25 August 2003

Official Opening of the Northern Territory Police Association Annual Conference
Hon Clare Martin MLA
Chief Minister

Can I acknowledge the Police Minister Paul Henderson, Leader of the Opposition Denis Burke, Police Commissioner Paul White, President Senior Sergeant Vince Kelly, Senior Vice President Senior Constable Wayne Nayda, your Vice President Senior Sergeant Geoff Sullivan, your Executive Officer Andy Smith, interstate guests, delegates and members of the Northern Territory Police Association.

Well, two years ago I attended this Annual Conference as the Leader of the Opposition, just prior to the election in August 2001.

So much has happened in a short space of time since then - a new Government; a new Commissioner; the rise of the threat of terrorism; new drug laws; successful major operations such as the arrest of Matt Page; and success in day to day operations, with very encouraging police results and trends against unlawful entries and other crimes in our community.

Since coming into office in August 2001, my Government and your Association have worked constructively together, producing good results for Association members and the community.

This constructive relationship has, in part, been made possible because of the professionalism of your Executive, led by President Vince Kelly.

Achieving results with the NT Police Association

In line with my commitment to you at your Annual Conference in 2001, my Government’s commitment to establish a Police Arbitral Tribunal was delivered in quick time.

Also in line with my undertaking back in 2001 - following constructive discussions with the Association - the Government increased the housing allowance paid to police members with a one off increase of 5% on the 1st of January this year, with a further 2.5% paid from the 1st of July. For the first time, a Northern Territory Government has guaranteed that further annual increases will be linked to the inflation rate. These two increases have seen the annual rate of the housing allowance paid to police increase by $447.

Together we’ve also been able to address other issues - including Government reimbursing the Association for the extraordinary legal fees occurred in relation to the defence of your colleague, Peter Pagett.

My Government has benefited from the Police Association relaying the views of police on the ground. The feedback we received from the Association about the day-to-day experience of police members with PROMIS certainly assisted in convincing my Cabinet colleagues to allocate an extra $1.2 million in recurrent funds to improve its workability.

Today, and not surprisingly, I’d like to focus on the O’Sullivan Report and the Government’s $75 million response to it.

Building the Future

Some surprise has been shown about the willingness of my Government to have a truly independent process and the decision to release the report
publicly. I believe these two steps were both logical and necessary. We needed this to be done properly and there was never any point in hiding from police officers and the community what we had seen happen over ten years.

The O’Sullivan Report has given us all the opportunity to understand how and why the under-funding of the police has evolved. The reasons for the resourcing problems facing the police are now history. What my Government wants to do is build the future.

I thank the Association and individual members for the open and frank manner in which they participated and contributed to the O’Sullivan assessment. Jim O’Sullivan reported to me a high degree of enthusiasm and genuine desire on behalf of police officers to move the Force forward.

A dedicated Police Force

A key finding of the O’Sullivan Report, and one that my Government wholly endorses, is that the Northern Territory Police Force is led by a professional Commissioner and staffed by a body of dedicated men and women who undertake an often thankless task.

From my Government’s perspective, the journey to build our Police Force has just begun.

The O’Sullivan Report has been an enormous process - but we know the implementation of the Report’s recommendations and the Government’s $75 million package will be even more challenging.

It will require vigilant attention from my Government. It will involve and affect all members of the Police from the Commissioner to the newest recruit.

Government increases Police Budget

In the wake of the O’Sullivan Report, the Government has committed an additional $75 million to the NT Police from now until 2006/07.

To put it in perspective - the current Police Budget is in the order of $130 million. By the final year the base funding of Police will have increased by $28 million. So the base funding - that is, the year in year out funding of Police - will have grown by more than 20%.

This demonstrates that my Government has placed a higher priority on our Police Force than many other competing demands for Government funds.

It demonstrates that this Government values the men and women of our Police Force.

And it demonstrates that we are serious about getting police resourced properly and about getting better policing outcomes for the community.

Human Resource Needs


Today I’ll focus on the funding to deliver extra human resources into the organisation, and funding to make Police a more attractive employer.

