



QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE STATEMENT OF WITNESS



Occurrence #: _____

Statement no.: _____ Date: _____

Statement of

Name of witness: _____

Date of birth: _____ Age: _____ Occupation: _____

Police officer taking statementName: SMITH Shane Michael

Rank: _____ Reg. no.: _____

Region/Command/Division: _____ Station: _____

Statement:

Shane Michael SMITH states as follows:

Career Experience

1. I am the Officer-in-Charge of Burketown Police Station, Queensland Police Service. I hold the rank of Sergeant.
2. I have been employed with the Queensland Police Service since 2002. I was previously a police officer with the New South Wales Police Force, from 1990 to 2002 attaining the rank of Senior Constable.
3. I have served as a general duties police officer at the following police stations:
 - Holland Park Police Station
 - Slacks Creek Police Station
 - Jimboomba Police Station
 - Browns Plains Police Station
 - Mount Garnet Police Station (Officer-in-Charge)
 - Mornington Island Police Station (Shift Supervisor and Acting Officer-in-Charge for most of 2020)

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- Burketown Police Station (Officer-in-Charge)

Policing in Burketown

4. Burketown Station currently has the capacity for two officers. In the eight months since I have been there, I have been operating as a single-person station.
5. Burketown is a relatively small community of about 200 persons, with a small township of Gregory 120km south of Burketown. Burketown is surrounded by cattle stations. Fishing and hunting are the main social activities within the Burketown division.
6. Burketown Police main functions are that of TMR - being a station whereby Drivers Licences and Registrations are completed for Department of Transport and Main Roads. Police also regularly attend the two licenced premises, being the Burketown and Gregory Hotels. Both hotel's provide take-away alcohol to patrons, which are recorded on registers. Police obtain copies of the registers and forward those copies to Doomadgee Police Station. Doomadgee is subject to the Alcohol Management Plan (AMP). These registers are kept to restrict the amount of illicit alcohol reaching the Doomadgee community.

Policing on Mornington Island

7. Mornington Island Police Station had an allocation for twelve general duties police officers and two plain clothes officers.
8. During my tenure there between 2019 and 2022, we were operating predominantly with eight general duties police officers.
9. During my tenure at Mornington Island Police Station, most officers who were stationed there were on six-month rotations from Mount Isa Police Station and had only one to two years policing experience.
10. Of those officers, most had very limited experience with First Nations peoples, aside from what they had learned at the academy and training they had

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undertaken with online learning products (OLP) during their first-year training program or mandatory OLP that are required to be undertaken annually.

11. In my experience in working on Mornington Island, officers who were transferred to that station who had previously been from the South-East corner of Queensland experienced a huge culture shock.
12. At Mornington Island the culture shock comes from several different factors. In a policing sense, when working on Mornington Island you are expected to take on extra responsibilities and differing workloads, like that of completing drivers licencing, vehicle registrations for example.
13. I observed that it was common for junior police on Mornington Island that it was their first time speaking with a First Nations person or a person from First Nations community. This posed a number of challenges, as a normal phrase used in a metropolitan area could mean something different in community and vice versa. The community has been offended in the past by the actions or a phrase used by a junior member, that might ordinarily have been accepted in a metropolitan area; however, the meaning of such a phrase is different on Mornington Island.
14. Both Mornington Island and Burketown are particularly remote, and officers do not have access to the creature comforts of living in bigger cities. There are no shopping centres or easy access to other shops when natural disasters are occurring in both regions – specifically on Mornington Island during cyclone season. Pre-planning is a must and those officers who have had no experience with either remote living or cyclones often find themselves being unprepared for that.
15. Generally, my experience is that the level of preparedness by officers when they arrive in a community like Mornington Island is generally low.
16. Mornington Island is arguably one of the most remote stations within the Queensland Police Service, with the only access being via aircraft, with one carrier (REX Airlines) servicing the Island.

