

QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE ABORIGINAL/POLICE RELATIONS

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Background

THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REPORT, "THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY into Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Misconduct", commonly referred to as "The Fitzgerald Report" was the catalyst for the most revolutionary changes in the history of the Queensland Police Service. One of the major changes recommended by the report was the introduction of community policing as a basic policing philosophy. The definition of *community policing* is:

an approach to police work which recognises and fosters a partnership between the service and the community. It involves police and the community working together to identify and solve policing problems. (*Cross Cultural Policing in Queensland* p. 1).

In 1990, to assist in the introduction and implementation of the community policing philosophy into the Queensland Police Service, a new branch—Community Policing Support Branch—was created. The Cross-Cultural Support Services Section, formerly known as the Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Ethnic Liaison Unit, is located within that branch and currently has a staff of two. It is hoped and anticipated, however, that it will be expanding in the near future.

In addition, the service has established a network of regional police who are designated as cross-cultural liaison officers in each region. These positions have responsibility for making links with community organisations and individuals, working with the community to identify and solve policing problems, and facilitating communication between police and the communities. Instructions issued in June 1991 also formalised their role in negotiation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups in potential crowd conflicts where there may be police action taken against individuals at a large gathering involving Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people to which police have been called. Under those instructions, the commissioned officer in charge must consider arranging for attendance of the liaison officer to assist in

reducing the risk of the incident escalating. There are currently twenty police officers in full and part-time liaison positions across the eight regions.

Communication

The need to establish and maintain strong effective relationships between police and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at a local level is considered a major priority for community policing by the Service. This is reflected in the strategic plan for cross-cultural policing in Queensland and has four main objectives:

- n To increase community involvement in addressing policing issues.
- n To increase police service members' understanding of the needs of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and ethnic communities and individuals.
- n To increase the number of police service members from indigenous and ethnic backgrounds.
- n To improve the manner in which the police service responds to the needs of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and ethnic people.

To assist in achieving these objectives Police/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committees are being formed throughout the State. There is also an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Police Advisory Group based in Brisbane.

The Police/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group was formed in November 1991 by people nominated by the Brisbane Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Police Liaison Committee. The first advisory group was formed as an "interim advisory group" with a life of six months to see how well the concept would work. In May 1992 the new advisory group was formed with many of the original group nominated to continue their role. The advisory group has no permanent chairperson, the office being rotated in a reverse alphabetical order.

One of the first issues addressed by the advisory group at the November 1991 meeting was the Queensland Police Service, "Cross-Cultural Policing in Queensland" booklet. The first objective of this booklet was, as stated previously, "to increase community involvement in addressing policing issues". This objective recommended the establishment of the Aboriginal advisory group with the following objectives:

- n To identify issues affecting the Police Service and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland.
- n To consider appropriate ways and means of addressing these issues.
- n To improve communication and understanding between police and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- n To have input into police service policy and development as it may affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

At the end of the meeting the advisory group declared it could work with those objectives as they gave scope to cover all the issues they would want or need to address.

The Brisbane based consultative committee is called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Police Liaison Committee, and the first meeting was held in August 1991. The purpose of the committee is to provide a forum for communication between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and members of the Queensland Police Service in the South Eastern area. The committee decided not to have a formal structure, or permanent office bearers. Nominations for a chairperson are called at the start of every meeting, and clerical support is provided by the cross-cultural support services section. This ensures that no one group controls the committee or meetings, and all people have equal status at the meetings.

The meetings are open to any person who wishes to attend, and are attended by both police officers and community members from the Gold Coast, Ipswich, metropolitan Brisbane, Redcliffe Peninsular and Stradbroke Island, drug arm, Federal and State government departments, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. All ranks of the police service attend the meetings, including constables, sergeants, and commissioned officers.

