Overview of Crime Prevention in Queensland

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Crime and crime control are very complex issues and relate not just to the police and the criminal justice system but to the way society operates as a whole. Reported crimes in Australia have risen by over 60 per cent, from 845,923 in 1980/81 to 1.41 million in 1988/89 (Mukherjee & Dagger 1990). Rather than attributing this increase to the significant changes that have occurred and are continuing in Australian society, these trends tend to be laid at the door of policing. Walker and Henderson (1991) draw attention to research in this area:

But research conducted in Australia and overseas suggests that, although worrying, these rising crime figures may be due to a short-term trend in population growth, together with some familiar changes in society. If changes were properly understood by governments, the media and members of the public, there would not appear to be the need for the draconian solutions that some people have suggested. Furthermore, the research conclusions argue that by placing greater demands on police, courts and prisons, at the expense of alternative strategies, we may be perpetrating the myth of ever-increasing crime (Walker & Henderson 1991).

Whilst this places responsibility for crime outside of the direct control of police, the Queensland Police Service has a major role and responsibility for protecting people and property. One of the possible ways of doing this is through active participation in crime prevention.

Traditional policing has been reactive and incident driven. Random mobile patrols appear to do little to reduce crime or increase the chance of apprehension. Rapid response, despite community expectation, is significant only when life is threatened or a crime actually under way. Most crimes are solved not by criminal investigation, rather when the offender is apprehended immediately, or the victim or another member of the community provides information which permits identification. There is little evidence to suggest that simply increasing police numbers will reduce crime or increase crimes solved.

With increasing crime rates and low ‘clear-up rates’ it would appear to be time to explore other options, not as add-on public relations exercises, but as a
genuine attempt to improve policing. To do this, however, the police require community understanding and support.

The Fitzgerald Inquiry

The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Misconduct [the Fitzgerald Report] (Queensland 1989) was the catalyst for change in the Queensland Police Service, as it was for a number of other areas of state government operation. In relation to policing, the Fitzgerald Report commented on and made recommendations concerning most aspects of policing and the police organisation. These included structure, resources, recruitment and training, promotions and transfers, pay and conditions, management and strategic planning, information and support systems, community policing, regionalisation, civilianisation and specialised policing activities. Each of these areas has been subject to considerable activity within the Queensland Police Service since the Fitzgerald Report was published.

Fitzgerald made very specific recommendations about the style of policing that he believed to be appropriate in Queensland and made extensive reference to community policing and crime prevention. For example, Recommendation C. 1.6 states:

community policing be adopted as the primary policy strategy, with policing again becoming a neighbourhood affair. The Police Force must move away from the concept of policing based on reactive defence of the community and towards mobilising the community and its police to prevent crime, maintain order and deliver services dictated by the needs of the community. To this end:

(a) preventative policing strategies are to be an integral part of the normal activities of every police officer
(b) the community is to be involved with the police in preventing crime through the establishment of community crime committees and community crime prevention programs based on the needs of individual communities (Queensland 1989, p. 381).

To adopt such a radical shift from the traditional policing model required not only changes in organisation and attitude within the Queensland Police Service, but the redevelopment of a positive relationship between the Queensland Police Service and the community. That relationship, with a focus on crime prevention, was enshrined in the Police Service Administration Act 1990. This Act describes the functions of the Queensland Police Service in the following way:

The functions of the Police Service are:
(a) the preservation of peace and good order:
   - in all areas of the State;
   and
   - in all areas outside the State where the laws of the State may lawfully be applied, when occasion demands;
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(b) the protection of all communities in the State and all members thereof:
(i) from unlawful disruption of peace and good order that results, or is likely to result, from:
  - actions of criminal offenders;
  - actions or omissions of other persons;
(ii) from commission of offences against the law generally;
(c) the prevention of crime;
(d) the detection of offenders and bringing of offenders to justice;
(e) the upholding of the law generally;
(f) the administration, in a responsible, fair and efficient manner and subject to due process of law and directions of the Commissioner, of:
  - the provisions of the Criminal Code;
  - the provisions of all other Acts or laws for the time being committed to the responsibility of the Service;
  - the powers, duties and discretions prescribed for officers by any Act;
(g) the provision of such services and the rendering of such assistance, in situations of emergency or otherwise, as are required of officers by lawful authority or the reasonable expectations of the community, or as are reasonably sought of officers by members of the community (Police Service Administration Act 1990, p. 4).

