



# ***JUSTICE, INTEGRITY AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE***

## **Members present:**

Mr MA Hunt MP—Chair  
Mr MC Berkman MP  
Mr SM Dillion MP  
Hon. DE Farmer MP  
Ms ND Marr MP  
Mr PS Russo MP

## **Staff present:**

Ms F Denny—Committee Secretary  
Ms S Dodsworth—Acting Assistant Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC HEARING—OVERSIGHT OF THE OFFICE OF THE VICTIMS' COMMISSIONER**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**Wednesday, 21 May 2025**

**Brisbane**

**WEDNESDAY, 21 MAY 2025**

**The committee met at 10.00 am.**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare open this public hearing for the committee's oversight responsibility of the Office of the Victims' Commissioner. My name is Marty Hunt. I am the member for Nicklin and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today. With me here today are: Peter Russo MP, member for Toohey; Natalie Marr MP, member for Thuringowa; Michael Berkman MP, member for Maiwar; Hon. Di Farmer MP, member for Bulimba, who is substituting for Melissa McMahon MP, member for Macalister; and Sean Dillon MP, member for Gregory, who is substituting for Russell Field MP, member for Capalaba.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee.

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**HEADFORD, Ms Jennifer, Director, Engagement, Office of the Victims' Commissioner**

**KAY, Ms Sarah, Executive Director, Office of the Victims' Commissioner**

**O'CONNOR, Ms Beck, Victims' Commissioner, Office of the Victims' Commissioner**

**SCHLOSS, Ms Deanne, Manager, Corporate Services, Office of the Victims' Commissioner**

**THOMS, Ms Dimity, Director, Policy and Systemic Review, Office of the Victims' Commissioner**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. Thank you all for attending today. I invite you to make an opening statement to the committee before we move to questions.

**Ms O'Connor:** Thank you. I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to their elders past and present. I pay my respects to adults, young people and children who are victims of crime. I recognise their steadfast friends, families, agencies and communities who support victim-survivors. I pay my respects to those who have not survived and recognise the enduring impact this has had on their loved ones. I recognise their stories and advocacy and how vital it is that they are considered in our system responses.

Chair and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as Queensland's inaugural Victims' Commissioner. It is an absolute honour to represent the Office of the Victims' Commissioner to the parliamentary oversight committee for the first time since my office was permanently established last year.

If you were to step outside right now and ask many Queenslanders walking down the street what they would do if someone committed a terrible violent crime against them, their answer would likely be simple: most would call the police. They would call the police because they believe—no, they trust—that our systems and institutions will believe them and support them; that people will be kind, they will be compassionate and they will be understanding of their hurt; that the crime will be investigated and that the offender will be caught and charged; that the courts will deliver justice and that the person who committed the crime will be held accountable, receiving a sentence that is comparative with the harm that has been caused; and that they would receive immediate support—someone to help them navigate a complex and technical process—and they would be financially supported to heal and recover.

This trust is not just a belief; it is the cornerstone of our society. As Queenslanders, we are actually privileged to live in a place where we enjoy freedom, rights and protections. At the heart of those protections is a deeply ingrained understanding that if someone commits a terrible crime against you or your family the system will stand with you, it will deliver justice and it will make things right. But what happens when that trust is shattered? What happens when the system you believed in, the system you relied upon, turns its back on you?

Imagine this. A violent crime is committed against you or your child or your partner. You do what you have always been told to do: you call the police. But instead of justice, you are told that there is not enough evidence to charge the person who hurt you, that you have had too much to drink, or that your story just does not add up. Imagine the anguish of hearing those words. Imagine the disbelief, the betrayal and the helplessness. Now imagine something even worse: imagine a loved one being murdered and sitting in a courtroom as lawyers debate the meaning of the word 'heinous', as if the murder of your loved one would be anything less.

In 2021, the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce heard from over a thousand victims of domestic, family and sexual violence in Queensland. Victims told the taskforce over and over that the system had not been there for them—that it did not stand with them, it did not deliver justice and it did not make anything right. Shockingly, more often than not the system often made things worse.

The role of Victims' Commissioner was created in response to that taskforce work as well as the report of the commission of inquiry into the QPS responses to domestic and family violence and a parliamentary inquiry into support for victims. These reports and inquiries all made clear the urgent need for an independent advocate to elevate and protect the rights of victims of crime across Queensland. My role is to ensure that victims of crime are not just heard but also truly prioritised across the criminal justice system. By listening directly to victims I bring their experiences and concerns to the table, ensuring I share their advice with you to shape policies and services that we provide.

