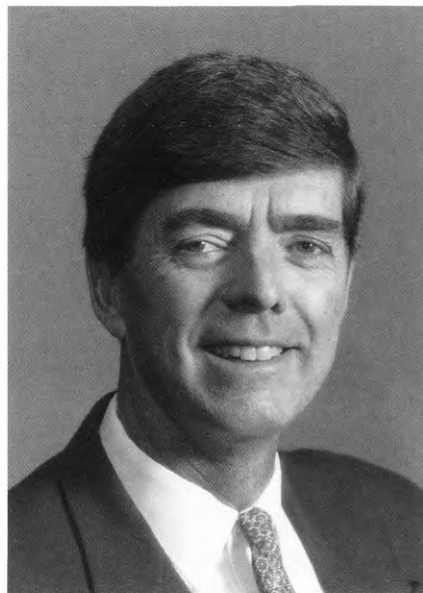


Confronting a complex criminal environment: the AFP adapts to meet the challenges

By Deputy Commissioner Adrien Whiddett



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The AFP operates in a dynamic and continually changing law-enforcement environment and is constantly evolving to meet new challenges.

Its investigations range from those into Asian and South American drug-trafficking groups, international counterfeiting, smuggling and multi-million-dollar fraud against the Commonwealth.

Increasingly, Australia's foreign policy development is being influenced by issues of law, order and crime and in line with this trend the AFP's mandate must continue to evolve.

Current indications are that the global communication, information, and financial transactions networks will be difficult to regulate, and as a result commercial transactions affecting Australia will no longer be physically located within the boundaries of a state or of the nation.

In August 1993, the then federal government requested a review of Commonwealth law enforcement arrangements in view of the increasing complexity of crime, the emergence of new criminal threats, the increasing number of bodies with law enforcement responsibilities, and the significant costs of law enforcement.

It was noted that the Commonwealth's law enforcement arrangements should meet identified needs, should not involve unnecessary duplication, should prevent role confusion, maximise co-operation and co-ordination between involved agencies and governments, should be informed by the best quality strategic intelligence available, and should be based on a clearly articulated, shared vision and

The traditional boundaries for the AFP in its agenda to investigate serious organised crime affecting the Commonwealth are being challenged by new frontiers in the changing face of increasingly global crime.

The emerging jurisdiction for the AFP in this new climate is one which must be seen as being between Australia and the rest of the world and underpins the need for the broad change process presently being implemented in the organisation. Deputy Commissioner Adrien Whiddett looks at the factors behind the current transformation, the mechanisms being used in the restructuring process, and the AFP's growing responsibilities in meeting the threat of global crime.

set of national priorities.

The review steering committee, of which I was a part, published its report the following year and wrote that organised crime in Australia could not be regarded as solely a local phenomenon but was being affected by changes in the international criminal environment.

It said that "with the internationalisation of criminal activity involving the impact of offshore criminal groups trading and operating into Australia, the constitutional reach of the Commonwealth grows accordingly. This too impacts on the future directions of the AFP".

In simple terms, the AFP's emerging jurisdiction must be seen as being 'between Australia and the rest of the world'. It must place emphasis on co-operation with domestic and overseas police law-enforcement agencies and on adding value and quality to the law-enforcement matrix of Australia as it affects Commonwealth interests.

It is essential that there is a clear understanding of the culture and environment in which criminal activity exists and in which law enforcement must operate and in doing so, developing links and good relations with the international law-enforcement community is a key role for the AFP. An important element of this process is the consolidation, consistent with emerging criminal trends, of our already significant presence in the South East Asia and Pacific regions.

Since its inception, the AFP has been sensitive and responsive to the changing needs of federal law enforcement and has undergone various restructuring processes. There is little doubt that few organisations, public or private, have experienced the extent of diversity and intensity of change undergone by the AFP. Indeed, the pace has not only usefully influenced this change, but also the capacity of the organisation and its membership to adapt quickly.

Previously, the emphasis of reforms was on the organisation's architecture and functions, however, the unique challenges facing us in today's environment require a focus on organisation culture.

The impetus for the reforms currently underway was borne of recommendations from the Review of Commonwealth Law Enforcement Arrangements (1994) and the Inquiry into Fraud on the Commonwealth (the Elliott Report, 1993) which made recommendations on the new and enhanced role of the AFP in Commonwealth fraud investigation.