The Act goes on to describe the Community’s responsibility:

2.4 Community Responsibility preserved.
(1) The prescription of any function as one of the functions of the Police Service does not relieve or derogate from the responsibility and functions appropriately had by the community at large and the members thereof in relation to:
  - the preservation of peace and good order;
  and
  - the prevention, detection and punishment of breaches of the law.
(2) In performance of the functions of the Police Service, members of the Service are to act in partnership with the community at large to the extent compatible with efficient and proper performance of those functions (Police Service Administration Act 1990, p. 5).

The Queensland Police Service Corporate Plan
The government framework was therefore set for changes in the style of policing. However, it was necessary that the Queensland Police Service adopt the philosophy and explore ways in which the new philosophy would affect
Members of the Queensland Police Service, at all levels, were given an opportunity to contribute to the mission, goals and direction that the Police Service would take over the next five years. A draft corporate plan, which drew on the Fitzgerald Report (Queensland 1989), the Police Service Administration Act 1990, the Queensland Police Service Code of Conduct (Queensland 1990a) and the knowledge, skills and experience of police personnel. This process led to significant shift in the mission and goals of the Queensland Police Service. The earlier Mission Statement had read:

The purpose of the Queensland Police Service is to contribute to the security and well-being of the people of Queensland and to preserve peace and good order throughout the State, by working cooperatively with the public and within the framework of the law.

The new Mission Statement developed by the members of the Queensland Police Service reads:

To serve the people in Queensland by protecting life and property, preserving peace and safety, preventing crime and upholding the law in a manner which has regard for the public good and the rights of the individual.

The new Mission Statement clarifies the variety of roles that police perform in society. It also places service at the beginning and recognises a potential conflict which exists for all police officers—that is, the tension between ‘the public good’ and the ‘rights of the individual’. The police have a responsibility, within the law, for protecting and upholding both.

The key result areas in the Corporate Plan produced in 1989 related very strongly to detection rates. The 1990-1995 Corporate Plan has three operational goals:

- to enhance the safety of the people of Queensland;
- to prevent crime;
- to investigate and solve crime.

The planning process reaches right down into the organisation with strategic plans being developed at regional, district and divisional levels. Each of these strategic plans has to identify what contribution that section of the Queensland Police Service is making towards the achievement of the corporate goals. Crime prevention, therefore, becomes an operational imperative.

**Crime Prevention**

Crime prevention, from a police perspective, can mean many things. Traditionally, it has meant providing advice on security devices and recommending protective behaviours. Often these activities were undertaken by a central unit and had no impact at all on ‘real’ policing. Neighbourhood Watch schemes build on the protection theme and, whilst encouraging community participation, remain peripheral to the main policing function.

Protection of property and people remains one of the strategies for preventing crime. Making people more aware of how to protect themselves is a valid function of the police and provides an excellent opportunity for community/police partnerships and problem solving. Indirectly, the investigation and solving of crime—where it leads to the apprehension of a persistent offender—can also impact positively on crime. Exploring ways of targeting persistent offenders and
those involved in the promotion and organisation of criminal activities can also be a valid crime prevention activity. However, addressing the causes of criminal behaviour and preventing it occurring in the first place may be the most effective way of reducing crime over the long-term. This is something that the police cannot do on their own and it is a new area of endeavour for them. Here, more than in any other area, there has to be meaningful involvement of the community and effective police/community communication and problem solving.