I have a small but extraordinary team working to support me including my leadership team, who are here with me today. Our work is guided by the values of bravery, advocacy, compassion, integrity and respect. We help victims understand and stand up for their rights. We focus on victims' strengths and their resilience to build confidence and cultural pride. Our work is guided by research, lived experiences and the wisdom of First Nations people.

Our work shines a light on what is working and, more importantly, what is not. Already, in a short space of time, we have carried out over 200 engagements to raise awareness of victims' rights, we have received nearly 600 submissions through our complaints and client engagement and we have developed widely acclaimed resources to support victims of crime. Personally, I have also met with many victims from across the country who have shown great courage to share their experience with me, yet we have so much more to do.

My role is to challenge us all to do better, to help reform a system that treats victims with dignity, fairness and respect at every turn. My role is to hold us all accountable, to ask and be asked the tough questions and to push for meaningful change where it is needed. Collaboration is at the heart of all of this. We all have a shared responsibility to deliver a justice system that does not just function but genuinely supports victims. I am yet to meet anyone who disagrees with this. The only issue is that they need help to know how.

I am deeply committed to ensuring that the Victims' Commissioner role continues to serve as a trusted voice for change—one rooted in justice, compassion, lived experience and action. Lastly, Chair, may I seek leave to share some information with you and the other committee members that helps outline my role and the work of the office to date. I have a highlight snapshot since September that I would like to share.

**CHAIR:** Are you seeking leave to table a document?

**Ms O'Connor:** Yes. Thank you, and I welcome your questions.

**CHAIR:** Thank you. Is leave granted table that document? Leave is granted.

Thank you, Commissioner. Certainly, in 33 years of policing I have encountered much of what you have spoken about in terms of system. In that regard, we have had public hearings recently—you have been a part of them—where we have heard lots of stories from victims dissatisfied with the system in general, but I am interested in the Police Service. I am interested in people's interactions with it and how we are doing in that space. Can you comment on how your office has been set up to interact with the Queensland Police Service to support victims, how that is progressing and what improvements you want to see into the future?

**Ms O'Connor:** There are a number of ways in which that occurs. First and foremost, part of my functions is to provide the opportunity for people to raise a complaint or an inquiry on the treatment they have received or any interaction they have had with any government agency, including the police. In the first instance, it is about how we would hear and understand their experiences directly. We are working through a memorandum of understanding with the Queensland Police Service that allows us to have a very smooth transaction when we receive those complaints, inquiries or requests for information where we can directly liaise with the team. That allows that to be a very smooth process for victim-survivors in terms of us responding to those issues.

I also undertake meetings with members of the police force regularly. I have also met with both the Police Commissioner and the Acting Police Commissioner since I have been appointed to the role. I have also had meetings where there have been issues raised, where the police have proactively sought my advice or my response, whether that is in terms of initiatives they are undertaking or whether or not there have been issues that they are responding to that they would like to keep me aware of as Victims' Commissioner.

**CHAIR:** If a victim calls the police, is at a police station and gives a statement or whatever and comes away from that experience feeling as though they have not been heard or any of those issues that you raised, where is the connection to your office from that experience? Are there brochures in the police station? Are police being trained now to inform people? How is that connection is being made or fostered or what improvements would you like to see?

**Ms O'Connor:** First and foremost, I have a network meeting called an SRG, which is a sector reference group. That was in existence even before I came on as the permanent Victims' Commissioner. The police have a permanent seat at that table and they regularly attend. We have done information sessions with the Queensland police based on the Charter of Victims' Rights, and they have very specific responsibilities within the charter. We have talked to them about that and helped them review their processes in terms of both their guiding documents and the way they can provide that information.

We have little wallet cards that have been issued to the police and are available for order on our website for any government service. When they do have contact with members of the public and victim-survivors, they can give them that collateral. They have also been supportive in working with us in developing some of the resources we have for victims of crime. For example, we have created a victims pathway product—or two now: one for victim-survivors of sexual violence and another one for victims of violent and nonviolent property crime. Both of those resources are a navigation tool which has been developed with victim-survivors and with stakeholders, police being one of them. Another thing we did with those resources was create a podcast to help people who have experienced rape or sexual violence to understand the system and what their choices are. We even had a very senior police officer participate in that podcast with us. We have actually had very proactive, active workings with the police.

**CHAIR:** From all those things you said, I think the most practical thing sounded like handing out the cards at the police station, but police need to order those. Would you like to see that as a standard practice for all victims, just to get a card from your office?

