

# REPORT SUMMARY

## Indigenous people in policing roles

*The Crime and Misconduct Commission acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and the sea and we pay our respects to the Elders both past and present.*

### The Crime and Misconduct Commission's *Restoring order* report

The Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC) has a keen interest in identifying ways to improve law and justice outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Our Applied Research and Evaluation area, in particular, has examined several issues relating to policing in Indigenous communities. Between 2007 and 2009, we visited a number of communities and asked local people about the challenges facing their communities and how the relationship between the police and the community could be improved. In 2009, we published our report *Restoring order: crime prevention, policing and local justice in Queensland's Indigenous communities*.

*Restoring order* recognised the importance of involving local people in decisions about community safety and policing in their communities. Police Liaison Officers (PLOs), Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Police (QATSIP) and Community Police Officers (CPOs) build relations between police and the community, assist the community to deal with crime and disorder, support the delivery of sworn policing services and help balance the enforcement of state laws and local lore and custom. However, we also found some areas that could be improved and committed to come back to the communities at a later stage to find out if there had been any changes.

### Our current review of Indigenous people in policing roles

Between November 2011 and January 2012 we visited eight Aboriginal and seven Torres Strait Island communities to discuss how Indigenous people participate in policing roles and how the Queensland Police Service (QPS) manages and supports them. During these visits, we talked to people working in these roles, key community stakeholders and local police. We also surveyed sworn police working in Indigenous communities.

The title of our report is *Indigenous people in policing roles: a follow-up to the Restoring order report*. A copy can be found at [www.cmc.qld.gov.au](http://www.cmc.qld.gov.au)

### What we found


The policing roles for Indigenous people are different depending on where the community is located:

- **Police Liaison Officers** are employed by the QPS and work in some Indigenous communities on the mainland and on Horn Island and Thursday Island (this is the QPS's preferred model known as the 'Standard Service Delivery Model').
- **Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Police** are employed by the QPS and work on Badu Island and in Yarrabah.
- **Community Police Officers** are employed by councils in some Aboriginal communities and in the outer islands in the Torres Strait.

Over the past few years, the QPS has increased the number of sworn police officer positions in Queensland's remote Indigenous communities. Over the same period, however, the number of Indigenous people in policing roles has actually decreased. In our report, we call on the QPS to hasten plans to employ PLOs in all mainland police divisions serving Indigenous communities.

In the Torres Strait, CPOs are employed by the Torres Strait Island Regional Council (TSIRC). The number of CPOs in the Torres Strait has decreased substantially since 2007. The CMC argues that it should be the responsibility of the QPS, not local councils, to provide day-to-day policing services to the Torres Strait. We urge the QPS to act on this responsibility in the Torres Strait, and recommend that the Service be given additional funding to do so.





In general, we found that Indigenous people in policing roles are involved in:

- liaison, communication and education activities to strengthen the link between the police and the community
- crime prevention and community development activities to address the causes of crime
- 'operational' activities to keep people safe and enforce the law.

The specific activities undertaken tend to be influenced by a number of factors and vary across different communities. We argue that the activities undertaken by people in these roles should be influenced more by the causes of crime in local communities, local people and local crime priorities. The CMC recommends that the QPS develop a better process to ensure that local people can help decide the right priorities for Indigenous people in policing roles.

In our report we also acknowledge that there are risks for Indigenous people in policing roles, particularly as they are more operationally focused than their counterparts working in mainstream communities. Occasionally PLOs, QATSIP officers and CPOs are called on to intervene in potentially dangerous situations. The CMC recommends that Indigenous people in policing roles be provided with the training and skills necessary to perform their roles effectively and safely. We also recommend that in some circumstances it may be appropriate and necessary for Indigenous people in policing roles to be granted Special Constable powers to respond to low-level local crime and disorder problems.

Although the QPS has made efforts to improve the management and support provided to Indigenous people in policing roles, we found that many of the QPS structures and processes are largely under-developed, under-resourced and under-used. Few of the support services are easily accessible to people in remote communities or take into account cultural sensitivities. The CMC recommends that the QPS needs to pay more attention to the critical areas of supervision, training and support for Indigenous people in policing roles.

## The way forward

Despite the positive steps that the QPS has taken to provide more patrol resources in the Torres Strait and to improve the working conditions for sworn police officers in remote Indigenous communities, there is still some way to go to ensure that Indigenous people in policing roles:

- play a more significant role in determining the local justice mechanisms and strategies in their community, particularly the nature and focus of the Indigenous policing roles
- more effectively support the delivery of core policing services
- facilitate communication between police and Indigenous people
- perform their role safely and are better supported by the QPS.

We have given our report to the Queensland Government and QPS for them to decide the action they will take. The CMC does not make government policy. However, we hope that this report can help government to continue to improve its response to crime and public safety in Indigenous communities.

A copy of the report can be found at: [www.cmc.qld.gov.au](http://www.cmc.qld.gov.au)

### Crime and Misconduct Commission

Level 2, North Tower Green Square  
515 St Pauls Terrace, Fortitude Valley Qld 4006

GPO Box 3123, Brisbane Qld 4001

Tel: 07 3360 6060

Fax: 07 3360 6333

[mailbox@cmc.qld.gov.au](mailto:mailbox@cmc.qld.gov.au)

[www.cmc.qld.gov.au](http://www.cmc.qld.gov.au)

CRIME AND  
MISCONDUCT  
COMMISSION



QUEENSLAND

September 2012

