

**GOLD COAST DISTRICT
NEGOTIATED RESPONSE TRIAL:
SURVEY FINDINGS**

February 1997

RESEARCH & COORDINATION DIVISION

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INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the findings of a telephone survey conducted by staff of the Research and Coordination Division of the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) to assess a new service delivery policy recently trialled in the Gold Coast Police District. The policy, known as 'Standing Operational Procedures for Negotiated Response to Complaints', was designed to reduce the demands being made on police resources by allowing certain minor offences to be dealt with by telephone. The trial commenced on 22 October 1996 and was in operation until 4 December 1996.

The main objectives in conducting the telephone survey were to:

- collect information on the type of incidents dealt with under the new policy
- assess the level of client satisfaction with the type of police response received
- provide the Queensland Police Service (QPS) with information to assist in the formulation of policy and procedures for implementing negotiated response.

The statutory basis for the CJC undertaking this survey derives from sections 23(g) of the *Criminal Justice Act 1989*, which defines as one of the responsibilities of the CJC: 'monitoring the performance of the police service with a view to ensuring that the most appropriate policing methods are being used'. The project is also in accord with a current CJC corporate objective to 'monitor and enhance the professionalism, effectiveness and responsiveness of the QPS'.

The paper is organised under the following headings:

- Background Information and Policy Description
- Methodology
- Survey Findings
- Summary and Policy Implications.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND POLICY DESCRIPTION

In late October 1996, the Gold Coast Police District trialed a new service delivery policy aimed at promoting the more efficient use of District resources. The policy, called 'Standing Operational Procedures for Negotiated Response to Complaints', was intended for use only in the Gold Coast District. The development of the policy was, in part, the result of a growing concern that substantial police resources were being expended to deal with relatively minor matters.

Although the new policy came under the banner of 'negotiated response', it was not designed to incorporate a wide range of negotiated response strategies, but rather focused more narrowly on handling relatively minor incidents by telephone.

The specific aims of the policy were to:

- provide police with additional time to conduct inquiries and investigations, and to engage in more pro-active work by reducing the requirement for police to attend to certain categories of minor offences
- allow calls for service to be prioritised to ensure that the most serious incidents received an immediate response
- improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Gold Coast District Communications Centre (GCDCC).

The types of minor offences identified by the QPS as matters that could be dealt with over the telephone without the need for a police patrol to attend were:

- malicious telephone calls (Radio Code - 107)
- minor stealing offences (123)
- unlawful use of a motor vehicle (127)
- wilful damage/graffiti (135)
- lost/stolen property (136).

The policy was designed to apply generally to the offences listed above. However, there were a number of conditions set out in the policy that limited the circumstances under which the matter could be handled strictly by telephone. For example, matters could not be handled using the new policy if:

- the value of property or loss to the victim was in excess of \$5,000
- there was some form of violence indicated by the caller or fears for the caller's safety
- there were suspects and they were at the scene
- there appeared to be some evidentiary value in police attending the scene
- there were suspicions that the matter was false.

The policy did not impose any conditions regarding lost property, and directed that all calls of this nature be dealt with by telephone. All other matters, including break-and-enter offences, were specifically excluded from the policy and continued to be handled by police in the usual manner (e.g. police patrol).

The new policy operated quite simply. When a call for service was received at the CGDCC, it would be categorised according to the seriousness and nature of the incident. If the matter was one of the minor offences named in the policy, and after the telephone interceptor was satisfied that none of the listed conditions applied, the caller was informed that the matter would be responded to at a later time by telephone. The Communications Supervisor was involved in this initial assessment and had the discretion to override the policy and dispatch a police patrol to the call if deemed necessary.

Once the caller was told that the matter would be handled by telephone, the relevant police station or Police Beat Shopfront was informed of the matter by facsimile and the job was removed from the Information Management System (IMS) dispatch screen. The unit receiving the facsimile was then responsible for contacting the complainant by telephone, completing a Crime Report and forwarding the details of the incident for entry into the Crime Reporting Information System for Police (CRISP).

The new policy was in use in the Gold Coast District for about one and a half months. As the result of objections raised in the Queensland Parliament on 3 December 1996,¹ followed by criticism of the new procedures in the media, the policy was suspended on 4 December 1996.

¹ Queensland, Legislative Assembly 1996, Hansard, p. 4762.

