

AFP Executive travelling north

The AFP is well-known for its role in helping fragile communities offshore – whether it is assisting with law enforcement or capacity building. In June 2007, the former Australian Government announced the Northern Territory Emergency Response initiative. This whole-of-government approach has provided policing members with a unique opportunity to offer invaluable assistance in their own country.

In December, Commissioner Mick Keelty and some members of the AFP Executive travelled to the Northern Territory to visit members serving in the remote communities of Mutijulu, Numbulwar, Arlparra and Alice Springs.

The Commissioner, Chief Operating Officer Andrew Wood and Assistant Commissioner Paul Jevtovic formerly of the AFP's International Deployment Group (IDG) went to see the developments made since the first deployment of AFP officers on 28 June.

Over three days, the delegation was able to see and appreciate the issues being faced by remote Indigenous communities, and to understand some of the challenges AFP members have had to deal with when policing these communities.

Operation Pleach – AFP officers on duty and making a difference

On 25 June, *Operation Pleach* began and the IDG selected a contingent of AFP members to assist with the former government's program to protect children from abuse and build the basis for a



*Dedication Challenges
Passion Community building*

better future. The Northern Territory Emergency Response was announced by the former Federal Government a few days earlier, after the April release of *Little Children are Sacred* report by the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse.

Eleven staff members were sworn in as special members to the Northern Territory Police (NTPOL) and one of the members was embedded into the NTPOL command structure. Five AFP members have since joined this contingent and have also been sworn in as special constables of the NTPOL.

During the trip, Commissioner Keelty was able to see police officers making a difference. Federal Agent Catherine Cowling is one of many providing a permanent policing presence and complementing the skills and experience of NTPOL officers and aboriginal community police officers. Federal Agent Cowling works in the small community of Numbulwar, 570 kilometres southeast

of Darwin, and has worked with school children through programs aimed to foster and educate them about personal safety and crime prevention.

The daily activities of police work in the region involve general policing activities, patrolling the community, speaking to community members and building relationships based on trust.

Commissioner Keelty said Federal Agent Cowling was one of many dedicated members in the organisation willing to work under challenging conditions to achieve solid outcomes for these communities.

"The members who have accepted this challenge to work in their own country have raised the level of consciousness in all of us," Commissioner Keelty said. "This is community policing at its finest and shows the ingenuity and decency of all of those people working in these communities."

Commissioner Keelty also noted the work in the Northern Territory was multifaceted, involving health and education professionals, clinicians and teachers as well as police.

"This is a long intervention," he said. "It's the Australian Federal Police in partnership with the Northern Territory Police and each of the Australian police forces. It's also a difficult job and not one that's just about law enforcement – it's about community building."

Federal Agent Shane Robinson, also serving in the Northern Territory, said the formation of solid relationships had allowed police to curb some criminal

behaviour within the communities.

"This deployment has provided an opportunity to bond with the people of my country," Federal Agent Robinson said. "It's not just about policing in traditional terms. It's about using your position within the community to generate positive experiences for the elders, community members and young people."

On 13 February, the Federal Parliament made a formal apology to members of the stolen generations. In his inaugural speech to the Parliament, Minister for Home Affairs, Bob Debus, spoke of that historic occasion, the history of his portfolio and his interest in, and intended focus on, the activities of the AFP.

"Home Affairs, I am reliably informed, is a departmental configuration which dates back to 1901," he said. "It was one of the first seven departments of the Commonwealth. The portfolio today is, of course, infinitely more sophisticated and complex than it was then, covering areas within the Attorney-General's Department, including criminal law and its reform, strategies for dealing with money laundering and drugs, the operations of the Australian Crime Commission and much else; also the Australian Customs Service, the Australian Federal Police and Commonwealth territories. Our focus is not only domestic but also on Australia's role in supporting our neighbours in the Asia Pacific. That role is notably carried out by the Australian Federal Police – one of the best and most educated forces in the world, leaders in building and promoting positive relations in our region..."

Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle

"Little Children are Sacred"

In our Law children are very sacred because they carry the two spring wells of water from our country within them*

*The title quote reflects the traditional Aboriginal law of the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory and was provided by a senior Yolngu lawman". Little Children are Sacred, <www.nt.gov.au/dcm/inquiriesaac/pdf/bipacsa_final_report.pdf>



Top left: Federal Agent Catherine Cowling; Above: detail of Jimmy Baker's artwork; Clockwise: Commissioner Keelty, Assistant Commissioner Jevtovic and COO Andrew Wood with Commander Dave Bachi, Karen Hill, Shane Robinson and Wendy-Anne McHale; Acting Commissioner Negus and A/C Paul Jevtovic farewell the first contingent of AFP members to the Northern Territory in June 2007; Commissioner Keelty with AFP members; NTPOL vehicle at one of the community outposts in NT.



All Photos: AFP and NTPOL members