

# PREVENTING VIOLENT CRIME IN AUSTRALIA: THE WORK OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON VIOLENCE

by  
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## 1. THE WORK OF THE AUSTRALIAN CRIME PREVENTION COUNCIL

Let me begin by expressing my warm thanks to the Australian Crime Prevention Council (APMC) and its members for inviting me to address this important conference. My own involvement with the ACPC goes back more than two decades. I still recall with pleasure attending my first ACPC conference in Canberra in the 1960s. I also have more recent memories of the last conference held in Adelaide in 1987. I attended and participated briefly in that meeting, having only just arrived back in Australia after a rather long absence on the North American continent.

The ACPC could have chosen no more challenging and timely topic for this current conference than that of '*Crime: Preventable or Inevitable*'. I am sure that I need to remind no-one in the audience of the deep public concern felt by Australians about the state of crime in the nation, and especially violent crime. All of us are dedicated to finding effective ways, within the framework of our democratic society, to reduce the amount of crime in our communities and to make Australia a safe and pleasant place in which to live.

Abroad, our image remains that of a country which is not deeply troubled by the problems of social disorder and conflict afflicting so many other parts of the world. It is this image, in part, which attracts to our shores increasing numbers of visitors who are discovering the natural beauties of this remote continent. However,

it takes little to change this positive image and to turn Australia into one of those pariah nations which no-one wishes to visit. Thus for both internal and external reasons there are strong motivations for us to do everything we can to alleviate public fears and concerns about crime.

I am really here today wearing two hats – that of Director of the Australian Institute of Criminology and also Chair of the National Committee on Violence. Before turning to my role on the Committee I would like to mention briefly some of the recent work of the AIC regarding crime prevention. The Institute is committed to the development of a comprehensive, practical and policy-oriented program of crime prevention. Much of our research and related work is now being directed to this area. For example, you may have already had an opportunity to see one or more of our new series of publications which deal directly with crime prevention topics. We launched this series last year with a small monograph discussing the troubling problems of missing children and detailing ways in which parents and citizens could assist in preventing children going missing in the first place, or when they do get lost ensuring that they are found as soon as possible.

A few weeks ago we issued the third in our crime prevention series – a monograph titled *Designing Out Crime*. This particular publication is intended to provide citizens, and professional groups and bodies like town planners, architects, builders and developers, with practical suggestions about how we can utilise environmental

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appointments in the Departments of Sociology and Political Science at the University of Washington in that city. He returned to Australia in 1977 to become Visiting Professor in the Department of Legal Studies at LaTrobe University in Melbourne. He spent two years as a Commissioner of the Australian Law Reform Commission with special responsibilities for the Reference on Sentencing. Since 1980, he has been Professor of the School of Criminology at the Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. He is on leave of absence from that University in order to discharge his present duties with the Australian Institute of Criminology.

He has published many works and it is with pleasure that we avail ourselves of his permission to reproduce his paper on "Preventing Violent Crime in Australia: The Work of the National Committee on Violence". He occupies the Chair of that Committee.

design to reduce the risks of crime victimisation, including violent crime. The thesis which lies behind this whole series is very much that crime is not inevitable – it is preventable!

## II THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON VIOLENCE

I must now turn away from general crime prevention issues to the much more specific area that I want to cover in my address today, namely, a description of the work of the National Committee on Violence (NCV) and its role in seeking to prevent violent crime in Australia.

It is perhaps fitting that I should speak about this topic here in Melbourne for, unfortunately, it was a series of events that occurred in 1987 in this generally peaceful and beautiful city which provided the catalyst for the establishment of the NCV. Those events were, of course, the two tragic mass shootings which occurred in Hoddle and Queen Streets in August and December 1987 respectively. These two shootings shocked the nation. They made us very much aware that events we had previously witnessed on our television screens occurring in far off parts of the globe could occur within the heart of one of our largest metropolitan areas. The impact of those two terrible crimes is still being felt by the victims and families of those who survived. But the shootings acted as a stimulus for positive action. In December of 1987 the Prime Minister convened a special summit meeting of the nation's leaders to discuss the state of violence and especially the need for gun control and other measures to deal with the problem. It was from this summit meeting that the recommendation flowed that a national committee should be established to enquire into the state of violence, its causes and prevention. Following further negotiations between the Prime Minister, the Premiers and the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, an announcement was made by the Federal Minister for Justice, Senator Michael Tate, in October of last year of the establishment of the NCV.

