




Speech By
Daniel Purdie

MEMBER FOR NINDERRY

Record of Proceedings, 6 February 2020

LEGAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr PURDIE** (Ninderry—LNP) (3.12 pm): I rise this afternoon to speak on the summary of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee's examination of the Queensland Audit Office report titled *Managing the mental health of Queensland police employees*. Before I discuss the report, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge a former colleague and friend who tragically took his own life the day before Christmas Eve back in 2015. Detective Senior Constable Russell Sheenan was not only a first-class detective but a first-class human. He had a long documented history and struggle with depression caused by his extensive work in the child abuse unit and he was also one of the first officers to attend the tragic Childers backpacker fire where 15 people lost their lives back in 2000. He had sought help numerous times and had tried hard to shake the black dog but eventually it got too much for him to bear. He left behind his loving wife, Kathryn, and his four kids Amy, Kaitlyn, Lara and Eden.

Tragically, Russell was not the first and, sadly, he will not be the last police officer to take their own life. There is not enough time here this afternoon for me to list all the former friends and colleagues I have lost over the years. I still remember the day when a former colleague Detective Sergeant Belinda Cush took her own life with her gun while at work.

The objective of the QAO was to determine whether the QPS is effective in preventing mental illness and monitoring and managing the mental health of its employees. The QAO determined that there were six crucial areas that needed improvement. The QAO recommended that the QPS better coordinates and enhances its staff wellbeing and mental health support services and information within a clear strategy and integrated framework; acts to understand and address the mistrust of some employees in its current mental health frameworks and support services; improves how it designs, coordinates, delivers and records its mental health training; assesses options for screening employees prior to them leaving the service, and for enhancing post-service support; develops processes and measures for analysing its data for trends and to assess the effectiveness of support services so they can be continuously improved; and improves the consistency and coverage of mental health screening and monitoring.

In response to the committee's most recent request for a progress report, then Police Commissioner Ian Stewart wrote—

The Queensland Police Service has worked on all six recommendations, with recommendations either finalised and implemented, or near finalisation with implementation subject to the availability of resourcing.

Therein lies the biggest challenge. The QPS have demonstrated their support for change. Now they just need the resourcing to make it actually happen. A metamorphosis is not going to happen by itself. This government is great at filling shelves with reports and strategies and placating the electorate with platitudes and promises. It will take a lot more than that for long-lasting cultural change to be achieved.

Beyond Blue conducted a national survey of the mental health and wellbeing of police and emergency services and published the results in a report titled *Answering the call* in 2018. The report reflects the voices and experience of 21,000 serving and former employees and volunteers from 33 police, fire, ambulance and state emergency services. *Answering the call* reports that respondents have higher rates of psychological distress, higher rates of diagnosis of mental health conditions and higher rates of suicidal thinking and planning than the general adult population.

In closing, I would like to quote former Labor prime minister the Hon. Julia Gillard AC, the current chair of Beyond Blue. She said—

Creating a mentally healthy workplace requires authentic commitment and sustained effort and resourcing. It requires valuing mental health equally with physical health and occupational and public safety.

Now we just need this Labor government to honour their former federal leader's words and put their money where their mouth is.