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17. Food and other items arrive via barge one day a week. The local supermarket is what is best described as a 'Friendly Grocer' sized supermarket with most food items but very limited variety.
18. Prior to an officer commencing on Mornington Island, the OIC sends out an information package via email. This package contains several items, from On-Line Learning Products (OLP's) that could be advantageous to complete, to the running of the station and watch house, and internal police social club. This information includes items like the officer ordering meat through the internal social club from the butchers in Normanton and preparing for the cyclone season.
19. One of the biggest issues for officers attending that is harder to address is that of being away from their friends and family, especially during Christmas etc. Being a supervisor/OIC during this time it is imperative that you capture this emotion quickly from officers, speak to them on an individual basis, and see how we can make the experience better, one popular initiative is that of Secret Santa for example.
20. Despite the information package and OLF, in my experience officers are often inexperienced in First Nations culture and have no training or information surrounding how to seek permission to enter traditional lands, as an example.

Domestic and Family Violence (DFV)

21. When I was on Mornington Island, there was an alcohol management plan (AMP) and it was an entirely dry community. I understand that the AMP has been reviewed and community members are now allowed to have twelve cans of mid-strength alcohol per person, per day.
22. Prior to the AMP being lifted, there was an overwhelming prevalence of contraband home brew alcohol that contributed to a large portion of domestic and family violence incidents that police attended.


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23. When police would be called to attend a DFV incident, persons would be intoxicated because of the home brew consumption. Once sober, they would have little to no memory of the incident at all.
24. Another issue when dealing with victim survivors on Mornington Island is that their statements are often very vague and lack detail. This appears to be because of a combination of limited memory of the incident and their limited understanding of what had occurred, resulting in limited ability to provide police with a statement of evidence.
25. Witnesses are often very reluctant to provide evidence and not wishing to get involved. This is particularly so if the respondent/defendant is incarcerated.
26. Obtaining statements in First Nations communities can be difficult. A combination of language and cultural differences and limited experience of some officers which can lead to confusion.
27. Fatigue for officers is also a contributing factor as officers are often on-call, meaning they will work a full eight-hour shift and then be recalled to duty, interfering with sleep patterns and rest periods.
28. The main challenges to policing DFV within the Burketown division is the tyranny of distance. There are no DFV services that attend the townships of Burketown or Gregory. Upon Police arresting an offender, and if there is a possibility that the offender is to be kept in custody, then police must travel to Doomadgee to lodge the offender in custody at that location. During the wet season, when the roads are closed, police must use the cell complex at Burketown, whereby Police must remain with the offender. Being a single unit officer, this may mean remaining in the cell complex overnight guarding the offender prior to bail court in the morning.

Community relationships

29. In my experience, the traditional owners on Mornington Island had a good rapport with the police and the community generally is very accepting of the police presence on the Island.


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30. Community members work well with the police and will often approach the members of the service that they trust and advise those members if there are difficulties with individual officers in the communities. Those problems can be then addressed with individual officers quickly and the issues, resolved. For example, I remember an incident when a junior officer in his first week on Mornington Island attended deceased person job. There were no suspicious circumstances. The officer made an innocuous comment about the post-mortem to a member of the family, and not to the head or most appropriate member of the family. This was taken as offensive and upset the family. I spoke with the family in regard to this issue, and once explained was happy with the police investigation, I also spoke with the individual officer, not as a criticism, but as constructive feedback educating the officer upon cultural differences and expectations.
31. While working in remote and regional Queensland, I regularly meet with community and stakeholders alike. At Mount Garnet Station I established Blue Light Discos and Coffee-with-a-Cop. The Blue Light Disco was a fantastic way of breaking barriers with the youth by gaining trust and friendship.
32. Coffee-with-a-Cop was an initiative so that I could provide information to the Mount Garnet community, as well as receiving feedback from the community in respect to policing and other social issues.
33. At Mornington Island I held regular meetings with community stakeholders, including Council, NGO's Department of Health and Education, Local Disaster Management Group. Those meetings would discuss varied issues such as the children sniffing petrol, to cyclone and covid-19 preparedness, to other crime and social factors including juvenile crime and DFV.
34. I am aware that the current DFV Sergeant Victoria Mildred, Mornington Island Station will attend, sometimes with the Officer-in-Charge, meetings with the relevant DFV stakeholders to ensure that those agencies are taking up with aggrieved persons and respondents after an incident has occurred.
35. On Mornington Island, police and Junkari Laka have developed the men's group for men's business. The idea of that group is to encourage men to talk about

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their issues – of any kind – with an emphasis on issues surrounding Domestic Violence. Police involvement in this kind of group encourages attendees to build a relationship with the police.