## III. TERMS OF REFERENCE, MEMBERSHIP AND FOCUS OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON VIOLENCE

In setting up the NCV the nation's leaders were determined that, to the greatest degree possible, its membership comprise persons who had some special knowledge and interest in the area under review. In addition to a core membership agreed to by all jurisdictions, each jurisdiction was also invited to nominate a further representative if it so desired. With the exception of Queensland each jurisdiction has in fact taken up this invitation and the Committee's total membership currently stands at 13 persons.

Between them the Committee members have a rich breadth of experience and knowledge about violence, its causes and methods of prevention. Disciplines represented include law, medicine, psychology, sociology and social welfare, while the professional positions occupied by members range from the Commissioner of Police for the Northern Territory, to the Director of Forensic Psychiatry Services of South Australia, to the Convenor of the National Women's Consultative Council. You will find a complete listing of the members and their qualifications in a small brochure, copies of which are available at the back of the conference room.

This brochure provides an outline of the very broad terms of reference given by governments to the NCV. You will see that these terms of reference ask the Committee to examine:

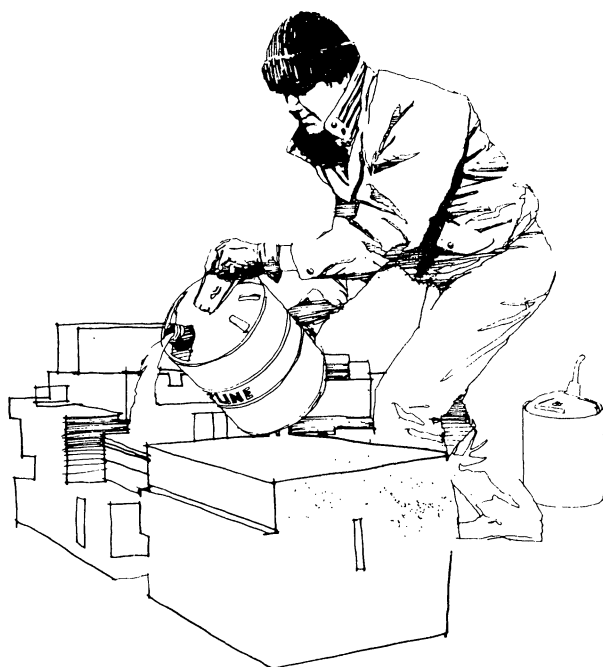
- The contemporary state of violent crime in Australia;
- Related social, economic, psychological and environmental aspects;
- Gender issues in violence;
- The impact of the mass media on the incidence of violence;
- The effect of drugs and alcohol on violent behaviour;
- Attitudes to violence among children and adolescents;
- The vulnerability of violence on particular groups;

- The development of strategies to prevent violence;
- The need for support and assistance for victims of violence;
- The need for special measures in the treatment of violent offenders.

The Committee is required to report its findings regarding these matters by December 31 of this year. This represents a formidable challenge. It is a challenge which is further affected by the relatively slim resources provided to the Committee to conduct its work. The funding for the NCV is being provided jointly by all governments with the Commonwealth contributing fifty per cent of the funds and the balance being paid on a pro rata basis, according to population, by each of the remaining jurisdictions. The total budget allocated is \$160,000. In addition, the Australian Institute of Criminology is providing secretariat services to the Committee as well as a range of other assistance including, as you will see from the brochure, organising a series of seminars and a National Conference on Violence.

