

WITNESS STATEMENT OF GRAHAM LEONARD ASHTON AM APM

I, Graham Leonard Ashton AM APM of [address withheld], state as follows:

- (A) I first became a member of Victoria Police in December 2009. Prior to joining Victoria Police, I was an Australian Federal Police (**AFP**) officer for 24 years, departing in December 2004 at the rank of Assistant Commissioner. I left to take the position of Deputy Director, Police Integrity at the Office of Police Integrity, following which I joined Victoria Police, initially as Director of the Forensic Services Department before being appointed Director, Corporate Strategy and Governance Department and, in April 2011, Assistant Commissioner, Crime. In February 2012, I was appointed to the position of Deputy Commissioner, Specialist Operations.
- (B) I returned to the AFP in early 2015 as a Deputy Commissioner. I returned to Victoria Police with my appointment as Chief Commissioner of Police on 1 July 2015 and continued in that position until my retirement on 26 June 2020.
- (C) My statement sets out the answers to the questions made in the request to me dated 28 August 2020. This statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. The Legal Services Department of Victoria Police has assisted by providing me access with information of Victoria Police for the purposes of making my statement, noting I no longer have my own access to information of Victoria Police. Where I have referred to conversations, unless otherwise stated, I refer to the substance of those conversations or the effect of the words that were said.

Victoria Police Involvement in the Hotel Quarantine Program

- 1 In the period between the initial declaration of a State of Emergency in Victoria (on 16 March 2020) until your retirement from your role as Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police (Relevant Period) who were the member(s) of Victoria Police with primary responsibility for liaising with:**
- (a) **the State Control Centre;**
 - (b) **the Emergency Services Commissioner and/or Emergency Management Victoria;**
 - (c) **the Australian Defence Force,**

in relation to the Victorian response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

What are those persons' names, ranks and usual roles? How were the nature and substance of their communication with each agency or Officer, their views and recommendations and advice brought to your attention as Chief Commissioner of Police (CCP)?

1.1 During the Relevant Period:

- (a) Primary responsibility for liaison with the State Control Centre (**SCC**) was with the State Police Liaison Officer (**SPLO**). This role was filled by different members from time to time.

Based on information provided to me by Victoria Police , I can say that during the Relevant Period the role of SPLO was usually performed by Superintendent REDACTED
Personal information.

- (b) Primary responsibility for liaison with the Emergency Services Commissioner and Emergency Management Victoria was with the State Emergencies & Support Command, Assistant Commissioner Michael Grainger.
- (c) Primary responsibility for liaison with the Australian Defence Force (**ADF**) was with Superintendent REDACTED
Personal information Assistant Commissioner (**AC**) Michael Grainger and Deputy Commissioner (**DC**) Rick Nugent. I note that Inspector REDACTED
Personal information was the ADF representative at the SCC. He is a Victoria Police officer and a part time ADF reserve officer, but was there in his ADF capacity.

1.2 The nature and substance of their communications with the respective agencies and officers were brought to my attention, through the chain of command, by the State Police Commander, then DC Shane Patton, as and when he considered that it was appropriate that this occur, having regard to the importance of the communication, as reported to him. This role was performed by DC Rick Nugent during the period from 16 March 2020 to 28 March 2020 while DC Patton was in self-isolation after returning from overseas.

2 What requests, whether formal or informal, were made of Victoria Police, during the Relevant Period, in respect of any role(s) Victoria Police Members (including Protective Services Officers) might play in the Hotel Quarantine Program? Who made those requests, to whom and when?

2.1 The first request I received for Victoria Police to play a role in the Hotel Quarantine Program (**HQP**) was at a meeting at 1400 on Friday 27 March 2020 (**27 March Meeting**), as described in paragraph 2.3 below.

2.2 Prior to this meeting, I was already aware that there was going to be some kind of quarantine program and I expected that Victoria Police would have a role in it. I had received text messages and phone calls from colleagues in the AFP and interstate which gave me a 'heads up' about the announcement to be made by the Prime Minister later that day, which led me to attempt to find out what the arrangement was going to be for Victoria. As best as I can now recall and ascertain, when I attended the 27 March meeting at 1400, the latest information I had was that '*ADF will do Passenger transfer and private security will be used*'. I address this further in paragraph 5.2 below.

