

AFP in Tasmania: the quiet achievers

By Bonnie Warn



Hobart Office Manager John Ross,

Hobart Office operations may not attract front page news headlines as often as some of the AFP's other business areas, but the variety and intensity of the work carried out in Tasmania shouldn't be understated.

"The nature of the jobs referred to us here in the Hobart Office is characteristic of the work of the broader AFP—at any given time, we could be involved in investigating a range of crime types, from economic crime and family law issues through to counter terrorism and telecommunications offences," Federal Agent Ross said.

Not only is the work rewarding, but members stationed in Hobart also appreciate and enjoy the city's spectacular location, relaxed lifestyle and proximity to a range of Tasmania's natural attractions including national parks, pristine beaches and acclaimed wine and food regions.

In an operational sense, while the size and location of the Hobart Office presents some challenges in terms of access to specialist resources and expertise, these very challenges present the members with an opportunity to broaden their investigation skills and knowledge.



Back row (left to right): Hobart Office Manager John Ross, Federal Agent Jason Van De Kamp, Tasmania Police Detective Senior Sergeant Shane Smith.

Front row, (left to right): Federal Agent Darren Pallot and Robert Cross.

As a team of six—including a Tasmania Police officer attached to the Joint Counter Terrorism Team, and a member who is outposted to Centrelink in an advisory capacity—the Hobart Office members must be prepared for referrals across a broad range of crime types.

Federal Agent Jason Van de Kamp joined the Hobart Office Team in 2005 as a member of the Joint Counter Terrorism Team and said his time in Hobart has been a valuable learning experience.

“After working in general duties policing in the ACT, coming to work in the national arena in Hobart was a substantial change for me,” he said.

“Working in the small office environment in Hobart has given me the chance to get involved in a range of different jobs and to increase my knowledge of the relevant legislation across each crime type,” Federal Agent Van de Kamp said.

Federal Agent Ross agreed that the dynamics of the small office present members with the opportunity to build their skills and knowledge, not only in an operational sense, but also through involvement in the office’s business

planning and through interaction with the AFP’s partner agencies.

“From my perspective it’s enormously beneficial in the development of a member’s career to serve in a place like Hobart. The team environment gives the members the chance to become actively involved in preparing business plans for the office, and the nature of the work here provides tremendous opportunities for them to forge relationships with our stakeholders and partner agencies at all levels,” he said.

One of the Hobart Office’s key goals is to increase the AFP’s visibility among its stakeholders in Tasmania and maintain close working relationships with partner law enforcement agencies at a local level. The Office Manager John Ross is keen to expand this initiative by promoting discussions with more agencies and increasing their awareness of the AFP’s role and investigative capacity.

While maintaining long-established ties with agencies such as Centrelink, the Australian Taxation Office, Tasmania Police, Customs, and the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions. During the past 12

months the office has also sought to generate close relationships with agencies such as Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, the Insolvency and Trustee Service Australia and Medicare Australia.

These efforts have already brought positive results, with several new referrals which otherwise may not have been made.

The relationship between the Hobart Office and Tasmania Police has been further strengthened through the establishment of Joint Counter Terrorism Teams, with a Tasmania Police officer seconded to the AFP to help coordinate information and investigations on national security. While the team is focused mainly on potential terrorism-related issues, the links between the two agencies forged as a result of this working relationship extend beyond the counter terrorism sphere, and have also been beneficial in relation to a range of other criminal activities.

Taking a proactive approach to crime trends in the region, the AFP has recently identified intellectual property



offences as an emerging issue, and has held preliminary discussions with Tasmania Police, the Australian Federation Against Copyright Theft and other stakeholders to examine the scope and magnitude of this type of crime in the Tasmanian environment. The group aims to develop a strategic plan to address issues identified as a result of the probe.

The AFP also works closely with Tasmania Police and other State and Commonwealth agencies through participation in Investigation and Consequence Management Exercises (ICMEX), which are funded and coordinated nationally by the Protective Security Coordination Centre (PSCC) and hosted by the relevant State or Territory police jurisdiction. The exercises are designed to test the local response to a major security incident under the auspices of the National Counter-Terrorism Plan.

Members of the Hobart Office took part in both the initial planning stages and the execution of ICMEX 'Southern Impact', conducted in Tasmania in July. The AFP's Joint Counter Terrorism Team member played a significant role in the culmination of the exercise.

In the lead-up to the staging of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Australia in 2007, the Hobart Office is also involved in a range of discussion exercises conducted by the PSCC, which is responsible for coordinating the whole-of-government security arrangements for APEC Australia. While the APEC forum runs from January to September 2007, the specific focus for Tasmania is on the Small and Medium Enterprises Ministerial Meeting and Working Group to be hosted in Hobart in March 2007

On average, economic crime—in a variety of forms—makes up most of the referrals received by the Hobart Office, representing about 65 per cent of the referrals received by the office since July this year. As an indication of the breadth and scope of investigations conducted by the office, some of the more recent jobs include:

- After receiving a referral from Tasmania Police regarding premises thought to have been used to manufacture counterfeit currency.
- Federal agents conducted investigations which revealed that a man from Derby in the State's north-east had been experimenting

with producing counterfeit plastic notes and had also attempted to manufacture United States currency. The man was charged with offences under the *Crimes (Currency) Act 1981*.

- A 67-year old Tasmanian man was arrested and charged in relation to alleged money laundering offences after an investigation led federal agents to execute a search warrant at the man's premises, seizing \$680,000 in Australian currency. The man was charged with conducting transactions to avoid reporting requirements and possessing property reasonably suspected of being the proceeds of crime.
- A 34-year-old man from Burnie was charged with offences under the *Criminal Code Act 1995* regarding allegations he had downloaded images of child pornography from the Internet.

Other matters referred to the office in recent times include identity crime, environmental crime, child sex tourism, telecommunications crime, money laundering, family law recovery orders and fraud matters.