

EDITORIAL

The provocative topic of just who is responsible for crime control, crime prevention and community safety is gradually filtering through to Australian cities and towns. There is now a growing realisation that reining in crime and containing its unacceptably high costs to people and property is a task for the whole community and not just for our paid law enforcers.

To suggest in this recessional climate that we all have a role to play in keeping the nation's crime rate down is going to take a lot of hard selling. Yet thankfully, it seems that we are willing to listen and that we are willing to be convinced.

Historically, crime prevention was always a community responsibility. Before western culture and countries exploded into industrialisation and beyond, local communities were the focus of life; and part of that focus was to accept co-operative responsibility for crime related incidents - enforcement, penalties and prevention.

As Australia expanded its industrial economy and its population in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, so its sense of community and of community responsibility contracted. In relation to crime, by the end of the 1970s an increasingly vocal population was calling for more police, tougher goals and harsher sentences, as society was seeing the national crime rate rise alarmingly.

The cost of crime by the mid 1980s was already in the billions of dollars. It still is. However by then, despite the often heard outcry for a further crime clamp down by the authorities, some local and state governments were already realising that an alternative strategy was needed. That strategy involved handing back responsibility to the community and reducing crime control costs.

South Australia lead the way with a 5 year \$10,000,000 programme to convince that State's population that crime prevention and issues of community safety were a matter for everyone. The thrust of the initiative was local education to encourage local participation in low cost co-operative projects. It was persuasively argued that crime

problems could and should be tackled locally.

Almost four years on, the South Australian initiative "Together Against Crime" is being evaluated across the state by local communities who have worked with industry, churches, social and business clubs to pilot crime prevention programmes.

Other States have followed by co-ordinating or encouraging similar community based crime prevention initiatives. Sadly, some States have yet to respond.

The Commonwealth Government through the Federal Justice Office of the Attorney-General's Department and the Australasian Police Ministers Council have been busy developing a national strategy designed to alert us all to the fact that controlling crime is something that requires the urgent attention of every Australian. Convincing a society that has its collective hands full just coping with the day to day tasks of short term economic, personal and social survival, will not be easy.

The Federal Justice Office has released a discussion paper and in doing so has placed crime prevention firmly on the national agenda. We await the impact of this strategy and look forward to all levels of government co-operating, funding and supporting locally driven strategies designed to measurably improve the safety of our communities.

The Australian Crime Prevention Council apologises to the readers and subscribers of the ACPC Journal for its inability to publish any editions throughout 1992. Despite the best efforts of the former editor John Van Groningen and myself, publication costs caught up with the Council and the journal's circulation was regrettably withdrawn.

The Council's executive is still addressing the problem. However we are pleased to have been able to publish this edition, the first of three we are planning for this year.

Don Robertson
Editor