

Coordinated partnerships at Canberra Airports

In August this year, Aviation industry partners were invited to see some of the APF's specialist teams at work during a two-day workshop in Canberra.

The workshop for airport uniform police and protective service officers based at Canberra Airport aimed to refresh and update their knowledge and skills in aviation law enforcement. It was also a prime opportunity to demonstrate to aviation partners how the AFP coordinates law enforcement at Australia's major airports.

The workshop included sessions on first response techniques, such as cordon and containment of suspect items, and presentations by specialist AFP and ACT police units including police negotiators, bomb technicians and members of the disaster victim identification unit.

One of the highlights during the two days was a special demonstration by AFP air security officers. Representatives from Canberra Airport, Aviation Rescue and Fire Fighting Services (ARFF) and the Department of Transport and Regional Services observed the demonstration as special guests.

"Because of the range of our work in the airport environment it's important that we create opportunities to demonstrate what we do," Canberra Airport Police Commander Linda Champion said.

"The workshop allowed our members to refresh skills and their understanding of the complex environment we operate in, as well as giving our stakeholders a chance to understand more fully the role of the AFP in

aviation," she said.

Superintendent Champion is one of 11 Airport Police Commanders around Australia who coordinate a comprehensive approach to criminality and terrorist threats in the aviation sector, under the AFP's unified policing model.

Assistant Commissioner and National Manager for Aviation Mandy Newton, explained that the AFP developed the unified policing model to draw together existing and future law enforcement functions at airports as a result of the Wheeler review on airport security and policing in Australia released in September 2005.

"The model is based directly on key recommendations from the review that called for centralised and comprehensive law enforcement at airports," Assistant Commissioner Newton said.

Under the unified policing model, Airport Police Commanders at the 11 major Australian airports direct the operations of the AFP's counter-terrorist first response teams, airport uniform police, police liaison officers and joint aviation intelligence teams.

Joint airport investigation groups at the five Australian international airports also fall under the Airport Police Commanders coordination.

The counter-terrorist first response function is delivered by protective service officers, bomb appraisal officers and firearms and explosives detection teams.

"Counter-terrorist first response involves a number of teams undertaking individual or coordinated duties to deter or respond to threats," Assistant Commissioner Newton said.

"The public may see our teams conducting activities such as firearms and explosives detection checks on passenger luggage. This may involve a firearms and explosives detection team made up of an AFP handler and detection dog, or it may be conducted by protective service officers."

"If a suspect item is found in a terminal for instance, specially trained bomb appraisal officers are called in to analyse the item. While they're doing this, our protective service officers ensure the public are safe from any potential danger by creating a cordon around the area," she said.



Photo by Taryn Doherty

Left: PSO Patrick Hobday with Canberra Airport Terminal Manager Ferdi Lumbacca and Commander Reith. Middle: Canberra Airport Police Commander Linda Champion. Right: Mr Lumbacca and AUP David Senior. Bottom right: Senior Fire Commander Reith with AFP members.



Photos by Greg Primmer

In addition to counter-terrorist first response teams, airport uniform police are being introduced progressively around the country.

“Airport uniform police are in place in Canberra, Adelaide, Hobart, Perth, Alice Springs, Darwin, Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne,” Assistant Commissioner Newton said “Airport uniform police for Cairns and Gold Coast airports will commence over the next 12 months.”

Airport uniform police are experienced police officers who have been seconded to the AFP from their State or Territory police force. They receive additional training on Commonwealth law, policy and police powers to enable them to operate under the relevant legislation and are sworn in as AFP special members.

“Airport uniform police are there to provide an immediate response to policing matters within airport environments,” Assistant Commissioner Newton said. “It is a community policing role, so their duties will include investigating minor criminal matters, taking reports, making arrests and conducting interviews.”

Aspects of the AFP’s role not generally visible to the travelling public are the intelligence and investigations functions.

“Our intelligence and investigation functions have been established as joint agency teams because these areas rely on efficient flows of information between our stakeholders,” Assistant Commissioner Newton said. “Investigations teams investigate serious and organised crime in aviation and include members from AFP, State and Territory police and Australian Customs Service”.

“The intelligence groups include members from these three agencies, but are also supported at different times by representatives from the Department of Transport and Regional Services, Australian Crime Commission and Australian Security Intelligence Organisation.”

During the two-day workshop in Canberra, Airport Police Commander Linda Champion explained that Airport Police Commanders work closely with these and other agencies.

“Not only is it important that each of the teams under my command work closely with ACT Policing, Canberra Airport Group, the airlines, airport operators, and agencies such as Aviation Rescue and Fire Fighting,” Superintendent Champion said.

Senior Fire Commander Rodney Reith from Canberra Aviation Rescue and Fire Fighting said the opportunity to be involved in the workshop was valuable.

“In all emergency response environments it’s highly beneficial that we have a good knowledge of each agency’s roles and abilities,” Senior Commander Reith said. “I attended a workshop session on first response training as well as the air security officer demonstration.

“The session and demonstration showed

me the different scenarios where the AFP may call on ARFF Services to assist, as well as highlighting the resources available to assist our aviation fire fighters in the event of an incident or emergency.”

Aviation Rescue and Fire Fighting Services is a business group of Airservices Australia, providing services at international, domestic and regional airports around Australia. In the past 12 months the ARFF has responded to more than 6400 incidents, including aircraft and structural fires, medical assistance and hazardous materials and fire-alarm responses.

Part of the two-day workshop included a simulated aircraft crash. ARFF members demonstrated how they respond to such incidents in coordination with the AFP.

“Working together with other agencies such as the AFP in a safety-critical environment ensures we can quickly and safely respond to emergency situations and incidents with minimal impact on, or interruption to airport operations and the travelling public,” Senior Fire Commander Reith said. “It’s valuable for aviation fire fighters to have a good understanding of the many roles the AFP perform at the airport, such as counter-terrorism, command agency, air security officers and policing.”