Community-based crime prevention programs and diversionary programs for young people are currently being discussed within the Queensland Government. However, with so many government and non-government agencies, it may be some time before the exact nature of any such program is clear. The Queensland Police Service cannot wait—if it is to be judged by the crime statistics (however unfair that is), the Queensland Police Service must take action with the community to address crime and its causes. In the past, policing has been about catching criminals. This still needs to occur. However, crime prevention, of all three types identified, has now become the focus of police activity. It is central, not peripheral.

**Crime Prevention Initiatives**

There are many crime prevention initiatives being taken throughout Queensland. Many of them are in their very early stages of development and vary significantly in focus and mode of operation. All crime prevention initiatives present a way of policing that is new and different for most police officers, and all are approached with apprehension by police. The case studies which follow are examples of a few of the crime prevention initiatives that are being trialled in Queensland.

**Regional strategy**

The increase of offences against the person and property are of grave concern to police. It is evident that alcohol plays a large part in the commission of these offences. Alcohol abuse also plays a major part in road trauma. One of the rural regions in Queensland, taking crime prevention as its major operational objective for 1991/92, decided that the misuse of alcohol and underage drinking were two identifiable factors leading to a range of offences. It was decided, therefore, that the major operational objective for the region should be to reduce the incidence of alcohol-related offences. Alcohol was seen as the root cause of many offences, and it appeared logical to attack the cause rather than the symptom.
The strategy to be trialled is to introduce objective and task-oriented patrolling targeting licensed premises on a regular and systematic basis. Such a focus is in fact very innovative for policing in Queensland, and the region is undertaking ongoing evaluation to see whether the strategy does reduce offences. The offences most likely to be affected by such a strategy include: underage drinking, offences against the person (including domestic violence), offences against property and road trauma.

Should such a focus be successful, it will lead the way for more significant change in other parts of the state as it will be seen to be worthwhile to address the causes rather than the symptoms of crime.

**Cherbourg Aboriginal Community**

A series of initiatives have been undertaken jointly by the Cherbourg Aboriginal Community and the Queensland Police Service—with support from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission—to address policing issues and problems on the Community. The original intention was not primarily crime prevention, but the outcome of effective cooperation has led to a number of initiatives aimed at reducing crime (particularly juvenile crime).

Cherbourg Aboriginal Community is in south-east Queensland and is made up of Aborigines who were displaced from their traditional lands in many parts of Queensland. Through the goodwill and willingness of community elders and senior police in the region, serious and successful attempts have been made to overcome the legacy of poor police/Aboriginal relations. The program has (in 1991) two major elements which directly impact on crime prevention, but these elements are fluid and flexible and have already given rise to a range of innovative activities.

Neither element had the major intention of crime prevention. The initial element involved the running of a community-based workshop involving members of the Cherbourg Aboriginal Community, the community police and the state police. The purpose of the workshop was to increase understanding of the role of the Community Police Service and the Cherbourg Council's by-laws and to establish a better relationship between the Queensland Police Service and the Cherbourg Aboriginal Community. The workshop went further and addressed issues of particular concern to the Cherbourg Aboriginal Community—in particular, juvenile crime. It also led to a range of recommendations on how the problems confronting the Community could be addressed. These recommendations ranged from immediate changes that addressed pressing issues, to longer-term plans concerned with diversionary programs to reduce juvenile crime and making changes to Council by-laws to support crime prevention activities. The workshop also led to a training program for Aboriginal Community Police, and a program to examine the membership and training of selection panels for police who were to be stationed at Cherbourg.

The second major element was concerned with constable training. The objective of the program was to develop constables’—particularly trainee constables’—understanding and knowledge of Aboriginal culture and the social organisation of Aboriginal Communities. It was hoped that this would result in better relations between members of the Aboriginal Community and police officers. The program (in 1991) has involved trainee constables working
with Aboriginal Community Police in the execution of their duties. Trainee constables were also required to spend a great deal of time with children in the primary and secondary schools. Not only has this increased police officers’ awareness of Aboriginal issues, but it has had a marked effect on the attitudes of many young Aborigines who are seeing police officers as human beings for the first time. The young officers have found themselves involved in a range of diversionary activities with young people and in some cases have taken on a counselling role.

