
82. The SOCIT model commenced as a pilot project in 2006 in two sites, Mildura and Frankston. These were funded by the Victorian Government as part of its \$34.2 million Sexual Assault Reform Strategy, a package of measures designed to improve the criminal justice response to victims of sexual assault.
83. In 2009, Deakin University conducted an evaluation of the pilot and found that the SOCIT model was effective. As a result, Victoria Police committed to the implementation of the SOCIT model across the organisation. The implementation of the model occurred over a two and a half year period, finishing in early 2012. It led to the creation of twenty-eight SOCITs, with approximately 370 specialist detective positions in the SOCITs currently located across Victoria. Previously, the equivalent of 211 full-time members worked in 26 SOCAUs across the State in 2009. Ten of those units were located in metropolitan Melbourne and the other sixteen were in regional areas. Today, 11 SOCITs operate in metropolitan Melbourne and 17 operate in regional and rural Victoria.
84. SOCIT detectives investigate an entire sexual offence and child abuse case, from first report to prosecution, including interviewing the victim, witnesses and suspects,

completing the entire criminal investigation, collecting evidence and preparing the brief of evidence. As this expansion in responsibilities required a major shift in skills and knowledge, a critical part of the transition to the new SOCIT model was the development of specialist training.

85. The Government's Sexual Assault Reform Strategy included funding for the first two MDCs, which were established by Victoria Police in 2007 in Frankston and Mildura. Since then, additional MDCs have commenced in Geelong and Dandenong, and MDCs in Bendigo and Morwell will commence in September 2015. Victoria Police has coordinated the establishment of each MDC.
86. MDCs are an innovative way of responding to sexual offences and child physical abuse. The centres co-locate three core agencies including a SOCIT, Centre against Sexual Assault counsellor and advocates, and child protection staff. Community health nurses will also commence in each MDC later this year. Co-located staff have strong links with key partner agencies who may deliver services to victims of sexual assault both on or off site, particularly the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine and the Victorian Forensic Paediatric Medical Service. The MDC in Dandenong includes two purpose built and specially designed forensic examination suites.
87. MDCs are considered to be a 'one stop shop' for victims of sexual offences which combine service providers in one physical location. This approach increases collaboration between service providers, and improves the response to victims of sexual offences. The MDCs are also designed to provide a secure space for victims to receive specialist support and counselling, and report an offence, without the stigma of attending a police station. Overall, the reform introduced a shift in the response to sexual offences, with the focus being on supporting the needs of the victim.
88. Overall, the MDC approach aims to:
  - 88.1 improve support for victim/survivors and families and support people;
  - 88.2 increase the reporting of sexual offences and reduce attrition of cases from the system;
  - 88.3 improve and integrate the investigation of sexual offences and child abuse;
  - 88.4 improve the quality of evidence in sexual offences and child abuse cases;  
and

- 88.5 improve the capability of agencies to respond collaboratively.
89. The Specialist Development Unit (SDU) was established during the SOCIT implementation to create specialist sexual offence and child abuse investigators within Victoria Police. The SDU aims to develop more effective investigations, ensure positive engagement with victims, and improve court outcomes. At the heart of these changes has been development of 'Whole Story', a conceptual framework for investigating and interviewing sexual offences and child abuse matters. 'Whole Story' aims to develop knowledge of sexual offending, ensure positive attitudes towards victims, and improve core investigative and interviewing skills. It is designed to work in synergy with existing interview protocols.

## CONCLUSION

90. Since the introduction of the Code of Practice in 2004, there has been, as at 2014:
- 90.1 a 136% increase in family incidents recorded;
  - 90.2 a 551% increase in intervention orders applied for by police (including family violence safety notices); and
  - 90.3 an 876.8% increase in incidents where charges were laid arising from family incidents.
91. In 2013/2014, Victoria Police laid criminal charges in 45% of family incidents attended – this has risen from 11% of total incidents in 2003/04. In 2013/14 almost half (45.7%) of all assaults were family-incident related.
92. These statistics demonstrate the significant increase in action taken by police, and increased reporting of family violence by the public which shows the overall demand that is being placed on the family violence system in Victoria. But, behind every statistic is a victim and we acknowledge the human toll of family violence on individuals, families, friends and the broader community.
93. Victoria Police has been and continues to be a policing agency that puts, as central principles, the safety of women and children, the protection of those affected by family violence and holding perpetrators of family violence to account. Violence in any form is unacceptable.
94. Victoria Police has played a key leadership role in Victoria over the past 15 years in responding to and preventing family violence from occurring. Of course we recognise there is always opportunity to improve our response, not only in our

policing response but also across the broader service system. The number of deaths and serious injuries that continue to occur as a result of family violence indicate that this is necessary to ensure the safety of our community.

95. Victoria Police is a reflective organisation that is committed to understanding the experiences of those who are affected by this crime and who use the system. Since 2001, we have continuously made improvements in our system response and our operating model to support those most vulnerable to family violence and to ensure our responses to family violence are effective and appropriate. Our submission to the Royal Commission identifies some key areas for further improvement and reform.

96. In my view, which is supported by Victoria Police, there have been some key elements in the reforms over the past 15 years that have been central in helping progress the reforms and which I believe are important to retain in any future reform work:

96.1 leadership across all parts of the system at the highest levels of government, along with strong governance arrangements to support this;

96.2 working collaboratively with key partners across the whole system on key reform areas and agendas;

96.3 specialisation, because family violence is a very complex issue that needs a service sector that understands that complexity;

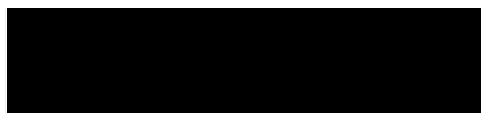
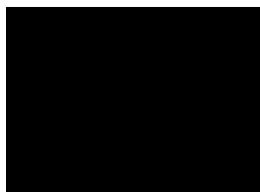
96.4 strong accountability mechanisms across the whole service system; and

96.5 prevention programs that address the causal factors related to this crime.

Signed by )  
**Wendy Maree Steendam** )  
at Melbourne )  
this 9th day of July 2015 )

WENDY STEENDAM  
ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER

Before me



An Australian legal practitioner  
within the meaning of the  
Legal Profession Uniform Law (Victoria)