

DRUGS:

“... Atmosphere of co-operation”

The following article is reproduced with the permission of Jeff Moss, Editor of *CONNEXIONS*, which is produced by the Division of Drug and Alcohol Services, NSW Health Commission, for the NSW Drug and Alcohol Authority. For information about subscribing to *CONNEXIONS*, write to Editor, *Connexions Magazine*, 8A McIntosh Street, Chatswood, NSW. 2067.

BY SUSAN NICHOLSON AND
JEFF MOSS

Drug trafficking is becoming an increasingly tougher business to succeed in.

Major government moves over the last 18 months have resulted in a co-ordinated crackdown on what Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser has described as one of the most “insidious and destructive of crimes”.

Many of the recent initiatives have followed recommendations by the Australian Royal Commission of Inquiry into Drugs (1980) and the NSW Royal Commission into Drug Trafficking (1979-80).

Co-operation

The moves have involved an unprecedented level of co-operation between state and federal law enforcement agencies.

Early in May, 1979, Prime Minister Fraser and NSW Premier Neville Wran announced the formation of a joint Commonwealth/NSW Task Force on Drugs. The force is an independent, highly secretive law enforcement agency which aims to secure convictions of people engaged in drug trafficking.

The next move came with the disbanding of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, an arm of the Department of Business and Consumer Affairs, late in 1979. Headed by the controversial Harvey Bates, the Bureau came under severe criticism over the competence of its staff.

The result: 79 former Narcotics Bureau officers changed departments and were sworn in as core personnel of the newly-formed Drugs Unit within the Crime Department of the Australian Federal Police (AFP). Head of the unit is Chief Superintendent Brian Bates, brother to Harvey Bates.

In the midst of this restructuring, the NSW government passed legislation giving a massive boost to maximum fines and jail sentences able to be imposed on those convicted on drug trafficking charges.

In June this year, a quarter of a million dollars was approved by the Federal Government to assist Thai law enforcement authorities in their attempts to combat drug trafficking from the famous Golden Triangle area of South-East Asia.

When the federal budget was handed down in August, millions of additional dollars were allocated to the Commonwealth Bureau of Customs to finance new moves to upgrade customs resources at “the barrier”.

Customs checks are to be tightened, the use of surveillance planes and launches will be boosted and the Drug Detector Dog program is to be increased.

Intelligence Bureau Proposed

Capstone of recent moves will be the establishment of the proposed national crime intelligence network known as the Australian Bureau of Crime Intelligence (ABCI).

The development of the Bureau was formally agreed to on August 29 at a meeting of state and federal police ministers in Melbourne. While the concept is yet to be approved by the respective state governments, the NSW government has already pledged its support.

“The simple fact is that crime and criminals know no boundaries, either geographical, social or economic, and a national approach is essential,” said NSW Police Minister Bill Crabtree recently when commenting on the ABCI proposal.

“A full and co-operative exchange of intelligence must be an essential factor in successfully combating major crime, especially that involving drugs.”

The ABCI will be located in Canberra and be staffed by a permanent head and at least two officers seconded from each state. Operating costs will be financed by the Federal Government.

The Bureau's terms of reference will be “to provide facilities for the

collection, collation, analysis and dissemination of criminal intelligence, with a view to providing these services to all Australian police forces to enable them to combat the spread of organised crime in Australia, and in particular, to assist Australian police to combat illicit drug trafficking”.

Formation of the ABCI will be a formal acknowledgement of the growing tendency within the Australian police forces to view drug enforcement and general law enforcement roles as indivisible.

Chief Inspector David Schramm of the AFP Drugs Unit's Overseas Operations Branch told *Connexions* that “there has been more and more public awareness of so-called organised crime . . . and of the increasing role of drugs in this field of activity.

“Where organised crime does exist, state borders do not play any part, therefore, there had to be a co-ordinated effort.

“The ABCI would not only provide a central repository for information but also a co-ordination point, a think-tank for how efforts should be directed in a particular area.”

Key Component

The AFP is one of the key components in the national crackdown on drug trafficking offences. When it was formed in October, 1979, by the amalgamation of the former Commonwealth and Australian Capital Territory police forces, there was no intention of involving the force in the narcotics side of law enforcement.

Then came the disbanding of the Narcotics Bureau, the absorption of many of the Bureau's staff into the AFP and the formation of the Special Drugs Unit.

Welding the three components of the AFP together has been a difficult task. The man at the helm is the AFP's first commissioner, Sir Colin Woods, formerly an assistant commissioner of London's Metropolitan Police Force.

Many people are beginning to tip that Sir Colin has a good chance of moulding the AFP into the Australian equivalent of America's FBI or Britain's Scotland Yard.

