



Blast from the past: December 1992

Commissioner's Message

AS the year draws to a close, I believe we should all look back upon our collective achievements with pride in the face of expanding demands at a time when all Government organisations have suffered major funding reductions.

This year we have achieved more with less, evidenced by successful fraud investigations, major drug seizures and in the Australian Capital Territory, higher public sup-

port in the community policing environment.

Our successes, both overseas and nationally, have been publicly acknowledged in various forums culminating in us receiving the inaugural national award for innovative management from the Royal Institute of Public Administration of Australia.

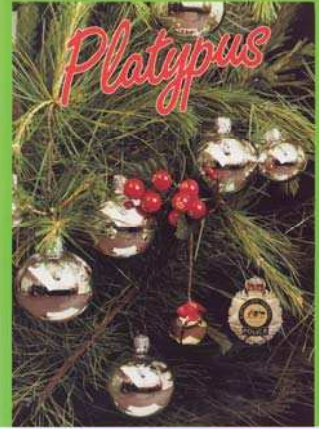
In a shrinking financial environment I can assure you the AFP will, in the New Year, face increased demands for its serv-

ices which will test the commitment of each individual. Our priorities will reflect this.

I am confident in the difficult times ahead that you will respond in such a way as to ensure the AFP's viability and continued success.

I wish you all the very best for a safe and happy Christmas.

R. McAulay
(R. McAulay)
Commissioner of Police



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Boys in blue – and the girls too?

Constable Steve Walker highlights the instances where the AFP can justify discrimination between men and women and where long standing police culture maintains an unjust balance.

There exist two levels of discrimination in work practices between men and women in policing. The first is the legal and justified discrimination that is based on meeting the aims and objectives of policing, in protecting the rights of the individual. The second is a more common and diverse, unjustified discrimination, which exists through a long-standing police culture that has socialised many of its members into practising discrimination along gender lines.

The Australian Federal Police has developed and implemented programs directed at eliminating all forms of identified, unjustified discrimination and has introduced measures to enable full equity of employment opportunity. These programs include further development of objectives tailored to meet the government's equal employment opportunity requirements while recognising the unique work requirements of the AFP.

How then is it not only practical, but in some cases legal, for some discrimination to occur within a police organisation? It must first be understood that there is a difference between the terms sex and gender. Sex defines the actual physical difference between men and women, while gender is a constructed term that differentiates between men and women on the basis of perceived differences in natural ability.

In some cases there exists legislation which demands segregation of

female and male areas of responsibility. One such case exists in the area of drug law enforcement where all police members are equally trained and equally capable in effective body search techniques.

Legislation however, is specific in that it allows for searching of people by officers of the same sex only. The rationale behind this legislation rests in the protection of the basic rights of an alleged of-

fender. In most general cases, and specifically in the case of victims of sexual assault, it is the choice of the individual as to who they are more at ease with talking. In some cases it may well be a male officer, but on the whole, especially when the victim of sexual assault is a female, she will choose to talk to a female officer. Again, as with body searches, this is expedient and protective of the rights and wishes of the victim.

Whereas there is legal and justified discrimination based on sex differences, there exists in policing further discrimination based on gender. This type of discrimination is unjustified and undermines, rather than enhances, the effectiveness of police operation.

Unjustified discrimination still exists. In one squad, a source claims that women and men on the whole, perform virtually the same role. However, women more frequently tend to become property officers, cataloguing items found by their male colleagues in the execution of a search warrant. Women, it is claimed tend to navigate rather than drive police vehicles. They tend to be appointed as radio operators and do more than a fair share of photocopying. Men within this area on the other hand, are the sole users of bolt cutters, sledge hammers and shotguns. These differences are justified to these male supervisors involved in this and other areas of the AFP on the grounds that women are more meticulous than men and so, on the whole, make better property officers and navigators, while men are much stronger than women, and are thus better at using bolt cutters and sledge hammers. They are considered being more 'natu-

It is no wonder that strong socialisation processes exist within police forces, given the history of male dominance.

ally adept' to handle a shotgun.

While many of these types of claims may seem justified to some supervisors, they are fundamentally (and blatantly) unjustified and discriminatory. A female police officer recently represented Australia in shooting at the Law Enforcement Olympics. The officer achieved the ranking of the best police marksman in the world, and was awarded two gold and a bronze medal for her efforts. This type of ability displayed in female police officers highlights the lack of credibility in an argument justifying the men only shotgun practice.

A further recurring aspect of gender discrimination which is common is that of the domestic (or home and clerical duties) and *matron* (or caring and nurturing) type role of policewomen.

Policewomen tend to perform more office duties than their male counterparts and this, according to one source, is due to the fact that policewomen go out of their way to learn new equipment and procedures — becoming the 'expert' in a unit. According to a further source, policewomen tend to be the only members of a unit who wash dishes, clean mess rooms, tidy desks and so on. It appears that these tasks *naturally* fall to policewomen only because policemen do not see their role in performing these duties. One source was baffled at the apparent skill a policewoman had in making a better cup of coffee for a superintendent than her male colleagues. It is perhaps this culture that caused a sergeant's recent and sincere claim that he wished he had a "nicer girl to take care of the paper work, filing and to keep the place tidy".

Another type of role which usually falls to policewomen is that of the caring and nurturing *matron*. Despite a woman's personal atti-

tude or experience in the care of children, the policewoman is nearly always singled out to take responsibility of a child. Often this direction is disguised as justified due to a woman's natural affinity with children, according to one Family Law Squad source.