2.3 The 27 March Meeting was a regular meeting (by video-conference) chaired by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Lisa Neville, and attended also by Corri McKenzie from the Department of Justice and Community Safety (**DJCS**), Commissioner Andrew Crisp and his assistant. These meetings were dedicated to COVID-19 response issues. My note of that meeting is at **VPOL.0005.0001.0057** at .0064.

2.4 My recollection of what was said at the 27 March Meeting relevant to Victoria Police's involvement in the HQP is as follows:

- (1) These meetings usually started with Commissioner Crisp providing an update as to what was happening at the SCC, in terms of its role as the coordinating agency. I recall that, on this occasion, Minister Neville opened the meeting by referring to the decision that the National Cabinet had just made that there would be enforced quarantine in hotels for returned travellers, effective from midnight on 28 March 2020.
- (2) Commissioner Crisp then confirmed that Emergency Management Victoria was assisting with the co-ordination of this hotel quarantine program but that DJPR (the Department of Jobs Precincts and Regions) would be running it.
- (3) At that point I asked Commissioner Crisp if he could confirm what was Victoria Police's intended role and whether Victoria Police would be asked to guard the hotels. He replied "no", and said that private security guards would be used to guard the hotels, which would be coordinated by DJPR, but that police would be needed to help with transferring the travellers from the airport to the hotels and to provide the security companies with any necessary back-up.
- (4) I confirmed to Commissioner Crisp that Victoria Police would assist with transferring the travellers from the airport to the hotels and would be available to provide support to the private security guards as and when called upon.
- (5) I asked Commissioner Crisp about the intended role of Victoria Police because I was keen to clarify these matters early in the meeting as the responses would determine what further questions I would need to ask Commissioner Crisp in order that I could get the appropriate Victoria Police teams doing all of the necessary planning work.
- (6) At some point in the meeting, Commissioner Crisp mentioned that he had convened an inter-agency planning teleconference to take place at the SCC that afternoon.

2.5 I am now aware that Victoria Police was represented at the SCC meeting held later in the afternoon on 27 March 2020 by Victoria Police members including AC Grainger, Superintendent [REDACTED] Superintendent [REDACTED] and Acting Superintendent [REDACTED]. I did not speak with any of those members prior to or following the meeting at the SCC on Friday 27 March 2020.

2.6 There was a detailed announcement by the Prime Minister of Australia made shortly after the 27 March Meeting. The Prime Minister's announcement included the following:

But today we believe we need to go even further. In addition to the arrival declaration and the support of legislation that is put behind that. So, by no later than midnight tomorrow, that is 11:59pm Saturday states and territories will be quarantining all arrivals through our airports, in

hotels and other accommodation facilities for the two weeks of their mandatory self-isolation before they are able to return to their home.

If their home is in South Australia or in Perth or in Tasmania and they have arrived in Melbourne, they will be quarantining in Melbourne. If it's in Sydney, it will be in Sydney, if it's Brisbane, and so on. This same situation we put in place, particularly for the case that you will be aware of in Western Australia in relation to the Vasco da Gama and the returning vessel there in terms of these arrangements. And the Western Australia Premier Mark McGowan will be having more to say about that.

But each state will be doing the heavy lifting themselves to support their other states. And I thank them for the reciprocal nature in the way they are putting these arrangements in place. It is a great team to be part of with the Premiers and the Chief Ministers. They understand they need to share each other's burdens to ensure that we can manage this issue together as a nation. This will be enforced by the state and territory governments. The Commonwealth will be supporting them with all manner of assistance, which will relate to the work done by the Border Force, logisticians, and other supports that will be necessary, but those arrangements will be run by the state and territory governments in each state.

We will be supporting them also by providing members of the Australian Defence Force to assist in the compliance with these arrangements. Now, I want to stress that members of the Australian Defence Force are not authorised as enforcement officers regarding prosecution in states and territories. That is the responsibility of law enforcement officers so sworn in those jurisdictions. The ADF will be there to support those enforcement authorities. And so we will be turning out the defence forces to support compliance with these new arrangements. It will require that cooperative and facilitative support and I have no doubt the defence forces will do that in the most sensitive way they can, but it is necessary.

