Facial recognition technology for police to help keep Territorians safe

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Cutting edge facial recognition technology is making it harder for criminals to get away with their offences and helping police keep Territorians safe.

Chief Minister Adam Giles and Police Minister Peter Chandler today visited Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services’ head office to see the new technology in action.

Mr Giles said the Country Liberals Government was committed to making the Northern Territory a safe place to live, work and play.

“The Country Liberals Government is investing in new technology and equipment for police so they have the tools they need to solve, prevent and reduce crime,” Mr Giles said.

“This new facial recognition software has already helped police identify or eliminate suspects and it is exciting to see it move to the next phase.”

Mr Chandler said facial recognition technology enabled police to more efficiently search through closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage and photographs.

“Like fingerprinting, facial recognition is a form of identification that allows a computer to quickly match similar faces based on facial features,” he said.

“Footage or images captured on CCTV footage can be submitted to NT Police’s facial recognition team who can load it into the facial recognition system for analysis and comparison with existing images in the database.

“About 100,000 images have been copied into the system database from existing Police information holdings, with the first part of the trial in early 2015 successfully identifying around 300 individuals from photos and CCTV footage.

“The technology is helping reduce investigation times by enabling investigators to quickly identify or eliminate suspects soon after a crime has been committed.
“It could also assist police to identify missing persons and also those in the community who suffer from Alzheimer’s or other similar health issues to assist police in getting them the care they need.

“The second phase of the trial incorporates a new application that has been designed by police to provide a fast and accurate identification system that will be used within the custodial arena.

“Rapid identification of people coming into custody is important, particularly when making assessments as to the person’s suitability for custody based on accurate health alerts that may relate to the person. This enhances the capability to provide a safer custodial environment for all concerned.”

To date the software has assisted NT Police in identifying:

- a man who stole goods from a commercial premises at Casuarina Village, identified by CCTV footage;
- a man who stole fishing equipment from a commercial premises at Berrimah, identified from CCTV footage;
- a man who unlawfully entered Charles Darwin University, identified from a still image obtained by security; and
- An unconscious man admitted to the Royal Darwin Hospital after having been seriously assaulted.

Mr Giles said the continuation of the facial recognition trial followed the recent introduction of mobile CCTV, the issuing of 1330 iPads to police officers and the installation of satellite communications and in car computers in 51 police vehicles in remote locations.

“The CCTV unit currently monitors 190 cameras located in Darwin, Casuarina, Palmerston, Alice Springs, Parap and Katherine, while the recently purchased mobile CCTV can be deployed at policing ‘hot spots’ and major public events,” he said.

“It’s all part of the Country Liberals’ Government’s plan to crack down on crime and make our streets safer.”

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