



# Cooperation is the secret to AFP success

The AFP celebrated 35 years of serving the nation on 19 October.

By Terry Browne,  
Team Leader Recognition and Ceremonial

Since it began operations on 19 October 1979, the AFP has constantly pursued its mission to provide dynamic and effective law enforcement to the people of Australia, repeatedly proving that it is a leader in law enforcement innovation and achievement.

The AFP was formed in the aftermath of the bombing of the 1978 Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting at the Sydney Hilton Hotel. The new national police force was originally meant to be an amalgamation of the Australian Capital Territory Police and the Commonwealth Police, a move designed to address law enforcement concerns raised by the investigation into the bombing.

As a result, the AFP was created to primarily address terrorism, provide a policing service to the ACT community and investigate crimes against Commonwealth Government programs. Barely three weeks after commencing operations, then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser unexpectedly announced that the AFP would take on drug investigations as well. For some observers, this was a departure from the planned orderly implementation of a new national police service. Drug investigations had not been included in this new federal policing concept for fear that this toxic trade would impact on its operational integrity.



AFP and Dutch police inspect the Malaysia Airlines MH17 crash site.

The AFP's commitment to high standards and the willingness to react quickly to the needs of government were apparent from the outset.

The AFP's commitment to high standards and the willingness to react quickly to the needs of government were apparent from the outset. The unexpected inclusion of drug investigations was facilitated by the transfer of 80 selected Narcotics Bureau officers from Customs; this additional expertise enabled the AFP to quickly engage in major offences in this field.

Being able to react quickly to changing circumstances has enabled the development of a multi-faceted organisation able to effectively engage with new and emerging crime as well as more traditional and established crime types. This ability has not been limited to service to the Australian community;

the AFP inherited the responsibility to maintain an Australian police presence with the United Nations peacekeeping contingent in Cyprus.

This responsibility dated back to 1964 and remains an ongoing commitment. The ability of Australian police to deliver a quality service in the international arena has led to ongoing requests for the AFP to assist in many of the world's trouble spots. Such has been the demand, that in 2004 the International Deployment Group was established to consolidate the specialist training and administration required to support Australian police contingents serving overseas.

While specific strategies need to be developed for each mission, the experience originally gained in Cyprus has been turned to the benefit of many countries including Haiti, Cambodia, Mozambique and Afghanistan. Currently there are AFP contingents serving in Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands with a variety of development programs underway with several countries in the Pacific region. Again the cooperative approach with law enforcement agencies throughout the region has provided a net benefit for all concerned.

Beginning with 2932 staff and a budget of \$67 million, today in order to deal with the demands of investigating crime in a 21st century society, the AFP's 2013-14 annual report listed staffing at 6853 and a budget of almost \$1.4 billion. This growth in staff numbers and budget is a direct reflection of the more complex and diverse investigations being undertaken. To better perform its role, the organisational structure of the AFP has also had to evolve. During various stages of this 35-year journey the entire workforce has been brought under the AFP Act and the 'One AFP' philosophy.

While the 'One AFP' philosophy is now applied to all AFP activities, it historically has been demonstrated in the AFP's approach to significant overseas operations. For example, within hours of the news of the 2002 Bali bombings, the AFP was able to place investigative and support staff at the crime scene at the invitation of the Indonesian Government.

A similar rapid response was possible with the call to render assistance in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. Again as recently as July this year, the AFP was able to have the officers on the way to





AFP forensic officers assist with the Bali bombings investigation.

the Malaysia Airlines MH17 crash site as soon as the mission was endorsed by the Australian Government. If it was the terrorism of the Sydney Hilton bombing that proved a catalyst to create the AFP, it was the world-wide consequences of the terrorism attack on the United States on 11 September 2001 that reshaped the AFP with the integration of the functions of the Australian Protective Service (APS) into the AFP.

Those functions were separated from the AFP in 1984 with the creation of the APS as a stand alone protective service agency. The 9/11 attacks made it clear that to adequately protect Australia, the APS protection functions at airports and government establishments needed to be combined with the AFP counter terrorism role. The successful integration of the APS with the AFP is yet another example of how the AFP can readily adapt to the changing nature of crime.

From the outset, the AFP's first commissioner, Sir Colin Woods, recognised that for the AFP to be effective it had to work in collaboration with all its contemporary law enforcement agencies, particularly Australia's state police jurisdictions.

As the then head of Australia's newest policing organisation, Commissioner Woods immediately set

"... I feel confident that together, and with the support of our well established partnerships, we are well equipped to meet the tasks that lie ahead."

about instigating a cooperative approach with the other law enforcement agencies in Australia.

In his first year as AFP Commissioner he held four formal meetings with the state police commissioners. He said: "There is every reason to believe these meetings have laid the foundations for strong and lasting ties and have served to resolve a number of the difficulties in Commonwealth-state police relations. The assistance readily provided to the AFP in its formative stages by these other agencies is appreciated and will serve to further enhance the growing relationship."

Apart from its own achievements over the past 35 years, the AFP can take pride in its participation in this progressive change in Commonwealth-state police relations. Partly due to necessity, and partly because of the willing adoption of best practice policing methods, relationships between Australian policing agencies no longer exhibit the sometime fractious relationships of the distant past.

Commissioner Andrew Colvin endorsed the ongoing importance of this relationship when he was sworn in as the AFP's seventh commissioner on 1 October 2014. In his first media conference as AFP Commissioner, he said: "The AFP will continue to be faced with unique and difficult challenges; however, I feel confident that together, and with the support of our well established partnerships, we are well equipped to meet the tasks that lie ahead.

"I look forward to working with our local and international law enforcement partners to address threats such as terrorism, organised and transnational criminal groups, and technology-enabled crime.

"I also look forward to the AFP continuing to provide a highly effective community policing service to the people of the Australian Capital Territory. The AFP is a relatively young police force, however, as with every police organisation, its strength lies in the quality of its people."