

Reception for the 2009 Conference of Commissioners of Police
of Australasia and the South West Pacific Region
SPEECH by His Honour Mr Tom Pauling AO QC
Administrator of the Northern Territory
Government House – 27 April 2009

Commissioners of Police, staff officers, international guests, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to Government House. I acknowledge the Larrakia people and their ancestors, traditional owners of the land on which this house stands.

Your theme this week is *Leading and Managing Change in Policing*. So I have looked back at our Northern Territory history to track change and also to see what issues remain consistent.

On the day that research on this topic was instigated, the Northern Territory Police Fire and Emergency Services were literally *back on the beat*. I don't mean to embarrass one of your keynote speakers, but the complete failure of Telstra's mobile network connection to the Territory meant that a high physical presence on the streets had to be implemented immediately and effectively.

But back to the early days. Our regular police force was established in 1870 as part of the South Australian Police Force, following annexure of the Northern Territory, previously a part of New South Wales, to South Australia. The entire strength of the South Australian Police Force at the time was: a Commissioner, 6 inspectors, 10 sergeants, 15 Corporals, 157 Constables, a saddler, 2 female searchers, 2 clerks, a Sergeant Major and 222 horses. The Territory's allotted staff was an Inspector, a Corporal, and 5 constables with horses.

At this period of history, in the United States of America, the estimated budget for the New York Police Department was nearly US\$4 million – with the two Police Commissioners costing US\$8,000 each.

I gave an Opening Address last month to the Planning Institute of Australia where I quoted from the diary of South Australia's Surveyor General, George Woodroffe Goyder, who also arrived in the Territory 140 years ago.

He referred to his men's liking for what was rather coyly referred to as "a *stimulant*", otherwise known as the demon drink. George Hamilton, Commissioner of Police of South Australia in the same era had run into a similar problem. The Police Gazette included the following General Order: *The practices of tippling at public houses is itself a bad one as no non-commissioned officer, trooper or constable can be depended on as fit for duty if he is in the least under the influence of strong drinking.*

Alcohol-fuelled problems continue around us but the police force has softened its stance regarding family. Mounted Trooper Corporal Paul Foelsche, a famous name in the history of our police force, was selected as head of Police Administration at Palmerston, as Darwin was then known. Ten years earlier, the response to his request for permission to marry was as follows: *The applications for permission to marry are becoming too numerous in the Mounted Police. I should be glad if P.Foelsche would get the fancy out of his head and remain in the Police as a single man for a few more years. I should be sorry if he rendered his position in the Mounted Police insecure by marrying ... as the number of married men is already inconveniently great.*

Foelsche did eventually marry, and in 1869, at the age of thirty-eight, he was formally promoted to the rank of Sub Inspector in charge of the Northern Territory. Originally a native of Hamburg, he had been naturalised just six days earlier. Foelsche sailed north to Port Darwin, closely followed by some troopers on Her Majesty's Schooner *Gulnare*. Unfortunately, he was immediately confronted with a written complaint from Captain Sweet of the *Gulnare* regarding "*scandalous conduct of two of the troopers on the voyage*". Grog and being served a fly-blown chop seemed to have been the trigger – the troopers were turned around and sent straight back south.

Sub-Inspector Foelsche received 230 pounds a year and at the other end of the pecking order, constables were entitled to one pence per diem as long service pay on completion of four years' service, with a further one pence per diem for every subsequent year. They were issued a blue serge tunic, two pairs of trousers and a cap every year and a new cloak every third year. Plus one pound two and sixpence each, half yearly, in lieu of boots.

It was soon realised that there were few months of the year when the uniform could be worn with comfort. Instead permission was sought to use white duck trousers, made of lighter weight cotton or linen, and felt helmets.

Some challenges in the Northern Territory haven't changed an iota. The first entry in the city's death register records the passing of William Read who died from "*drowning dragged overboard from a boat by an alligator*". Mr. Read, the *Gulnare's* Second Officer had been sleeping on the deck of one of the ship's boats when, at 01.30, there was a splash and a scream. All that was found was his mosquito net and pillow.

The first police fatality in the Territory occurred in 1872 when Mounted Constable Davis, had a dip in the sea and was taken by a crocodile. Only a few weeks ago we witnessed police and emergency services searching rural lagoons, and then the Daly River, for recent victims of croc attacks.

Just over a hundred years after our police force was founded, the Police Commissioners Conference was held in Port Moresby in April 1971. That same year, the police component in the Northern Territory increased to 279, members undertook a course in Aboriginal language and culture, construction began on the new Darwin city police station in Mitchell Street and the Drug Squad was formed on 2nd February 1971, with two members. The police transport fleet comprised 99 vehicles and for the first time, police traveled a total of more than 1½ million miles across the Territory in the course of duty.

Four years later, police in Darwin had to meet the challenge of Cyclone Tracy. All personnel at the police station took shelter in the cells from 3am to 4.30am at the height of the cyclone as phones, radios, electricity and the water supply failed. One report read *I attempted to get patrols out ... ferried cars to radio workshops to get radio aerials repaired. However most of the morning was spent retrieving bodies from the foreshores and placing them in the mortuary set up at the Police Station.* The Police Commissioner had to accomplish as much as possible in Day One to restore vital services and social order.

We have been spared any severe cyclones since, and progress has continued - at a staggering pace in recent years. But times can still be tough at the height of a severe wet season. Isolation is solved with modern communications, case studies are scrutinised and compared on ever speedier computers.

No longer do we have to find suitable horses except for eight members of The Mounted Police Unit re-established five years ago. Nor keep the peace amongst large parties of gold prospectors or escort gold safely to the port. Supplies are more reliable and do not include requests for a quantity of leg irons or Henri Martini Carbines.

There are now city patrols as well as bush coppers. Issues of stress, distance, the public's excess alcohol consumption continue. Equally, there are unique ingredients that add to the mix in each Police Commissioner's day. Many of the problems of each jurisdiction can be shared, as in important conferences such as yours.

To quote Bill McLaren, who served as Commissioner of Police for the Northern Territory for more than a decade, retiring in 1978, and whose wealth of material has provided much of this history: *Today the word "Police" crystallises the concept and practice of the maintenance of public peace, safety and good order. There is nothing constant about the range and variety of police duties, just as there is nothing constant about the pattern of crimes, the behaviour of criminals, the state of public order or at deeper levels, the hidden trends in society.*

As Administrator of the Northern Territory, I know that the Police remain "at the heart of the public service". The dedication shown by individuals and the support of their families continues to make all the difference to the smooth functioning of our communities. Cross cultural understanding continues to develop as does the consideration by senior ranks for the welfare of the serving men and increasing number of serving women.

I'd like to close with a quote from Mohammed Ali, born Cassius Clay, which could well apply to Police Commissioners:

The fight is won or lost far away from witnesses - behind the lines, in the gym, and out there on the road, long before I dance under those lights.

I welcome you to the Northern Territory and wish you all the best for this conference. We hope that you leave Darwin with positive memories of the Top End of Australia and a clear route forward for policing issues and priorities, solutions and future directions.