

Report by Superintendent J.J. Webberley Co-Opted Member Representing Police Concerning Crime Prevention Activities for the period 1977/79

I report that during the two (2) years I have been the Co-Opted Police Representative with the Australian National Crime Prevention Council, a great deal of research has been made, especially on the Tasmanian scene with Crime Prevention.

Contact has been made with every State Commissioner of Police, including the Australian Capital Territory, for the purpose of obtaining suggestions from them as to the latest developments of general crime and the best manner in which to combat it.

I have learnt from the Commissioners, or their Representatives, who are mostly Crims Prevention Officers, that without doubt, crime is on the increase throughout Australia.

It is felt by most Police Officers, on the feed back that I have received from the various States, that gaol does not appear to be a deterrent to the majority of our criminals.

The drug situation is on the increase and although Drug Squad Officers are working at top gear in every State, this disturbing type of crime appears to be growing out of control. Owing to the huge profits in cash that the drug dealers receive, they are prepared to risk gaol sentences or heavy fines, in order to carry on this crime, which seems to be spreading like a cancer.

It is the view of most Police Officers that capital punishment should be re-introduced, especially where Police Officers and Gaol Warders are murdered, because it is felt that in many cases, the shooting of Police Officers and Gaol Warders creates a situation where they feel that they have nothing more to lose.

Many Police Officers consider that the re-introduction of corporal punishment is a backward step and most undesirable, but where sexual offences were concerned, especially those involving children and violence was used, corporal punishment seemed to be the only answer to meet this type of repulsive crime, although it should be used by the agencies controlling the law with the utmost discretion. The same attitude applies to people who are the victims of cruel and painful assaults.

There still appears to be the problem of many rapes and assaults committed on women, but who are afraid to report them, because of the trauma they experience when going to court and are cross-examined by Solicitors. It is well known, of course, that when the victims are being interviewed, that Police must take every precaution to see that an innocent man is not subject to harsh treatment, for which he is not responsible, as many rapes that are reported, are in fact brought about by the irresponsible conduct of the female concerned.

In some States of Australia, some senior Police Officers feel that mandatory sentences should be imposed on criminals who use firearms. This may reduce the number of murders by the use of firearms, which is also on the increase throughout Australia.

Police in some States also feel that pornographic literature is too readily available to the public, and in many cases, is placed in view to the extent where people walking along the public footpath can see it. The type of literature that is available, it is felt, can cause people with a weak or disturbed mind to commit sexual offences, that perhaps they would not otherwise do.

During the past two (2) years, numerous seminars and meetings have been held with discussion groups, who are endeavouring to determine means and ways of reducing our readily increasing crime rate, and it is felt that the best means of combating crime is to educate the public, either with suitable films being shown or by television programmes, which relate a convincing message that "crime does not pay".

The television appears to be the most impressive means of educating people, especially the young and vulnerable age type of person to abide by the law.

On the other hand, some television programmes are of such a nature that they completely encourage young people, or the weak minded, to commit crimes and in fact, give them ideas on how to go about it. The unfortunate aspect of this situation is that these are the types of programmes that the public wish to see, even if they have no intention, or do ever in fact commit crimes.

The Police, at the present time throughout every State in Australia, are doing everything they possibly can to improve public relations, by taking an active part in Youth Groups, including various sports and other social activities. This, without doubt, does assist in keeping closer to the public and receiving their co-operation in assisting the Police. This type of social activity with the public encourages them to respect and assist the Police, wherever possible.

This situation is most evident when an appeal is made by television or radio for assistance by the public to the Police in cases where people are lost or information is required concerning witnesses to a crime, or other emergency situations.

There is no doubt that the Australian National Crime Prevention Council, together with the State Branches, are achieving a great deal towards the goal of Crime Prevention, but unfortunately, due to the drug situation, which I have described, the unemployment factor and in many cases, young people who do not have enough to occupy their minds, does create a problem that cannot be overcome easily.

In conclusion, I would like to state that I have done all I possible can, with the time available, by attending seminars and branch meetings of the Crime Prevention Council, but due to future commitments, I would not be able to become a Police Co-Opted Member when the elections are being held in August this year at Hobart, but if I am able to assist the Council in any way whatever, directly or indirectly, it would give me very much pleasure to do this.