A great deal can be done with these resources but it is interesting to observe that a number of other official bodies which have been given a mandate to review various aspects of violence which overlap with those of the NCV have also been much more liberally funded. For instance, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT) which in August of last year was given a reference to consider the impact of televised violence received about \$750,000 for research alone. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody is also examining aspects of violence affecting Aboriginals in our society and they have clearly received much more substantial funding than that given to the NCV. Looking overseas, a National Academy of Sciences Committee has recently been set up in the United States to look at violence-related research in that nation. They have received a budget of over US\$800,000 and have a reporting time frame of two years. Another committee is currently considering street violence in West Germany and that committee has a budget, I understand, exceeding US\$2 million.

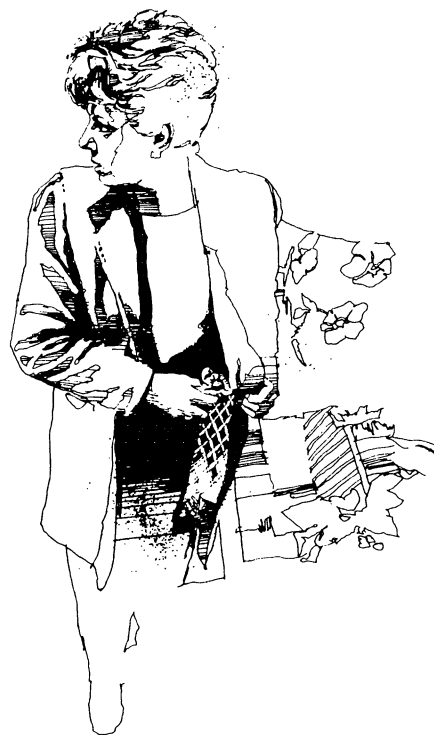
You will gather from all of this that not only are the funding levels associated with these various inquiries rather different but also that the problem of violence is one that is under serious consideration from a number of national and international perspectives. The NCV is very conscious of the need to maximise the resources that it does possess and to ensure that it does not duplicate or conflict with studies and reviews of violence being undertaken by other authoritative groups. Thus the Committee has



established a close liaison with the ABT and has received most valuable assistance from that body, including conducting a recent joint seminar on the topic of *'The Reporting of Crime and Violence'*. A joint publication venture is also planned with the ABT in the near future.

The NCV has also received very valuable assistance from the Parliament of Victoria's Social Development Committee which has been inquiring into strategies to deal with the issue of community violence. The Victorian Committee has now published three excellent reports dealing with various aspects of its terms of reference including, most recently, a report on the portrayal of violent behaviour in the mass media and entertainment industries. The NCV is very fortunate to have as one of its members Ms Judith Dixon, a former Chairperson of the Victorian Social Development Committee.

Strong collaborative ties have also been established with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission's inquiry into racist violence in Australia. The Commission will be, in company with the ABT, involved in the sponsorship of a National Conference on Violence which is to be held in Canberra from October 10-13. A very comprehensive program has been arranged for this conference, which is to be opened by His Excellency the Governor-General of Australia. We anticipate attendance by a most impressive array of researchers and policymakers concerned with violence issues in Australia and overseas. Senior members of both the National Academy of Science Committee in the United States and the Federal Violence Commission in West Germany have accepted invitations to participate in this conference.



#### IV. FORUMS, SUBMISSIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

In order to obtain the maximum amount of information, advice and guidance from all those involved with and concerned about violence issues, the NCV has developed an extensive program of consultation, research and publication. This program includes:

##### (i) Community Forums

A series of community forums are currently in progress which have been designed to give local policymakers, professionals, interested organisations and members of the public the opportunity to meet with the Committee. Very successful forums have now been held in Canberra, Adelaide, Perth, Sydney, Brisbane, Darwin and Alice Springs. On July 24 a further community forum is to be held here in Melbourne and then on July 26 the final forum will be conducted in Hobart.

The Committee has learned a great deal from these gatherings. They have been well attended in each venue and have attracted submissions from both professionals and lay persons. The Committee has, in particular, received very moving accounts from the victims of violence about their traumatic experiences and has obtained a much better understanding of the terrible realities of the trauma associated with violent crime. The Committee has also been able to obtain at first hand some better understanding of the scope and dimensions of the problems associated with violent crime in different parts of the country. I shall say more about this issue in a moment.