Meeting attendance is usually forty to fifty people; however, the recent May meeting saw seventy-two people in attendance. A wide range of subjects are discussed at these meetings including police procedures at the city watch-house; police disciplinary procedures; public servant and police recruit selection procedures; youth problems; funding received by the service in relation to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody; conflict between the police service and Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders; and specific operational policing problems in various areas. The forum allows everyone to discuss issues of interest or concern to them and to exchange views, information and ideas.

It should be acknowledged that the Brisbane based consultative committee or advisory group cannot speak for the rest of the State, therefore, the establishment of consultative committees throughout the State is most important. It is necessary that a mechanism be developed to formally link these with the Brisbane groups to ensure a statewide perspective is available at decision making.

One of the keys to ensuring community policing is successful is in the use of advisory groups and consultative committees. Two-way communication can be achieved and maintained through these mediums. For successful communications the police believe the following rules should be followed:

- be aware, and sensitive to cultural differences
- be honest and open
- listen to what is being said
- respect each other's point of view
- do not ridicule a speaker
- do not talk down to anyone
- consult
- be patient
- share ideas, knowledge, opinions and viewpoints
- trust and respect each other.

Training

Coupled with this strong recognition of the need for improved communications, is an acknowledgment that programs to improve police and Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander relations are an important priority for the Queensland Police Service. Major advances in training and in the development of programs targeted at improving these relationships are also taking place. As part of their university studies, all police recruits now undertake "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social-cultural Awareness Training". This topic gives students an insight into these cultures and the impact of white settlement. The beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are outlined in addition to aspects of cultures including traditional roles, family structure and laws. Appropriate behaviours for police when interacting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also discussed. The universities also organise special lectures to complement these studies, at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the community are asked to come and speak to the recruits.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues are also integrated throughout other recruit course studies at the Police Academy with the assistance of an Aboriginal lecturer. In addition, staff and recruits from the academy visit the "Agtanaluy" Aboriginal cultural centre at Inala on a regular basis. The visits have been organised to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the culture and appropriate police responses to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to enhance communication.

The Academy has also made its resources available to the community, in the Woomera course program. This is a three-week full-time ongoing certificate course run by private consultants funded by the Federal Government and provides personal development and work experience for Aboriginal people. The course participants use the Academy facilities and frequently Academy staff and senior police officers are involved as guest

lecturers. As well, recruits interact directly with the participants and learn much from that direct interaction. Two of the twenty-six participants from each course are given work experience at the Academy.

Training in cultural issues also extends to in-service education and training. A cultural awareness training program is currently being developed, following consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities statewide, by a project team including a project manager and both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander project officers. The project will provide a module for the competency acquisition program in 1993 and successful completion of the subject will be a prerequisite to wage increases for all non-commissioned officers.

Another part of the cultural awareness training is the development of an induction training package directed specifically at police who are to serve in communities with significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Service policy already specifies the inclusion of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community representatives on selection panels for police officers promoted to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities. Another training package being developed will train selection panel members, including community representatives, in skills to select for the most appropriate officers to serve on these communities. Both of these packages are being designed by an Aboriginal consultant, Mary Graham and Associates.

A trial program operating at Cherbourg since early 1991 provides intensive community-based training for first year constables through a one-month full-time program in which the constables live with the community and get involved in all aspects of community life with Aboriginal community members. Activities include supervising youth camping trips, visits to local schools, attending at the community's emu farm, and other community oriented activities. The program provides participating police with an insight into the lives and circumstances of Aboriginal people, and evaluations have indicated a positive change in the attitude of participating officers towards Aboriginal people. The program has been designed with the community elders and has the full support of the community. An external evaluation of the program and the development of a training package that can be extended to other regions and communities are also being undertaken with the assistance of Commonwealth funding.

Programs and Projects

As part of community policing various regional initiatives have been implemented, targeted at improved policing of their local communities, including the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and acknowledging the role of these communities and members as partners in community policing initiatives. For example, in Townsville, police work with the Aboriginal liaison committee and the local licensing inspectors to visit night spots and remove under age drinkers from these premises.

