

NT Police consider operational implications

By Commissioner Paul White

The Northern Territory Government is to formally consider the 'Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse' during the August Legislative Assembly Sittings. NT Police fully assisted Mr Rex Wild QC and Ms Pat Anderson during the consultation phase of the report, and is currently considering the operational implications in regard to each of the recommendations contained in the report should they ultimately be adopted by Government.

Coincidentally, the Commonwealth Government recently declared a 'national emergency' and announced a number of strategies aimed at protecting Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory. The strategies have far-reaching implications not only for police, but for a broad cross section of Government agencies and allied NGO's. Many of the proposed Commonwealth strategies, as they relate to policing, involve issues that the NT Police has already identified and is currently addressing in the form of several significant initiatives which can be succinctly summarised as follows:

- Violent Crime Reduction Strategy (VCRS) commenced in November 2004. It involves a targeted approach to violent crime with a rigorous quality control of all police responses. Members have received comprehensive training in practices and procedures for dealing with domestic violence and in responding to violent crime. The primary objective of the strategy is to reduce violent crime in the Northern Territory by:

- understanding and targeting the causal factors of assault and domestic violence;



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- utilising generic strategies to target recidivist violence offenders, victims and their families;
- monitoring police performance and providing feedback to the workforce;
- working with other government and non-government agencies that provide support services to victims of domestic violence.

The long term goal of this strategy is to see a sustained reduction in violent crime in the NT. The NT has the highest rate of homicide in Australia. Nearly half of these homicides are domestic violence related. The NT also reports the highest assault rate in Australia. Many of these assaults occur as a result of domestic violence. Indigenous victims are over-represented in the data. The total number of police initiated Domestic Violence Restraining Orders issued between 1 July 2006 and 30 June 2007 was 2237. The total detections of Breaches of Domestic Violence Orders between 1 July 2006 and 30 June 2007 was 1568. These figures are entirely consistent with the objectives of the VCRS and demonstrate a significant increase in response activity since the inception of the strategy, both in

the context of initial response in providing protection to the victim, and the subsequent enforcement intervention in cases where the order has subsequently been breached by the respondent. By way of comparison:

- In 2003-04 there were 897 orders issued
- In 2006-07 there were 2237 orders issued
- In 2003-04 there were 751 breaches detected
- In 2006-07 there were 1568 breaches detected
- Child Abuse Taskforce (CAT) commenced operations in June 2006 to provide for a more responsive and effective approach to serious reports of child sexual abuse, maltreatment and neglect. The Task Force represents a new level of collaboration between the NT Police and the Department of Health and Community Services (FACS), enabling joint early assessment, intervention, and investigation of the most serious cases of child sexual assault and physical abuse.

- Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk (SAID) commenced in January 2006 targeting the supply and use of illicit and licit substances in remote communities in the tri-state regions of the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia.

- Peace at Home Project in Katherine Region has NT Police working together with Family & Children's Services (FACS) to holistically case manage families involved in domestic violence.

- Indigenous Policing Development Division, established by NT Police in September 2006. The Division is headed by a Superintendent with a staff of nine

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(9) and is committed to increasing the level of Indigenous representation in mainstream policing. It is responsible for Indigenous employment and career development including marketing the NT Police as an employer of choice, attracting Indigenous employees and capacity building in this regard. Later this year NT Police aim to commence the first ever fully Indigenous recruit Constable training squad intake.

- Remote Community Drug Desk (RCDD) formed in May 2004 dedicated to targeting persons involved in the distribution of illicit drugs to remote communities. This initiative has proved to be highly successful at stemming the flow of illicit drugs to communities.

- Drug Detector Dogs launched in December 2004. Two dogs based in Darwin and two dogs in Alice Springs servicing the operational regions, and in particular, providing an enhanced capability to identify drugs at transport hubs servicing remote communities.

- Juvenile Diversion Scheme and Community Youth Development Units. The NT Police Youth Diversion Scheme was developed and is managed by NT Police. Its purpose is to alleviate youth boredom, give young people a sense of purpose and provide an opportunity to develop life skills to prevent offending and promote responsible behaviour. The Community Youth Development Unit (CYDU) program provides intervention and support including co-ordination of youth services, case management of young people on pre-court diversion programs and those 'at risk'. Sport, recreation and life-skill activities/programs are available for all young people.

- Drug Use Monitoring Australia (DUMA). In 2006, the NT Police sought and obtained funding from the Commonwealth

to conduct a data research project. This collects information from detainees, charged with an offence, in police watch-houses prior to release, as to drug and alcohol taking prior to arrest. The outcomes of the project will enhance the understanding of supply and demand of illicit drugs. The NT Police has since sought and obtained further funding from the Commonwealth to continue the project for four years in Darwin and one year in Alice Springs.