##### (ii) Submissions

The NCV has advertised as widely as possible for written submissions to be made to the Committee by interested individuals and organisations. A proactive approach has been made to various groups and individuals who are believed to have special expertise or knowledge relevant to the Committee's terms of reference. The Committee has also met in person with a number of experts at its continuing series of formal meetings spread over its entire life span. These experts have included persons involved with sport in violence, the treatment of violent offenders, violence on transportation systems and racist violence. The published deadline for submissions is now July 31, but even later offering would still be gratefully received by the Committee.

##### (iii) Research

The limited funding provided to the Committee has not allowed it to sponsor any original research studies. However, through the good offices of the Criminology Research Council a number of studies have been launched into different aspects of violence and it is hoped that the researchers involved in these studies will at the very least be able to report some of their preliminary findings to the Committee during the course of the National Conference on Violence in October. Some of the studies which will be viewed with great interest by the Committee include ones looking at violence associated with public drinking facilities; violence amongst street kids; violence directed towards Aboriginal women; and violence in certain workplace settings like health care facilities and in the transportation industry.

##### (iv) Seminars and Conferences

Some details have already been provided on the seminar and conference activity associated with the Committee's work. A seminar on alcohol and crime considered the associations between alcohol use and violent behaviour at a gathering in Perth in April of this year. In May, in association with the ABT, a seminar on the reporting of crime and violence was conducted. This seminar was an especially lively and provocative event which brought together some of the leading media personalities in the country to discuss this controversial topic. The seminar also heard an excellent presentation from a senior member of the management of the BBC about that well known organisation's approach to the handling of violence in its news presentations. Guidelines developed by the BBC on the subject seem likely to be influential in the deliberations of the ABT and its consideration of violence on the electronic side of the media.

##### (v) Publications

At its first meeting in November of last year the NCV resolved that it would give strong emphasis to what it perceived to be its educative function. This function consists of seeking to provide members of the community in Australia with objective and current information about issues associated with violence. The Committee decided that in addition to its final report to governments it would seek during the course of its life to publish a series of documents

discussing different aspects of violence. Subsequently, two series of publications have emerged from the Committee – first a set of short monographs and second a set of briefer discussion papers titled *Violence Today*.

Two monographs have now been released – one titled *Violence in Australia*, and the other *Victims of Violence*. The release of the latter document at the last meeting of the Committee held in Sydney in late May, reflected another decision made by the Committee to give early consideration and emphasis to the needs of the victims of violent crime. The monograph, written by the Research Director of the NCV, Dr P.N. Grabosky, contains a comprehensive overview of the status of various services provided to crime victims in Australia. It is suggested that these services are still far from complete and that much remains to be done to alleviate the plight of both the victims of violent crime and other types of offence. A third monograph is planned for release within the next six to eight weeks which will deal with the topic of the treatment of violent offenders.

Two issues have appeared in the *Violence Today* series – one over-viewing the state of violent crime in Australian society and the other considering the very important and now well publicised topic of domestic violence. A limited number of copies of both of these *Violence Today* publications are available here today at this conference. You may also obtain copy of the monographs by writing directly to the AIC at PO Box 28, Woden, ACT 2606. Unfortunately, we are not able to distribute these publications without charge because of our restricted budget. Further issues in the *Violence Today* series are planned dealing with topics like sport in violence, racist violence, violence in television, workplace violence and political violence.

Plans are also now well afoot for the preparation of the Committee's final report. It is anticipated that this report will fall into three principal parts – an analysis of the state of violence; a review of the causes of violence; and a presentation of the Committee's suggestions and ideas about how violence can be prevented or reduced in our society. I cannot at this stage say on behalf of the Committee what each of these reports will contain since we are still very much in the midstream of our Committee activities and deliberations. However, I will say from a personal perspective something about each of these three broad areas which are to be covered by the Committee in its final report.