The AFP executive met in late 1994 to consider these reports and debate the organisation's future directions. The group re-evaluated six basic areas: the AFP as an entity, its core business, ethos, key relationships, people and organisational structure.

The change implementation process which followed represents a major reformation of the AFP. It was built on the foundation that greater attention should be given to what may be described as the 'inner organisation', including its culture, definition of roles, personal capabilities of its people, and the growth and professionalism of the individual.

The organisation is now in the final stages of this process which has also incorporated introduction of the best management techniques from the public and private sectors to provide the Commonwealth with a dynamic, respected law-enforcement agency equipped to deal effectively with current and future crime trends.

Among the methods of implementing these changes has been a commitment to fostering a professional ethos embracing the values of integrity, commitment, excellence, accountability, fairness and trust. Exhaustive consultation and participation processes have been seen as essential if 'ownership' of and commitment to the reforms are to be achieved.

The approach to training and development of personnel now aims to imbue cultural change and diversity in all aspects of its programs. A security plan is being implemented to strengthen the relationship between an individual's behaviour and their responsibility to the organisation. It includes the development of a code of conduct and the implementation of a professional reporting policy which also protects whistleblowers within the organisation.

An integrity audit regime to prevent corrupt practices is being adopted and will require all personnel to declare private interests and undergo tests for illicit drugs in the workplace.

The disbanded rigid, functionally-focused branch structures are being replaced by a flexible team-based approach to investigations, in line with the national operations model, enabling investigative resources to be pooled and drawing on the best available skills and expertise throughout the AFP.

It aims to empower individual investigators while emphasising the importance of working with other agencies and in alliance with the National Crime Authority.

The method features the formation of investigative teams when new references are received or as operations develop within a region. These self-contained teams cover the whole investigation of an operation and include staff trained in intelligence, general surveillance and proceeds of crime assets seizure. They have access to specialist support such as lawyers and accountants as required.

Team leaders are selected on the basis of their competency, the complexity of the operation and their skills.

Strategic intelligence is being enhanced to facilitate the identification of criminal enterprises and groups while the AFP's technical, scientific and forensic areas, already of world standard, are continually being improved to keep pace with measures necessary to maintain effectiveness against the changing criminal environment.

The organisation has flattened its rank structure and restructured middle-management responsibilities, adopting titles which describe the responsibilities of a position rather than the rank of the individual. Unnecessary hierarchical and organisational barriers have been removed to streamline the chain of command.

Priorities for best possible outcomes have been established and include the investigation of serious, high-level fraud and of major organised crime such as international drug trafficking.

Resources are being optimised to meet operational priorities and work

demands to achieve the best results for the AFP and its client agencies. Among the strategies being used to achieve this is the creation of a key-client, external reference group which allows client agencies to monitor and provide direct feedback on the effectiveness of AFP priority setting and investigative outcomes.

In recognising the greater diversity, pervasiveness and disruptive impact of organised crime, the AFP must continue to strengthen its international liaison network for all Australian law enforcement organisations. It must widen the role and responsibilities of overseas liaison officers to monitor emerging criminal threats, reinforcing the current emphasis in South East Asia, particularly Vietnam and China.

In locations where resources preclude direct AFP representation collaborative arrangements should be established with other international law-enforcement agencies.

The reform process will ensure that, as the global economy grows and as criminal enterprises cross national and international borders, the AFP can continue to fulfil the increasing demands of its role as the Commonwealth's primary law enforcement agency.

The AFP has set itself the goal of moving from an organisation more familiar with controlling and directing its membership, to one which will lead and enable them. We have no illusions that navigating the way through the many cultural 'reefs' in this process will be without difficulty and frustration. Nevertheless, our resolve is firm.

But as we grapple with our internal reforms, the march of crime continues and we must appreciate the urgency of preparedness.

The AFP's task is to concentrate, in partnership with other law enforcement organisations and aligned bodies, on the increasingly global nature of organised crime, which quite properly should be the highest priority of a national police agency in safeguarding the interests of the Commonwealth.

To meet this challenge we need a workforce which is intelligent, educated and dedicated and an organisational entity that is adaptable and flexible in the ever-changing environments in which we operate.