The other thing we are doing is we will be supporting the states and territories in the important work they have of enforcing the existing isolation arrangements for people who are already here. The ADF will be supporting those states and territories with compliance checks to ensure that people are at their residences, that they have so sworn that they would be at. To ensure we get compliance with the self isolation.

Again, if there is a situation where people are non-compliant, of course the enforcement authority is the state jurisdiction and the relevant law enforcement agency in that state. But the ADF will be there to put boots on the ground, to support them in their enforcement efforts, and I thank the ADF for their great support in turning up to this task. We believe these important actions are the most important we can take right now because of what you've done, Australia. By you getting onboard with the changes that you have needed to make, this means we can target our efforts even more into these areas, where we believe the most critical concern is right now.

2.7 The reference to the ADF supporting states with 'compliance checks' was news to me. Deputy Commissioner (DC) Rick Nugent had communications with the ADF that afternoon in relation to this matter and he and DC Patton kept me informed subsequently [VPOL.0005.0001.0248 at .0248 and .0249].

2.8 Also on Friday 27 March 2020, at 1530, I received a message from Simon Phemister, the secretary of the DJPR [VPOL.0005.0001.1279], in the following terms:

Graeme [sic], we're running the inbound passenger isolation system with Transport (just announced by Premier). Can I get a point person from your crew to liaise with pls. If anyone else sees a role for their crew pls let me know. Claire Febey, DJPR is running this with support of Paul's team.

2.9 I responded at 1534 on 27 March 2020 as follows:

Mate ask Claire to call dep commissioner Rick Nugent in the first instance. I will send you his number"

I then forwarded DC Nugent's mobile number to Mr Phemister.

2.10 At 1600 on 27 March 2020, I attended a regular meeting of the Victorian Secretaries Board (**VSB**). The attendees at VSB meetings are the secretaries and equivalents of the Victorian government departments and agencies. My note of that meeting is at **VPOL.0005.0001.0057** at .0064-0065.

2.11 My recollection of the VSB meeting on 27 March 2020 is as follows:

- (1) Simon Phemister, the secretary of DJPR (which, from what Commissioner Crisp had said at the 27 March Meeting, I understood to be the responsible department for organising the HQP in Victoria) said, amongst other things, that DJPR was organising Skybus to undertake the transfer of passengers to the hotels, which were to be located in the CBD at first instance, with regional hotels to be used later if required.
- (2) The secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (**DHHS**), Kym Peake, provided an update on numbers, which included that 2/3 of COVID-19 cases in Victoria were then returned travellers, and that the number of new cases was down by 8%.
- (3) There was discussion regarding the projected number of returned travellers who would have to be accommodated under the HQP. I mentioned the possibility of using the conference facility at Mt Aitken and noted that it had 124 rooms. I mentioned this facility due to its proximity to the airport. It was suggested, however I do not recall by whom, that there might be 2,000 arrivals per day until July, when the numbers would step down.

2.12 In my diary [**VPOL.0005.0001.0057** at .0065], I made a list of 3 items that I intended to raise at this meeting should the opportunity arise. They were:

- (1) "ADF spot checks"
- (2) "guarding? Travellers"
- (3) "list of stage 3".

2.13 In relation to "ADF spot checks", it was my view at all times that while it was beneficial to have ADF personnel working at the SPOC and, later, providing support to the Police Assistance Line, it was preferable that police undertake the 'on the ground' roles in Operation Sentinel. That was because police officers had both the appropriate training and the necessary legal powers to respond to any issues that might arise in the field in Victoria.

- 2.14 “guarding? travellers” was a note that, should it be raised, I would confirm that Victoria Police was only doing the passenger transfer aspect of the international arrival quarantine operation and not the guarding aspect.
- 2.15 The reference to “list of stage 3” was to the specific restrictions/rules that would be applicable under stage 3 restrictions.
- 2.16 I do not recall raising any of these points at the meeting.
- 2.17 I also do not recall any discussion at the VSB meeting on 27 March 2020 regarding security arrangements for the hotels in the HQP.

