

Opening statement

Counsel assisting Ms Catherine Boston
Operation Bredbo public hearings
3 May 2022

Last year, a Chinese migration agent made a complaint to the Australian Border Force. The agent alleged that she had paid \$11,000 to Detective Sergeant Wayne Dean and his associate Bill Meletsis to recover a significant amount of money owed to one of her clients. The agent alleged that Detective Sergeant Dean then conducted so-called ‘mediations’ at the Melbourne West Police Station between her and the alleged debtor, and took a police statement from her, but that her client’s money had not been recovered.

The agent’s complaint raised a concern that a member of Victoria Police may have been bribed to use his position as a police officer to assist in the enforcement of civil debts.

The matter was referred to the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission, IBAC, which commenced a full investigation under section 64(1)(c) of the *IBAC Act 2011*, codenamed Operation Bredbo.

Detective Sergeant Dean has been a member of Victoria Police since 1984, and has known Mr Meletsis from the Carlton restaurant scene since he (Dean) worked at Carlton Criminal Investigation Unit (CIU) in the 1990s. For the past decade or so, Detective Sergeant Dean has been stationed at Melbourne CIU in Docklands.

IBAC investigators executed search warrants at Detective Sergeant Dean’s home and workplace on 17 February this year. Approximately \$18,000 cash was seized from a safe in his home, and \$1300 cash was seized from a wallet in his desk at Melbourne CIU.

A number of witnesses have already given evidence in private examinations, including Detective Sergeant Dean and Mr Meletsis.

Detective Sergeant Dean admitted accepting some cash payments from Mr Meletsis but denied doing so in exchange for services.

Meanwhile, Mr Meletsis denied making payments to Detective Sergeant Dean at all.

Through the examinations in this public hearing, the falsity of those denials will be exposed.

The Commission will hear evidence indicating that Detective Sergeant Dean accepted cash payments in exchange for using his position as a police officer to provide ‘assistance’ in the resolution of multiple civil disputes to the satisfaction of those paying him.

Evidence will be presented suggesting that such assistance included:

1. Detective Sergeant Dean improperly accessing Victoria Police’s LEAP (Law Enforcement Assistance Program) database to obtain the contact details of parties to civil disputes, and to pass on these details to those paying him; and
2. Detective Sergeant Dean exerting pressure on parties to civil disputes to resolve matters to the satisfaction of those paying him, including by:
 - a. attending the premises of the parties
 - b. explicitly and implicitly threatening to charge parties with criminal offences if they did not resolve the matters to the satisfaction of those paying him, and
 - c. using Victoria Police premises to conduct “mediations” between parties to civil disputes.

The Commission will consider whether and to what extent it is appropriate for members of Victoria Police to become involved in civil disputes.

The Commission will also consider the propriety of the methods used by Detective Sergeant Dean, and in particular their capacity to place undue pressure on members of the public to resolve matters in a manner favourable to the interests of the persons paying Detective Sergeant Dean, and the capacity of such methods to prioritise access to the resources of Victoria Police to those who can pay.

The Commission will also examine the appropriateness of some of Detective Sergeant Dean’s relationships, including with Mick Gatto, and whether Detective Sergeant Dean breached Victoria Police policies relating to hospitality and gifts, and disclosable associations.

Further, the Commission will consider whether other members of Victoria Police were aware of Detective Sergeant Dean's conduct, whether red flags should have been raised, and whether any barriers to police recognising and reporting the misconduct of their colleagues prevented these matters being exposed at an earlier time. The hearings will examine a range of systemic vulnerabilities and consider opportunities for reform to strengthen policies, systems and practices to prevent police misconduct.

It is not only in the interests of the community to expose police misconduct, it is also in the interests of Victoria Police. When misconduct occurs in Victoria Police it damages the community's trust in the police generally, and therefore hampers the ability of police generally to do their jobs.

Before commencing the public hearings I note that this investigation arose following a report by a member of the public.

If any other member of the public or Victoria Police has information about Detective Sergeant Dean or any other member of Victoria Police accepting monetary payments, or inappropriately placing pressure on members of the public to settle civil disputes, or of members of Victoria Police not reporting such misconduct by their fellow officers, they are encouraged to make a complaint to IBAC, Victoria's independent police oversight body. Complaints can be made anonymously. More information is available at www.ibac.vic.gov.au.

Commissioner, the first witness will be Detective Sergeant Wayne Dean.