

MODERN POLICING IN THE KIMBERLEY

On 7 July 2004, speaking on behalf of the Western Australian Police Service, Commander Murray Lampard APM delivered a PowerPoint presentation to the Kimberley Society. At a personal level, he has served as a detective for most of his career – a period of almost 30 years. As a regional commander, he has responsibility for the huge North - Eastern Police Region, which includes the Kimberley, the Pilbara, the Mid West Gascoyne, and the Goldfields Esperance Districts. Almost 42,000 of the 210,049 residents in the North - Eastern Police Region live in the Kimberley District. Superintendent Steve Robbins is the senior officer for the Kimberley. Superintendent Alan Gronow APM, who preceded Steve Robbins, is now the senior officer for the Mid West Gascoyne. To provide some context, Commander Lampard spoke about the challenges presented by the diversity of policing. Most people are aware that crime is increasing but not everyone realises that the police have a lead agency role in emergency management. In tropical cyclones, for example, police work with volunteers and local government to evacuate people and maintain control. Commander Lampard tracks cyclones as part of his job so that the police can be ready to deal with any impact on a community or a town. Other joint exercises include police working with CALM officers to remove or kill rogue crocodiles and to search for the bodies of people taken by those reptiles. In April 2003, the police, acting on a CALM order, shot a four-metre crocodile on Cable Beach.

Other aspects of policing for which Commander Lampard holds responsibility include the provision of services relevant to terrorism, coastal activities, indigenous communities, and the safeguarding of tourism. As a trained anti-terrorism commander, he works with other agencies and emergency services to provide training, awareness, and risk assessment relevant to terrorism incidents. Those activities included monitoring the risk of terrorists attacking the cruise ships that visited Broome after the Bali bombing.

Coastline and state security involves police officers putting measures in place to prevent the interruption of shipping associated with the exploitation of natural resources. The police also work with Coastwatch in the management of illegal entry. With regard to that activity, members will recall that John Rogers spoke to Kimberley Society in June 2003 about Coastwatch activities of the 1980s. Since then, and particularly in the wake of the bombings that have occurred in Asia, security in northern Australia has been a matter of much greater concern.

The large budget available for remote area policing provides a six-seater Cessna Navaho aircraft to assist with delivery of police services to nine localities in the top half of the state. Those localities are Balgo, Bidadanga (Lagrange), the Dampier

Peninsula, Kalumburu, Warmun (Turkey Creek), Warakuna, Kintour, Warburton, and Jigalong.

The way that the police deal with cultural issues that include traditional lore and tribal punishments in indigenous communities has changed. When it is taken into account that the Kimberley has some 122 indigenous communities, and that 30,469 of the people within the North - Eastern Police Region are indigenous, it is not surprising that all officers who serve in remote localities receive cultural awareness training. They receive generous financial packages for working in those localities but they are on call seven days a week. Members will recall that Inspector Martin Cope provided a personal view of remote policing in northern WA in August 2003 and that, whilst he obviously enjoyed that work, he showed that it can be very demanding.

A lot of effort goes into building rapport with children in remote communities and, in the towns, police work with indigenous people to manage alcohol abuse. The provision of sobering up shelters plays a large part in that process. Commander Lampard commented on the excellent job done by Police Aides and Wardens and he noted that, on a recent visit to the north, the Minister for Police, Michelle Roberts, presented Malcolm Dann with an award that recognised his long term service (12 years) as a Warden to Beagle Bay.

In safeguarding tourism, the police face pressure from the increasing number of visitors who arrive from cold climates to experience the outback. Not all are prepared for the intensity of the heat and, as a result, some need to be rescued. Australian tourists who lack tropical experience also strike problems.

In the Wet season, the police need to monitor situations where floods wash away sections of roads or bridges. On the Gibb River Road, only six hours of rain can fill a creek bed with water and wash out the road. Stranded tourists might then need to be rescued or supplied with food and water. At other times, people come to grief trying to cross fast-flowing rivers. In January 2003, after a vehicle washed off a crossing into the Elvire River, police officers worked with the Shire of Halls Creek, community members, and the Fire & Emergency Services Authority to rescue nine people. Hire vehicles are prominent in such incidents, and in others in which the tide stands vehicles that have been taken onto beaches or mudflats. Lake Argyle is big enough to require the occasional search and rescue operation, and other rescues take place in remote localities that include Wolfe Creek Crater.

Another area of work that taxes the police is the massive escalation of crime associated with drug use and substance abuse. The police use a harm minimisation approach in dealing with both drug users and people affected by substance abuse. In particular, they try to protect women and children against a range of abuses.

The evening's talk was mostly serious but Commander Lampard managed to slip in a few light-hearted anecdotes. He finished by remarking that modern policing in the Kimberley is "not all work and no play". There is a lot to be said for working in a place where a person can drop a line in the water and come up with a marvellous Red Emperor or Barramundi.

Cathie Clement

Editor's note: Since presenting his talk, Mr Lampard has been promoted to Assistant Commissioner and the old North - Eastern Region has been merged into a new super portfolio of Regional Western Australia. Only the immediate metropolitan area remains outside the new super portfolio.