

Fighting crime in the 'premier' State

By Stephen Simpson

BIG, bold and brassy are terms regularly used in an attempt to define the atmosphere and lifestyle of Sydney, and Sydneysiders would probably say the description is close to the mark.

Sydney is Australia's largest city, with a population of more than 3.5 million people living in what approximates a giant square, bounded by Broken Bay in the north, the Blue Mountains in the west, and Port Hacking in the south. In a virtually uninterrupted ribbon of development north and south of Sydney are the cities of Newcastle and Wollongong, which together contribute nearly 700,000 people to New South Wales' overall population of 5.75 million.

The harbour and waterways, the Bridge, the Opera House, the beaches, the Blue Mountains; they are internationally known features of beauty that characterise Sydney and contribute to its cosmopolitan atmosphere. Also contributing to the atmosphere is the worst traffic congestion in Australia, along with industrial air pollution in the western suburbs of Sydney caused by the city's basin-like geography.

The harbour and beachside suburbs of Sydney boast some of the most beautiful views imaginable, with housing prices to match. Owning a house in Sydney, with its dwindling land supply and surging demand, costs on average a third more than in Melbourne, its nearest rival, and approaches twice the cost of Canberra. With household incomes little different from the national average, house ownership in Sydney is beyond many of its residents.

Sydney has a varied racial mix in its population, with areas of high ethnic concentration that have correspondingly high levels of unemployment, crime and social problems.

The nation's busiest international and domestic airports are in Sydney and together with Newcastle and Wollongong, Sydney has the



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Sydney, the focal point of Federal crime in Eastern Region.

busiest seaports. This volume of traffic also means that some of Australia's largest drug seizures are made or orchestrated in Sydney. Operation 'Clinker' (October 1988), a 43 kg heroin seizure; Operation 'Soy' (May 1989), 50 kg of heroin; Operation 'Melaleuca' (February 1990), 28 kg of cocaine; Operation 'Chair' (June 1988), a 3 tonne cannabis seizure; all had Sydney as a focus.

The home-grown drug industry in NSW is also very active, although less profitable of late, as the NSW Police and its Drug Enforcement Agency arm have had great success in discovering and destroying huge crops of cannabis throughout the State.

As for Commonwealth fraud, most departments have offices in Sydney with staff numbers, revenue and expenditure figures, and a client base, commensurate with

the size of the city's population. This has resulted in AFP's Eastern Region in recent times being involved in a number of major investigations into sales tax and social security frauds; counterfeit currency operations; illegal immigrant scams and frauds by government employees.

The size and character of NSW and particularly Sydney means that Eastern Region's working environment is clearly one where its 515 personnel are exposed to all facets of AFP national policing.

The Region's Structure

The Region has three major divisions: Drug Operations; Fraud and General Crime; and Intelligence. Support branches are: Corporate Management; and Services with outposted sections of Forensic Services, Police Technical Unit, Internal Investigations Division (IID)

and Internal Security and Audit Division (ISAD).

Assistant Commissioner Phil Baer heads the Region, with Commanders Morri Blaylock, Andy Wells, and Ray Phillips in charge of the drugs, fraud, and intelligence divisions respectively. There are a further 19 superintendents, 111 sergeants and 335 constables in the Region and the 56 staff members are at levels four (3), three (8), two (22) and one (23).

Drug Operations Division

Statistics indicate that Sydney is the major point of entry of drugs into Australia, meaning that the Division is at the forefront of the AFP's national drug policing objectives.

The Division has around 120 officers working in one of three Branches: Response; Targeting and General Operations.

The Response Branch basically reacts to drug seizures at either the airport or a seaport on an around-the-clock basis and generally runs short-term investigations. It deals regularly with Customs officers and import agencies.

Targeting Branch conducts longer term investigations based on targeted individuals and groups. The Branch also has a surveillance capability.

General Operations Branch is mainly responsible for investigating parcel post seizures at the International Mail Exchange. It is also a training area for new members to the Drug Division.

Numerous joint drug operations in the Region are conducted with the NSW Police Drug Enforcement Agency and with the Australian Customs Service. A unique agreement exists between the NSW Police and the Region which defines the respective roles relating to the importation and distribution of drugs in this State.

Fraud and General Crime Division

Considering the size of the State's population, as well as the concentration of Federal government departments and authorities in Sydney and their expenditure budgets, this Division is also at the forefront in protecting the Commonwealth's revenue. Whilst the types of matters investigated seem no different from those in other Regions, the volume of work is, however, greater.

