

# Drugs, tax frauds, computer

## Commissioner talks on tasks, need for federal policing



In this interview for The Canberra Times, the Commissioner, Major-General R.A. Grey, talks to Philip Castle on subjects of wide-ranging interest about the Australian Federal Police and points to some of the trends for the future in law enforcement. Mr Castle, pictured, has been reporting on AFP matters for the past two years.

**You've been in your new job nine months. How do you feel now, looking over those nine months, your own commitment to the job and your own desires for it, the visions that you had when you first came in?**

I came into the job with no preconceived views as to the people. I was aware of the task. I have found it interesting, even fascinating as an immediate task as Commissioner and as a profession. In broad terms I have been delighted with the standard of motivation of the officers throughout the AFP and their dedication to it. At the same time, I think that we need more resources to fulfil the demands placed upon us, and which indeed, have been placed upon us since 19 October 1979, and I'm delighted that, in my view, the government recognises that.

**Do you think your past background as a very successful military officer has helped or made any difference at all to being a police Commissioner?**

I do not believe that lateral entry is the answer through a police force. I do believe that we should have a technical stream of officers. But if you have been used to, for many years, the command of a disciplined force, then you can come in to the police, provided you come in at one end or other of the spectrum. That is the top or at the bottom.

**The Australian Federal Police Association has commented that the job that's expected of the AFP, particularly the increasing role in some areas, hasn't been matched by government funding and by skilled police officers coming into the ranks.**

You bring up a few points there. Let me pick up the point of the association first. I believe the relationship with the AFPA between the top command structure of the AFP and the national executive is both sound and productive, certainly to me. I welcome their intervention in matters that concern them and I've been grateful for their help over the period I've been Commissioner here. I'm sure that the branch executive officers of the AFPA have the same relationship with my regional commanders as I do with the national executive. On your specific point, the government will never give enough resources for me to be happy that I can satisfactorily fulfil all the demands, many of them increasing, that are put upon the AFP in the manner and of the standard I expect the force to perform. The government did give an additional four million dollars which will allow a recruitment of police officers and indeed a slight increase in civilian areas. That civilian area increase will allow a section of police officers to go back into straight, for want of a better word, policing work. That's a good step forward and I believe the government, certainly my Minister, is very well aware of the demands

placed upon the force and knows full well what we need in resources to fulfil those demands.

**Is it a worry to you that some relatively good officers are being attracted to other government departments on much better salaries than they can get in the immediate short-term in the AFP?**

Although we have lost some officers it hasn't been in any sense a drain or a run. I regret any experienced police officer leaving the AFP, particularly if for greener pastures with more money. On the other hand if we did not have the other departments such as Social Security, Department of Health or Medifraud and so on carrying out their own investigations we would involve the AFP investigating a myriad of regulatory offences not really appropriate for a police field and that would also, and I think this important, would detract from AFP resources being deployed on matters of major concern to the government and the Australian community.



**You don't see as a major problem either the level of work that some of these investigation sections are doing or its attractiveness to a small number of AFP officers?**

I don't see it as a major problem. The best way to put it in perspective is that as these departments recruit — and they have recently done in one case from overseas — highly trained ex-police officers they will produce more cases of referral to us. That means a greater drain on our resources or perhaps because of the time it takes us to build experienced levels of investigators, a greater backlog.

**On the associations, the relationship between the local ACT AFPA and the national association, how do you see that as functioning as far as your role as Commissioner is concerned?**

The AFP is a national force and as its Commissioner, I have a national responsibility which incorporates not just the ACT but all States of the Commonwealth and indeed a number of areas overseas, some of which you know have been increased lately. I therefore believe that my relationship with the Australian Federal Police Association should be one directly to the national executive. That relationship has been established. We meet once a month if there is something to discuss but the avenue is open once a month on both sides and I believe it is almost an open door policy on my part subject to other demands. It is amicable and it is accepted as such on both sides. There are times when we will, of course, disagree on matters but I personally see the aims of the Association an

advancement of conditions and welfare and even in industrial awards for officers of the AFP, has been very close to, if not identical with, what I see as the progression of the force. That therefore means that the local branches, you've mentioned the ACT, but there are local branches in every State, should have their detailed day-to-day access when necessary to the local regions, their commanders and other officers in the management chain. Therefore in the ACT I do not allow direct access by the local branch. If they have a matter which is of local interest, they, of course, will deal with the commanders of the ACT. Should it have a national interpretation or importance they would, I assume, place it before their national executive within the AFPA who very promptly, and it has happened on a number of occasions, seek discussions or access to me, either by telephone or directly. From my viewpoint, it works extremely well.

