

The past five years

a significant time

[Deputy Commissioner John Lawler APM]

Twenty-five years is a significant milestone in any field, but in the federal policing arena in Australia it is a significant achievement. The establishment and history of the AFP and some of its forebears is covered elsewhere in this anniversary edition of *Platypus Magazine*, but a period of great interest to me has been the past five years which have been years of key development for the organisation.



Deputy Commissioner John Lawler APM

Starting with the AFP's role at the 1999 pre-election ballot in East Timor, the AFP began to develop a higher profile not only with the Australian public, but with the Australian Government. The fact that Australian police officers were involved in assisting to supervise the ballot under precarious conditions rated highly in the daily news of the time. At this extremely stressful period in East Timor, AFP members conducted themselves impressively and demonstrated that literally while under fire the AFP could be a reliable source of advice to the Australian Government on matters of major importance.

Since that time there has been a sharp focus on the AFP's expertise in a range of matters including protective security, its investigations into illicit drugs, fraud, personal protection, people smuggling and its peacekeeping activities in countries in the near region.

The Sydney 2000 Olympics provided the AFP the opportunity to support the security services provided by the NSW Police. The AFP played a

significant role in whole-of-government coordination surrounding the Olympics which I feel demonstrated the AFP's ability to deal with critical national protection issues. Only days after the conclusion of the Olympic Games, and amid the confusion and protests which surrounded the Melbourne World Economic Forum in September 2000, the AFP team assigned to assist the People's Republic of China delegation seemingly achieved the impossible. By using a degree of innovation and flexibility they delivered the delegates to the forum relatively unscathed. The success of this operation sharpened the AFP's 'can do' image with Government.

Success can have a cumulative effect, but it was the implications to Australian national security following the 11 September attacks on America in 2001 and the 12 October attacks in Bali in 2002 that propelled the AFP's profile into an arena not experienced by the organisation before. Again the AFP was equal to the demands of the investigation into the terrorist bombings in Bali and in responding in the manner in which we did, we re-established existing law enforcement links and forged new ones. In assisting the Indonesian National Police (INP) with the investigation the AFP was able to apply its own skills to the investigation along with coordinating the assistance of international law enforcement agencies and Australian State and Territory police who possessed supplementary skills essential to the investigation.



Signing in at the 2001 Heads of Narcotics Law Enforcement Agencies conference hosted by the AFP in Sydney. At the time John Lawler was the General Manager of Eastern Operations.

In conjunction with the obligations taken on by the AFP relating to counter terrorism and the Bali investigation, the AFP was maintaining its strike rate in its 'routine' investigations while increasing its commitment to policing duties in the Pacific region.

The AFP continues its commitment to East Timor having had a presence there since 1999 and on 24 July this year celebrated the first anniversary of the launch of Operation Helpem Fren in the Solomon Islands with the unveiling of a monument cemented in place over the destroyed remains of hundreds of surrendered weapons helped mark the occasion.

A key factor in the development of the AFP over the past few years has been its ability to work with a wide variety of multinational agencies. The March seizure of pseudoephedrine hydrochloride in the Philippines not only removed 1 tonne of chemicals from the production chain but showed again the flexibility of our rapid deployment capability.

Following that we were one of eight countries involved in the investigation and eventual dismantling of a clandestine lab in Fiji in June this year. This was quite a remarkable job in the context of law enforcement and

an indication of where we are heading in future operations. It demonstrates the AFP's ability to cooperate with law enforcement agencies and to inject a high level of strategic thinking. I believe AFP officers also have a level of sensitivity to the needs of those agencies which goes down well and is a subtle but sure sign of the AFP's continuing maturity.

The past five years have been important ones for the AFP. Along with what I have already mentioned, it has been demonstrated that there has been a significant link between the AFP's drug interdiction efforts and the reduction in heroin supply and subsequent overdose deaths. It is this level of success that sends a pulse to Government and it is our ability to provide appropriate and timely information that has enhanced our standing.

The AFP's history has been one of continuous change in order to best meet ongoing law enforcement challenges. Significantly our 25th anniversary year coincides with the introduction of a new organisational structure – the Functional Model, which, I believe, increases our ability to deliver timely and quality information to Government and helps generate a greater understanding of the AFP among our key stakeholders.

The establishment of National Managers in Canberra has improved the focus on key operational functions and provided a higher level of national coordination and support to operational activities. The Functional Model was a natural evolution in enhancing the AFP's effectiveness and is about delivering the right resource in the right place; this is true whether it involves a Government forum or an operational need. The model is working in reality, not just as an esoteric idea but has a significant purpose in the practical work of organisational outcomes. This all bodes well for the AFP's future.