Australian Federal Police

Eastern Region



Officer-in-Charge
Assistant Commissioner P. Baer



Intelligence Division
Commander R. Phillips



Fraud and General Crime
Commander A. Wells



Drug Operations Division
Commander M. Blaylock

The Division has 130 officers working in four branches, three of which are dedicated to investigating the wide range of Federal crimes and allegations requiring Federal Police attention. The fourth Branch, General Investigations, is designed to cater for the specialist functions surrounding the complex proceeds of crime and assets tracing investigations; the growing forged currency inquiries; and the sensitive Family Law investigations. As well, the Branch is home to the Operational Co-ordination Centre and the Divisional Support Group.

Outposted to Newcastle are four members under the command of a detective sergeant. This office investigates the full ambit of Federal offences in the growing Newcastle and Hunter Valley region.

Some of the investigations are extraordinarily complex, some are highly sensitive, others involve potentially huge revenue losses to the government. Some are also dangerous. At present the Division is investigating an alleged tax fraud where funds involving about \$150 million are being diverted overseas. Another current investigation arising out of an ICAC inquiry concerns allegations of the 'sale' of confidential government information.

An Australian citizenship scam allegedly involving forged certificates, a \$600,000 profit to the principal and the arrest of several people, was investigated last year.

With little information to work with, the Currency Unit late last year tracked down an alleged forgery operation concerning more than \$8 million in US bank notes and made three arrests. The Criminal Assets Investigation Unit contributed a \$28 million share of the \$37 million in criminal assets presently held Australia wide.

Danger can accompany any investigation. In August last year, one of the Division's constables was run over by a car when he and two colleagues attempted to interview the driver over a forged tax cheque matter.

The Newcastle office has had its share of interesting investigations. In 1991, the office was involved with Queensland Police in the arrest of a man who allegedly tried to blow up a cruise ship to collect insurance.

Intelligence Division

With more than 140 personnel, the Intelligence Division is numerically the Region's largest. To claim Sydney as the nation's organised crime capital may be speculative, but in terms

of drug seizures and criminal asset seizures alone, it could be justified. If Sydney isn't the crime capital, it comes close. In this context, the work of the Region's Intelligence Division is vital.

The Division has four branches: Crime Analysis; Crime Intelligence; Portswatch and Protection; and Surveillance.

The Crime Analysis Branch processes information and develops it into useable intelligence in the identification of targets. It is the Division's research arm. Its personnel collect information from the other divisions as well as other agencies such as Customs, Corrective Services, the NSW Crime Commission, the DEA, and the State Intelligence Group, and disseminate it accordingly. They are also skilled in a wide variety of languages.

The investigative arm of the Division is the Criminal Intelligence Branch, which develops targets for eventual referral to operational units. The Branch also provides tactical support to operational units when required and has a team specialising in politically motivated violence.

The main role of the Portswatch and Protection Branch is to respond to alerts on passengers arriving in or departing from Australia. The Branch also gathers intelligence information to assist Customs in its functions. It also provides close personal protection to VIPs and certain consular officials. The Airport, Seaports and Close Protection Units of the Branch are stationed at Sydney



Eastern Region HQ's impressive foyer.

Airport, and two Seaports officers are posted at Wollongong.

The Surveillance Branch collects evidence to support an arrest or seizure of criminal evidence, working only on jobs where normal investigation cannot achieve the required results. Its officers are involved in controlled deliveries of drugs, 'life-style' surveillance and long term target surveillance.

Services and Corporate Management Branches

The Services and Corporate Management Branches provide the means to allow the Region to operate, and account for a diverse range of functions.

Services Branch handles the Region's communications, drug and

exhibit registries, training, the computer network, legal services, technical services and auditing. The absence of any of these functions would rapidly bring the Region to its knees.

The same is true of the Corporate Management Branch. Personnel, pay and conditions, general services, building and property, budget management, health, welfare, media liaison, and the quartermaster are units all making a vital contribution.

The Outposts

Forensic Services Branch has a staff of 15, of whom eight are in the Physical Evidence Unit. The Branch provides a specialist document examination service to the AFP Australia wide, and the Unit is involved in recording physical evidence. The expertise of both areas is widely acknowledged throughout the AFP.

The Police Technical Unit occupies an office remote from RHQ and provides the technical support for the Region's investigations. The IID and ISAD outposts are within Regional Headquarters and (it is hoped) no busier than they should be.

The Region also has a number of officers, including three superintendents, on secondment to the NCA's Sydney office, as well as four officers on secondment to the Australian Securities Commission. A superintendent and a sergeant are also on secondment from Investigations Department, HQ, to the Cash Transactions Reports Agency (soon to be AUSTRAC) in Sydney.



An indoor range is one of many specialist features of Eastern Region HQ.