**There appears to be a massive growth in some crime areas in Australia particularly drugs, white collar, computer crime and so on, but what's the overview of what's happening criminally in Australia?**

There is a growth in white collar crime throughout the country, particularly in those areas which we're all concerned about; drugs or drug-related crime, taxation and other frauds relating to major amounts of money. There is even, I believe, an increase, a lot of it drug-related, to the standard of criminal offences of even break and enter and steal and so forth, perhaps connected directly with drugs, of obtaining money and areas to get them. How does that affect the AFP? I think that's the basic question. There is no doubt in my mind that the country needs and deserves an official federal policing system. That is in no way to take away from State police forces the proper policing of their States in every sense. There's something beyond that, not least in the international sense, not least in offences against Federal Acts and other completely Commonwealth areas. Particular areas of concern are drugs and major taxation fraud.



**Is the law adequate to cope with the sort of modern crime that's coming up in these areas?**

I suppose one could say that we don't make the law we purely enforce it, but no doubt all police officers would have a view on it. But it is not the problem of the Federal police except in the proper input to the Law Reform Commission, of which we are properly a part, to comment upon the laws

that are made by the government of this country. We enforce them.

**How big a threat really is organised crime to the Australian citizen?**

How do you define organised crime? Crime has been with us since Julius Caesar and will be with us into the centuries to come. Crime to me is crime whether organised or not. If I take it in the broad connotation in colloquial sense, I believe that crime is increasing, that certainly white collar crime, again using the general euphemism, it seems to be increasing in the society today and if we're not careful as we look forward to the century to come that the world we hand over to our children's children will not be as pleasant or as easy to live in as that which you and I now see.



**Are there groups of people who, with quite well-organised, relatively efficient methods, have combined together to act criminally and to make a large amount of profit or power through it?**

I believe certainly it is true and we've seen and it has been well publicised in the drug scene which is probably the best line. People syndicates, if you want to call them that, have gotten together and out of the drug scene comes many other horrors of crimes, including of course, the laundering of money. That is a fact, but I emphasise the point that it is still a matter of criminal offences. The word organised has been with us from one century or another and will remain with us.

**The computer crime area is a very highly technical skilled area of fraud. Are the police forces generally, not just the AFP, equipped to handle that type of very skilled understanding of what's going on?**

I can't speak for any other police force except the AFP. We are running a course under the auspices of the Australian Police College in computer crime. I'm also hopeful of sending selected officers of the AFP to a course conducted by the FBI next year on that same subject. It is true to say that I would like some more 'experts' in computers and perhaps indeed in the higher levels of accountancy in such matters. There are of course two ways of doing that, the first is to have consultants or people brought in from outside, from the outside world, for a limited period of time, on a consultancy basis. The other option is to train one's own officers which will take a tremendous amount of time and indeed money. We can't afford the time set against the rise in these aspects of crime but I think we need a bit of both and that's what I'm looking for.



# crime a top concern for AFP



**'We need more resources to fulfil the demands placed upon us'**

• *Commissioner, Major-General R.A. Grey ... delighted with the standard of motivation of the officers throughout the AFP and their dedication to it.*

## How effective are the police forces in combating that sort of really sophisticated crime?

Police forces are as good as resources allow and included in those resources are the powers they are given. The resources allowed the police and indeed the powers are never as much we would wish in order to combat crime in the manner that we would like to. That of course, is a matter for government of conflicting priority and it always will be. On resources, it is a matter of finance set against competing demands across the whole spectrum the government has to operate before and with. On a matter of power, there is a civil libertarian if you like, versus those of us who believe that the police are the best people, best equipped people in society to deal with crime.



## How do you feel the AFP relates, gets along with the other State police forces, where it's imperative to combat crime.

Firstly, I don't believe there's any problem whatsoever, and the relationship between the State Commissioners and myself — we have an on-going and firm relationship, both in formal committee and informally — the co-operation and liaison could not be better. It was said some time ago, that perhaps the AFP was entering the province of, and even competing with, State police forces. I don't believe that to be true and my fellow Commissioners have agreed with me that there was no interference or entering into their province within their States. There has been mention of a lack of co-operation between the AFP and the Australian Bureau of Criminal

Intelligence. In the formative stages of the ABCI there were perhaps difficulties between the AFP and that body. It certainly has not been so since I became chairman of the management committee in March 1983. The ABCI is built upon the structure set up by its first director and is now going, forging ahead, with the complete support of the Australian Police Ministers Council, as stated recently in their communique after the last council meeting, and the complete support of all the State Police Commissioners. Discussion, of course, will come up on particular operational matters from time to time, but I am delighted at the rapport and the support for the ABCI among and within the Commissioner's Conferences of Australasia.

## The Premier of New South Wales has been critical of what the AFP has been doing in its telephone recordings. Do you feel that the criticism is justified in any way?

