

ACT gets modern launch fleet

3 new boats to boost patrols

Two modern six-metre launches designed for water patrol work in the ACT have gone into service on Canberra's Lake Burley Griffin.

The two launches are part of a tender which also includes another larger launch for ACT use.

The craft have been built by Western Australian boat-building company Star Boats of Perth.

They are crewed by the AFP's six-man ACT Water Police Squad.

Officer in Charge, Sergeant David Ashurst, said the boats were transported by road from Perth after undergoing their sea trials and pre-delivery tests there.

Sergeant Ashurst travelled to Perth for the pre-delivery trials and also visited the water police section at Fremantle to discuss training programs, equipment and procedures that could benefit the ACT section.

"The three new boats replace four previous units — two Savage 5.8-metre launches, one Hamilton six-metre launch and one six-metre Bertram cruiser," Sergeant Ashurst said.

"All of these units had been in service for about nine years."



• Sergeant David Ashurst and Senior Constable Dave Gough work on the new six-metre launches outside the Water Police headquarters on Canberra's Lake Burley Griffin.

He said the old craft would be sold by tender.

The two six-metre launches have twin 75 h.p. Mercury outboard motors while the seven-metre cruiser is equipped with a more powerful in-board motor.

"The crew members feel good about having the new equipment," Sergeant Ashurst said. "All have obtained their Maritime Services Board licences."

The new craft will be used for regular patrol work on the lake for emergency and rescue purposes.

Seeing in dark 'a matter of practice'

Police officers doing night surveillance and targeting work can improve their night sight with training, according to the police medical officer, Dr Tony Marsh.

Dr Marsh said the eye cells used at night were different from those used during the day. Many people did not know how to make use of night sight.

He said daytime vision used cells called cones, which are located centrally in the retina, and which allow people to look straight at an object.

But night vision relied on scattered cells called rods which pick up objects only by scanning.

"People have no doubt experienced seeing something by passing their vision over it at night," Dr Marsh said. "But they cannot define it visually when looking straight at it."

"This is because the rods are scattered but are picking up light reflections at night, while the cones, which only see centrally, are not working in the darkness."

Dr Marsh, a former Air Force doctor, trained pilots as night fighters in the RNZAF during the war.

"We taught the men to scan the skies while operating at night instead of staring into the darkness trying to locate other aircraft," he said.

The men were trained in a darkened gym and their efficiency often improved to the extent that they more easily found enemy aircraft in darkness.

He advised officers to practice night scanning.

On a job, the target area should be formed into a square and the scanning should begin at the top left hand corner, across to the right, drop down a step, scan back, and repeat the movement.

Tests for night vision were discontinued after it was found that people under stress generally have reduced night vision capacity.

He said stress could be related to anything from a medical complaint, personal life or job frustration.

AFP survey on self-rule

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A contract policing system has long been in operation in most Canadian provinces, but such a system would need considerably more detailed study before its possible application to Australian conditions could be assessed. In Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) provides services to all provinces except Ottawa and Quebec by contractual arrangement.

Should that system be adopted here, the AFP would provide services under contract to the ACT. To gain some first-hand knowledge of the system, Assistant Commissioner Val McConaghy (Commander, ACT Region) will visit Canada later this year when he will have extensive discussions on the contract policing system.

In general terms, the Canadian contract system ensures, in principle, that the Federal Government provides and maintains a community police force, and that its internal management remains with the Federal Government. Nevertheless, the commanding officer of the community force is also responsible to a community body in matters dealing with the operation, broad policy and functions of the community force. The Commander is appointed by the Commissioner after consultation with the community body.

Minimum policing standards for

the community force are also agreed upon after consultation. Arrangements exist to allow withdrawal of community police to meet emergency situations occurring elsewhere but, once again, there is provision made for consultation.

An important element is, of course, costing and under the contract system the community is required to meet an agreed sum for the provision of police services.

Any Australian system of contract policing would have to meet peculiarly Australian problems and may be quite unlike the Canadian system outlined above. Members should not take this outline as a description of any option currently under consideration.

An advantage of some type of contract system for the ACT is that the unity of the AFP would be preserved while, at the same time, the community would have a police force accountable to it and for which it had paid, in part or in full.

The option of maintaining the status quo would preserve the newly-forged unity of the AFP and, with it, the present career structure of members, the opportunity for wide experience in both national and territorial policing, and the economy of a single support system. It would also minimise industrial and morale difficulties attendant on changes stemming from self-government.

On the negative side, however, the new local government would have less say in determining local policing needs than if it were directing its own separate force, and the local community would not be contributing to the cost of local policing.

A third possible option of a separate ACT force would mean splitting the AFP as the only immediate source of trained personnel, thus losing all the advantages currently enjoyed of a unified force, and risking industrial and morale problems.

The community would be in control of its own force, however, and would be financially responsible for it.

As indicated there could be other possible options, either within or in addition to those described.

There has been a decade of change in Federal and ACT policing. The uncertainties, anxieties and apprehension that have preceded and followed changes have affected many officers. Their impact on any disciplined force is fully appreciated. We would therefore hope for a quick resolution of the issue.

Ultimately, of course, the final decision rests with Government. This article, at least, may serve to enlighten members about the options which may be considered and highlight the considerable complexities facing AFP management — and Government.