

The times are changing for community policing

By Assistant Commissioner Peter Dawson

NOWHERE else in Australia is the AFP so visible and so directly in contact with members of the community than it is in the Australian Capital Territory.

In providing a traditional community policing service, ACT Region members encounter challenges that their fellow officers in other Regions may seldom face.

In meeting these challenges, ACT Region members adopt a flexible attitude towards the methods employed to maintain the peace and to protect Canberra's community.

I suggest that traditional policing approaches are decreasing in effectiveness and risk losing the support of the people they serve. Crime rates and fear of becoming a victim of crime rise, while police budgets shrink.

The propensity to attack these problems by increasing police numbers is not the answer. The answer lies in a greater community involvement in building a safer community.

Community opinion surveys in the ACT show that people have expectations of a better police service; a service that is more caring and personal; a service in which the people can become more involved; a service that is part of the community and not one that is apart from it. In ACT Region we have moved to change the traditional approach to policing so that we can meet the expectations and achieve the approval of Canberra's community.

Traditional 'law enforcement' is about the optimum use of laws and police powers with the minimum use of reasonableness and discretion. It is confrontationalist, isolates police from the community and erodes public confidence.

The record of civil unrest in England and America is testimony that this philosophy is not only out-

dated but endangers community peace because of its 'hard line' approach. ACT Region does not support this philosophy.

While 'law enforcement' will always remain integral to policing, it is expected that a balance must be exercised in our responsibility to enforce the law with a higher priority being given to sharing the responsibility of maintaining a peaceful and safer community with the people. This means police must work with people in solving problems; not without or against them. This 'softer line' approach is commonly referred to as community policing and it is the philosophy we practice in the A.C.T.

We have managed over the years to attract a high level of approval of Canberra's law abiding people. This is good news, however, it can



Assistant Commissioner Peter Dawson

quickly turn into bad news if we rest on our laurels. We must continue to work at living up to the expectations of the people we serve.

A snapshot of Canberra

Australia's capital city, Canberra, is located 300km southwest of Sydney and was founded in 1913.

It was designed by American architect, Walter Burley Griffin, whose entry was chosen as the winner of a world-wide competition. In 1927 Canberra became the seat of Federal Government. Today, Canberra's population is approaching 300,000

Being an inland city, Canberra has a continental climate - hot summers with temperatures sometimes reaching 40 degrees Celsius and crisp, sunny winters with early morning temperatures sometimes below freezing point.

Canberra can best be described as a city scattered throughout parkland. More than half the city and suburbs is made up of green areas.

The city's focal point is an 11km long lake which was created in 1963 by damming the Molonglo River. Its 35km shoreline is spread with lawns and gardens picnic spots and trees.

Carefully designed buildings and monuments dot the landscape and blend with the natural setting. Parliament House, the National Gallery and the Telecommunications Tower on the summit of Black Mountain are highlights of the city's interesting architectural style, while monuments including the Australian War Memorial stand in honour of Australia's proud military history.

Canberra offers the best of both worlds. A cosmopolitan capital crammed with interesting sights and activities yet never far from the peace and simplicity of nature.