3 What was the response of Victoria Police to those requests? Why?

- 3.1 As stated in paragraph 2.4(4) above, at the 27 March Meeting, I confirmed to Commissioner Crisp that Victoria Police would assist with transferring the travellers from the airport to the hotels and would be available to provide support to the private security guards as and when called upon.
- 3.2 I considered this arrangement of responsibilities to be appropriate. Transferring travellers from the airport would require police powers, including to block off roads and footpaths when travellers arrived at the hotel.
- 3.3 As for guarding, it was my expectation that this would involve acting as sentries, stopping people coming in and out of the hotel and deterring guests from breaching quarantine and absconding from the hotel. Guarding duties of this nature were, in my view, appropriately done by security guards. I did not think returning travellers in 14 day hotel quarantine would present a high risk of absconding such that police would be required to guard them. But police powers would be needed in the event a person did try to leave quarantine, so police back up would be required.
- 3.4 I was comfortable with the decision that had been made to use private security guards to do the guarding work. This was on the assumption that they would be appropriately resourced, trained and tasked. My understanding of “guarding” in this context was that security would be positioned at entry/exit points and elsewhere throughout the hotel. Their role would be to stop anyone who was unauthorised from entering or leaving the hotels, and call police if required.
- 3.5 I did not envisage that these private security guards would be used other than as outlined above. For instance, I did not expect that the guards would be used as escorts for travellers while in hotel quarantine. That was not raised with me at the 27 March Meeting, or at any other time.
- 3.6 At the time when I was told about the use of private security in the HQP, with police to be called to provide assistance if required, I did not have concerns or reservations about this decision. An arrangement under which police are called as and when needed is consistent with how Victoria Police works with private security in other contexts such as in event management.

3.7 Victoria Police provided the support and assistance that was requested of it in relation to the HQP. At the Victoria Police Executive Command meeting held on 30 March 2020, I gave an update in which I noted that, despite the minimal notice we had received, there had been excellent feedback on Victoria Police's response. The minutes of that meeting are at **VPOL.0005.0005.0001**.

4 Who do you understand made the decision(s) and/or gave the direction for the engagement of private security companies in the Victorian Hotel Quarantine Program?

4.1 I do not know who made this decision and I am not aware of there being a direction.

4.2 It was clear to me from what was said by Commissioner Crisp at the meeting with the Minister at the 27 March Meeting that a decision to use private security guards had been made prior to that meeting. However, it was not said to me by Commissioner Crisp or the Minister at that meeting or subsequently who made that decision.

4.3 I have set out in answer to question 5 below the various messages and discussions I had prior to the 27 March Meeting, from which it was also apparent to me that the decision to engage private security had already been made.

4.4 I have set out in answer to question 3 above my views as to why I was comfortable with the use of private security guards, with police back up. For my part, I don't recall expressing a view, however I am sure that I did not raise any objection to this plan. I do recall that my view was not specifically requested at the 27 March Meeting.

4.5 In the course of preparing this statement, I have been shown an email sent by Supt REDACTED to persons including AC Grainger and Commander Tully following the SCC meeting referred to in paragraph 2.5 above [**VPOL.0002.0005.0117**]. I had not previously been aware of that email or its contents. In that email, Supt REDACTED states, "*CCP recommendation that private security is to be the first line of security.*" I do not know on what basis she said this. I did not speak to her or to any of the other Victoria Police members who attended the SCC meeting on Friday 27 March 2020, as noted in paragraph 2.5 above.

4.6 In the course of preparing this statement, I have been shown the following extract of what I am informed is taken from the statement dated 25 August 2020 of Claire Febey of DJPR as to what was said at the SCC meeting on Friday 27 March 2020:

MR CRISP: Sorry, John, can we – and again, apologies, I missed – I had to step out again. But in terms of security at accommodation, have we covered that? So, private security, Victoria Police? I understand the preference of Victoria Police, or the Chief Commissioner, is that private security be the first line of security, and then police to respond [sic] as required. Is that your understanding, Mick?

MR GRAINGER: Yes, it's Mick Grainger here. Absolutely that's our preference.

MR CRISP: So just curious as to who's going to take responsibility around contracting private security? Is that DJPR? Claire?