## V. THE STATE OF VIOLENCE

The task of making an objective assessment of the state of violence in the nation is proving to be both difficult and controversial. The difficulty springs principally from the lack of accurate, reliable and uniform crime statistics of all types in this country. The inadequacies of the statistical data relating to the state of crime in Australia is really a national disgrace.

As most of you here will be all too well aware, the movement to try and remedy this situation has been seeking to make an impact for more than two decades. I can recall writing one of my first articles, in collaboration with my friend and former colleague at the University of Sydney Law School, Gordon Hawkins, on the need for uniform crime statistics in the mid 1960's. Only in April of this year the latest in a long series of reports dealing with this topic was published by the National Uniform Crime Statistics Committee.

This report, which I understand has received the approval of the Australian Police Ministers' Council, proposes the establishment of a new National Crime Statistics Unit within the Australian Bureau of Statistics to resolve, finally, the problems associated with the compilation of a national set of uniform crime statistics. One hopes, with some fervor, that this is the final chapter in what has been a rather sorry story of official inaction and neglect.

Within the limitations set by the status of the crime statistics, some general statements can be made about trends in violent crime.

### (i) Homicide

Almost certainly contrary to public understanding, and in a rather encouraging way, the most serious of all forms of violent crime, homicide, has proven to be remarkably stable in its incidence over the past decade or so in Australia. It is probably difficult to believe this statement after one has read yet another gruesome account of some murder splashed across headlines in the media. Nonetheless, Australia's overall homicide rate remains well below that of many other countries, including the United States. Just how different these rates are can perhaps be most graphically demonstrated by looking at the homicide rate in just one city in the United States – the capital Washington DC. In 1988 there were 372 homicides in Washington DC, a city with a population of about 622,000. This figure exceeded in total all homicides committed in Australia in the same year.

Statistics like these should not make us at all complacent but it is important to put our own problems of homicide in some form of perspective. Although we do not have at this stage any national study of the context in which homicides do occur in Australia some excellent work has been done in New South Wales and Victoria to tease out the social and allied realities behind the formal statistics.

In New South Wales the work of Alison Wallace and the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has been of particular interest and importance, while in Victoria the Law Reform Commission, under the guidance of Dr David Neal, has provided some very interesting information about local homicides. The data produced from these sources confirm that both the offenders and the victims of homicide are most typically people who know one another and, in many cases, live with one another. The greatest risks of becoming a homicide victim, or for that matter the victim of most forms of violence, come from family and social settings. In the case of homicide the perpetrators are overwhelmingly males, and the victims are, disproportionately, females. Guns are all too frequently the favoured weapon in homicides.

A great deal remains unknown about homicide in Australia and the gaps in knowledge are ones which need to be filled rapidly if sensible policy decisions are to be taken to reduce both fatal and non-fatal violence in our country. One proposal which has already been advanced by the Australian Institute of Criminology to the Australian Police Ministers' Council is for the establishment of a National Homicide Monitoring Scheme which would examine in detail, on an annual basis, the nature of crimes of this type and the way in which they are dealt with by the criminal justice system. It is



only through a regular monitoring program of this type that it will become possible to identify trends within homicides and to pinpoint specific methods by which such offences might be reduced. In the United States a monitoring function of this type is already undertaken by the highly reputable Disease Control Centre based in Atlanta, Georgia.

## (ii) Other Violent Crime

The situation in regard to trends in other forms of violent crime are not as encouraging as is the case with homicide. From the data available it would appear that there have over the past decade or more been significant increases in serious assault, sexual assault and armed robbery in Australia. These increases seem to be ones which cannot be explained entirely by vagaries in reporting practices and behaviours. However, with the exception of the crime of robbery which is believed to be relatively accurately and reliably recorded in the crime statistics, there are problems associated with the interpretation of the nature and dimensions of the increases experienced in serious assault and sexual assault.

