

State and federal police co-operation essential in fighting global crime

By Terry Browne



AFP's Peter Donaldson, SAPOL's Rob Lean and NCA's John Ganley at the signing of the memorandum of understanding which put the South East Asian Crime joint task force in place.

Hand-in-hand with the federal agency alliance is the AFP's alliance with state police. The interaction between state and federal police is well demonstrated by the operating arrangements between the AFP and SAPOL.

As the oldest centrally organised police organisation in Australia, South Australia Police (SAPOL) is long on tradition, but also quick to embrace innovation.

Now emerging from its own reorganisation process, one of SAPOL's major philosophies has been to find the means to make the law-enforcement dollar go further for the benefit of the South Australian community. Among a wide range of initiatives this has reinforced SAPOL commitment to emphasising co-operation with allied law-enforcement bodies.

Rob Lean, SAPOL Assistant Commissioner (Crime) said that the South Australia Police service has been quick to engage inter-agency co-operation when dealing with major

crime. A change in the notion of what makes for effective policing has also taken place.

"Gone are the days when we considered a 'buy and bust' with a drug dealer as being a good day's police work," he said.

"We now know that is just where the job begins."

He said that crime has taken on a global dimension.

"Now a burglary investigation is likely to turn up an addict who has stolen property to pay a supplier who is in turn a point of contact for an interstate or international crime organisation.

"All our officers are encouraged to view the big picture and this has led to a closer working relationship with the AFP and other state and federal agencies.

"At the senior level, through regular formal and informal contact, SAPOL officers keep apprised of matters of mutual interest with their allied-agency counterparts.

“Turf protection is a thing of the past.”

He said it was a fact that inter-agency co-operation existed long before formal arrangements were put in place.

“Co-operation between SAPOL and the AFP developed out of the simple desire of investigators to see that the job got done,” Assistant Commissioner Lean said.

SAPOL Detective Superintendent Dennis Edmonds (Drug Task Force) agreed: “Putting in place a co-operation policy in some regards has simply formalised networks that have existed for some time.

“When it comes down to it, police want criminals brought to justice. In the end it is of minor importance which is the lead agency in the investigation.”

A similar situation has developed in fraud investigations.

SAPOL Detective Chief Inspector Geoff Eaton, (Fraud Task Force) said that an investigation which clearly starts off as a fraud matter for state police can quickly move into the federal arena if taxation and corporate law violations are detected.

The AFP and SAPOL currently have exchanged two fraud investigators. Senior Constable Wayne Tompkin is based at Central Region head office as a special member of the AFP assisting with federal fraud investigation. Likewise, Federal Agent Trevor Wynn is located with SAPOL as a special member.

Detective Chief Inspector Geoff Eaton said: “Federal Agent Wynn is not only here to learn SAPOL fraud procedures, but to offer up ideas as well.”

Assistant Commissioner Lean said that early co-operation between state and federal authorities is the key to a successful outcome and sharing intelligence at an early stage can help choose the investigative line most

likely to obtain a successful outcome.

“Nothing cements an inter-agency relationship like a successful outcome,” he said.

Inter-agency co-operation

An example of this renewed drive for inter-agency co-operation is the joint task force between SAPOL, AFP and the NCA investigating the effects of South East Asian-based crime on the South Australian community.

Early in 1995 an intelligence assessment was conducted by SAPOL. As a result, the joint task force commenced on June 5, 1995 comprising seven SAPOL members, five federal agents and three NCA members. All task force members were sworn in as members of each agency involved.

As well as maintaining contact with interstate counterparts running similar operations, the South Australian-based joint task force is closely linked to the Australian Customs Service, the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs and the Australian Taxation Office and is able to take on board other agencies as required.

Unique to the task force is an AFP designed data base which has allowed the merging of the existing intelligence owned by each of agency for use by the task force. When the operation is eventually wound up this combined data along with the criminal intelligence collected during the operation will be available to each agency in a form compatible to each agency’s particular computer systems.

Assistant Commissioner Lean emphasised that SAPOL has also had a history of good working relationships with other state police services.

Whatever the inter-agency mix and whether the operation was successful or not, Assistant Commissioner Lean said that mandatory debriefings are now emerging as an important phase of all operations.

“Whether or not the operation was successful, debriefing is a critical phase in developing successful operational processes, and is the only way to continually improve police methods,” he said. □

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