METHODOLOGY

DATA SOURCES

For this study, the analysis was restricted to calls for service categorised as Priority 3 - Division ZZ (Negotiated Response). These were matters identified by the CGDCC as minor offences covered under the provisions of the new policy. Over the period of the trial, there were 125 calls for service categorised in this manner, representing only 1.5 per cent of all calls received at the CGDCC.²

OUTLINE OF THE SURVEY

The survey, which began on 19 December 1996 and ended on 9 January 1997, was administered by telephone using CJC research staff as interviewers. It consisted of 17 questions. Each respondent was asked to recall the incident he or she had called the police about and whether it involved loss or damage to property. They were asked a range of questions designed to assess how satisfied they were with the way the police handled the matter, and given an opportunity to comment on how the police could improve their service. (A copy of the survey is attached as an appendix to this report.)

Of the 125 calls for service, 48 complainants could not be contacted during the time frame allocated for the survey. A further three were not surveyed because they refused to participate. Of the remaining 74, all were interviewed but 13 were excluded from the study because their complaints were handled by police using other negotiated response strategies (such as making arrangements for a patrol to attend at a later time or by asking the complainant to report the matter in person at the local police station). Sixty-one respondents (80%) had their complaints dealt with by telephone.

² During the period 22 October to 4 December 1996, the GCDCC received 8,209 calls for service.

SURVEY FINDINGS

Survey findings are presented under the following major headings:

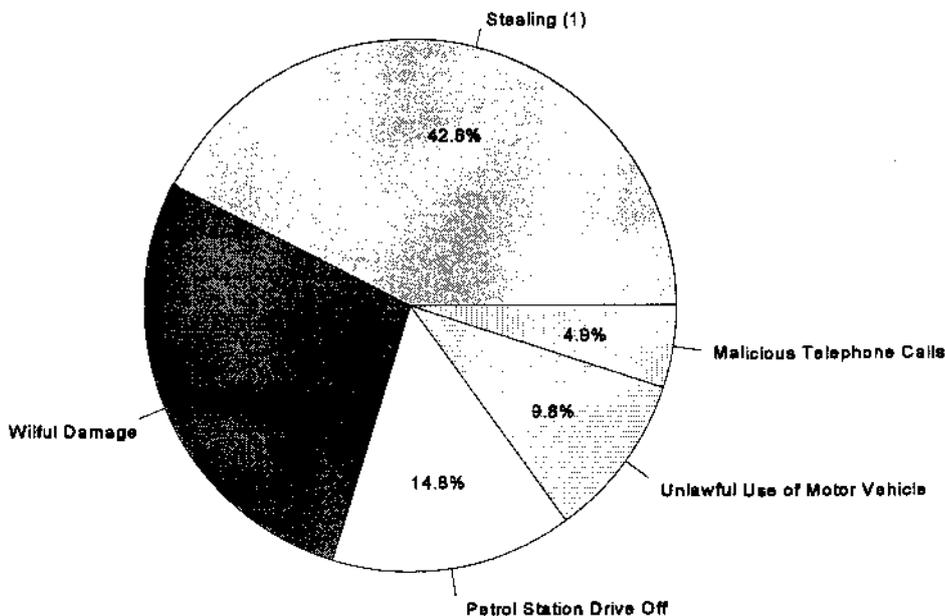
- Characteristics of the matters reported by respondents
- Perceptions of respondents
- Levels of respondent satisfaction
- Respondents' suggestions for improving service delivery.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MATTERS REPORTED BY RESPONDENTS

Respondents were informed of the date on which they called the police and were then asked if they could recall the nature of the incident. Figure 1 summarises the responses to this question.

It shows that all of the incidents reported by the respondents were offences covered under the provisions of the new policy. Just under half (43%) were stealing offences with wilful damage making up the second largest offence group (28%). Petrol station drive-offs, which were excluded from the stealing offence category, were the third largest category and accounted for 15 per cent of all reported matters. Slightly less than 10 per cent of matters dealt with unlawful use of a motor vehicle and a further 5 per cent with malicious telephone calls.

FIGURE 1 - TYPES OF MATTERS REPORTED BY RESPONDENTS



- Notes: 1. Stealing (1) excludes petrol station drive-offs.
2. n=61.

In 89 per cent of all cases, the matter being reported involved loss or damage to property. Table 1 shows that a large majority (76%) of matters dealt with by telephone involved relatively minor losses of less than \$1,000. Only four matters (7%) involved a loss or damage valued between \$1,000 and \$5,000. In accordance with the requirements of the policy, there was no case, other than for unlawful use of a motor vehicle, where the value of the loss or damage to property exceeded \$5,000.