"If AFP becomes as much of a byword as America's famed FBI, Australia will have an Englishman to thank for it," wrote leading crime journalist Bob Bottom recently.

"As the pioneering commissioner of the Australian Federal Police . . . Sir Colin Woods has already succeeded in inspiring public confidence in the new force. If he has his way during the remaining two years of his three-year term, AFP is destined to become the symbol of a force to be reckoned with."

Drugs Unit

The Drugs Unit of the AFP is based in Canberra but it has a number of specialist units located in each of the states and drug liaison officers stationed overseas.

"To a certain extent, a natural overlapping occurs between state police responsibilities and what the federal police would do within that state," explained Chief Superintendent Bates.

"Basically, the federal drug enforcement role is within two areas: the import/export of drugs, because that is a federal offence, and coupled with that what we loosely call major trafficking in drugs.

"And when we talk about major trafficking in drugs we include those people who are the financiers and the organisers and those who are trying to control the drug trade. . .

"Where the AFP is not directly involved from a prosecution point-of-view is at the domestic street level of the use and abuse of drugs. That is clearly a state matter.

"But it is also in that area, of course, that police forces pick up a lot of their intelligence. So there has to be an interface of the AFP with

the state police to get the benefit of that intelligence to assist the broader aims of combating the drug problem".

In the import/export area, the AFP shares the responsibility for drug law enforcement with the Bureau of Customs.

"As Narcotics Bureau officers we were customs officers," said Chief Superintendent Bates. "When the government decided to integrate the Bureau into the AFP, it had to clarify the role of Customs and the responsibility of the AFP.

"The Government decided that Customs would continue with the traditional Customs role—the barrier role of trying to prevent the flow of drugs into the country. It was up to the barrier stage only and from there onwards the responsibility rested with the AFP."

The situation has never been black-and-white, so practical administrative arrangements were made between the Department of Business and Consumer Affairs (housing Customs) and the Department of Administrative Services (housing the AFP) to facilitate co-operation.

Heroin Focus

The Drugs Unit places a clear emphasis on heroin trafficking. "Most of the heroin coming into Australia originates in South-East Asia and is routed through Bangkok and also down the Malay Peninsula through places like Penang and Kuala Lumpur," said Chief Inspector Schramm.

"While there is also a substantial trade in cannabis, particularly in the form of Thai sticks, our main objective is to try and counteract heroin trafficking.

"I think there would be no argument within the community—amongst those involved in the treatment and rehabilitation of drug

addicts and amongst law enforcement people—that the priority has got to be heroin.

"Currently, the Golden Triangle (Burma, Laos, Thailand) remains the main source of supply of heroin into Australia. It would not be fair to say, however, that it is the major heroin producer in the world. It enjoyed that distinction for a number of years, but recent intelligence suggests that South-West Asia (Afghanistan, Northern Pakistan and Iran) is becoming the main source of heroin production from our point-of-view.

"However, because of Australia's proximity to South-East Asia and because of our recognised air travel routes, South-East Asia continues to be the main source of supply."

The illegal drug trafficking is usually detected by one of two major methods. "The first way," said Chief Inspector Schramm, "is to arrive in an international airport and be subjected to baggage examinations, or maybe even a physical search. That's very much a Customs responsibility.

"The AFP, however, relies primarily on intelligence—learning who is bringing it in, when they are bringing it in, and where they are bringing it in."

It is clear from the many recent law enforcement moves that "co-operation is the name of the game" at the moment. As Chief Superintendent Bates put it: "The Commissioner, Sir Colin Woods, has very strongly taken the role of working and co-operating with his counterparts in each state to try to formulate an extremely positive approach to ensure that the drug problem in the 1980's is going to be viewed as one of national concern.

"If there is going to be an impact on this problem, there must be an atmosphere of co-operation."

Australian Federal Police College Library

LOCATION

The library is located on the Ground Floor of Lawley House, Brisbane Avenue, Barton. All visitors to the College must first of all register with the Duty Officer at the front Enquiries Counter.

BACKGROUND

Originally established as part of the Commonwealth Police Training Centre in July 1978, the library now holds a comprehensive collection of

textbooks, periodicals, legislation, law reports, digests and reference material.

SERVICES

The library and information services provided by the College Library include:

- a) answering reference and research queries;
- b) loan of library material including textbooks, law reports and periodicals;

d) photocopying of any library material required;

e) distribution of legislation to all Divisions; and

f) provision of current awareness services.

There are two qualified staff members in the College Library:

Librarian: Pamela Handside

Telephone: 704841

Library Officer: Marie Wilson

Telephone 704898