

A flexible approach to problem solving

The AFP's Operational Response Group is enhancing the way it does business to meet the needs of a changing world.

Since its inception in 2005, the Operational Response Group (ORG) has been responsible for providing specialist and tactical policing capabilities and a high-readiness response to incidents of civil disorder, primarily for the AFP's international missions. The team of dedicated professionals operates at a high tempo and trains for a variety of situations from executing high-risk warrants to quelling incidents of unrest and instability.

The ORG has always strived to consistently improve its results through amending and updating methodologies and training systems. From the way it trains new members to the services it provides in Australia and abroad, the ORG has taken a progressive approach to its operations, which it sees as enhancing members' primary role as police officers with additional specialist skills.

The ORG's charter requires it to maintain a workforce in a high state of readiness for deployment. This means maintaining a stringent training and preparation regime to ensure that all members are able to respond immediately to requests for assistance. This means the group is able to provide a range of specialist services across a broad spectrum of operations at all times.

Coordinator Operational Response Group Jason Williams said this ensures ORG activities integrate with, and compliment, the rest of the AFP. This high state of readiness and the requirement to regularly deploy to operations at short notice requires

a great deal of commitment from its members and their families.

"Our charter encourages collective and individual flexibility and diversity, so while we have a different set of skills to other parts of the organisation, we are definitely a part of the AFP and focused on providing support that services organisational needs," he said.

"Recently, we've been looking at how we can deliver our business more effectively through developing flexible approaches to problem solving. This is reflected in our revised training regime."

Previously, the ORG has relied on recruiting trained tactical operators and specialists. But this year a decision was made to train police joining the ORG using a program developed by the AFP. More importantly, the recruitment and selection of external applicants for employment with the ORG was based on the premise that every member must be an AFP member first and a member of the ORG second. The aim is to provide an approach to tactical operations training that is consistent with broader AFP values and goals, with the first course due to begin in August.

Lasting up to 16 weeks, the course will test the tenacity and determination of those wanting to join the ORG and will give trainers an opportunity to explore and develop the skills and capabilities of recruits in a range of environments. Not everyone is suited to the demands



01: ORG members prepare to board a vessel on Canberra's Lake Burley Griffin as part of a capability demonstration. **02:** ORG members apprehend an armed suspect as part of a capability demonstration. **03:** An ORG member boarding a moving vessel. **04:** Assistant Commissioner Mandy Newton, Commander Paul Osborne and Commander Clive Murray observe aboard the vessel on Canberra's Lake Burley Griffin. **05:** An ORG Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat approaches a ship in preparation for boarding.



placed on them by the ORG, so a key requirement of the new training program is to ensure that new members can work well within the team. They must be capable of performing well across a broad skill set and in any kind of environment.

The successful completion of the course will help to ensure the ORG has met its target of having 154 members by 2011. This gives the AFP a greater degree of flexibility when planning operations both in Australia and overseas.

Superintendent Williams said a three day rigorous selection process was conducted in April to find the

most suitable candidates with the commitment and capacity to work in difficult situations.

“All our members must have the ability to make difficult decisions as part of a team, or as an individual, in highly challenging environments,” he said.

“By expanding the type of assessment we subject the candidates to, we are able to test their response to physical stressors as well as observing their ability to cope psychologically. Like the job, the training will be rigorous. It requires strong personal values and a tenacious determination to succeed.”

Some parts of the course will also include participation by members from the AFP’s partner agencies and the broader AFP. Training alongside the ORG helps to improve their individual skills, but also builds the level of interoperability and understanding between different organisations.

Improving the way it collaborates with international policing agencies is another goal of the ORG. The group aims to be a leader in providing realistic and effective services at all levels of risk to face current and emerging challenges.

“We are striving towards achieving



01: ORG Tactical elements approach a building before entry as part of a capability demonstration. **02:** ORG Tactical elements establish a cordon and enter a building through multiple entry points. **03:** An armed role player awaiting a surprise meeting with ORG tactical elements. **04:** ORG members move toward a building before conducting a tactical entry. **05:** An ORG deployable command vehicle. **06:** Members from across the AFP and Queensland Police at an international negotiators course run by UK police.



best practice in everything we do," Superintendent Williams said.

"This means listening to and learning from those who do things differently, those who are from other countries and other police services, and from those who operate in challenging environments."

Superintendent Williams used the example of a recent training exercise the ORG took part in with tactical operators from the Philippines, as part of a three-day program to discuss shared areas of experience and expertise. This was done to support the AFP Counter Terrorism engagement with police in the Philippines.

"The Philippines police work in very difficult and high risk environments on a regular basis," he said.

"They live it every day and if they are able to share their techniques of working in this environment while we share some of our training skills, it will help both organisations to improve the way they deal with the challenges they face."

As part of its commitment to improving capability through innovative training techniques, the AFP recently conducted an International Negotiators Course.

Held in Canberra, it brought together members from ACT Policing, Serious and Organised Crime, Queensland Police and the ORG. Rather than focusing on traditional community-based scenarios, the course examined the complexities of dealing with international negotiations.

This included the challenges posed by negotiations involving multiple players, negotiating through third-party intermediaries and the challenges of working in foreign or culturally diverse environments. The course included specialists from the United Kingdom's police services who shared their knowledge of managing situations of cultural and political uncertainty, particularly in countries in conflict.

The ORG provides a unique service to the AFP. Its commitment to sustained improvement, and its focus on flexibility to operate with all areas of the AFP and other agencies, will help to build on its reputation for excellence and the ability to get the job done.