MS FEBEY: Yes. I understand that that's for us to take up. So I'd like to have a follow up conversation with Mick [Grainger, Victoria Police] and just understand a little bit more about how he sees that best working, and then we're happy to make sure that the right arrangements are made, both in hotels and also in exploring what the arrangements might be with the transport as well.

4.7 "Mr Grainger" is AC Grainger of Victoria Police. I have not previously been aware of the contents of this discussion. I have not listened to any recording of the meeting or read a transcript of the entire meeting. As far as I can recall, my only communications with Commissioner Crisp prior to the meeting at the SCC on 27 March 2020 were as described in paragraphs 2.3-2.4 above, and the text message from him set out in paragraph 5.7 below.

4.8 The decision to use private security guards for the HQP was conveyed to me earlier that day by Commissioner Crisp at the 27 March Meeting which commenced at 1400, as outlined in paragraph 2.4 above. I consider that I had no involvement in the actual decision making process regarding security at the quarantine hotels and I was not asked for, and did not make, any recommendation on this topic at the 27 March Meeting or on any other occasion.

5 When, and in what circumstances, did you come to understand that private security companies were to be engaged in the Victorian Hotel Quarantine Program? At that time, did you hold any:

- (a) **views as whether that was appropriate and/or preferable to other models? and/or**
- (b) **reservations or concerns about that engagement?**

If so, what were those views, reservations and/or concerns and to whom, if anyone, did you express them?

5.1 I first learned of the decision of the National Cabinet to require all returning travellers to quarantine in a hotel for 14 days from a phone call I received from an interstate colleague at around 1300 on Friday 27 March 2020.

5.2 At 1322 on 27 March 2020, I sent a text message to Commissioner Kershaw of the Australian Federal Police [VPOL.0005.0001.0244] in the following terms:

Mate my advise [sic] is that ADF will do Passenger transfer and private security will be used.

5.3 At 1332 I sent Commissioner Kershaw another text message in the following terms:

I think that's the deal set up by our DPC. I understand NSW will be a different arrangement. I spoke to Mick F. [ie, Mick Fuller, the Chief Commissioner of NSW Police]

5.4 I now do not recall from whom I received the advice to which I referred in the first text at 1322 on 27 March 2020. I have reviewed the text messages and WhatsApp messages I received at around that time, and none include that information. I have also reviewed the available records for my mobile telephone, which do not disclose the incoming calls that I received on that day.

5.5 A few minutes before I sent these texts, at 1316, I had sent a text message to Chris Eccles, the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet [VPOL.0005.0001.0140] in the following terms:

Chris I am getting word from Canberra for a plan whereby arrivals from overseas are to be subjected to enforced isolation from tomorrow. The suggestion is Victorian arrivals are conveyed to a hotel Somewhere where they are guarded by police for 14 days. Are you aware of anything in this regard?? Graham

5.6 I did not receive a text reply to that message, and I cannot recall whether Mr Eccles – or some other person – telephoned me with the information regarding the use of private security that I passed on to Commissioner Kershaw at 1322 on Friday 27 March 2020.

5.7 Subsequently, at 1334 I received a text message from Commissioner Crisp [VPOL.0005.0001.1283] in the following terms:

I just received this from Matt Burr from the ADF. I assume you would have it but just letting you know.

Thanks Andrew, federal announcement very shortly regarding ADF support to state police for COVID19

5.8 As I have already said, the decision to use private security guards for the HQP was otherwise conveyed to me by Commissioner Crisp at the 27 March Meeting which commenced at 1400, as outlined in paragraph 2.4 above.

5.9 As I have also already said, I was not asked at the 27 March Meeting for my views about the appropriateness of using security guards for the HQP, but I was comfortable with that decision for the reasons summarised in my answer to question 3.

5.10 Later in the afternoon on 27 March 2020, I informed DC Nugent of the outcomes of the 27 March Meeting, which included the arrangements for the incoming passenger arrivals and I told him that I was comfortable with the plan, which included the use of security guards at the hotels. I believe that this discussion occurred face to face at our offices on level 10 at Victoria Police headquarters. I have no specific recollection of discussing this issue with anyone else, within or external to Victoria Police, either at that time or subsequently.

6 Do you now hold any different (and, if so, what) views, reservations and/or concerns regarding the involvement of private security companies in the Victorian Hotel Quarantine Program?

