

# Collaboration is the key to professional standards

**Observing the standards of the profession is an integral part of the AFP culture, one that is supported by partnerships which ensure high-level external review.**

All AFP members are required to maintain the highest level of professional standards in both their professional and their private lives. Developing and maintaining a culture of integrity throughout the organisation is dependant on both internal and external measures, and the relationships with our independent external oversight partners play a key role.

Although the AFP has primary responsibility for resolving complaints about the organisation or its members, both the Commonwealth and Law Enforcement Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) and the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity (ACLEI) undertake separate elements of the external oversight role. This tripartite approach has resulted in a robust and accountable system, according to Manager Professional Standards Mark Walters.

“The AFP implemented a new complaint management system in 2006 to receive and respond to internal and external complaints,” Commander Walters said.

“The system emphasises early intervention and resolution of minor conduct matters. While the system functions well, the Ombudsman’s oversight provides an underlying strength and increases public confidence.”

ACLEI’s role is somewhat different, but just as important. The Integrity Commissioner was established in 2006 to detect, investigate and prevent corruption in the AFP and the Australian Crime Commission, with a priority on serious and systemic corruption.

The AFP has been working closely with Integrity Commissioner Philip Moss and ACLEI since it was set up. Regular formal and informal meetings are a feature of the relationships with the Ombudsman and ACLEI to ensure a strategic and proactive approach to maintaining professional standards. ACLEI describes the relationship as an ‘integrity partnership’ into which it has input at all levels, from recruit training to management.

“The relationship between the agencies needs to be strong and healthy, with a capacity to engage in open and honest dialogue,” Commissioner Keelty said.

“The AFP is committed to the ethos of continuous improvement in our practices and procedures.

“Upholding the integrity and the reputation of the AFP as a premier law enforcement agency is pivotal for continued success, especially given the diversity of roles we perform in the local community, nationally and in the international arena. The AFP values are the foundation of our integrity framework and we rely on every member being aware of their responsibilities to uphold these values in their every day work.”

In June 2008, the Integrity Commissioner informed the AFP that ACLEI intended to develop a pilot program for reviewing the AFP’s anti-corruption plans, including monitoring its implementation. Commissioner Keelty said the joint initiative provided a welcome opportunity to ensure plans were in place to meet anti-corruption targets.

Under the review, ACLEI will seek to increase its understanding of the AFP processes used to identify and assess integrity risks, the general risk profile of the AFP, the controls and strategies in place to mitigate or manage identified corruption risks and what other measures may be planned. The results of the review are expected in the 2009-2010 financial year.

The oversight role of the Ombudsman came about as part of the response to the Review of the Professional Standards in the AFP: February 2003, the Fisher Review. That review indicated the need for a “managerial model of professional standards using minor infractions by employees as an opportunity to improve that person’s performance and review the systems and processes that may have contributed to the behaviour in the first place”. The Ombudsman conducts reviews of the AFP’s complaints management system twice a year and reports annually to the Federal Parliament on those findings.



Integrity Commissioner Philip Moss

In December 2008, Commissioner Keelty and the Ombudsman, Professor John McMillan, attended a forum to further strengthen the relationship between the two organisations. The forum, hosted by the Ombudsman, presented an opportunity to exchange information and ideas to better understand the role and responsibilities of each agency.

One outcome of the forum has streamlined access for the Ombudsman to Professional Standards staff support and training which has enhanced his capacity to conduct his twice-yearly reviews of the AFP's management of its complaint handling framework. The outcomes of the reviews are fed back to the AFP, resulting in a system that is continuously improved and strengthened. These changes also assist the AFP to reflect best-practice across both national and international policing jurisdictions.

Inside the AFP, Professional Standards (PRS) has responsibility for developing, monitoring and enhancing organisational professional standards. In 2007, in the first review, the Ombudsman made 24 recommendations on improving a range of systems from recording information to implementing guidelines and legislation. Eleven recommendations were made in the Ombudsman's second review and the third review made three recommendations, these related to enhancing practices and recording issues.

"This excellent result acknowledges that the current management of complaints complies with all legislative requirements and that AFP practices have improved significantly in line with the desired outcomes of the Fisher Review," National Manager Human Resources Paul Jevtovic said.

"The AFP has implemented a range of best-practice initiatives to minimise misconduct and corruption risks and to achieve an effective and proactive integrity framework. Each element of the framework is complementary and incorporates education, prevention and proactive investigation strategies. This holistic approach is implemented across all functions of the AFP and is necessary to ensure the highest level of resistance to corruption across the organisation.

"Education and prevention measures are key to reinforcing the values and principles governing professional conduct and encourage an organisational culture of integrity and honesty."

To assist members to understand how the AFP Core Values apply to their everyday work, reporting obligations, the complaint management framework, and ethical decision-making concepts, PRS delivers a range of integrity awareness programs.

The AFP recognises and values complaints, as analysing their causes and nature and the processes for dealing with them improves outcomes for the future. Continuing cooperative relationships with both ACLEI and the Ombudsman is vital to ensure that the AFP can fulfil its role and uphold its good reputation with governments and communities.



Manager Professional Standards Mark Walters