In the far northern region, the Police Service have or are in the process of employing nine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to act as liaison

officers. Two of these will be located in the Cairns shopping mall to improve relationships between the police and people who congregate in the area. Thirteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander liaison officers have also been employed in Townsville to assist police working in the city mall and surrounding parks. This program is operating as a three-month trial. In Weipa, police have assisted with a Comalco sponsored scheme which has addressed youth problems through the development of training and employment initiatives to meet local industry needs.

A Murri Watch community initiated program has been established and is fully supported by the Brisbane City Watch-house where local community volunteers are contacted when an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is brought into custody. The volunteers assist with cash bail if necessary, and where possible, take the arrested person out of the watch-house and back to the community. Where prisoners are not released, the Murri Watch members interview and counsel the prisoner. Similar programs have, and are, being developed in a number of centres around the State, including at Townsville, Mt Isa, and Rockhampton. Townsville has a funded coordinator for this program as well as one full-time cell visitor who works with a number of volunteers. This scheme, acknowledged by the Queensland Police Service as a major community policing initiative, recently won the Commissioner's lantern award for community policing.

Methods for providing a policing service to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, by necessity, vary considerably depending on the location of the community in question and its specific needs and problems. For example, while the Aboriginal people within urban and larger rural centres have access to mainstream policing services, the majority of designated Aboriginal communities and the eleven Torres Strait islands are policed by a combination of State police and Aboriginal/Islander community police. While Aboriginal/Islander community police are employed and equipped by the community council and exercise varying powers depending on the local by-laws, the Queensland Police Service has some responsibility for training, and where State police are present they have a supervisory role over the community police. The Queensland Police Service has sought, and recently received, a federal grant to upgrade training for community police across the State. Training commenced in the far north region on 9 June 1992.

Other strategies to enhance police/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relations include increasing the representation of people with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background among Queensland Police Service staff. The service's recruiting section is reviewing and developing marketing strategies to attract recruits from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. A bridging course is now being conducted at the South Johnson TAFE College, Innisfail, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The purpose of the course is to assist students to achieve qualifications required for the academic component of the recruit training program.

The Service is also responsive to policy developments arising from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. All of the recommendations relevant to policing are supported in principle by the service, although the implementation of some will depend on availability of additional funding and other necessary resources. Along with other government departments, the Queensland Police Service has applied to the State and Commonwealth governments for funding to implement these recommendations.

Many of the Royal Commission's recommendations had already been implemented or were being developed by the time the final report of the Commission

was completed. Revised instructions on the care and management of prisoners had been progressively implemented over the preceding two years, and a custody manual is currently being finalised which consolidates all policies and procedures on detention of prisoners. The introduction of this manual includes training in identification of at-risk prisoners and duty of care obligations, developed jointly between the Police Service and the Health Department. A statewide training exercise has commenced to train all watch-house staff on their duty of care obligations and relevant prisoner health and risk factors. The manual itself will be subject to consultation with the Aboriginal community and other interested community groups.

Summary

The specific policies, procedures, and programs outlined indicate the commitment by all levels of the service, including the Commissioner and executive officers, to improve relations between police and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They are only part of the reform process which is improving the face of policing to all community groups and to achieving a fair and equitable policing service for all Queenslanders.

The Queensland Police Service has come a long way in the past few years—but what has happened is only the foundation. It must be acknowledged and appreciated that the future tasks are not, and will not, be easy. For many years the police and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have opposed each other both physically and culturally and it will take many more years to overcome this past. Two-way communication will not come easily either for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or police. It is a new experience for us all and it will require a strong concerted effort from all parties to ensure success.

References

- Queensland Commission of Inquiry into Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Misconduct 1989, *Report of a Commission of Inquiry Pursuant to Orders in Council*, [the Fitzgerald Report], Government Printer, Brisbane.
- Queensland Police Service 1991, *Cross-Cultural Policing in Queensland*, Corporate Planning Branch, QPS, Queensland.