**Ms O'Connor:** That would be fantastic. I agree.

**Mr RUSSO:** Commissioner, in relation to your office, what is your vision going forward for the organisation?

**Ms O'Connor:** One of the things that I did as a priority when I came on board was get together that sector reference group, to talk to a number of victim-survivors and to work with my team directly on developing a strategic plan. We have called that Protecting Rights, Transforming Justice. It is a five-year plan over the term of my tenure, with a very specific focus that victims are respected, that they are seen and that they are heard in a justice system that anticipates their needs. It is not good enough that we just have a system that attempts to meet its needs. We know enough about what victim-survivors need. We know the fact of what they are dealing with such that we should now be reaching even further—that services should be able to anticipate what their needs are and proactively design the way that not only they are supported but also they access services and, more importantly, how they are handed to other sections of the criminal justice process. That is where some of the concerns really are—where they can slip through the cracks or where information is not handed over. Some of that siloing is quite a common thing that people will express when they are speaking to us.

The purpose and what I want to see is that we have a justice and victim support system that upholds the dignity and rights of all victims of crime within a culture of safety, transparency and accessibility, and I want to be a champion to that. I want to be a critical friend to those who are making the decisions on how to go about that, to centre victim-survivors and ensure we put them as a priority when we are considering system reform.

**Ms MARR:** Thank you for being here today. Listening to you today and having a look at this paperwork you have given us—one of my favourite people is results-driven—you obviously collect data and use that effectively to make sure you provide the right resources. One of those resources you have is the online one, new in September, for your victims of sexual violence. Another one is for property crime. With the one for sexual violence, we know that some of these people find it very difficult to actually speak to anybody. I imagine that if they jump online these resources might make them feel a bit more comfortable. Has that resource allowed you to have more engagement with these people? You probably do not have a lot of data because it has been there since only September. You have provided a great resource. I just want to know that it is working—that it gets people to engage with you more—and how your staff can handle that growth, if that be the case.

**Ms O'Connor:** We have had some extraordinary engagement with that resource. We are also finding that it is not just about the engagement with my office or me; these resources were designed to be a self-help guide and something that enables practitioners or a family friend to help to have that conversation. They are meant to be in easy language and easily accessible so that anyone can help guide through.

They are also like a decision-making tool. When we speak to people we find that they have either referenced that or it has been a gateway for them to feel confident when they are accessing any part of that process. To give you an example, in the very first instance of an acute experience of sexual violence, 'Do I go to the emergency service and do I undertake a forensic medical examination? What are my options? What are my rights? Can I change my mind? Do I have to do it now? Do my choices compromise evidence gathering?' It is all of those kinds of things. We have been given direct feedback about how that has been really helpful in people being able to not only understand what decisions are available for them to make but also who can support them and who they can call. It just gives dignity, choice and control for people.

The victim's pathway for sexual violence has been viewed over 2,000 times and with nearly 1,200 users in the time we have had that. There is a podcast series associated with it. We did the podcast particularly because we wanted to make sure there were lots of different ways to access that, depending on how people think, learn and process information. Every version of it is translatable and is available through any kind of software that people might need from an accessibility perspective. The podcast has had 395 downloads, which I have been told in podcast land—that is not really my jam—is actually impressive. The property pathway has had 3,209 views and 1,700 users. We are seeing that these products are actually being accessed and are really relevant.

One thing that is important also is that we have some video explainers on our website about rights and about support services. One of our video explainers around the charter has actually been looked at independently 10,300 times, and we have only been in operation for that particular part of our service since September last year. I am really proud that not only have we created resources that people are finding useful but also we are getting it out there that they are available and how people can access them.

**Mr BERKMAN:** I am interested in the breakdown you have of complaints by agency. The percentages are useful, but how many complaints have you received so far? Can you give a sense, aside from the agency breakdown, of what kinds of themes, issues or offences they relate to?

**Ms O'Connor:** When we talk about complaints we use the language 'submissions', because there are people who will provide us complaints that are very clear are complaints, but when we assess them they may not sit under the charter, or we have people who will come with an inquiry or some feedback and we say, 'On first-level assessment, we would think this would fit within the charter.' We use the term 'submission'. As I am talking about that, I want to give that explainer.

For the last six months and as of 30 April, we have received 577 submissions from 387 clients. That is important because we often find that people will not come with just one agency or one issue they are raising; they will come with a much more complicated matter for us to undertake. Of 375 complaints, they are from 216 clients. We have had 167 inquiries from 165 clients. We have had 35 feedback submissions from 31 clients.

