

Commissioner's message



*Mick Keelty APM
AFP Commissioner*



*Mick Palmer, AO APM
AFP Commissioner
(1994–2001)*



*Peter McAulay, AO QPM
AFP Commissioner
(1988–94)*



*Major General
Ronald Grey, AO DSO
AFP Commissioner
(1983–88)*



*Sir Colin Woods, KCVO
CBE QPM
AFP Commissioner
(1979–82)*

Although we are a relatively young police service, the AFP is by far the longest serving federal policing agency in Australia's history.

I believe this has not happened by accident, but has been the result of a number of innovative organisational changes and the ability of the AFP's members to embrace changes for the better.

In many ways the AFP has been a pioneer in police management practices. I am the fifth AFP Commissioner and am proud to be included in a group that has been selected because they have continually looked towards the horizon in order to see where the AFP is going, rather than looking back to where it has been. That is not to say that it is inappropriate to take a look at our history in our 25th anniversary year. This edition of *Platypus Magazine* devotes a number of pages to our history and there are personal reflections from key personnel, but importantly there are also articles dealing with contemporary issues with an eye to the future in the concluding pages.

When I became Commissioner in 2001, the AFP had been the recipient of the vision of Sir Colin Woods, Major General Ronald Grey, Peter McAulay and Mick Palmer, supported by the skills of a range of senior officers and a core body of members and staff willing to implement each of their plans.

Sir Colin Woods was invited from England to help establish and head up the new national police service in 1979. He came to a policing environment where allied agencies were a little suspicious of the new organisation and, not surprising, had adopted a cautious attitude. Such was Sir Colin's role. At one level he had to establish

an internal structure for the organisation that would allow it to function and then also he had to begin the linking processes to allied agencies.

Ronald Grey, a Major General with a distinguished military career, brought a high level of strategic thinking to the AFP. In May 1987 he became the first Australian Police Commissioner to make an official visit to the People's Republic of China. Commissioner Grey's understanding and appreciation of international cooperation led to a major expansion of the AFP's overseas liaison officer network during the period he was Commissioner, increasing the number of countries in which the AFP had posts from three to 12. He was also responsible for focusing Government on the cost of crime and the resources required to cope with it.

Another legacy of Commissioner Grey's military background was a recognition of the value of strategic tactical intelligence in the fight against organised crime – particularly drug trafficking.

Peter McAulay brought a depth of police experience with him, having been a senior member of the South Australia Police, a senior officer with the United Nations Civilian Police in Cyprus and finally the Commissioner of Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services. It could be said that he'd had much experience in managing diversity within organisations. The unification of the AFP's workforce began under Commissioner McAulay. The AFP had sworn members employed under one piece of legislation and unsworn members employed under another. While sworn members were eventually represented by only one police union, unsworn staff could boast a vast array of unions which generated a labyrinth of employment terms and conditions for the AFP to deal with.

Eventually unsworn members were included under the AFP Act on 22 November 1990 meaning the AFP Commissioner was now in command of a unified workforce.

Peter McAulay retired in 1994 and another former NT Commissioner, Mick Palmer, was selected to head the AFP. Commissioner Palmer had extensive experience in policing and the law. As AFP Commissioner he implemented a major reform program to modernise the work practices and organisation structure of the AFP consolidating and extending the McAulay reforms.

Mr Palmer is recognised as having played a lead role in the professionalisation of policing across Australasia. He was a member of the group of Australian Police Commissioners which developed the first National Strategy for Police Professionalism in 1989, a strategy which has proven instrumental in the development of policing in Australia to face the challenges of the 21st century.

On arriving at the AFP he announced that the days of patch



protection were over and that not only was it time to “talk the talk” it was time to “walk the walk” when it came to implementing management practices, particularly to interagency cooperation.

It was now time for law enforcement organisations to start cooperating on a local, national and international level. Previously unfamiliar terms like transnational crime started entering the AFP’s corporate language; as did terms like broad banding and change management. Reflecting the corporate world’s identification of ‘middle management’ functions as being largely redundant in the emerging technological environment coupled with an increasingly tertiary educated workforce, the traditional police rank structure was significantly compressed. Both inspector ranks dropped out completely and the traditional gradings within sergeants and constable ranks were revised.

The traditional police ranks, of course, only remained valid in the ACT and other uniformed areas of operation like peacekeeping and external territories – the term *federal agent* now emerged to describe the role of those sworn AFP members below the rank of Assistant Commissioner.