- Rural and Remote Workforce Workshops on Substance Abuse. The NT Police has received funding as part of the NT Government's Rural and Remote Workforce Grant Program to conduct 'Rural and Remote Communities Alcohol and Substance Abuse' workshops in the Northern Territory (Darwin and Alice Springs). The purpose of these workshops is to assist police offices in remote locations, and their managers in Darwin/Alice Springs, in making decisions and developing strategies to deal with alcohol and substance abuse.

Many issues relating to the detail of the Commonwealth Government's announcement on special measures to combat child abuse in the Northern Territory need to be examined and clarified. A few of the most pressing considerations include the following:

- What area of the Northern Territory will be affected by the measures – all Aboriginal land or only part thereof?

- Precisely which communities will be affected by the measures and will they impact on the major urban centres in the Northern Territory – for example, in relation to the sale and consumption of alcohol?

- What legislation will be introduced to ensure the special measures are legal?

From these issues, it can be seen that a lot of consultation work

needs to be undertaken to negotiate on the finer details and coordinate a partnership approach to the special measures. The Commonwealth Government has proposed the introduction of alcohol restrictions on Aboriginal land, however, liquor restrictions already exist for the majority of Aboriginal Land in the Northern Territory, such areas being declared pursuant to Part VIII of the Liquor Act. NT Police has been the driver of the development of successful Alcohol Management Plans at Alyangula and Nhulunbuy and is currently participating in a collaborative approach toward a similar plan for urban Alice Springs. Restrictions aimed at supply reduction and harm minimisation are in place at most major centres.

There is a push to increase police levels in some communities. Any such commitment, by necessity, involves significant resource implications not just in terms of the direct financial impact, but rather in terms of the increased infrastructure and accommodation requirements. With regard to the interstate members, there is a need for specific training to exercise NT Police powers, upgrading of investigative skills for dealing with child sexual abuse and the provision of thorough education in relation to cultural issues more generally, to prepare the additional personnel for dealing with and working in remote Indigenous communities.

It is important to acknowledge the important work of our Aboriginal Community Police Officers (ACPOs) in communities across the Northern Territory. They will undoubtedly be called upon to further assist in the overall policing response. ACPOs build strong relationships within the communities they are based in, leading to good communication and reassurance to residents. Their cultural understanding provides invaluable assistance to other NT Police in

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serving and protecting members of the Northern Territory community.

The Commonwealth assistance presents the opportunity to continue the excellent work already carried out by the NT Police right across the Territory. The initiatives that have already been introduced have provided a strong base to work from and build upon.

A phased approach to the policing initiative is planned, firstly concentrating on community assessments and prioritising assistance based upon the level of perceived community dysfunction.

This will be followed by the deployment of additional resources on the ground to gain community confidence, gather intelligence and begin to create an environment where other stakeholder agencies can more effectively attend to their respective core responsibilities.

The ongoing hard work of NT Police members across the Territory will not be overshadowed by the presence of the additional members provided under the Commonwealth assistance. It is those very efforts that allow the NT Police to stand proudly on its record of achievements. Members of the NT Police will continue to work alongside police from other jurisdictions in order to produce the best outcomes for the Territory community.

The Central Australian Aboriginal Family Legal Unit Aboriginal Corporation (CAAFLUAC)

Recent initiatives to address the needs of victims of sexual assault

Who are we and what services do we provide?

CAAFLUAC was established in 2000. Funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department. We are a Family Violence Prevention Legal Service.

Located in Alice Springs, we provide services to Indigenous women, children and men in Alice Springs, Ntaria, Papunya, Yuendumu and Tennant Creek, in accordance with our operational framework and service delivery priorities.

We are a justice, advisory and referral centre for victims of family violence. Our primary focus is to provide Indigenous victims of family violence, including sexual abuse, with legal advice and case-work assistance, counseling, assistance and support, child protection, information, support and referral services.

We also participate in and deliver community awareness and prevention initiatives, provide referral as appropriate to mediation and perpetrator programs, and contribute to law reform and policy initiatives. Our priority areas of law are family violence restraining orders, sexual assault, child protection, criminal compensation, and family law where the legal matter relates to family violence.

Protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse

CAAFLUAC is a member of the Central Australian Family Violence and Sexual Assault Network (the peak body for specialist and related Central Australian organisations providing domestic



A service for victims of family violence

and family violence, including sexual assault, services in Central Australia) which provided a substantive submission to the Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse. The submission:

- Recognised and responded to the extreme lack of sexual assault and related services in Central Australia, the negative impact this has upon victims, their families, and, future reporting of sexual abuse.
- Noted that the trauma of sexual assault is further compounded by the processes and procedures by which victims are required to report sexual assault, and, the consequential legal processes and procedures.
- Outlined the complex and often inter-related factors contributing to sexual abuse, and barriers to effective protection against sexual abuse and reporting of offences – including the lack of female police officers.
- Advocated for improved responses to Indigenous victims of sexual assault including the establishment of a multidisciplinary 'One Stop Shop' sexual assault referral centre in Alice Springs as an ideal way to systematically

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