

Project Macer's perfect landing

The finalisation of Project Macer two years' early completes an astonishing success story for the AFP's Aviation function.

When the 2009 Beale Review recommended that the AFP transition to an 'All-In' model for Australia's 10 major airports it created a problem for federal law enforcement. Where do you find 500 new police officers when you need them?

Beale's *New Realities: National Policing in the 21st Century* recommended that security at major airports in the post September 11 world should be policed under a single Commonwealth agency.

The subsequent All-In model meant the former arrangement with AFP, state jurisdictions and protective service officers (PSO) would be replaced with a complete "All-In" sworn AFP uniformed police presence.

While the all-in model is widely accepted as best international practice – the problem remained. Where do you find a new Aviation police force roughly equivalent in size to the ACT's community police force?

Project Macer

In mid-2010, Project Macer was established to make the All-In model happen. A big initiative of Macer was to transition airport PSOs who could become redundant under the new model into the new All-In workforce.

Like all successful initiatives, Project Macer's implementation and lack of ripples means it hasn't attracted too much attention. In aviation parlance it has pretty much flown in under the radar. Now completed – two years ahead of schedule and an estimated \$10 million under budget – you could say Project Macer made a perfect three-point landing.

The most personally satisfying outcome for National Manager Aviation Shane Connelly was the take up of PSOs who transitioned to sworn policing.

"I've felt the PSOs were wonderful throughout this process," Assistant Commissioner Connelly says. "They really did take a leap of faith in the organisation and that paid off for them and it paid off for the organisation."

Under Project Macer, PSOs were given first option to transition as sworn police officers to staff the extra positions needed at airports. However, there was some concern about how many would take up the offer. There was a series of gateways in the transition process. The transition course was 16 weeks – in addition to the member's previous PSO course.

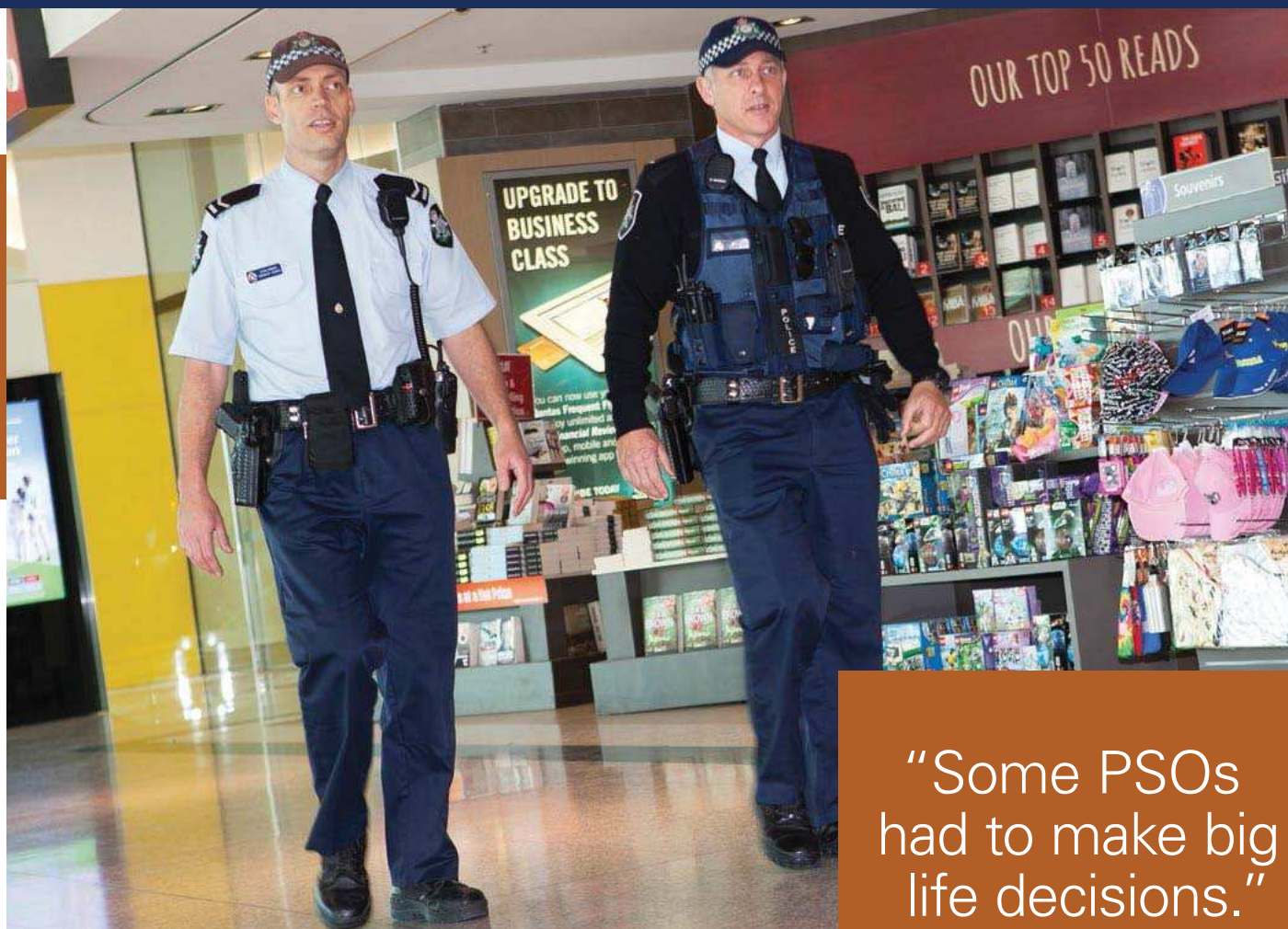
A strong communication campaign made sure the airport-policing community had accurate information. Ultimately, the former PSOs/new constables became the project's best ambassadors. Assistant Commissioner Connelly says it was "tremendous" that there were very few redundancies in what was an extremely large reform. Very little external recruiting was needed to achieve project objectives.