Policewomen only appeared in uniform for the first time in 1947, and were only permitted to perform general duties, (duties other than administrative or support) in 1973. By 1978 all other police serv-

ing from general duties work to diplomat and VIP security.

According to figures released in the AFP Equal Employment Opportunity draft policy, the AFP currently has the highest level of women than any other police service in Australia. Women are assigned to both plain clothes and uniform duties, ranging from general duties work to diplomat and VIP security.

Women officers are now appointed to promotional and recruitment boards to highlight the importance of fairness and equity toward all parties. The AFP recently established a Women's Desk which is responsible for examining issues relating to women as an occupational group. A woman's forum is now conducted on an annual basis, while equal employment opportunity issues form part of standing agenda items of police consultative committees and councils.

The AFP has done much for the removal of unjustified discrimination and the differentiation between the roles of female and male officers, but it still has a great deal further to go before full equity is realised. There still remains only two female commissioned officers while there are no female representatives on either the Police Board of Management or National Consultative Council.

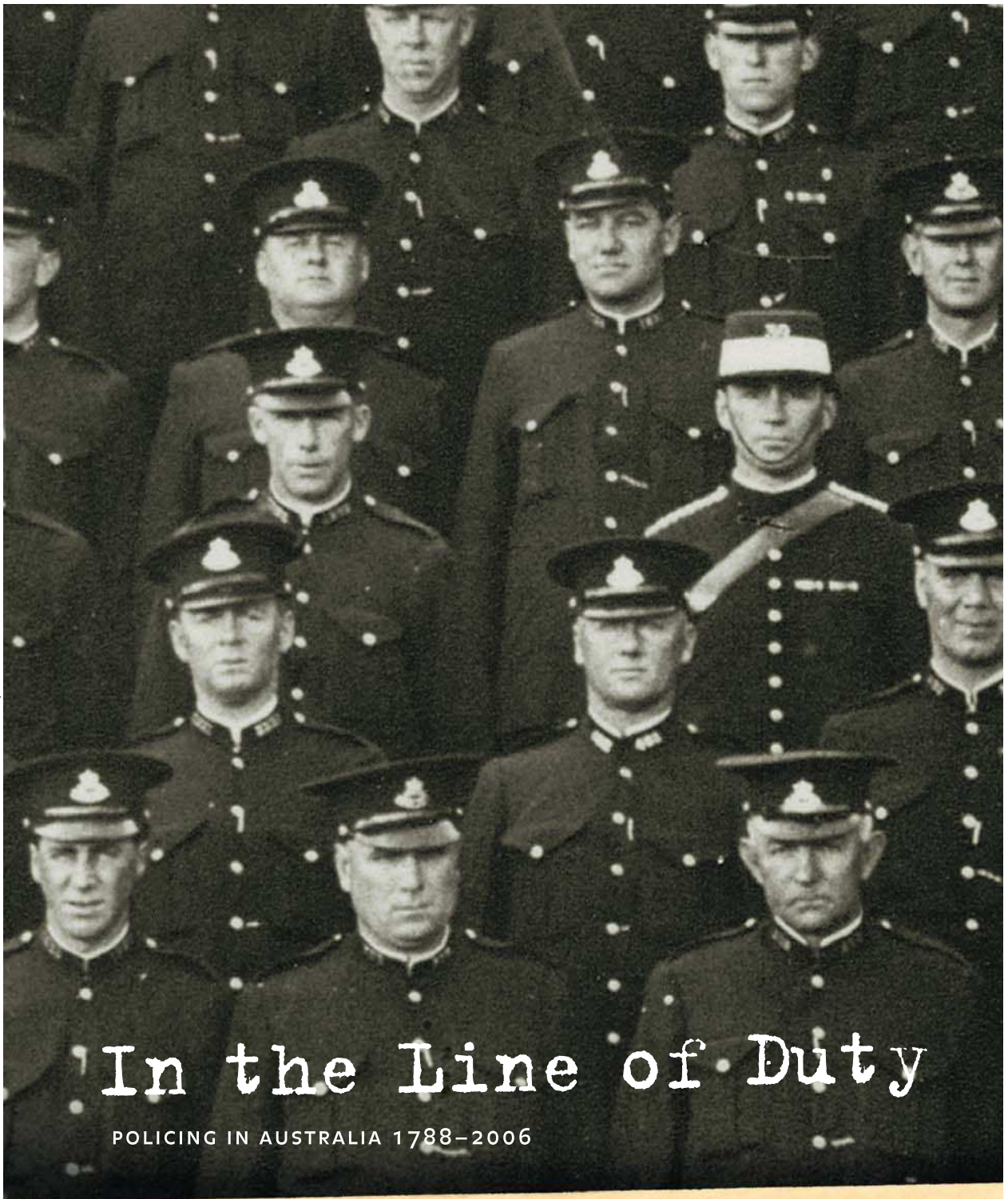
The AFP legally and justly discriminates on the basis of sex — utilising the difference between the sexes to achieve the aims and objectives of policing. Yet, like so many other areas of society, it can at times discriminate unjustly on the basis of gender, due to a long standing police culture that is only now slowly changing.



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NOW SHOWING



In the Line of Duty

POLICING IN AUSTRALIA 1788–2006

Never before has the story of Australian policing been told as a national story.

In the Line of Duty is a timeline of important moments in police history presented through documents, images and objects held in police archives and museums around the country. The exhibition coincides with the Dedication of the National Police Memorial, constructed to commemorate those officers killed on duty.

OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA 26 AUGUST 2006 – 25 FEBRUARY 2007

Interstate Police on duty at the opening of Federal Parliament House, Canberra 9th May 1927 (detail) AFP Museum

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