TABLE 1 - VALUE OF LOSS OR DAMAGE TO PROPERTY REPORTED BY RESPONDENT

Value \$	Number of matters	Percentage of matters
1 - 500	32	53
500 - 1,000	14	23
1,000 - 5,000	4	7
other	11	18
Total	61	100

- Notes:
1. Percentages have been rounded up.
 2. 'Other' consists of one respondent who did not recall the value of the loss or damage to property and six respondents who did not answer the question, and includes four matters involving incidents of unlawful use of a motor vehicle where the value of the loss was the replacement cost of the motor vehicle.

PERCEPTIONS OF RESPONDENTS

The adoption of the negotiated response policy marked a substantial change in the way that police would respond to certain types of calls for service in the Gold Coast District. To gauge the public's attitude to the new policy, respondents were given an opportunity to comment on whether they were comfortable with this new style of service delivery.

Respondents were asked if they felt pressured to have their matter handled by telephone. Most (80%) reported that they did not feel pressured.

Table 2 shows the reasons given by the 20 per cent of respondents who said they did feel pressured. Although most respondents said that they did not feel pressured into having their matter dealt with by telephone, the survey found that 65 per cent of all respondents (73% of pressured respondents) felt that they were not given a choice to have the incident dealt with by some other means (e.g. police patrol).

When asked if they would be happy to have a similar matter dealt with by telephone in the future, 69 per cent of respondents said that were happy to have incidents handled in this way. Table 3 lists the reasons that respondents gave in support of this answer.

About 30 per cent of survey respondents (18) indicated that they would not be happy to have a similar matter dealt with by telephone in the future. Table 4 lists the main reasons given by these respondents.

TABLE 2 - WHY RESPONDENTS FELT PRESSURED TO HAVE THE MATTER DEALT WITH BY TELEPHONE

Reasons stated by respondent	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
I wasn't given an option.	8	73
The police said that they wouldn't attend.	1	9
They didn't seem to want to bother sending a police car.	1	9
Told me that it would take a long time.	1	9
Total	11	100

Note: Percentages have been rounded up.

TABLE 3 - WHY RESPONDENTS WOULD BE HAPPY TO HAVE A FUTURE MATTER DEALT WITH BY TELEPHONE

Reasons stated by respondent	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
More convenient	13	33
Faster	4	10
Better use of scarce police resources	14	36
Other	8	21
Total	39	100

Notes: 1. Percentages have been rounded up.
 2. 'Other' included: 'I wouldn't expect police to come for a call of this type' (5); 'I don't mind as long as the police do a follow-up investigation' (1); 'Don't know - wouldn't matter' (2).

TABLE 4 - WHY RESPONDENTS WOULD NOT BE HAPPY TO HAVE A FUTURE MATTER DEALT WITH BY TELEPHONE

Reasons stated by respondent	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Police officers should be attending to all calls for service - 'it's their job'.	11	61
It makes a person feel better to have the police come and speak in person.	2	11
You don't get enough information over the telephone from police about what they intend to do.	4	22
Officer on the telephone was rude.	1	6
Total	18	100

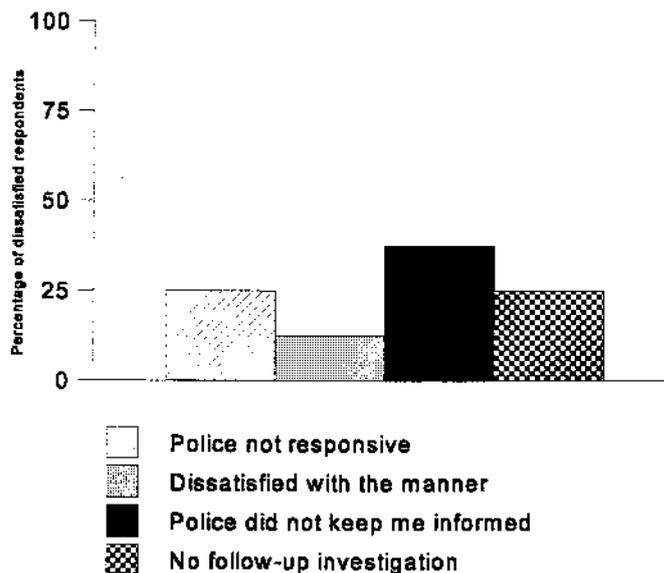
Note: Percentages have been rounded up.

