

# The time was right for change

## - the Central Region experience

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General Manager Central Region

**T**he past twelve months in the AFP for the people of Central Region have been challenging, frustrating, rewarding, testing, but mostly satisfying.

Following the September 1994 Executive Officer's Conference at Mollymook on the NSW south coast and the subsequent Change Steering Committee meetings that followed, it was evident the AFP's delivery of its core business, and indeed core business itself, had to change.

The change needed to be fast, structured and implemented within an empowered environment. It was also evident that the change process would appear to be somewhat messy as managers would need to constantly adjust their course and be flexible in the time frames allotted.

In March 1995, Central Region took a good look at its resources and at the best structure within the region to meet the objectives set at the Mollymook conference. With options in mind following an appreciation of the direction the organisation was destined, issues raised at the Change Management Steering Committee meetings were able to be deliberated on by the Regional Management Team (RMT) and implementation stages readily identified.

We had also been hard at work establishing professional formal and informal business partnerships with key agencies in South Australia, particularly SAPOL, NCA, ACS, ASC, ATO, DSS, DIEA and the DPP. If the region could have chosen a time for change, this was the time.

The region took a new approach in setting up staffing its Regional Management Team (RMT). By focusing on the forces for change it was apparent that the RMT would have to be representative of each of the areas of change. Subsequently the RMT now comprises the General Manager, Director Operations, Director Operations Support, the

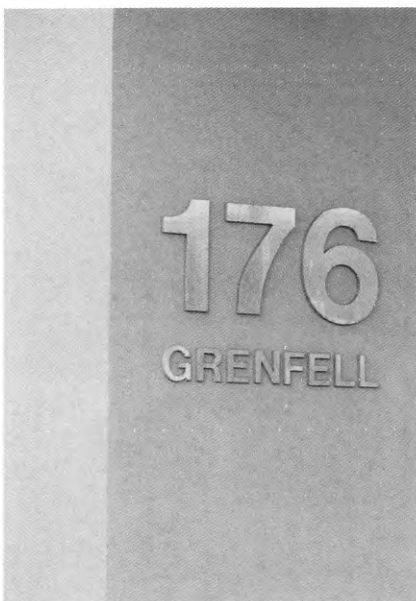


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Regional Executive Officer (REO), Team Leader Regional Co-ordination Centre (RCC), regional AFPA President and the Legal/Policy/Training Team Leader.

In August 1995, Federal Agent Luke Cornelius, the Legal/Policy/Training Officer was appointed Chairperson of the RMT. In October 1995, the RMT commenced meetings in the muster room thus allowing all members of the region access to, and participation in, the previously circulated agenda.

Operations issues, such as considerations of detailed and/or sensitive operation plans, are not discussed at the broader RMT meetings but are resolved by appropriate RMT team member sub-committees. Minor operations issues, which include response-type activities, are normally resolved by the RCC. The RCC has the delegation to approve the allocation of funds in



emergency or straight forward circumstances.

The RMT operates with reference to two agreed goals and respective sub-goals:

#### Goal One

*By acting as a mentor/coach cultivate leadership skills within the context of an empowered team environment.*

- Provide dynamic, innovative and responsible leadership which will serve as a model to others.
- Provide effective communication between the RMT and all members with a view to fostering open and honest debate:
  - to manage the change process through effective communication and the provision of opportunities for feedback and participation in the planning and decision making process;
  - to develop the capacity to monitor change and to measure its importance on the RMT and the way it operates; and
  - identify and market key functions internally and externally to provide best practices.
- Through facilitation sessions enhance the implementation of empowered teams.
- Within the operations model foster the development of generalists through multi-skilling.
- Undertake a training needs analysis in support of core business (Resource Management/Technology).
- To maintain a PMP providing assessments conducive to working in empowered teams.

#### Goal Two

*To improve staff morale by providing a healthy work environment.*

- Review current policy and procedures to ensure compliance with EEO, OH&S and Comcare requirements.

The next step was to review Operations Support to place it in the best position to provide the necessary and essential infrastructure to the operations teams. In May 1995, each area of the traditional Operation Support was placed in teams with those teams responsible for producing



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function statements, or business plans if you like, that outlined those essential functions and information requirements required to meet the demands of the new organisational model.

Attached to each of the function statements were identified team budgets. The budget process enabling the region to have a better than reasonable forecast of running the region's administration for the financial year. Another outcome of this process was that it identified how much of our financial resources could be directly allocated to the region to meet its core business commitments.

A critical and bonus outcome of this process was the removal of duplicate functions and information requirements in the region. This has allowed the region to redeploy six staff members to operations. A significant outcome given the region has an official full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing of 94.

Communication and co-ordination are the two most essential elements of the region developing best practice in a teams environment. Being essential, these two elements are also the two that can disrupt change if they are not properly managed. With the region in a total team environment, we have seen two key changes that are in stark contrast to the historical and traditional line management which dictated the way daily national

policing was conducted.

Firstly, as teams become used to operating within the key principles of TRUST, FLEXIBILITY and ACCOUNTABILITY, the gap between management and the teams at the coal face has widened. Prior to change this gap had always been controlled by our personnel being locked into line management reporting. The spans of the bridge to fill the gap is now in management hands. Secondly, our people are becoming 'individuals'. 'Individuals' in the sense that they are now being allowed to think and act for themselves. Consequently the grouping of these 'individual' skills are providing for the dynamic nature of teams. This is a culture shock to anyone who maintains traditional values and cultures.

The management of communication and co-ordination has not been easy. Key members of the RMT have also become 'individuals'. There have been numerous instances where communication between members of the RMT has broken down. The effect of this is felt within the operations and operations support teams. This difficulty has been addressed by the RMT revisiting our commitment to the regional goals and the dedicated approach required by the Director Operations and Director Operations Support operating in an enhanced co-ordination and coaching role.

The words of Sir Allen Sheppard sums up this situation so well: "Self-generated strategic change requires the stamina, the endurance and the resilience to just keep coming back to that strategy. You get knocked partly off, but you come back again. You get knocked the other way off, but you come back. You're not going to arrive if you get diverted".

The region has implemented a staff career development program. In December 1995 all staff members were involved in a one-on-one discussion with management to identify skills, qualifications, expertise and expectations. This has resulted in a number of changes within the region that will significantly enhance our commitment to unifying our workforce and providing another dimension to

our multi-skilled teams. In March 1996, a similar program will commence with federal agents. The bottom line of the development program is: "We don't really know all our people".

At the RMT meeting on February 16, 1996, a commitment was made to specifically focus on the people in the region for the next six months. With the change process in some sort of control (we will never get it right and we never should), the identification and pursuit of core business, and the initial settling in period within the new organisation model behind us, we can now well afford a review of our position in the organisation and develop our most valuable resources. In addition to these commitments, the region has been involved in a number of multi-cultural seminars and now has an active women's network.

Being part of a region that has been isolated to some degree from a central office, and the larger regions, has a number of down sides. To overcome as many down sides as possible the region has been committed to providing people for various project briefs and other national programs over the past year.

The cost of such a commitment has been returned ten-fold as a result of every such deployment. The exposure and experience each of our staff have gleaned from these commitments could not have been obtained from attending training courses or seminars. □

*Central Region regularly holds training courses in matters of relevance to client and allied agencies.*