36. Officers will attend such meetings in plain clothes and sit in the circle so that all participants are of equal standing in the group.

37. Police do not talk about individual cases but will address scenarios and will answer questions about proposed scenarios. All participation in the group is voluntary, though I am aware that Probation and Parole will often advise their clients that they should attend.

38. Police regularly use the Police Citizens Youth Club ("PCYC") vehicle to collect group members to assist them in facilitating their attendance at the group and return home again. This service, and the group itself further builds on networking within the community and building rapport with existing and new stakeholders.

39. Since the inception of the group, I can recall two separate occasions where men attended at the police station to self-report incidents of DFV prior to there being a complaint from an aggrieved or complainant about the incident.

40. DFV matters are particularly sensitive in a community like Mornington Island and bring a lot of shame to individuals in the community.

41. In addition to the Men's Group, I would contact the individuals after DFV incidents and offer police and other referral services. I would make myself available to be contacted by either party and I would ensure contact would be on neutral ground, like at their own home address or when I see them in the community, such as at the shop.

42. I would particularly ensure to engage with men who had been recently release from prison to see how they were settling back into community life and make myself available if they wished to talk later.

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Police Liaison Officers (PLO)

43. The role of the PLO is very different on Mornington Island as compared to any other station and district I have worked in. The PLO at Mornington Island has a great knowledge of culture and Traditional Lore. As a Police Officer the PLO is a fantastic resource, so that Police do not overstep and offend members of the community.
44. The PLO at Mornington Island is Lyle 'Jimmy' Wilson.
45. In my view, and experience, it is imperative that new officers to the station should avail themselves of Jimmy and work a few shifts with him when they first arrive.
46. He is an invaluable source of information for those new officers (and officers generally) as he can provide information about issues of culture, and how to address members of the community as well as important information about Traditional Owners and traditional areas on the Island.
47. He is a wealth of knowledge about all of the families on the Island and has intimate knowledge about particular family members. He is able to identify 'taboo' relationships. That is, when it is and is not culturally appropriate to talk to particular persons. For example, Jimmy cannot see or talk to certain female relatives as that would be considered culturally inappropriate.
48. I was stationed at Mornington Island for two years and seven months and was in regular contact with Jimmy about a variety of issues. I ensured that I would seek advice from Jimmy particularly about cultural issues and customs or traditions that I had not previously had experience with or exposure to.
49. There are other PLOs that work on the island at the PCYC. I did not have any direct involvement with them or seek their advice and am unable to comment about their effectiveness or otherwise.
50. Having worked previously at Mount Garnet, the PLO in that area, worked from Ravenshoe, some 55km east of Mount Garnet. The PLO there assisted police mainly with Blue Light Disco's that were held periodically for the youth in the

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area. The PLO was not from the Atherton Tablelands area, and as such did have the total respect from the local First Nations communities. He was considered an outsider, without knowledge of local Traditional Lore's or customs. This was a very different community as well without Native Title, so the Traditional Owners did not have access to lands or persons did not have to gain permissions to the Traditions Owners to enter the lands, rather permission was sort and granted from the managers or owners of the cattle stations that surrounds the communities.




Shane Michael Smith

Justices Act 1886

I acknowledge by virtue of section 110A(6C)(c) of the *Justices Act 1886* that:

- (1) This written statement by me dated and contained in the pages numbered 1 to 9 is true to the best of my knowledge and belief; and
- (2) I make this statement knowing that I may be liable to prosecution for stating in it anything that I know is false

 Signature
 Signed at Mornington Island this 4 day of August, 2022
(place) (day) (month) (year)



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