LEVELS OF RESPONDENT SATISFACTION

Respondents were asked if overall they were satisfied with the way that the police handled the incident. The survey found that most (65%) said that they were satisfied. This is slightly less than the general level of client satisfaction recently recorded in a Service Users Survey conducted by the QPS Corporate Planning Unit in 1996.³ This survey found that 79.5 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the response that they received from the police.

Figure 2 shows the main reasons given by the 30 per cent of respondents who said that they were dissatisfied with the police response. It shows that the most common reason given by respondents who were dissatisfied with the way that their call was handled under the new policy was that police had not informed them of the progress or finalisation of the matter (38% of respondents).

FIGURE 2 - REASONS FOR RESPONDENT DISSATISFACTION



Note: n=16.

³ September 1996 Client Satisfaction Survey, QPS Corporate Planning Unit, Unpublished.

RESPONDENTS' SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY

In light of their recent experience, respondents were given an opportunity to make suggestions about ways that police could improve the delivery of policing services. Table 5 summarises the types of suggestions put forward by the 18 individuals (29%) who responded to this question.

TABLE 5 - RESPONDENTS' SUGGESTIONS ABOUT HOW POLICE COULD IMPROVE THEIR SERVICE

Suggestions offered by respondents	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Police officers should show more concern for victims.	4	22
Officers should be making more efforts at keeping respondents/victims informed.	5	27
The police need more resources.	4	22
Police need to focus on the really serious matters and place less emphasis on minor things.	4	22
Don't know.	1	5
Total	18	100

Note: Percentages have been rounded up.



SUMMARY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This paper presents the findings of a telephone survey conducted by CJC research staff to assess a new service delivery policy recently trialed in the Gold Coast Police District. The policy, known as 'Standing Operational Procedures for Negotiated Response to Complaints', was designed to reduce the demands being made on police resources by allowing certain minor offences to be dealt with by telephone.

The policy was in operation from 22 October to 4 December 1996. The telephone survey was conducted over the period 19 December 1996 to 9 January 1997 with 74 people interviewed.

- During the period that the policy was in operation, 125 incidents were dealt with by police under the policy's provisions. This represented only 1.5 per cent of all of the calls for service received by the Gold Coast District over the period. Of the 74 respondents interviewed, about 80 per cent (61) had matters dealt with by telephone.
- Just under half of the matters (43%) involved stealing offences. Wilful damage incidents made up the second largest group (28%), followed by petrol station drive-offs (15%).
- Three-quarters of all the matters involved losses or damages to property valued at less than \$1,000. In accordance with the requirements of the policy, there were no matters, other than unlawful use of a motor vehicle, where the value of property exceeded \$5,000.
- Eighty per cent of respondents said that they had not felt pressured by police to have the matter dealt with by telephone. However, 65 per cent of respondents also stated that they had not been given a choice to have the matter dealt with by some other means (attendance by a police patrol).
- About two-thirds of the respondents stated that they were satisfied with the way the police had handled the matter, and 69 per cent said that they would be happy to have a similar matter dealt with by telephone in the future. (This is somewhat lower than the level of client satisfaction with policing services recorded in a recent QPS survey.) The most common cause of dissatisfaction was that police had not kept respondents informed of the actions they had taken.

The findings of this study support the continuation and extension of the trial. It is vital that police develop ways of using their resources more efficiently. Handling certain types of calls for service by telephone is one way of doing this. Use of this procedure not only increases efficiency, but represents a cost saving to the QPS in the order of \$75.00 a call.⁴ However, there are several ways in which the policy could be improved and the risk of public controversy minimised.

- **Increase the community's awareness about negotiated response as a service delivery strategy.**
Negotiated response represents a significant change in the way that police services are delivered in a community. It is therefore important that the public be informed about what negotiated response involves and the reasons for its introduction.
- **Offer the caller a choice of police response (e.g. telephone versus police patrol).**
Some survey respondents expressed frustration at not being given the choice of police response (e.g. telephone versus attendance by police patrol). As a service delivery strategy, negotiated

4 Estimated cost of attending average false alarm, QPS, Unpublished.

response should be designed not only to maximise efficiency but also to focus on client needs. Both these objectives could be achieved by incorporating several response options in the policy. One of these options might include allowing the respondent to choose the style of police response they would prefer. As indicated in the survey, even when given the choice, most respondents would still have been happy to have the matter dealt with by telephone.

- **Develop a call-back procedure to keep callers informed about action taken.**

The survey highlights the importance of police keeping the respondent or victim informed. Several respondents spoke of the need for the QPS to establish a process whereby the police would keep the respondent or victim informed about the progress of the matter or, at the very least, notified when the matter was finalised. A telephone call-back procedure, or notification by mail, would increase public satisfaction with the policy and the willingness of people to have future calls handled in this way.