In terms of the second part of your question about what the themes are and what is coming through—we have percentages there—I just want to preface it by saying that the diversity of victim-survivors is very significant and they will all come with very individual concerns and matters. If I were to boil it down, there are consistently two themes that are the issue: access to justice and equity for justice. Access is that they can get the support they need and they are empowered to participate meaningfully in seeking their own justice. Equity is that, regardless of where they are located in Queensland, what crime or harm they have experienced or whatever their identity is, they are treated

with fairness, their unique needs are recognised and their rights are upheld. They are, thematically, the two biggest issues: 'Can I get access to support?' and 'Can I get access to that support in an equitable way?'

There are five key domains, if you like, that we are starting to see patterns of in being able to collect the information we are receiving through all of this contact. The first one is around dignity, choice and control. I have talked about that a bit this morning. It is just that people want to have agency to be able to make decisions that actually affect them. They want to be seen as not just a witness or a complainant. They want to participate. They want to be asked what their views are and have their needs taken into account.

There is accountability and learning, so they want to have the harm they have experienced recognised and prioritised in sentencing, as an example. They want assurances that their voices are going to be heard in courtrooms. That is including through being provided an appropriate opportunity to provide a victim impact statement. That is significantly what we are hearing.

They want safety and protection. With regard to your question directly about the police, they want the police to understand and respond to their risk of harm appropriately and they want to be regularly informed about decisions that are being made about them in the progress of their investigation or if the investigation is going to stop at any point, and they want to be provided support through that process.

The other one is about their healing and support. It is a fundamental right within the charter that, no matter which front door you go through, a victim of crime has the right to be referred to an appropriate service for support and at any stage that they access, whether it is for historical harm or for current harm. The problem we have at the moment is that they are not being told—that is why the wallet cards would be an extraordinary thing, if everybody had those with them. It is still fundamental that the burden is on the victim-survivor to understand where to go, who to talk to, what support they can get and what they cannot, and it is absolutely fragmented depending on where you live within the state and what you can get access to, your comfortability with technology and all of those kinds of issues.

A very strong theme is that victims want to know and have access to appropriate support immediately after the offence—immediately—and, particularly, know what advocacy they can be provided during the criminal justice process. That is from the front counter of a police station all the way through to sentencing, Victims Register and beyond. I hope that answers your question.

**Mr BERKMAN:** That is very helpful. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** We have four minutes left and two questions to go.

**Ms O'Connor:** Sorry, I am talking quite a bit.

**CHAIR:** Member for Gregory, with that four-minute warning in mind, if we can get two questions out that would be great.

**Mr DILLON:** Commissioner, you have touched very briefly on the area I was going to ask about. I want to highlight a specific regional presence, often where there are very small or single-officer police stations. Is there any body of work you are undertaking with respect to these regionally dislocated people who live in small communities out west where there is limited access to or awareness of digital access that you can expand upon in the future in that respect?

**Ms O'Connor:** I am being very purposeful and deliberate in terms of making sure that my engagement, first and foremost, is prioritising regional and remote communities. I am spending a lot of time in Far North Queensland and have plans for Western Queensland. I have been to Mount Isa, Townsville and Cairns. I have a whole lot of engagement that I am doing deliberately for those reasons. Having the privilege of accessing a lot more services readily within South-East Queensland is not a surprise in any sector, but I really want to understand what that means in regional Queensland. I am meeting with mayors, with members and with First Nations leaders within community to try to understand what that is and collect all of that information.

One of the other things is that we are undertaking a review of the Charter of Victims' Rights. We are putting a statewide and interjurisdictional lens on where all of those issues are to inform how we improve accessibility, scope and enforceability around victims of crime, with a regional focus in particular.

**Ms FARMER:** Thank you for your wonderful work. It is so impressive. We have a bill before the House about a set of QSAC recommendations about sentencing for sexual assault. Of the ones that are not contained in that bill, could you comment on impact on victims? I note that one in particular, for

instance, is about resources for courts and legal practitioners in the general theme of education and awareness that you have already discussed this morning. Can you comment at all on the other recommendations that are not contained within the bill?

**CHAIR:** I think you need to be quite broad about that. There is a bill before the House. It was introduced only yesterday. I understand that you probably would not be across the detail of that yet.

**Ms O'Connor:** I am not, but I would be very happy to take that on notice. I just have not had an opportunity to review that to give you a fulsome answer.

**Ms FARMER:** Not the ones that are in the bill but the other ones. Thank you.

**CHAIR:** That concludes the public hearing. Thank you to everyone who has participated today. For any questions taken on notice, responses will be required by 10 am on Wednesday, 28 May. Thank you to our Hansard reporters. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's webpage in due course. I declare this public hearing closed.

**The committee adjourned at 10.30 am.**