The interesting thing in these matters is, we are only empowered, that is, within the province of the Commissioner at the moment, to seek a warrant under the Telephone Interception Act 1979 in the pursuit of a narcotics offence or alleged offence. Occasionally, as we now know from events in New South Wales, other events will come forward as a side-line of the narcotics investigation. That happened recently in New South Wales. Properly, information that comes that way is passed by me to another police officer. In this case it was to the Commissioner of the New South Wales Police who immediately took proper action within his own jurisdiction.

## On the question of police corruption, how do you regard the AFP as standing on that matter?

It would be foolish of me to say that my force, or indeed, any police force, is entirely free of corruption. A police force is a mirror of the society it represents and of course

there are some people who will fall into temptation. However, I do not believe that the AFP has any institutionalised corruption whatsoever in its ranks and on any scale is an honest, clean and worthwhile force. Having said that, I don't for one moment deny that there may well be some officers performing at a level which falls far short of the standards that I would expect of every single officer of the force. But to emphasise the point, I believe it is very rare.

Criticisms have been made that when there's a national demand, resources have to be got from somewhere and sometimes picking them out of the ACT is a quick solution to it.

Having lived in the ACT on and off since the beginning of 1948 and having been grateful for the standard of policing in the past of the old ACT force, I believe that the standard of policing which the ACT now has, is as good and in resources, better than its ever been. I do not for one moment imply that the standard of the police officers in their day-to-day work is any better than former days. The resources devoted to the ACT now are greater than they were at the time of formation of the AFP and therefore the cessation of the former forces in October 1979. There is, in fairness, a lack of experienced officers, that is, in years of service. But like every walk of life people have to start somewhere and I am delighted with the standard, the motivation and indeed, the ability of young police officers to cope with the demands placed on them from day to day. I would, of course, want a few more experienced officers to carry them on in the path of policing, but we're not doing too badly in that either. However, as a person, I'm never satisfied. We monitor the situation carefully and it probably is true that we have a higher percentage of relative youngsters. That should never be taken, as some people and the public usually do, as a reflection on their ability to carry out their policing tasks. Others have complained about the training aspects not being suitable, now that we are a federal force, for the demands of the ACT. Well let's take law for example. There are 320 periods devoted to law subjects in the 20-week recruit training course at the Weston College.



Only 43 relate to Commonwealth law as distinct from ACT ordinances. Even those are of general application and background. At the same time, every recruit who, on graduation from Weston, goes to the ACT has a local procedures period in which he or she is taught and brings him or her up-to-date on the local requirement of the exact area to which he or she is sent. That period is three weeks. That should give a thorough grounding in the laws and procedures applicable to their area. And of course, as I think you know, they also have an in-service continuation training period in that. Overall, am I concerned about the ACT? Are the residents of the ACT being disadvantaged by the AFP existing? In my view, certainly not. Yes, we sent

some to Pine Gap, yes, they acquitted themselves extraordinarily well and as a result of that, they are far better equipped to deal with whatever demonstration might occur from time to time. I think there were three (last week) within the ACT, in fact in the area of Parliament House. Did the ACT suffer in their absence? No, it did not, but as I repeated earlier, I will never have enough policemen and resources to satisfy all the demands.

## How do you see the priority of the ACT? It must be a conflicting demand at times?

No, I don't believe it's conflicting. I think that it exists in my mind exactly the same as other national offences against Commonwealth borderlines across the whole of Australia and indeed overseas. I would hope that we satisfy the customer, the public, wherever we need to operate, but we will always need more.



## The speculation is that Canberra, or the ACT, will get self-government of some form in the next two, three, four years. How would you see demands for a more autonomous policing role being met?

I can't, of course, prevent the outcome of the task force which has been set up by government into those aspects of self-government for the ACT. I and my two deputies have appeared before that task force to discuss this very question and in broad terms I believe that any return to an ACT police force, separate and autonomous, would mean a downgrading of the current policing abilities and levels for the Territory. It would also mean, in my view, a downgrading of the overall experienced levels and training available to the AFP as we currently view it. With the larger force there are more opportunities for promotion, courses, for experience in the wider atmosphere which can only benefit the ACT when those officers move back to it. One could argue that long experience in the one spot could be set against that. I don't personally believe that to be true. Some of my officers are also appearing before the committee from an overall selection of ranks of the force and no doubt they will give their own views clearly to the Task Force.

## How do you feel the community policing ideas are working in the ACT where police are getting down to a fairly grass roots level of the community needs?

The proposal I support wholeheartedly. But it will never be able to reach complete fruition until, in fairness, we have more resources and trained officers. The government has given me more resources and I am, of course, hopeful that that level of commitment will continue. I can clearly see and respect the views of those citizens in Canberra who would wish on self-government, should that occur, to have their own force. I personally believe that will result in a lowering of the standards of general policing services and experience of officers available to the Territory. I wouldn't wish to see that.