

Intelligence Branch

Experience needed for effective intelligence role

THE head of Western Region's Intelligence Branch, Detective Superintendent Nick Drew, knows exactly what he wants in someone under his command. He said to be effective in Western Region an intelligence officer needed a good deal of general investigative experience, good communication skills and a fair dose of common sense and maturity.

"It's no good coming here as a recruit. Without experience you're just wasting your time," he said.

Western Region's Intelligence Branch consists of the Airport Intelligence Section, the Regional Observation Section, five Intelligence Units, the Police Technical Unit, Seaports plus the *resident agents* in Broome, Port Hedland, Albany and Geraldton. It is the largest branch in the Region with 46 officers.

The Intelligence Units are divided into drugs and fraud investigations. Each of these units is headed by a sergeant and usually comprises at least three constables. Each unit looks after national projects as well as local matters.

"We also carry out police checks for the Christmas Island casino tour operators," Detective Superintendent Drew said.

He was quick to point out that the sheer size of Western Australia is not appreciated by much of the rest of the country. To address the problem of collecting intelligence in such a large state, he said that the Regional Commander had placed officers in remote coastal townships in order to get first hand information on those matters of interest to the AFP.

"In placing the *resident agents* we

have attempted to provide a service tailored to the the needs of the drug and fraud branches," Detective Superintendent Drew said.

The *resident agent* program has been established to provide intelligence on the full range of AFP concerns as well as to deal with day-to-day issues and to take matters to the local court.

"Our main problem is being metropolitan based in a very large state. Hopefully, having an AFP presence in remote areas of the state will make our profile more visible," Detective Superintendent Drew said.

He acknowledged that in Western Australia's remote areas the AFP has to rely on the community to supply information. "It is the eyes and ears of the community that are so valuable to us," he said.

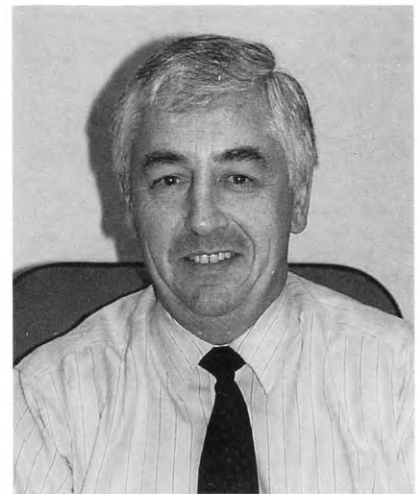
Gradually the profile of the AFP is being raised in the non-metropolitan areas while in the metropolitan area, the AFP is well known and the local media no longer confuse AFP activities with WA Police activities.

Detective Superintendent Drew said that the Intelligence Branch has been responsible for paving the way for successful investigations not only in the drugs area but in the line of suspect financial transaction and money laundering.

Fraud Intelligence Unit

OIC of the Fraud Intelligence Unit Detective Sergeant Mick Duthie said having an intelligence unit concentrating specifically on fraud meant that "We are able to filter the chaff from the wheat for the Fraud Branch".

The Fraud Intelligence Unit was created to better link the Intelli-



Detective Superintendent Nick Drew

gence Branch with the Fraud Branch to enable follow-up to be done on intelligence that came into the Fraud Branch but was left dormant due to the sheer weight of the work load. The unit also has responsibility for all Austrac referrals.

Detective Sergeant Duthie's team is also breaking ground in a new area of interest for the AFP.

"Given that the Commonwealth Government has put such a high priority on paedophile investigations, we have now taken it on as a high priority. We have been liaising very closely with WA Police Vice Squad and with Customs to ensure that we have adequately covered the AFP's responsibilities," he said.

"Other investigations undertaken by the unit include corruption, secret commissions and corrupt tendering processes.

"We had the solicitor-general here recently and our case officer was able to point out faults in the current Commonwealth's tendering process. Our investigations found that the process is open to abuse.

The solicitor-general was very interested in the recommendations that came out of an investigation which essentially started from an intuitive call by one of the intelligence team.

“He picked up on a comment in a newspaper article where an interior decorator complained of the corruption in the office outfitting industry.

“After interviewing the decorator, our officer was then able to demonstrate that Commonwealth departments in Perth were paying exorbitant prices for office refurbishments and had little or no comeback on the contractors,” Sergeant Duthie said.

A review of the process has been recommended.

An early success for the unit came with the investigation of corrupt Customs officers who were removing departure tax stamps from passenger’s tickets and then obtaining reimbursement for the labels from post offices. This led to convictions and dismissals from Customs about 12 months ago.

“Of course the lament of the intelligence officer is that you never get to lock up the criminal so it is difficult to cultivate that person as one of your informants. However, as members of the intelligence area come from operational areas, they

tend to have their own informants who are of use when the officers start work in intelligence,” he said.

Drugs Intelligence Unit

Detective Sergeant Terry Buckingham said that the Drugs Intelligence Unit not only concentrates on drugs, but is interested in those aspects of organised crime which flow from the drug trade.

The unit not only has a responsibility to provide regional intelligence but has responsibilities to national projects which are co-ordinated out of Strategic Intelligence Division (SID) at headquarters.

The unit’s priority is to generate targets for drug operations.

“We don’t get involved in the arrests or interviews, as that would defeat the reason of having an intelligence area,” Detective Sergeant Buckingham said.

Apart from specific targets the unit also looks at targets seen to be of general importance. An eye is also kept on criminal assets activity because the unit targets with a wealth base in mind.

“We are not looking for the hired help,” Detective Sergeant Buckingham said.

“Occasionally we have common targets with the WA Police, but generally we don’t look at street deal-



Detective Sergeant Terry Buckingham

ers because we are looking higher up the chain. We work well with the WA Police and we keep each other informed.

“Generally we are looking at the harder drugs and currently WA Police is concerned mainly with amphetamines, with production starting to take place in WA,” he said.

Sharing information

The AFP Intelligence Branch has a good relationship with the new intelligence unit in the Criminal Justice system. This unit provides information generated within prisons and has opened up a new source of information for the AFP. Courier recruiting takes place and associations are formed in jails. This information can be of great importance.

Another good source of intelligence is provided through the Australian Customs Service. Customs is well established along the WA coastline. The AFP is able to tap into relevant intelligence through their Customs liaison officer, while reciprocal arrangements with Customs maintains a two-way flow of information.

Detective Sergeant Buckingham said he was attracted to intelligence because there is always something new to deal with, but insists that having sound operational experience is the key to being a good intelligence officer. □



Members of the Fraud Intelligence Unit, (l to r) Detective Constables Rob Caruso, Ian Fraser and Steve James with Detective Sergeant Mick Duthie