So far as serious assault is concerned, there are clearly differences in the interpretation given to this particular type of offence among Australian jurisdictions. There has also been a concerted movement in the past five years or so to encourage much greater reporting and recording of assaults occurring within the context of the family. In the case of assaults upon children, mandatory reporting practices have been introduced in many Australian jurisdictions. There have also been strong pressures directed towards the criminal justice system to deal with domestic assaults as criminal rather than 'private' events. These developments may, in turn, have had quite a significant impact on the reported levels of this category of violent crime.

In the area of sexual assault there has been a longer term legal and social movement designed to both broaden the concept of behaviours brought within the framework of what was formally termed rape, and to encourage greater reporting by the victims of offences of this type. The outcome may well have been that far more of these offences now come to the notice of the police, and are reflected in the crime statistics. It is also to be remembered, although often ignored in practice, that there are widespread variations in the definition given to sexual assault among Australian jurisdictions. Thus comparisons between the rates of sexual assault, and serious assault, in various jurisdictions are fraught with peril.

## (iii) Street Violence

There is little doubt that the form of violence most feared by the public, and certainly most publicised in the media, is that occurring in public places and committed by total strangers. The most horrific illustrations of such attacks are to be found in those which took place in Hoddle and Queen Streets. But we also tend to receive quite frequent accounts in the media of random attacks occurring in parks, streets, transportation systems and other public facilities. It is attacks of this type that create great community alarm and which tend to result in an increasing underutilisation of public facilities because of the fears of becoming a victim of crime. Our community forums have indicated that these public concerns are greatest in the large metropolitan areas, and especially in Sydney and Melbourne. In Sydney we have been informed that usage of the various transportation systems has dipped quite significantly after normal business hours and 'all but the brave or foolish' avoid using trains and buses late at night.

We are still in the process of gathering information on this topic and I do not wish at this stage to draw any conclusions about the nature and dimensions of street violence. However, it is apparent that information about this topic is at best fragmentary and often impressionistic. Systematic records are either not kept or are unavailable concerning the situational context in which violence occurs in general. Without much more substantial computerisation of official records, and substantial investment in research, this situation is likely to prevail for some time into the future. We have certainly been told by persons who are in a position to observe trends in violence, including law enforcement officials and judicial officers, that there does seem to have been an increase in what has been described as random and 'purposeless violence'. We have also been told that this violence seems frequently to be associated with young people who are unemployed and who are often under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

The NCV is going to have to make an assessment of all of the evidence that it can obtain on this issue and to make a statement about the situation as it perceives it. But it does seem clear already that many Australians are unnecessarily and unreasonably fearful about the risks of becoming the victims of a violent crime, especially in a public place. Regrettably, it is often those who are at least risk of becoming such victims who have the greatest fear. For example, it is well established that the elderly citizens in our country are as a group least frequently the victims of violent crime. Yet they are also one of the most fearful. We must obviously do all that we can to better communicate to our older citizens, and to other groups who are not at high risk of violent crime victimisation, what the true nature of the crime situation is. Fear reduction must be viewed as one of the important functions to be performed by government and other bodies with a responsibility for crime control.

## (vi) Violence in Other Settings

In the monograph *Violence in Australia*, published earlier this year by the NCV, the Committee draws attention to a number of other contexts in which violence occurs in contemporary Australian society. These contexts include the workplace, sport and entertainment. It is clear that violence is often associated with many so called typical activities of our daily lives including going to work, and seeking relaxation through sport and other forms of entertainment.

Certain occupational groups appear to be more vulnerable to the risks of violence than others. For instance, the Committee has already been told that certain health care workers, educators and transportation workers run the risk of being assaulted in greater proportion to their number than do other sectors of the community. So too, certain sporting activities seem to be more likely to provoke violence on and off the field than others. The Committee is examining these issues and will be reporting upon them in more detail in its final report.