If so, what are those views, reservations and/or concerns, when did you first form them and to whom, if anyone, did you express them?

6.1 No, I do not. I remain of the view that well trained private security guards are appropriate to use for guarding work.

6.2 I have since become aware (I believe from media reports I have read following my retirement) that private security guards ended up being used to escort quarantined travellers for exercise and fresh air. When I heard of the proposed use of private security in the HQP, I did not envisage that these guards would be used as escorts for travellers or otherwise have close contact with them. My

expectation would be that if there was work to be done which involved interacting with the returned travellers, this would have been done by people with appropriate health and other training, not by security guards.

7 To your knowledge was there any:

- (a) **resistance;**
- (b) **other attitude (and, if so, what attitude),**

by Victoria Police, or any (and, if so, which) members of Victoria Police executive, to the involvement of Australian Defence Force personnel in the Victorian Hotel Quarantine Program?

- 7.1 No. The only time I can recall it being suggested to me at any time during the Relevant Period that ADF personnel would be involved in the Victorian HQP was the information to which I have referred in paragraph 5.4 above, which led me to send the text message to Commissioner Kershaw referred to in paragraph 5.2 above, namely that the ADF would be doing passenger transfer. I do not know what happened with that proposal and, by the time of the meeting of the VSB at 1600 on 27 March 2020, DJPR was organising Skybus to undertake the transfer of passengers to the hotels as referred to in paragraph 2.11(1) above. I now understand that the transfers were ultimately done by Skybus, with AFP escorting them. For my part I would not have had a problem with the ADF doing that, and I am unaware that anyone else had any issue with that.

8 Were the fact of the resistance or the substance of the other attitudes identified in relation to the answer to the previous questions conveyed to any (and, if so, which) Victoria government officials or Departments? When and how?

- 8.1 This question is not applicable in light of my answer to Question 7 above.

COMDISPLAN

9 What is the COMDISPLAN?

- 9.1 It is the Commonwealth Disaster Plan.

10 During the Relevant Period who, to your knowledge, had authority to request non-financial assistance from the Commonwealth pursuant to COMDISPLAN?

- 10.1 I believe it is the Premier, or as may be delegated by the Premier.

11 To your knowledge, was non-financial assistance requested from the Commonwealth by, or on behalf of Victoria in relation to the Hotel Quarantine Program, either pursuant to COMDISPLAN or otherwise?

If so, who made the request(s), when and what was requested? If not, why not?

- 11.1 Not to my knowledge.

Communications with CCP

12 Were you, or (to your knowledge) was anyone on your behalf, involved in communication with Australian Defence Force personnel on or about:

- (a) **31 March 2020;**
- (b) **14 April 2020; and/or**
- (c) **otherwise during the Relevant Period,**

which concerned the Hotel Quarantine Program in Victoria, or elsewhere in Australia? What was the substance of that communication and who was involved in it?

In answering this question please make reference to and provide all relevant notes, correspondence, diary or calendar entries or records howsoever made that capture the fact or substance of that communication insofar as it concerns the Hotel Quarantine Programs in Victoria and interstate.

- 12.2 On 28 March, 31 March and 14 April 2020 (and on other dates), I attended the Police Commissioners' Forum meetings which were organised by the Australia and New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency (**ANZPAA**) to discuss COVID-19 issues. These meetings were held twice weekly and were attended by the Australian and New Zealand police commissioners.
- 12.3 The minutes of these meetings are:
- (1) 28 March 2020 **VPOL.0005.0001.1259**
 - (2) 31 March 2020 **VPOL.0005.0001.1262**
 - (3) 14 April 2020 **VPOL.0005.0001.1240**
- 12.4 One or more representatives of the ADF attended and spoke at each of these 3 meetings, providing an update primarily as to the ADF's activities in support of police quarantine compliance checking work in the respective States and Territories and, at the April meeting, their assistance at border control points. Their attendance at the 31 March meeting was at my specific request.
- 12.5 Whilst I do not have a strong recollection of these discussions, I note that the minutes of the 28 March and 31 March 2020 meetings refer to ADF providing logistical support in some jurisdictions regarding Australians returning via airtravel. My recollection is that this related to activities at the various airports. Although the minutes of the 14 April 2020 meeting do not record this, in my diary [**VPOL.0005.0001.1268**] I noted that Brigadier General Paul (Kenny) referred to the ADF assisting with travellers' quarantine in hotels in New South Wales.
- 12.6 The possible involvement of ADF personnel in the HQP in Victoria was not raised at any of these meetings nor, to my knowledge, on any other occasion.