"Some PSOs had to make big life decisions. It's a scary thing for any person faced with potential redundancy. They've got a family to feed, a mortgage to pay. So that was quite challenging.

"But as a group they were up to the challenge and proved to be role models. If you talk to the college, the transition courses were some of the best courses they have run."

Opportunities

The benefit to the former PSOs is the world of increased opportunities as a sworn police officer. Constable Will Collett made the decision to transition specifically as a career opportunity. He graduated in May 2012 and says taking up the offer was a positive step.



Constables Warwick Hodges, left, and Will Collett conduct a patrol at Canberra airport.

“Some PSOs had to make big life decisions.”

“I was an air security officer previously,” says Constable Collett. “It was similar to PSOs from the perspective where you were limited in where you could go and what positions were available within the AFP. That’s not a criticism at all. It’s just that if you wanted to do other things outside that field then it could be limited.”

He says there are now many more opportunities available to him, both in Aviation and the broader AFP. “The major airports like Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane in some ways are like small towns and there is a great deal of work.” Alternatively, Constable Collett says he is looking toward the broader AFP field at some time in the future.

“Just about everything that is on the table within the AFP is now potentially available when you are sworn. That may be determined by your time or ability in the job, but the opportunity is there, where previously it wasn’t. As a result you also feel you can achieve more personally and at the same time contribute more to the broader community and the AFP.”

Assistant Commissioner Connelly says “we didn’t stop the transition on recruitment”. Providing opportunity was integral to the Project Macer. The All-In model provides new universal training opportunities for all Aviation members and the possibility of transfers to and from the Aviation function.

Training, in particular, will also add to the career curve for new Aviation members. He says in raising a unified community, national and aviation law enforcement capabilities “we are training a professional workforce that can be deployed to many roles”. That means building trade craft across the workforce.

Other developing trade skills such as Behavioural Assessment and Security Questioning will be rolled out to every Aviation member to aid behaviour assessment of people at airports. Similarly, Immediate Action Rapid Deployment training is to be implemented across the Aviation function as well. Constables will also be trained in and qualified to investigate small prohibited imports, which takes pressure off Crime Operations and Serious and Organised Crime.

Assistant Commissioner Connelly says these opportunities are not just available to Aviation members. Post-Macer, he wrote to all state office managers and airport commanders to stress that this was an opportunity for all AFP members. “We no longer need to think about Aviation Sydney or Sydney Office – we have to start thinking of AFP resources be they in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth or wherever.

“These opportunities are not just about Aviation. These opportunities are about any AFP member wherever they are.”