## VI. THE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

The second major area of responsibility assigned to the NCV is that of examining the causes of violence. This responsibility is one which can all too readily lead the Committee into a fearful quagmire! Theories about the causes of violence abound among experts and laypersons alike. The literature on this topic alone is vast. The Committee's staff is currently reviewing this literature in depth and we will be presenting a comprehensive overview of the latest and most compelling research-based theories about the causes of violence in our final report. We expect to be greatly assisted in this task by the work of the US National Academy of Sciences. That Committee's principal function is to look at the objective research data on the causes of violence on an international plane.

Some suggestions regarding the effect of different factors upon the incidence and type of violence can be discerned from the Committee's terms of reference. Mention is made, for example, of the impact of the mass media on the incidence of violence. In its community forums, and also in a number of early submissions made in writing to the Committee, the media's impact in precipitating violence has been emphasised. Television has been suggested as one of the principal influences on those who engage in violent behaviour, and especially on younger people. The Committee has been told that the continuing sensationalising of violence on television, and its continuous packaging in fictional and news programs, at the very least desensitises people to the commission of violent acts and, in the case of particularly vulnerable people, may precipitate violent acts.

The vast array of research literature available about the association between the viewing of television, and other forms of media, and violent behaviour does not as yet seem to have produced a 'smoking gun' which demonstrates a conclusive relationship between the witnessing of violence on the one hand and the commission of violence on the other. However, in the view of many informed observers there is now sufficient persuasive information available to suggest that even without the availability of such specific proof of cause and effect there is enough evidence to warrant various forms of restriction on what can be viewed by

children who are certainly the most vulnerable and impressionable group in this area.

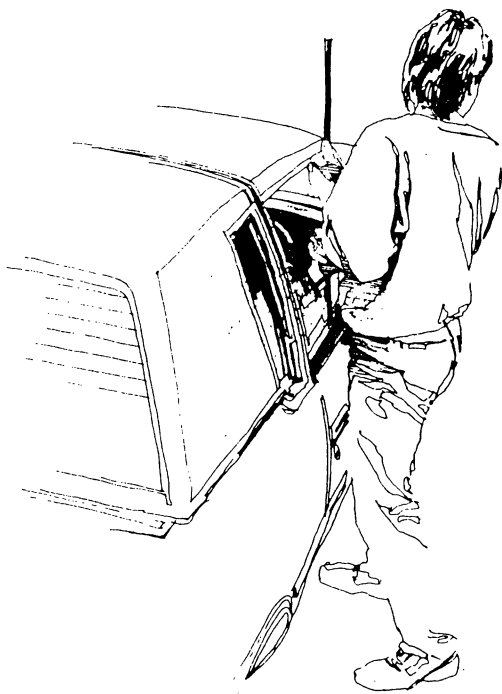
Another term of reference of the NCV relates to the effects of drugs and alcohol on violent behaviour. Again, the Committee has already been told at forums and in submissions about the powerful association between the use of alcohol, and certain other drugs, and violence. Alcohol appears to be an especially powerful associate with violence in many contexts. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in Aboriginal communities whose entire social fabric is being subjected to sustained destruction through the ravages of alcohol, and associated violence. It is not, of course, alcohol alone which is the explanation of such violence. Rather it is behaviour which can be traced back to the general destruction of traditional Aboriginal society by the dominant settlement of Europeans for the past two centuries in this country. It is significant that those Aboriginal communities which seem to have best been able to adjust to contemporary conditions have been those who have received back their land. Land rights, and with it control over their own lives, has brought with it a new sense of self identity and pride in the Aboriginal community. It is through such developments that they are able to not only deal with the complex problems of drinking behaviour but also with other problems which confront so many Aboriginals in contemporary Australia.

## VII. THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE

Mention of some of the more positive experiences that have taken place in our recent relationships with our Aboriginal citizens and, especially those reducing levels of violence in their communities, provides an opportunity to turn to the final area of responsibility that has been assigned to the Committee - that of making recommendations about ways of preventing or reducing violence in the broader Australian society. This task is, as well, one which is of daunting dimensions and complexity. I believe that there is universal recognition already among Committee members that there is no easy or short term answer to the problems of violence in our society. The complexity of the causes of violence are such that they do not lend themselves to nice and quick solutions.

