# Episode 14 - James Scicluna - Country Policing - v2.mp3

**John Pratt:** [00:00:04] Hello and welcome to Tasmania Police's brand new podcast. This is Tas Police. I'm Inspector John Pratt and I'll be your host as we chat to a wide range of Tasmanian police officers about why they joined the job and why others should too. We're coming to you today from Lutruwita, Tasmania, and before we start our conversation, I'd like to respectfully acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of the land upon which we work and pay our respect to elders past and present. We recognise the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the continuing custodians of the rich cultural heritage of Lutruwita, Tasmania.

**John Pratt:** [00:00:48] Today on this is Tas Police. We're taking a look at what it's like to be a police officer in rural Tasmania. James Scicluna is a sergeant at the Rosebery police station on the west coast of Tasmania. Since joining the service, James has worked in various areas of Tas Police before his most current posting to Rosebery. We're going to find out what it's like to be a country police officer and some of the different kinds of incidents James has been involved in. It's great talking to you today, James. Thanks very much for joining us.

**James Scicluna:** [00:01:14] Thanks for having me.

**John Pratt:** [00:01:15] To start off, can you tell us a bit about what made you join Tasmania Police and a bit about your career so far?

**James Scicluna:** [00:01:21] Yeah, so Tasmania Police was something I wanted to join since an early age, but not so much when I did; my plan was to go into the Defence Force. Unfortunately, that didn't eventuate and so Tas police was always something I was planning on doing when I got a bit older. But as a result of not getting into the defence, I joined the police and graduated at nineteen years of age.

**John Pratt:** [00:01:40] And once you had graduated, what did your career path look like?

**James Scicluna:** [00:01:44] Yeah, so look, I went back to the west or the north west. So I graduated to Burnie. I did three and a half years in Smithton after that. So that was my first stint to the country policing area. Then I went to Launceston, worked at Ravenswood, went to the drug squad in Launceston as well. Before then getting promoted to sergeant and taking over one of the public order and response teams. Obviously since that time I've subsequently transferred to Rosebery, so I'm in charge of the West Coast, which includes Rosebery, Strahan, Zeehan and Waratah. And then in addition to that, I spent several years in the Special Operations group as well.

**John Pratt:** [00:02:20] So did you originally grow up on the West Coast at all, James?

**James Scicluna:** [00:02:23] Yeah, I did. So I grew up in Burnie. Probably wasn't the place I wanted to graduate to at the time. You know, obviously having lived there, growing up there and went to school there, I was a bit concerned about coming across friends from school. But when I got the transfer there, when I graduated, I haven't really looked back and really enjoyed my time, both in Burnie and Smithton before going to Launceston.

**John Pratt:** [00:02:43] So having spent time in Smithton, Burnie and now Rosebery, clearly you enjoy the West Coast and the work that the area has to offer.

**James Scicluna:** [00:02:50] Yeah, look, it is a very different type of work, especially compared to when I was at Ravenswood. Now it is enjoyable and it's one of those areas where it's almost like going back in time a little bit and you can have that connection with the community, which you kind of don't have as much when you're in those bigger stations.

**John Pratt:** [00:03:05] So as well as having that community connection, what is it about the policing on the West Coast that you enjoy?

**James Scicluna:** [00:03:10] Well, I think for me, the community side of things is one of the big ones. There's nothing better than being able to walk down to your local coffee shop or takeaway and just actually being greeted by first name. So you become a bit more familiar with the people that you're actually, you know, your policing, which can make your job a little bit harder at times, but it also can make it easier.

**John Pratt:** [00:03:29] Do you think developing relationships with people in your community, like you've just explained is very important?

**James Scicluna:** [00:03:34] Yeah. Look, that's the key. Policing in country areas compared to the cities, it is very different. And you do rely on those relationships. A lot of the times when I get a job, simply a phone call to say, Hey, it's Jimmy from the police, you know, what can you tell me about this? And that usually opens up a lot more doors than what I would probably have if I tried the same tactic in Launceston or Hobart.

**John Pratt:** [00:03:54] And just so people get a bit of an idea, what's your staff there at Rosebery? How many people have you got working with you?

**James Scicluna:** [00:04:00] Yep. So at Rosebery we have, including myself, we have three people stationed at Rosebery. At Strahan we also have three, plus another sergeant who shares responsibilities with myself, of managing this area. At the scene we have two constables and at Waratah we have one as well.

**John Pratt:** [00:04:14] And I would imagine with the West Coast that you work in, you would have a big variety of jobs that you deal with.

**James Scicluna:** [00:04:21] Yeah. Yes. Look, we do get quiet times. I'm not going to lie, but when we're busy, we are really busy. So I've been here for about two years roughly. And in that time I've had bushfires, we've had ongoing protest action, you know, and then I've also had the whale strandings from a couple of years ago, which kind of propelled us into the international spotlight.

**John Pratt:** [00:04:42] So you mentioned the whale strandings. Could you tell us a bit about exactly what role you played with that particular incident?

**James Scicluna:** [00:04:48] Yeah. So initially, when the whale strandings first got reported to us due to the remote nature of the West Coast, we were the first ones to be notified about the whales. And so one of my colleagues actually went down to the Macquarie Heads where the initial report was one whale. He got down there, rang me back up and said the 70. And then that slowly developed into about 700 whales I think all up by the time it was all done. So my main role for that was to liaise with Parks and Wildlife who were the main response agency in relation to trying to save the whales and then manage all the extra resources. So that included Tasmania Police and the roads being blocked off where we needed to so we could make sure that the area was safe, and then also liaising and dealing with Tassie Ambulance to make sure we had a medical response in the event one of the rescuers was unfortunately injured.

