



ILEC 2006 AGENDA

SESSION 1 - KEY ISSUES

**GREG O'CONNOR, PRESIDENT
NEW ZEALAND POLICE ASSOCIATION**

New Zealand Police: Key Issues

Recruitment and Retention of Sworn Officers

Recruitment and retention continue to be major issues for the New Zealand Police. With sworn police attrition averaging 5% nationally, the police have had to find 365 or more officers annually to backfill those who are leaving – and that's without fulfilling the Government's promise of recruiting 1000 sworn frontline officers by 2010, a promise extracted as a result of a staffing campaign by the Police Association. The major concern is that, in eight of the 12 police districts, the attrition rate continues to rise.

The problems arising from attrition rates have been exacerbated by the difficulties of recruiting 1000 extra officers. New Zealand's tight job market has seen the police competing with other organisations for recruits. Additionally, police salaries and conditions have not been keeping pace with comparable jobs in the private sector, and many officers agree that police "need a decent pay rise" to attract quality recruits.

Since the beginning of 2006, the Police have been taking a number of steps to try and encourage recruiting, including the relaxation of physical and academic standards. This may have widened the pool of potential officers, but concerns have been expressed that this will undermine efforts to attract quality recruits. The Police are also moving to recruit school leavers, but the Police Association has concerns that people in their late teenage years do not possess the maturity required to perform the demanding roles of a police officer.

The Police have also been taking steps to attract UK police officers to New Zealand. Approximately 200 officers have been recruited from the UK, put through transition training, and are being paid the equivalent salary of a NZ Officer with the same service. Their previous qualifications, including detective qualifications, are also recognised and most have been promoted within 3 years, 2 as high as Inspector.

Review of Policing Legislation

New Zealand is currently reviewing its primary piece of policing legislation, the Police Act 1958. The Act is being reviewed because it has been amended some 25 times since it was enacted and because the "one size fits all" style of policing that prevailed in New Zealand during the 1950's is no longer applicable to the complex nature of New Zealand's modern society. A myriad of public, private and volunteer agencies now contribute to policing in New Zealand. Currently, the Police have released three "issues papers" for public discussion on the Principles of Policing, Governance and Accountability and Employment Arrangements. Another five issues papers will be released for public consultation through to early 2007. It is intended that a new Police Bill will be drafted in late 2007 and, if approved by Cabinet, the Bill will be introduced in Parliament by early 2008.

Inquiry into Police Conduct

The Commission of Inquiry into Police Conduct is due to report back in March 2007. Its final report was delayed by several months as a number of legal issues needed to be resolved. The Commission was formed after historical sexual allegations were

raised against several police officers or ex-police officers. These allegations resulted in two high-profile criminal cases in 2005, of which one of the accused was a serving Assistant Commissioner (he was acquitted), while the other case involved two former police officers (who were convicted). As a result of the allegations, the Government was keen to ensure there was a full, independent investigation into the way in which police, at the time, dealt with those allegations. The appointment of the Commission has no doubt helped to fuel the generally negative view of the police portrayed by the media over the last twelve months, with some, including one Judge, even going so far as to suggest there is a “sick culture” in the force.

Arming Issue & New Equipment: Taser and Body Armour

Police in New Zealand are not “generally” armed. In September 2005, the Association surveyed its membership to determine whether changes should be made, but there is only minority support amongst police staff for arming the police. Just over a quarter of sworn officers supported the general arming of the police while 7 out of 10 were opposed. Amongst non-sworn staff, 34% were in favour of general arming, and 57% were opposed. 15% of sworn officers reported that there had been an incident over the last three years which would have been better resolved had they been carrying a firearm.

The New Zealand Police began a trial of the Taser X 26 stun gun in September 2006. The Association had lobbied for its introduction. The trial will determine whether the Taser is suitable for introduction as a tactical but last option. Although some political parties and civil libertarian groups have raised concerns about the safety of the Taser, the results of the trial so far have been promising. The first person to be “Tasered” in New Zealand was an 18-year-old man in Auckland on the weekend of 9-10 September. Although the victim did receive some minor scrapes and bruising, he was otherwise uninjured and was arrested without further incident.

The police have yet to roll out the introduction of stab-resistant body armour to its front line officers. Delays in manufacturing with regard to the UV protection quality in the fabric have meant that the introduction of the vests had to be delayed. The Association had lobbied for the body armour to be made available to officers who requested it. However, it is to be made compulsory for all frontline officers.

“Civilianisation” of police

Given the Association’s recent “Fund the Frontline” campaign, debate continues on what extent, if any, should specific police duties be “civilianised” in order to free up more sworn staff for frontline duties. As criminal offending originating from the Internet and new technology may well be the most significant challenge for the NZ Police over the next few decades, the role of a typical constable may, out of necessity, become more specialised and increasingly professionalised. As other roles in the police become more specialised, demanding a more specific set of skills, the debate about the proper extent of non-sworn personnel in the police has become a significant issue. This occurs at the margins of our work, the low-level guarding type work over the high level specialised work.

Police Funding Models

As the New Zealand Police are funded from Government revenue, the general guidelines in the Public Finance Act 1989 and its Amendments apply.

Due to the demise of an ambitious but unsuccessful attempt to “computerise” the New Zealand Police, the Government has responded by placing strict financial oversights on police, including the appointment of a chartered accountant as Deputy Commissioner. This has impacted considerably on the independence of the Commissioner as most of his funding is “tagged” to specific areas. Under the supply/purchase model of public funding operated by Treasury in NZ, where defined and measurable inputs and outputs take precedence over outcomes, the government can considerably influence the Commissioner’s policing priorities.

As law and order issues are generally foremost in the minds of the New Zealand public, the funding of policing has become increasingly politicised. Political parties routinely campaign on law and order issues, and elected Governments, having received a mandate from the public, attempt to direct police funding towards addressing specific issues relating to law and order. This has further eroded the independence of the Commissioner and given the Minister of Police a greater say in how the police should be properly resourced. Just how much power a Minister of Police can exercise, and where the line should be drawn between the jurisdiction of the Minister and the Commissioner, is one of the issues being explored as part of the review of the Police Act.

Concerns have also been raised that the current method of assessing funding priorities within the police through the current timesheet system may not be completely reliable. New Zealand Police Officers must account for their time in half-hourly periods by filling out timesheets at the end of every shift. However, these timesheets are cumbersome for officers to fill in and may not be giving a very accurate picture of how officers are spending their time. They are, however, the means by which police account to government.

The Criminal Environment

Reported crime has fallen constantly in New Zealand over the last decade, but violent crime and drug related crime has risen.

An explosion of methamphetamine production and use has meant that organised crime groups, of which New Zealand has been generally free of, have now become entrenched.

The Police Association has been at the forefront of alerting and educating the public on both methamphetamine and organised crime over the last 10 years when the Police were denying both problems. Subsequent events have proved us right, enhancing considerably the reputation of the New Zealand Police Association as commentators on Policing.

Greg O'Connor
President
New Zealand Police Association

September 2006