There does seem to be quite persuasive evidence from the available research literature that violent behaviour is strongly associated with learned beliefs and values. What we are taught at a very early age in both the context of our families, our neighbourhood and in our school systems influences to an enormous degree how we are likely to behave. If, as seems apparent at present, our culture is one which favours the resolution of conflict, whether in the context of the home or outside it, through the use of violence it is likely that the transmission of violence will continue from generation to generation. We also know that some societies seem to be much less afflicted by violence than others. Cross cultural studies can tell us a great deal about what it is within a given society which is likely to precipitate or reduce violent behaviour.

The existing information suggests that the long term reduction of violence in any society must come through the communication of non violent values and behaviours in the home. Good parenting would seem to be of enormous importance in determining whether or not a child is subsequently vulnerable to the risks of becoming violent. Parenting in turn requires access to adequate social and economic resources including houses, education and work. Societies which are unable to deliver such resources on an equitable basis are those which are most likely, it would seem, to experience high rates of violence. We are already witnessing in our own nation signs of serious inequalities in the distribution of resources and we have been recently reminded of the fact by the very graphic and comprehensive report produced by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission on homeless children. Street kids are perhaps the most visible and tragic manifestation of fundamental flaws in the process of developing our youth resources in this





## PREVENTING VIOLENT CRIME IN AUSTRALIA



country. Without a firm commitment by government to change this situation we may well face far worse problems of violence in the future.

There are also likely to be other shorter term proposals advanced by the Committee when it comes to address the issues of preventing violence. There is, for instance, the vexed question of access to weapons and especially guns. The recent history of attempts to control guns in Australian society has not been a very happy one. Attempts to exercise better control over access to alcohol and other drugs have also been far from successful. Little success also seems to have been achieved in providing effective treatment to those who have been convicted of violent acts. Treatment facilities for violent offenders within correctional systems seem to be few and far between.

In the past, the criminal justice system seems to have been viewed as the principal bulwark in society against violence. This bulwark is one which has been proven to be quite vulnerable to assault. Increases in police resources and powers, coupled with enhanced punishment for those convicted of other offences, continues to be offered in many quarters as palliative for many of the problems associated with violent crime. There is no doubt that the criminal justice system has a very important role to play in this

area but really only as a matter of last resort rather than first resort. The prevention of violence in society must ultimately be a community responsibility and one which will require innovation, imagination and a long term commitment.

The National Committee on Violence has less than six months more in which to deal with all of these areas of responsibility. Today I have only been able to touch upon certain aspects of the Committee's Terms of Reference and to indicate to you some of the general directions in which we are moving. I feel confident we will produce a report which will set some important guidelines for this country in dealing with a subject of enormous importance and significance to all Australians. I welcome, as does the Committee, any comments or suggestions that any of you have to facilitate our very difficult and challenging task.

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## NOTICE TO ADVERTISERS

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It can be an offence for anyone to engage, in trade or commerce, in conduct "misleading or deceptive". In particular Section 53 contains prohibitions from doing any of the following in connection with the supply of goods or services or in connection with the promotion, by any means, of the supply or use of goods or service:

- Falsely represent that goods or services are of a particular standard, quality or grade, or that goods are of a particular style or model.
- Falsely represent that goods are new.
- Represent that goods or services have sponsorship, approval, performance characteristics, accessories, uses or benefits they do not have.
- Represent that he or it has a sponsorship, approval or affiliation he or it does not have.
- Make false or misleading statements concerning the existence of, or amount of, price reductions.
- Make false or misleading statements concerning the need for any goods, services, replacements or repairs.
- Make false or misleading statements concerning the existence or effect of any warranty or guarantee.

#### PENALTY

For an individual — \$10,000 or 6 months imprisonment

For a corporation — \$50,000 \*

It is not possible for this company to ensure that advertisements which are published in this magazine comply with the Act and the responsibility must therefore be on the person, company or advertising agency submitting the advertisements for publications.

**IN CASE OF DOUBT CONSULT YOUR LAWYER**