

National problem needs a national response

An enhanced understanding of organised crime in Australia has led the AFP to create its highly successful 'Crime Program' and unite with Commonwealth, state and territory law enforcement agencies to fight an increasingly sophisticated criminal enterprise.

Organised crime is no longer the preserve of insular entities formed along exclusive cultural or ethnic lines.

Organised criminal groups have become increasingly sophisticated, have flexible affiliations that transcend state, territory and international borders, and are willing to engage in any profitable activity.

This represents a direct threat to the integrity of Commonwealth, state and territory security and governance arrangements, and exposes Australians to the multitude of threats posed by serious and organised crime.

In February 2010, the AFP created its 'Crime Program', which oversees the work of its Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) portfolio. With dedicated resources in all states and territories – and

officers embedded around the world – the SOC portfolio is a key element in the Commonwealth's reinvigorated focus on combating organised crime.

The backbone of the Commonwealth plan is based on two major documents released in 2010: *The Commonwealth Organised Crime Strategic Framework* and the *National Organised Crime Response Plan*. Both encourage interagency and cross border police cooperation and the latter calls for legislative changes and the removal of impediments to information sharing.

Further to these, the *Protocol on Multi-Jurisdictional Investigations for Serious Organised Crime* – signed by all Australian police commissioners in September 2010 – seeks nationally consistent operational methodologies and

governance processes for all trans-border investigations.

Significantly, the AFP and its law enforcement partners are now identifying links between seemingly unrelated criminal outfits, such as one recently identified between Mexican drug cartels, Australian-based outlaw motorcycle gangs and Middle Eastern money launderers.

At the official opening of the new AFP National Headquarters in April this year, Prime Minister Julia Gillard told AFP members that international law enforcement collaboration is vital.

"Criminals don't respect national borders and that means our law enforcement agencies need to work closely with their international counterparts to stay one step ahead of offenders," she said.

01: Bags containing methamphetamine seized during Operation Stance in Sydney in May.

Just as the impact of organised crime is a shared problem affecting Commonwealth, state and territory interests, the most effective law enforcement responses will involve coordinated effort across numerous jurisdictions.

The commitment to this approach is evident in a SOC portfolio key performance indicator, which stipulates that 50 per cent of operations must be conducted under joint agency agreements, rising to 60 per cent by 2012-13.

The establishment of standing, multi-agency organised crime investigation teams around Australia will see a 'national approach to a national problem' mentality. Some of them include the Joint Organised Crime Group in New South Wales and the Joint Agency Task Force on Organised Crime in Western Australia.

Operational outcomes since February 2010 indicate that the multi-jurisdictional approach to combating organised crime is working. Over \$15 million has been seized as a result of SOC operations since its inception, including \$9.2 million as a result of one joint AFP-Australian Crime Commission (ACC) money laundering investigation in March 2010.

The AFP and its domestic law enforcement partners have also seized more than 1.8 tonnes of drugs and their precursors between July 2010 and 5 May this year — an increase of almost 45 per cent compared with the same period last year. Statistics also show an 81 per cent increase in cocaine seizures and 146 and 260 per cent increases in heroin and amphetamine-type stimulant seizures respectively.

The establishment of the Criminal Assets Confiscation Taskforce in January 2011 has also contributed to the multi-agency approach to disrupting organised crime. In all, \$41.9 million worth of assets have been restrained in the current financial year to 16 May, compared with \$18.9 million in 2009-10.

AFP Commissioner Negus recently told a Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs hearing that the multiagency approach to asset forfeiture has seen Taskforce members — the AFP, Australian Tax Office, the ACC and Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions — adopt a significantly more aggressive approach to seizing the assets of organised criminals.



Ethos evident in operational outcomes

Three recent operations demonstrate the benefits of working collaboratively with law enforcement partners around Australia.

Operation Collage

In October 2010, Australian law enforcement agencies combined to seize the third largest shipment of cocaine ever detected in Australia. The operation commenced following a referral to the AFP from the US Drug Enforcement Administration.

The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and the AFP, with support from NSW Police and the Queensland Police Service, joined forces to seize 400 kilograms of cocaine at a small maritime port on Queensland's southern coast.

Three organised crime figures with links in Australia and South America were arrested and charged after the cocaine was transferred from a mother ship in the Pacific Ocean to a small craft, which was then used to exploit Australia's large coastline by transporting the drugs to a non-commercial port.

AFP Deputy Commissioner Andrew Colvin praised the inter-agency collaboration during the operation.

"Customs has been the AFP's partner in this operation and their expertise has been critical to success," he said.

"Support from NSW and Queensland Police also shows how effective Australia's law enforcement agencies can be."

Operation Rossa

In April 2011, the AFP and Victoria Police charged 13 people linked to Australian and Middle Eastern organised crime with

a range of drugs, firearms and proceeds of crime offences during Operation Rossa.

The joint operation saw the AFP, Victoria Police, Australian Crime Commission and Customs conduct 25 search warrants in Melbourne and Ballarat resulting in the seizure of more than 2.5 kilograms of amphetamine-type stimulants and their precursors. A stolen motorcycle and six firearms were also confiscated.

The seizure of approximately \$4.5 million worth of assets over the course of the protracted investigation significantly impacted on a major organised crime group.

AFP Manager Melbourne Office Commander Scott Lee said that it is now clear that Australian law enforcement agencies are "ganging up" against organised crime syndicates.

Detective Superintendent Doug Fryer from Victoria Police also praised the multi-agency effort, saying it was a great example of the positive results that can be achieved when state and



Commonwealth law enforcement agencies work together.

Operation Stance

May 2011 saw the largest seizure of methamphetamine in our nation's history when 239 kilograms of the drug, worth up to \$50 million on Australian streets, was seized in Sydney and Perth.

Cash and a loaded 9mm semi-automatic pistol were also removed by police when four organised crime figures with links to Australian and European organised crime were arrested and charged.

The standing Joint Agency Taskforce on Organised Crime in Perth, comprising officers from

Western Australia Police, the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and the AFP, was instrumental in bringing the operation to resolution. At the time, AFP Assistant Commissioner Kevin Zuccato acknowledged that the AFP would continue to rely on and seek out the specific skill-sets of its domestic and international partners.



Results get noticed

During a hearing of the Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in May, Senator for Queensland Mark Furner noted the amount of media reporting of organised crime disruptions — from fraud and money laundering to cybercrime and drugs.

He said that “the huge drug seizure” of 460 kilograms of cocaine in his home capital of Brisbane was indicative of the good work being done by the AFP and Customs.

The increasingly close working relationships between Commonwealth, state and territory law enforcement agencies are vital to ensuring the ongoing effectiveness and increased efficiency of the AFP's national response to serious and organised crime.

02: AFP members and Customs and Border Protection Service officers display cocaine seized during Operation Collage at a media conference last October.

03: In May, Federal Agents working on another job—Operation Chance—intercepted more than 50 kilograms of cocaine chemically suspended in drums of hydraulic oil.