So too terms like *general manager*, *coordinator* and *team leader* began to emerge in the corporate documentation as the AFP introduced a teams-based model to its work. The idea being that the skills and personnel makeup of a team was dependent on the nature of the operation at hand. This team would exist until the task was complete and members would then move on to other teams requiring those individual skills.

This in part reflected contemporary management ideas and also followed Royal Commission recommendations into police integrity that had identified entrenched structures as those that were most susceptible to the acceptance of corrupt practices.

While these changes were accompanied by a degree of scepticism by the membership,

examples of the success of this approach were soon self evident and people adapted quickly.

It is not as though for all this time of change the AFP had been only looking inward. Our members had been quietly building strong working relationships with all manner of allied law enforcement agencies at home and abroad. Already there had been remarkable successes by a variety of joint task forces undertaken with the complete range of federal and state agencies in the fight against organised crime in Australia, while the successes internationally in collaboration with other countries had also been effective in dismantling a number of transnational crime syndicates.

The AFP’s liaison officer network had also steadily grown and cultivated cooperative relationships with countries with similar cross border law enforcement concerns.

By the time I became AFP Commissioner in 2001 there had been an incredible transformation of the AFP that I could not have envisaged as a serving member in 1979.

It had changed from being an organisation using a traditional hierarchical structure for all of its operation and management needs to an organisation that could be defined as being truly “flexible and dynamic” – to quote the literature that accompanied the change process – and had accomplished this while maintaining significant operational success along with receiving a variety of awards from independent bodies for its innovation and accomplishments.

But organisational change is something that can never stop, and, even if we had wanted to collectively take a breather from change, the terrorist attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001 meant that everything about policing was up for review.

An immediate consequence for the AFP was the start of the integration process of the Australian Protective Service (APS) into the AFP’s existing protection function. APS members were obviously going to play a key role in the battle against this new form of terrorism and brought to the AFP a range of skills which complemented those already held by the organisation.

It was immediately clear that policing organisations now had a significant role to play in the full range of counter terrorism activities. It was also clear that terrorist cells quite often used criminal techniques to progress their agendas and ultimately if a terrorist incident took place it was going to be police investigative techniques that would identify and lead to the arrest of the perpetrators.

Then came the bombings in Bali in October 2002. In all 202 people from all corners of the globe died in horrendous circumstances in a place renowned for its innocence and peaceful charm.

Australia’s direct connection to the incident was that Bali is a popular holiday destination; 88 of those killed by the bombing were Australians.

The initial AFP team that flew into Denpasar just hours after the bombings was a blend of police, forensic, technical and administrative personnel who were used to working in teams and valuing the skill contributed by each member. Supporting this team I would also like to think was an organisation encumbered with minimal red tape.

It is difficult to image how we could have mounted such an enterprise in 1979.

The AFP's relationship with Indonesian law enforcement was also an essential factor in the overall success of the investigation. It was not solely necessity that led Indonesian National Police (INP) to invite the AFP to participate in the investigation. The AFP has had more than two decades of interaction with the South East Asian region and in that time, individually and collectively, AFP members have generated significant good will with respective law enforcement agencies.

Likewise our relationship with State and Territory police in Australia made it possible to bring in to play the extraordinary skills those organisations possess.

Subsequent missions to our near neighbours, most notably East Timor and the Solomon Islands, have resulted from similar multidirectional relationships and have yielded excellent results for all concerned.

But there are constant reminders that we cannot rest on our achievements. Currently we are back in Jakarta assisting the INP to investigate the 9 September detonation outside the Australian embassy. The fact that a bomb much larger than that used in Bali led to many fewer deaths than the Bali bombing is evidence that counter terrorism measures can work, but it does not diminish the regret for the deaths of nine people and the 161 injured.

What it does show us is that terrorism is not a particular product of any particular country, class or creed. Terrorists, like criminals, are likely to be part of any society. Just as criminals have no regard for the rights of others, so too terrorists act with little sympathy for those who do not subscribe to their particular view of life. Terrorism is the ultimate transnational crime so it is incumbent on all law enforcement agencies to cooperate effectively in order to combat this crime against humanity.

So it is that in a quarter of a century the AFP has emerged from a cautious merger of initially dissimilar policing agencies with a relatively unclear mission to one that has achieved operational successes that have been lauded in Australian Parliament and around the world. Organisations do not acquire such status by accident, but as a result of the vision of a few and the trust, ability and commitment of the many.