13 **Were you, or (to your knowledge) was anyone on your behalf, involved in communication with the Victorian Minister for Police (or her delegate) on or about 24 June 2020 which concerned:**

- (a) **the Hotel Quarantine Program in Victoria, or elsewhere in Australia?**
- (b) **the role of Australian Defence Force in the Hotel Quarantine Program in Victoria?**
- (c) **the role of Victoria Police Members (including Protective Services Officers) in the Hotel Quarantine Program in Victoria?**
- (d) **any request which had been made for assistance by Australian Defence Force personnel in relation to Victoria's response to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

What was the substance of that communication and who was involved in it?

In answering this question please make reference to and provide all relevant notes, correspondence, diary or calendar entries or records howsoever made that capture the fact or substance of that communication insofar as it concerns the Hotel Quarantine Programs in Victoria and interstate.

- 13.1 I attended one of the regular meetings with Minister Neville, Commissioner Crisp and Ms McKenzie of DJCS on or about 24 June 2020. At that meeting, there was discussion between Commissioner Crisp and the Minister regarding a request that had been made for ADF personnel to assist in Victoria, which Commissioner Crisp advised had been withdrawn. This assistance was not in relation to the HQP.
- 13.2 On 25 June 2020, I gave a radio interview to Neil Mitchell on 3AW. That interview included the following exchange:

Mitchell	You're comfortable with the army coming in?
Me	Yeah at this stage, they're not involved in any of the police side of things. So I think they're involved in the logistic planning. I think there's talk about the hotels and security side of things.
Mitchell	Well we were told they were going on patrols with police.
Me	We haven't been engaged on the police patrols side of things. So that would be news to me.
Mitchell	Are you comfortable with that sort of approach?
Me	Well I know Shane similarly would have a view that we have got side of it covered. So I'm not sure, if there were military assisting on patrols I'm not sure what that would look like. But that's not something that's been discussed with us.
Mitchell	Well, even the door knocking. The Minister told me that they'd be doing some door knocking as well
Me	Well certainly, well
Mitchell	Which you have been doing.

Me	Well, in terms of checking people are there What health are focusing on at the minute is having a more deeper conversation with people just a random talking about health and safety and doing the right thing, you know, in the health management
Mitchell	Because it is a difficult balance isn't it, the police and the army?
Me	Yeah of course it is. And the army themselves don't have any local domestic powers So you know, whatever they're doing it very much needs to be in support

13.3 Immediately after that interview, I had an exchange of text messages with Minister Neville. These text messages related to the suggestion that the ADF would be 'going on patrols with police', and had nothing to do with the HQP. As is apparent from the interview transcript, that was a surprise to me as we (Victoria Police) had not been engaged by anyone regarding the ADF doing police patrols. I cannot recall what the exact position was with respect to how the ADF were being used at this particular time. At times ADF was providing logistical support and also assisting with the Police Assistance Line. At various times throughout the pandemic Victoria Police was looking at other areas where we could utilise the ADF to assist, bearing in mind that they did not have police powers or any powers under the public health directions. In terms of police patrols, that was an area that required police powers and which we had covered.

13.4 In that interview, I referred to "talk" about possible ADF involvement in "the hotels and security side of things". I do not now recall what this referred to or where, or from whom, I had heard it. My remark could well have been in response to something that had been said in the media in the previous day or two.

14 To your knowledge, during the Relevant Period, did any member of Victoria Police communicate with or convey to Australian Defence Force personnel that Australian Defence Force assistance:

- (a) **was not required;**
- (b) **was not required to be expanded or extended;**
- (c) **was to be reduced,**

in relation the Victorian Hotel Quarantine Program? If so, who made that/those communications and why?

14.1 Not to my knowledge.

Dated 7 September 2020



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Graham Leonard Ashton