

Working on the fringe

Being an AFP Protective Service Officer can involve working in some of Australia's most far-flung places. But living in a remote community often comes with its own rewards.

The township of Exmouth sits on the North West Cape of WA, the most westerly point of the Australian continent. Bordered by the Indian Ocean to the west and the Great Sandy Desert to the east, the population of 2,500 has to travel 1,270 kilometres to get to Perth or more than 3,000 kilometres to Darwin.

AFP members living in Exmouth provide protection services to the Department of Defence's Naval Communication Station Harold E Holt.

Despite the remote location, Exmouth Protection Station Manager Kurt Decker says there is plenty to do when not on duty.

"Most AFP members at Exmouth are involved with local clubs or organisations such as St John

Ambulance, the Volunteer Fire Brigade, State Emergency Service, Pilbara Army Reserve Regiment and the surf club," Assistant Inspector Decker said.

He also enjoys taking advantage of the area's natural environment. With the Cape Range National Park and the Ningaloo Marine Park on the town's doorstep, Assistant Inspector Decker says the opportunities available are vastly different to those found in his home state of Tasmania.

"There are sports like game fishing on offer, as well as squash and golf," he said.

"Members are also able to take part in the annual Krait Trophy, which is a scenario-based firearms competition between the AFP, WA Police and the Army."

Assistant Inspector Decker says members working in Exmouth enjoy being part of the close-knit community. They've been involved in building a purpose-built Marine Rescue headquarters, acquiring a response boat and raising money for the Game Fishing Club.

"Living in a small town, AFP officers are always under the spotlight whether they're on or off duty," Assistant Inspector Decker said.

"While everyone knows who you work for, it's also very rewarding to contribute to the community's future and to be a part of it all."

Also living on the fringe of Australia are Protective Service Officers stationed at the Australian Defence Satellite Communication Station (ADSCS). Just 30 kilometres outside the WA city of Geraldton,





01: Protective Service Officers at Exmouth **02:** The Kojarena Pirates participating in a dragon boat race
03: Assistant Inspector Kurt Decker.



AFP members are not quite as isolated as they are at Exmouth. But the vast distances to other major centres means members and their families face similar problems to others living in remote areas.

Certainly the coastline can be inhospitable. Geraldton is found on WA's Batavia Coast, named for a 1629 shipwreck. The Batavia sank on its maiden voyage, and gained notoriety after survivors revealed the shocking details of the subsequent mutiny and massacre that took place on the nearby Abrolhos islands. It was just the first of many ships to come to grief in such difficult waters.

Members based at ADSCS provide security video monitoring, foot and vehicle patrols, access and egress control, bag and vehicle searches, alarm responses and emergency management and coordination for the Department of Defence. They

also play an active part in the local community, and take pride in the work they do for a range of charities.

These efforts can take many forms, and can lead to some surprising results. Recently the AFP's Station Manager Marlene Stevens agreed to organise an ADSCS team for a local dragon boat competition. With a combination of members from the AFP, Defence, Boeing Australia and a few civilians, it was a good opportunity to build interagency relationships.

However most of the crew had never been in a dragon boat before and, with just 30 minutes to practise, few anticipated they'd have much success. Named the Kojarena Pirates after a small town east of Geraldton, they donned bandannas and eye patches and took to the water, managing to place third in the final.

This success spurred on the team, and all 21 members agreed to take part in the annual Cancer Council fundraiser Relay for Life. Not only did the Kojarena Pirates complete the most laps of the local sportsground in 24 hours, they managed to come second in the fund-raising stakes and donated more than \$6,000 to cancer research.

AFP Protective Service Officer (PSO) Bill Alford says he's enormously proud to be a part of the team.

"Apart from being good fun, this event has helped AFP members build a better relationship with stakeholders at the ADSCS in Geraldton," PSO Alford said.

"Now we can have a rest and look forward to next year's event."