



Commissioner's Message

THE community policing function of the AFP is the lead topic in this issue of Platypus. The allocation of over 25 per cent of AFP resources to community policing is just one indication of the relative importance of this function. In this message I wish to discuss the measure of success of the AFP particularly as perceived by members of the Canberra community.

The term 'public safety' has been applied to the concept of measuring the success of a community police force.

The police officer of today works in a restless society beset with social problems and an ever changing pattern of crime. There are different standards now expected from a police officer to that required by the community five or ten years ago. He or she is called upon to perform a multitude of community services far removed from thief catching. Police business is people business.

The police officer of today spends a vast amount of time attending to incidents involving the public, where diplomacy and tact are required to maintain the peace and good order of the community. The police often come into personal contact with the public when they, the public, are frightened, threatening, abusive, desperate, violent or ashamed. The action taken by police under those circumstances markedly affects the dignity or self-respect of the members of the public involved, and influences their views of the role police play.

The public have in general two distinct and fluid views of their police force; the first is that they welcome police protection, the second a resentment to interference. The views held remain in a state of flux depending on the prevailing circumstances — friend or enemy.

I believe that the service we provide to the community in the Territory is second to none and the level of public safety is equally as high, although there is always room for improvement.

In today's economic climate we can not realistically expect more resources. We must manage what we have efficiently to ensure Canberra's community has a high level of confidence in its police force.

We have witnessed a renewed call by the members of the Legislative Assembly and some elements of the public for the re-introduction of an ACT Police Force separate from the AFP. It was argued that the re-creation of an ACT Police Force would bring about a more community orientated force without the necessity to compete with national priorities.

A separate Police Force for the Territory will bring about a stifling of career prospects for many of its members, with limited promotion prospects and expertise. Progress in career paths and the broadening of expertise are the mainstay of any Police Force and more particularly the AFP. I do not endorse the call for a separate ACT Force.

I believe that the policing of the Territory and its community should be progressive and abreast of the times; I further believe that a return to the old system is retrogressive and will result in a lower standard of service for the community of Canberra.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R.A. Grey', written over a horizontal line.

(R.A. Grey)
Commissioner of Police