

MR GREY'S LAST WORD



*Major General Grey and Commissioner McAulay after his swearing in at the ACT Law Courts.
(Picture by Peter Wells, Canberra Times)*

A few days before his retirement on February 15, 1988, Commissioner, Major General Ronald Grey, gave an interview with journalist Mr Bob Bottom and the AFP's Director of Information, Mr Philip Castle. Some of the interview was reported in the Melbourne Age on Monday, 15 February.

Here is a summary of some of his comments:

After eight years the AFP was now set on a firm basis with proper structures in place, Commissioner Grey said. It would be unwise for this to be taken for granted and to be complacent about its progress. It would need fine tuning.

It was clearly time for him to retire from the AFP and for a new hand and a new eye to take it over. He was personally delighted with the appointment of Commissioner Peter McAulay.

While five years was long enough for him this did not mean that future Commissioners should not stay longer. In his opinion the next AFP Commissioner should come from within its own ranks.

He felt his greatest achievements during his term as Commissioner had been to establish the AFP's international stan-

ding and to put the right people into the overseas liaison jobs; to establish the credibility of the ACT nationally and overseas and to help an emergence within the AFP of the attitude that AFP policing was a profession and not merely a job. He was pleased that training was now on a professional basis and was a development and educational process rather than something to be endured.

His regret was that he had not always been able to remove those who were not good enough for the AFP.

Policing in Australia had turned the corner and co-operation between law enforcement agencies had never been better. This was not only because of the work of the National Crime Authority, but that co-operation was now being willingly given. There was mutual re-

spect and he had learned much from his fellow Commissioners.

Acknowledging that the NCA had got some good runs on the board he said it also had some special powers which made it easier to operate. It could more easily deal with the 'Mr Bigs'. But the NCA had become a drain on the best resources.

'I would not like to see the NCA doing a succession of jobs that the normal police forces are very capable of doing and doing very successfully. That in my view is not what the NCA should be about,' he said.

The NCA was a costly response to what was essentially a law enforcement problem. It would be far better, he said, to expand the investigative functions of the AFP and to spend more time on common police services.

While recent publicity had highlighted public corruption he was not unduly worried by it. He said it should also be seen in the context of the many honest officials throughout the nation who held, and worked to, totally honest principles. But if corruption was found in public office then it had to be taken out in the strongest way. Corruption could not be

passively accepted at the head. If allowed to go on unchecked it was like a cancer which would destroy the whole.

He was pleased to say that the AFP was almost totally free of corruption and that it had a stamp of integrity which was widely acknowledged. He did not believe the AFP had any major corruption. Where there had been problems these had been quickly dealt with and were more often errors of judgement. People who lacked basic integrity did not belong in the AFP, he said.

He had the highest praise for the NSW Police Commissioner, Mr John Avery, and said that he and his senior officers had been outstanding in their dedication and efficiency in cleaning up its problems.

'I have the highest praise for the NSW Police,' he said. 'It has had its ups and downs. But there is no doubt about the ability of the NSW Force. It ranks well on a world standing and is a first class police force.'

He said that trust and co-operation had to be the keynotes in the dealings of the Australian police forces. Information had to be willingly shared and when it was given should be acted on.

The need for joint task forces to continue was now gone. The current level of co-operation meant it was now quite possible to put together ad hoc task forces when they were needed rather than tying down a group. His view was that the JTFs fulfilled a need before the NCA was established.

He said police often wanted more powers and some of the public felt they already had too many. He still said the AFP needed access to taxation records.

'But I accept that the powers we have are pretty much those we are going to get,' he said. 'I'm not dissatisfied with that. The Confiscation of Assets legislation was a major step forward. However, I would like to have, as in the US, the fruits of those confiscations put into law enforcement rather than going into general consolidated revenue.'



He felt it was wrong for those frozen assets to be opened to the defendants to use in their defence as had occurred in a recent decision in Queensland.

Government had to be quite clear that there was a real cost to proper law enforcement and this meant providing additional officers and resources if it wanted additional things done. If the Confiscation of Assets legislation was to



be properly applied then the AFP needed the proper numbers of officers to follow the money trail.

'We don't have enough resources and we do need more,' he said. 'This is the premier law enforcement agency of the Federal Government. As it gets more successful it, of course, generates more work.'

He denied emphatically that he had ever felt political interference in his five years and said that it had not even been attempted and he thought that may have been because people knew what sort of a man he was. He spoke highly of the former Special Minister of State, Mr Mick Young.

'The relationship which was set by Mick Young, who was my Minister for a long time, was excellent. I could not hope ever to work with a better Minister of the Crown in regard to the responsibilities of the AFP. He was clear headed, direct and totally responsible.'

Commissioner Grey said he was concerned that the AFP's position must remain autonomous. He cautioned against removing that autonomy and said it had to remain separate under the clear control of the Commissioner. It should not be another arm of Attorney General's.

The criminal justice system was failing to deal with criminals.

'The criminal justice system seems to protect the accused and often the convicted, at the expense of the victim,' he said.

'A thug is still a thug, a thief is still a thief. People convicted of major offences are the outlaws of our society. They live

outside the law, totally, and, in my view, they should be regarded as such and treated as such.'

He did not support a return to an autonomous police force for the ACT.

'It would be of no great benefit to those officers serving in the AFP,' he said.

'Separate police forces would not give the grounding and experience and flexibility which we can offer. This force which includes the ACT region is infinitely greater in its present form. In hindsight I think most would agree, even though the former ACT Police Force was an excellent force.'

The AFP should never be thought of as an amalgamation of the former police forces but rather as a new force in its own right with three roles, or 'the Trinity' as he referred to it: international, national and ACT policing. Its overseas role had been significantly effective in recent years and very much due to the calibre of the overseas liaison officers.

He recognised that some of the old enclaves still existed but they were nowhere near as significant as they had been. He thought they would have little influence now on the AFP and those people who felt that still lived in the nineteenth century.



(Pictures by David Bartho)

On the media, he had not greatly changed his views.

'There are some magnificent people in the media in Australia, but there is an increasing number, some of whom are perhaps young but not all, who belittle the proper ethics of their profession. The trial is by gossip and by innuendo, however there is some honour. Without a free press we have no civil liberty whatsoever.'

His final message to those in the AFP was that it is a high calling.

He said: 'The lessening of crime of a country is an object worthy of the best thoughts, the best efforts of our best people. We are fortunate to have so many best people in the AFP — look after them.'