

What's in a Name?

By John Ireland

“Public servants, bureaucrats, pubes, fat cats, support staff or unsworn members” these are some of the many names, some more derogatory depending on the circumstances, by which staff members of the AFP are known.

The architects of the first AFP Act in their collective wisdom saw the need for the AFP to be able to recruit other than police officers under the provisions of the Public Service Act. Recruitment on this basis was seen as necessary to supplement police skills, provide professional advice and support, and provide a range of support services necessary for the effective administration of the organisation.

The employment arrangement has served the AFP well over its first decade. It has enabled a range of people to be recruited from both within and outside the public sector. While the present restructuring proposals include revised employment arrangements for staff members and will continue the development of an effective multi-disciplined organisation, many of the changes which have occurred over the past 10 years to the AFP and in particular to the Public Service Act structure of the AFP, have been a precursor to the present restructuring.

The Initial Structure

On 19 October 1979 the 245 public service staff of the former ACT and Commonwealth Police Forces were amalgamated to provide the first line of support to the fledgeling AFP. It had been decided in the run up to the creation of the AFP that the public service staff should provide independent administrative support and not rely on the 'parent' department (ie the Department of Administrative Services) as had been the position with the two former police forces.

This process was complicated by the incorporation of the staff of the Narcotics Bureau one month after the AFP started operations.

The first step was to establish the identity of the group separate from that of the Department of Administrative Services, while recognising the Secretary of that Department retained “permanent head” powers over the staff; the Commissioner of Police had only the power of direction of the public service officers attached to the AFP. The title “Office of the Australian Federal Police” was adopted. The most senior public service officer was classified at the old Clerical/Administrative Class 10, was titled “executive officer” and through delegated authority from the DAS Secretary had administrative responsibility for all staff.

Developing the first AFP budget, establishing the “advance account”, amalgamating the personnel operations units, developing operational support mechanisms, finding interim office accommodation and organising uniforms and equipment were just a few of the issues which kept these staff occupied.

This had all to be done at the same time as continuing to support AFP operations and assisting the Commissioner in developing co-operative arrangements with other police services, e.g. in December 1979 supporting the AFP initiative for a meeting in Canberra of all Commissioners to discuss organised crime.

1984 Review

The staffing arrangements remained basically as established in 1979 with the exception of the establishment of a position of Chief Executive Officer (filled initially by Mr Frank Boyle and then Mr Steve Gavin), until the 1984 Joint Management Review. The review was conducted at a time when Royal Commissioner Frank Costigan QC had commented in a report that:

“The police forces are not properly equipped. Indeed the standards of administrative support in the criminal investigation branches is disgraceful. It still reflects 19th century attitudes.”

The review noted that the then organisation structure of the AFP was a product of the organisations which were incorporated within the AFP framework in 1979. As part of its restructuring the review team recommended that the Commissioner of Police become a “Secretary of a Department” in relation to the Public Service Act staff employed by the AAFP. This along with a range of recommendations designed to upgrade the staff support of the AFP was accepted and legislation was effected in 1985.

For the first time all within the AFP had technically the same “boss” - the Commissioner.

Present Proposals

While the 1984 review removed a number of the barriers to all within the AFP working as an effective team, the work which led to the 1989 Corporate Plan identified barriers which still existed for the best deployment of the AAFP's human resources. Now, 10 years down the track there are some 600 public service officers engaged in all areas and functions of the AFP short of “feeling the collar” ie. the actual exercise of police arrest powers. The present proposals, amongst other things, will remove the last barriers to the development of the team. The ideals expressed by one of the first public service officers transferred to the AFP in 1979, Mr Ken Sandoe, could become a reality in law as well as practice. Ken's view, which in some ways could characterise the future of the AAFP and has been the hallmark of staff to date, was:

“Coming together is a beginning; staying together is progress; but, working together is success.” ■