APPENDIX

SERVICE USERS SURVEY Gold Coast Police District 1996

Number

--	--	--

NAME OF SERVICE USER
TELEPHONE NUMBER
DETAILS OF CALL

RECORD OF TELEPHONE CALLS

Number of Calls	1	2	3
Date			
Time Call Commenced			
Time Call Completed			

APPOINTMENT TIMES (CALL BACKS)

No.	Date	Time	Comments
1			
2			

INTERVIEWER'S SCRIPT

Good afternoon/evening, my name is I am a Research Officer for the Criminal Justice Commission and would like to speak to.....

If the person is not available: We are interested in contacting.....in order to speak to him/her about a recent call he/she made to the police that was dealt with by way of a new policy. Perhaps I could ring another time?

If available: The Criminal Justice Commission is conducting a brief 10-minute survey in cooperation with the Queensland Police Service to evaluate a new service delivery policy recently trialled in the Gold Coast Police District. A recent call that you made to the Queensland police was handled by officers following this new policy. I would like to ask if you were satisfied with the way that the police handled your call. Your responses to this survey will be kept strictly confidential and will only appear as statistical summaries. Would you mind participating in this survey?

If no: Thank the person for his/her time and terminate the call.

If yes: I don't want to take up too much of your time. Is it convenient for you to talk to me now?
If necessary, arrange for another convenient time and confirm contact details.

I would like to talk about a call that you made to the police on

QUESTION 1

Do you recall what was the matter that you called the police about?

- | | |
|---|---|
| Break and Enter | 1 |
| Stealing | 2 |
| Assault | 3 |
| Wilful Damage | 4 |
| Petrol Drive-Off | 5 |
| Traffic Accident | 6 |
| Other..... | 7 |
| Don't Recall (<i>Terminate Interview</i>) | 8 |
| Nil Response | 9 |
-

QUESTION 2

Did the matter you called police about involve loss or damage to property?

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Yes | 1 |
| No (<i>go Q4</i>) | 2 |
| Nil Response | 9 |
-

QUESTION 3

What was the approximate value of the property?

\$1 - \$500	1
\$500 - \$1,000	2
\$1000 - \$5,000	3
Over \$5,000	4
Don't recall	8
Nil Response	9

QUESTION 4

Did you speak with a police officer in person, or was the matter handled over the telephone?

In person	1
Telephone (<i>go to Q8</i>)	2
Nil Response	9

QUESTION 5

Did the police officer come to see you, or were you asked to go to a police station to discuss the matter further?

Police came to see me	1
Went to police station (<i>go to Q7</i>)	2
Other.....	3
Nil Response	9

QUESTION 6

How long did it take for the police to arrive?

1 (same) day	1
2 (next) days	2
3-7 days	3
More than a week	4
Still haven't arrived	5
Nil Response	9

QUESTION 7

Do you think the matter that you called about could have been handled strictly over the telephone?

Yes (<i>go to Q11</i>)	1
No (<i>go to Q11</i>)	2
Don't Know (<i>go to Q11</i>)	8
Nil Response (<i>go to Q11</i>)	9

QUESTION 8

Did the police indicate that you had a choice to have the matter handled over the telephone or to have a police office attend and speak to you in person?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't Recall	8
Nil Response	9

QUESTION 9

Did you feel pressured to have your matter dealt with over the telephone?

Yes	1
No (go to Q11)	2
Nil Response	9

QUESTION 10

Why did you feel pressured?.....
.....
.....

QUESTION 11

Would you be happy to have a similar matter dealt with over the telephone in the future?

Yes	1
No (go to Q13)	2
Nil Response	9

QUESTION 12

If yes - Why? Can you give me some reasons?
.....
.....

QUESTION 13

If no - Why not? Can you give me some reasons?
.....
.....

QUESTION 14

Overall, were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way in which the police handled the incident?

Satisfied (<i>go to Q17</i>)	1
Dissatisfied	2
Don't know (<i>go to Q17</i>)	8
Nil Response	9

QUESTION 15

Can you tell me why you were dissatisfied?.....

.....
.....

QUESTION 16

Given this experience with the police, how could they improve their service?.....

.....
.....

QUESTION 17 - (*Determine without asking*)

Male	1
Female	2

THIS CONCLUDES OUR SURVEY.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.

Interviewer:.....