**John Pratt:** [00:05:33] So from your perspective and your involvement in that incident, how long were you actually tied up with it for?

**James Scicluna:** [00:05:38] Yeah, so that was probably a good four days and they were very long, full days. I think you're probably averaging 16 to 18 hour days for the 3 to 4. Once we got into the recovery mode, for me personally, the actual amount of time spent on that job actually decreased. Whereas in the first 3 to 4 days where we were trying mainly to save these whales, that's where we put a lot of big hours in whale stranding.

**John Pratt:** [00:06:03] That's a pretty unique sort of job. Are there any other interesting jobs that you've had to deal with whilst you've been on the West Coast?

**James Scicluna:** [00:06:08] To be honest, that's probably the biggest that I've been involved in on the West Coast. We have had ongoing protest action in relation to the Tailings Dam at Rosebery, which I believe has been in the media not so much recently, but in the last 18 months. So that's that's another job that takes a lot of our time up. And then other than that, they're probably the two big ones that I've had since I've been here.

**John Pratt:** [00:06:27] James, like a lot of areas of Tasmania you are surrounded by a lot of bush. Bushfires must be a problem for you around the West Coast. Are you able to tell us about any events involving fires that you've had to be involved in?

**James Scicluna:** [00:06:40] Look, bushfire, that is a big issue that we obviously face every summer. At the end of last year, unfortunately we had a bit of an early one when we had the bushfire. Rosebery was working on that day. That was actually a really good case of how these little areas work together to try and combat something that's that major. Unfortunately, we did lose a building in Rosebery, but the work that we did between Tas Fire through their volunteer program and also the local SES have to shout out to them. They've been fantastic. We were able to get boots on the ground and try and stem the fire from getting any bigger than what it actually was whilst we waited for other resources to be deployed from Burnie. And I think they came as far as Devonport as well.

**John Pratt:** [00:07:20] So during bushfires a lot of the times the Tasmania Fire Service is the responsible Management Authority. Are you able to tell us what roles police actually play in a bushfire incident?

**James Scicluna:** [00:07:31] Yeah, sure. So it does get a little bit blurred when you start thinking about the country areas because of the remoteness. But traditionally our main responsibility as police, is to make sure that we block roads off if required to assist in the firefighting efforts and also assist in the evacuation if ordered by fire service.

**John Pratt:** [00:07:48] So moving away from actual police incidents and just having a quick chat about your career, you've recently undertaken the inspectors promotional course. Can you tell us a bit about what that's involved and how you found that as an experience?

**James Scicluna:** [00:08:00] Yeah, look, so the inspector's course for me that started a couple of years ago now, 2020, I think. So that's been about nearly a three year process for myself. And it involved a lot of study and then a lot of learning about different management styles and how to actually manage people and deal with people. So I was successful in passing that at the end of last year. And so I'm now qualified for promotion to inspector if I decide that's the path I want to take. But it's, you know, I said that I've done the SOG, but I'd say mentally this one was probably one of the hardest courses I've done.

**John Pratt:** [00:08:31] Congratulations on attaining that qualification, James. As I'm sure you're aware, we're on a recruitment drive at the moment and recently we've just had our largest ever recruit training course commence with 80 recruits. What or who do you think would make a great police officer?

**James Scicluna:** [00:08:46] That's a really good question. I think if you look back on it, 20 years ago, you would have had to have someone X amount of height, you know, quite well built, physically solid. And I'm glad to say that these days that's no longer the case. So I think sometimes the best recruits are those ones that when you first look at them, you go, Oh, I don't think that person is going to be a police officer, because those ones that you kind of discount at the very beginning can often be the most surprising. So I think the best police officers are the ones that can think on their feet, have a very life experience, and also have a level of empathy, because at the end of the day, we are not only dealing with people in the community, but we're there to help serve our communities as well. And I don't think you can do that successfully unless you can have a bit of empathy every now and again.

**John Pratt:** [00:09:29] As we come towards the end of our chat today, I'd just like to get your thoughts on what advice you would give to anyone who is thinking about joining Tasmania Police.

**James Scicluna:** [00:09:37] Yeah, look, you know, having joined at a very early age myself, I'd always recommend and suggest people try and find other police officers that are actually serving and try and get a good picture as to what actually policing entails. You know, you see all the cool things, you know, the helicopters, SOG, the fast boats and for some people that's their career paths. But for others they just want to help serve the community and do their little bit. So if a person can try and speak to as many different police as they can and try and get a more accurate picture of what policing is, I think that would serve them well when they start looking at maybe joining Tasmanian police and trying to do their bit to make a difference in the community.

**John Pratt:** [00:10:17] Yeah, I think that's very good advice, James. As you've explained, you've spent a fair bit of time on the West Coast. I think it's important to point out that there are numerous rural police stations within Tasmania police around the state, from Liawena in the Central Highlands, almost in the centre of Tasmania, coastal police stations, police stations on both Bass Strait Islands and indeed Bruny Island. There's a big variety there where people can go should they choose to. Thanks for joining us today, James, and thanks for talking about your experience as a country police officer. It's been very informative.Thank you.

[00:10:48] No worries, thank you very much.

**Speaker1:** [00:10:53] So far on this is Tas Police, we've chatted to our former commissioner, Darren Hine, and our new commissioner, Donna Adams. We've also heard from our recruitment services team and some new recruits. There have been some interesting and inspiring conversations from people who have experienced everything Tasmania Police has to offer. And this is just the beginning. If you like what you heard today. Please subscribe on your favourite podcast app and while you're there, consider leaving us a review or a rating to let us know how we're going. You can also stay up to date with podcast episodes on our website at recruitment.police.tas.gov.au/podcast.