These two initiatives, and the cooperative spirit that they have generated in the Community, led to a workshop aimed at addressing the significant truancy problem among young people in the Cherbourg Aboriginal Community. This workshop involved people from the Community, the police, local schools, the Education Department, and Corrective Services. The workshop set about identifying the reasons for the high truancy levels and possible strategies for addressing the problem. As a result of discussions, a community-based working group was established to put in place the strategies identified: strategies which addressed encouragement and greater participation issues in the classroom, and activities which occupied young people in their leisure time. The workshop was coordinated by the police, which sat uncomfortably with some from outside the Community, but the group established to mobilise the proposed strategies largely consisted of members of the Cherbourg Aboriginal Community. The willingness of the Community and the police to work together to address issues of mutual concern is an impressive short-term outcome of these initiatives. The work being undertaken at Cherbourg Aboriginal Community is being monitored and evaluated so that lessons can be learned and effective practices put in place in other Aboriginal Communities.

**Community consultative committees**

One of the areas being encouraged in community-based crime prevention is the introduction of community consultative committees. Such committees were recommended in the Fitzgerald Report (Queensland 1989) and have been introduced in a number of locations throughout the state. It is hoped that the establishment of such committees will assist with the shift of emphasis for police from being primarily crime solvers to that of crime preventers. Such a shift has financial as well as social benefits, as less crime should mean less police time spent on investigation and arrests, less court time and less prison time.

Community consultative committees have a significant role in educating the community in the realities of crime. Crime is committed in the community by members of that community and, therefore, the community must accept some responsibility for crime prevention. Without community support, police activities in the area of crime prevention are unlikely to be successful.

The introduction of such committees has not been without problems and it has become clear that guidelines are required to ensure that the committees achieve objectives which are satisfactory to both the police and the community. Such guidelines need to be flexible enough to adapt to the differing circumstances in different locations. It is also vital that police officers receive training and support in working with such community based committees, as it is an unfamiliar activity for most police. The committees
should have broad community representation, and it is envisaged that they will have the following functions:

- to provide a forum for discussing matters of concern relating to the policing of the local community;
- to arrive at decisions resulting from discussion about policing issues, and to ensure action is taken;
- to promote and develop a genuine partnership between the police and the community;
- to make the community aware of Police Service policies, ideas and directions; and
- to provide access to information and assistance to members of the community who feel unable to voice their concerns directly to a police officer.

The effectiveness of these community consultative committees in identifying and taking actions on issues of concern to the community will be monitored and evaluated.

Statistical Support for Crime Prevention

In 1990 a project was undertaken by the Management Services Branch of the Queensland Police Service in consultation with one police division to analyse the sudden increase in break and enter offences in that division. This analysis examined the major means of entry to premises, the type of premises entered, the day and time of offences, the geographical location and seasonal influences. The purpose of this examination was to identify the type of information available for use in operational planning, targeted patrolling and community policing initiatives.

There were a number of problems encountered in undertaking this analysis, not least the sparsity of information readily available to assist officers in diagnosing problem areas. As a result, the analysis had to be undertaken manually. The information produced proved to be of considerable significance in identifying common factors in break and enters, as well as at risk locations and times. For example, it was identified that the majority of break and enters through windows in commercial buildings occurred through louvred windows. This information enabled officers to advise companies on replacement of vulnerable windows, and introduced the possibility of insurance companies offering incentives for changing windows. As with many programs in the past, no evaluation was undertaken into the impact of this information on local policing. However, the data produced has been recognised as being of considerable importance in preventing crime, and it is hoped that a computer system able to record such information will soon be in place.

No evaluation has as yet been undertaken of any of the projects mentioned. The value of evaluation is only just being recognised, and a
process of identifying the achievements made towards objectives is being introduced. However, the use of this sort of data is only practical if the information is readily available in a useable form.

