



The work of former AFP Assistant Commissioner Frank Prendergast – and many other AFP members – has seen community confidence restored in the Royal Solomon Islands Police Force.

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The difference in position and capability over the past decade has been enormous and is, in part, the reason that former AFP Assistant Commissioner Frank Prendergast has received the AFP's first 'Order of the British Empire' for services to policing and the community for his efforts in transforming the RSIPF into where it finds itself today.

His work – and that of many AFP members over time – has changed the face, reputation and accountability of the RSIPF, restoring public confidence in the force to its community. The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) has been the driver behind the change, but not the only thing responsible for it.

In his last role in the AFP, former Assistant Commissioner Prendergast (retired) was the the AFP's National Manager Workplace and Development. In this role he was also involved in transforming organisational culture, and says his experience in the Solomon Islands has shown him how important it is to have the backing of a committed team. And in receiving the OBE, which is the equivalent

# ‘Sollies’ OBE: it’s an honour for us all

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of the Order of Australia, from the Solomon Islands’ Government, former Assistant Commissioner Prendergast has a genuine intent to acknowledge the role of others in transforming the RSIPF.

“It took me by surprise to receive the OBE, and I’m quite humbled by the fact that I’ve been awarded the honour. It really reflects on all the good work that was done by many, many AFP people in the Solomons over a long period of time, and also my colleagues in the RSIPF.

“When you look at RAMSI it actually stands out internationally as a very successful capacity mission and a stability operation.

“We restored order, we built the police force in markedly quicker timeframes than people have been able to do internationally – and a successful conclusion of RAMSI last year is testament to how successful the Mission has been, and is evidence of the effort that everyone put into that Mission.

“It is something that the AFP and everyone involved with can be rightly proud of.”

“The rest of my career prepared me for the challenge - my time as an investigator in Melbourne and Adelaide, my time managing Adelaide and Melbourne offices, National Manager Counter Terrorism, National

Manager (former) International Deployment Group and National Manager Operations Support all gave me the tools that I needed when I went into the Solomons.”

## Elections the key

The 2014 Solomon Islands elections were something of a turning point for the RSIPF and then newly appointed Commissioner, Frank Prendergast, who was sworn in August that year.

Concurrent organisational, cultural and operational challenges awaited, along with pressing upcoming events and the ongoing development of the RSIPF toward an impending ‘draw down’ of the major role played by RAMSI to a Solomon Islands Police Development Program (SIPDP) in 2017.

But first on the agenda was the looming national election in November 2014. Ensuring the elections were safe and secure was a test the RSIPF had to pass.

The force was already under pressure with allegations that it was unresponsive and lacking in discipline. The community was concerned about whether the RSIPF could manage. There was also criticism, unfair in Assistant Commissioner Prendergast’s view, over its management of the April 2014 floods and subsequent riots.



Top: Solomon Islands Police Force Commissioner Walter Kola presenting AFP Assistant Commissioner Frank Prendergast with his OBE.

Bottom: 2014: AFP Assistant Commissioner Frank Prendergast accepts the Sword of Allegiance from Royal Solomon Islands Police Force Acting Commissioner Juanita Matanga during his swearing in.

Right: 2014 – AFP Commander Greg Harrigan welcomes extra AFP support staff to the Solomon Islands ahead of the country's General Elections.



Being ready for the completion of the RAMSI mission in mid-2017 was a national priority and concern. “Everyone’s minds go back to the [election] troubles in 2005-2006,” he said.

“The police force was under a lot of pressure because of discipline issues and the accusations that they were non-responsive – all these types of factors.”

Not only were the elections successful – but the RSIPF earned international praise for its operational conduct. Importantly, the Solomon Islands community found new confidence in its police force.

Former Assistant Commissioner Prendergast says the missing ingredient was appropriate and accountable leadership, which had led to discipline issues and a lack of accountability, which in turn resulted in inconsistent and at times sub-standard performance.

Developing the appropriate leadership team and restoring standards was the absolute key priority, and while this was an ongoing endeavour over the next two-and-a-half years, it paid almost immediate dividends.

“When I arrived I commenced immediately renewing and developing the leadership team as well as enforcing basic standards and the performance of the police force improved quite remarkably and rapidly,” he says.

Right: The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force has been delivering cyber safety information courses to community schools since 2014.



Above: 2016 – Royal Solomon Islands Police Force Commissioner Frank Prendergast addresses guests at an RSIPF event.

Below: 2015 – Royal Solomon Islands Police Force Commissioner Frank Prendergast joins Solomon Islands Government officials and then Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands Special Coordinator Justine Braithwaite to open the new RSIPF headquarters on the island of Malaita.



“Now that doesn’t happen because one person comes in. That happens because the latent capability exists and it just needed the right leadership approach to bring it out.

“It also occurs because the RSIPF has a lot of very talented and committed staff who were trying to do the right thing, and because the PPF has been working hard for a long time to develop RSIPF capacity and capability.

“I was in the fortunate position of being able to build on the good work of a lot of people so my main role was to build an environment that enabled the potential that existed to be realised.

“In this I had a lot of valuable support from a range of Participating Police Force and RSIPF officers particularly the Commander PPF Greg Harrigan, and Deputy Commissioner Juanita Matanga.”

### Remarkable progress

The progress of the RSIPF since the 2014 elections has been remarkable. Former Assistant Commissioner Prendergast said the RSIPF has transformed from being a major receiver of aid to an RSIPF that is increasingly training other Pacific nations.

As RAMSI transitions into the SIPDP, Solomon Islands will still look to its partners, particularly Australia and New Zealand, for support. But that support will be much more in the nature of capability and

capacity development rather than operational policing.

“The RSIPF is looking to the new program to build on the partnership that exists with the PPF, and to focus on building RSIPF’s capability, improving RSIPF corporate support and assisting with the implementation of a ‘Crime Prevention Model’.

“The bottom line is,” Assistant Commissioner Prendergast says, “The RSIPF has been working without a lot of operational assistance - for the past three years, particularly.

“I am pleased to say that the RSIPF Executive and the police force have managed all its competing priorities very well, and I believe there is a growing confidence within the police force that ‘yes, we can do this’.”

“It is very clear to me that with an appropriate leadership team in place, the work that RAMSI has done over the years has really paid dividends which you can see in the development of the RSIPF today.

“Everyone who has been involved in the PPF and RAMSI should be very proud of what has been achieved.”

AFP Commissioner Andrew Colvin said he was proud to see the Solomon Islands Government recognise AC Prendergast with an OBE.

“I congratulate him for his outstanding service to the people of the Solomon Islands and his ongoing leadership role with the AFP. It again demonstrates the significant, positive outcomes the AFP can achieve when it works closely with its international partners to address transnational crime, and in this case, regional stability,” he said.

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“It is something that the AFP and everyone involved can be rightly proud of.”



2016 – Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) Commissioner Frank Prendergast inspects an RSIPF guard of honour.