

Keeping our airports safe

Protecting airports has been part of the AFP's business since its inception, but work in the aviation sector has increased rapidly over the past five years.

Since air travel became more common in the 1960s, there has been an increased requirement for a police presence at airports around Australia. With air travel an integral part of modern life the threat of terrorism has increased, so the need for security at airports and onboard aircraft is greater than ever before.

Due to the significant growth experienced in international air passenger traffic, Australia's aviation network has become a key component of our national infrastructure. With so many people travelling by air, the security of our airports is at the forefront of the collective public consciousness.

The September 11 attacks in the United States further cemented airport security as an issue that will remain high on the national agenda.

Since commercial aviation became a prominent feature of the Australian lifestyle, a variety of arrangements have divided the responsibilities of providing airport security among Commonwealth, State and Territory authorities. Airport policing was taken care of by the Commonwealth Police until the AFP was formed in 1979. Responsibility for maintaining a counter terrorist first response capability was transferred to the

Australian Protective Service in 1984, while Responsibility for community policing was retained by the respective State or Territory policing service.

In 2005, an Independent Review of Airport Security and Policing for the Government of Australia, known as the Wheeler Review, found that existing arrangements were inadequate and recommended a unified command structure for policing at the major airports. This was the genesis of the current Unified Policing Model and the Aviation function for the AFP. The AFP has taken carriage of airport policing and security since then.

National Manager Aviation Roman Quaedvlieg said that with more than 100 million passengers travelling by air each year, public

safety was the AFP's number one priority.

"The AFP is contributing to overall national security by its presence at Australia's 11 major airports, and aims to provide a seamless and safe passenger experience," Assistant Commissioner Quaedvlieg said.

The Unified Policing Model was implemented by the AFP in response to recommendations made by the Wheeler Review, to unify the layers of security measures, on the ground and in the air, in order to protect aviation against terrorism and organised criminal activity. The presence of the AFP at major airports enables a comprehensive and coordinated approach to addressing criminality and terrorist threats in the aviation sector.



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01: AFP members on the tarmac 02: A Protective Service Officer keeps watch at Sydney Airport 03: AFP members with a canine companion 04: AFP officers on patrol in an airport terminal.

A large airport is like a city within a city due to the high volume of people and commercial businesses operating there. Airport Uniform Police provide the localised and accessible policing presence which is an integral part of the broader airport community.

Under present arrangements, Airport Uniform Police are made up of State or Territory police who are seconded to the AFP and sworn in as special members. This arrangement enables these members to retain their respective State or Territory police powers, and therefore to operate under the relevant State, Territory or Commonwealth legislation as required.

Airport Uniform Police officers say a typical day on duty is hard to describe, their work is varied and interesting, and they can be called on to attend a wide variety of incidents, from low-level criminal activity such as shoplifting offences to more serious offences such as suspected drug smuggling or disturbances on aircraft.

The AFP's work in the aviation sector also contributes significantly to the Australian Government's counter-terrorism arrangements. Under the Unified Policing Model, the Aviation portfolio provides Protective Service Officers to perform a counter-terrorism first

response (CTFR) role at the major airports.

In the event of a terrorist incident, the CTFR role ensures that the incident is contained, the immediate area is cordoned off and people are evacuated from the area. Specialist bomb appraisal and firearms and explosive detection capabilities are included in the response, and they are highly mobile and unobtrusive.

Regional Rapid Deployment Teams provide an active deterrent to terrorist threats and are able to rapidly deploy to regional airports throughout Australia. These teams also include firearms and explosives detection dogs, and bomb appraisal officers.

Firearms and explosives detection dogs are part of the CTFR role, and work in conjunction with bomb appraisal officers.

"In the past year, AFP bomb appraisal officers have assessed more than 50 unattended or suspicious items each month at airports across Australia," Assistant Commissioner Quaedvlieg said.

"The AFP's canine expertise has also been recognised both domestically and internationally, and this has resulted in a number of requests for information and assistance with training.

"The National Canine Program now has 45 trained canine teams in place, with detection capabilities across the total range of known explosives."

Another important element of Aviation security is the AFP's Air Security Officer (ASO) Program. Air Security Officers travel in plain clothes on selected domestic and international flights to safeguard against in-flight attack. They are armed and trained to immediately respond to and resolve attacks on board.

While terrorism remains a constant threat to the safety of passengers in Australian airports, the theft of freight also persists as an area of concern. In July 2007, the AFP's Reduce Aviation Freight Theft (RAFT) project began in trial form to investigate theft or suspicious movement of aviation freight. The project works closely with both the freight industry and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service. Since it began, more than \$350,000 worth of lost freight has been reported. Two arrests have been made, and six active investigations are underway.

The AFP continues to engage with stakeholders from the aviation industry and government agencies to actively enhance aviation security policy and arrangements.