**Issues for the Queensland Police Service**

For these strategies to work and have long-term benefits for the police and the community, a number of issues will need to be addressed.

*Attitudes*

Many police officers still see their function as catching criminals. Crime prevention is not ‘real’ police work. For local and corporate crime prevention initiatives to work, police officers have to have a commitment to the new way of working. They need to understand the interrelation of crime prevention and detection, and realise that both are valid and necessary to achieve the corporate mission and to provide an effective Queensland Police Service.

*Technical support*

Crime prevention activities may require different information and technical support than criminal investigation. There needs to be flexibility to ensure that appropriate support is available.

*Resources*

One of the major challenges will be how to shift resources-both human and financial-from reactive, incident-driven policing to proactive, problem-solving crime prevention activities. Without such a reallocation, little will be able to be done. In a time of fiscal restraint, it is unlikely that police will have access to significant additional resources.

*Community-based policing*

Traditionally, police organisations have been inward looking. They have-theoretically, at least-answered only to the law. Looking outwards and working with the community will not come easily. Police organisations and their members will find it difficult to include external influences in their planning. The military model, which permits action to be taken as if on a war footing-where resources are not considered and where the needs of the community come second to the victory over crime-is no longer appropriate. Helping Queensland Police Service members to communicate with the community and deal with the complexity of the issues that real communication will raise is a major challenge for the Police Service.

*Evaluation*

If crime prevention is to be a long-term strategy in the mission to protect people and reduce crime, the various strategies being adopted will need to be evaluated. The Queensland Police Service can no longer afford to implement strategies and expend resources without some idea of the impact of such strategies. Policing has long been using methods that are now seen to be
ineffective. If the proper balance between reactive, investigative policing and proactive preventative policing is to be achieved, the benefits and impact of crime prevention strategies will need to be demonstrated.

The public

No major change of emphasis will be possible without community support. At present, the community judges police effectiveness on response times and similar methods. They will need to have a greater understanding of policing and accept that, for resources to be moved to preventative strategies, reaction times may suffer. In Queensland particularly, there is a great deal of healing to occur in the relationship between the police and the community. Trust and respect need to be restored. There are many in the community willing to help police in this task. What members of the Queensland Police Service need to do is to explain policing issues to the community and recognise that the community has a right to indicate how it (the community) is policed. The community has a stereotypical image of police-as the police have of themselves-and this image has to be broken.

Conclusion

The Queensland Police Service has changed its ethos, not by directive but through consultation. However, operationalising this new ethos will not be easy. It is dependent on the goodwill and commitment of Queensland Police Service members and their willingness to make an act of faith that the new way will be better than the old. There is no hard evidence to prove that is the case, and police like hard evidence. The new ethos is also dependent on community support and involvement which the police have little control over. This lack of control makes the police feel uncomfortable.

The changes in ethos mean a change of image and role for police. The crime fighting role is a glamorous, if inaccurate, image. The effectiveness of the crime prevention role is, at present, supposition and the image far less glamorous. It will not be easy for the police or the community to accept the new image and role. For crime prevention to be effective, the changes must be accepted by both.

Perhaps crucial to the long-term success of policing-both preventative and investigative-is evaluation. To provide effective protection and a worthwhile service in a complex and ever-changing society, it will be crucial to evaluate programs and activities to identify what impact they have and why. This will ensure that policing continues to have a valid and valued role in society and may contribute to the reduction of crime.

In 1991, Queensland is at the beginning of these changes, and has a long way to go. Much has already been achieved, yet it would still be easier to go back to the old way than to persevere with the new. It will take commitment from the managers within the Queensland Police Service and the support of the community to keep up the momentum and develop in the staff a long-term commitment to a different role for policing in Queensland.
References

Cornish, P.N. 1989, Crime Prevention Strategies-Summary of Overseas Study Tour January/February 1989, South Australian Police Department.