The principle way to boost the strength of the force will be the traditional means of recruiting Constables.

O’Sullivan set the challenge. He said with a great deal of effort, and
sufficient Government funding, the organisation could double its rate of recruiting and training constables. As such, the Government has allocated funding which will enable the maximum rate of recruitment to take place. This will see five recruit squads to train 120 new recruits each year. If we take into account the standard attrition rate, this will see in the order of 50 extra Constables available for each year for deployment.

By the end of 2006, there will be 150 extra Constables in the NT Police.

**Bridging the Gap**

We all know that this Police Force has a shortage of Sergeants and Senior Sergeants. As Jim O'Sullivan found, this is a product of recruitment freezes in the 1990s. The problems this shortage has caused have been highlighted to my Government by the Association over the past two years.

As you are aware O'Sullivan has recommended that as a temporary measure, experienced Sergeants from other jurisdictions be contracted to the Territory for limited periods.

My Government wishes the Sergeant shortage did not exist. It is a matter of immense regret that because of the recruitment freezes of the past we now face this problem.

It is clear that as the strength of the force is built, we will no longer have to look elsewhere for experienced Sergeants.

From the outset my Government has recognised that lateral entry is a delicate area for the Association. We’ve made clear that the development of the details of this program will involve the Association.

O'Sullivan said up to 50 experienced Sergeants could be used. Government is prepared to fund this number but we’ve said we believe that a rough figure of 25 Sergeants is more likely to be practical and achievable.

A very important recommendation funded by my Government is the expansion of the number of Aboriginal Community Police Officers (ACPOs). As we increase the ranks of constables and above by 150, the number of ACPOs will be increased by 28 and the number of Auxiliaries by two.

**More civilian support**

Boosting the number of civilian support for Police is critical to reducing the strain on the organisation and to seeing better service delivery to the public. The Government has funded over 80 civilian positions to help achieve these aims.

These civilians will be dedicated to a host of different roles. Some will provide support to uniform members; others will increase the capacities of the Police Force; others will provide scope for more police to be released back to core policing duties.

There is no desire on behalf of Government to see wholesale civilianisation of police roles. Rather, what we have done is provide the Commissioner with the funding to engage more civilians. Where appropriate, these new resources will be used to advance the goals of police and implement the recommendations of the O’Sullivan Report.

**Improving Police Conditions**

The attrition rate in the Police has been too high for too long. When an officer with years of service leaves the Police, the Territory loses an asset.
In short, we want more police to stay in the job.

There is no doubt Territory police officers have a strong commitment to the job.

I hope the boost in Police numbers and other resources will encourage more officers to stay in the NT, but my Government knows that employment conditions are also a very important factor in morale - where individuals see their careers going and whether they want to keep policing here in the Territory.

**Death and Disability Cover**

In August 99 arrangements for the death and disability cover for police entering the Force changed. Before that time, police had death and disability cover as a component of Superannuation – police entering after that date had either none, or minimal, cover.

My Government recognises the dangers inherent in policing, and believes officers should have as part of their employment conditions a form of cover to protect themselves and their families if an accident or tragedy occurs.

This reinstatement of death and disability cover will benefit all police that have come on board since 1999. Close to 300 members will see a benefit for themselves and their families.

Funding for this initiative is included in the Government’s $75 million package. The details of how the new cover will be put in place need to be worked through. Again, my Government will ensure the association will be included in these discussions.

**Police Housing**

The quality of housing provided to police in the major urban centres has been an issue for a considerable time. Around 150 members are provided with houses in major urban centres. These houses are, in many instances, of unacceptable standard.

My Government understands that inappropriate housing can have a significant impact on morale – not just for the member but, just as importantly, for their families.

The current situation is not acceptable. Government is committed to improving the quality of urban housing and all viable options will be examined, including those identified in the O’Sullivan Report.

Improvements and changes will take time. Government obviously wants to see the most inappropriate housing situations dealt with as the first priority.

**Supporting our Aboriginal Police Community Officers**

Aboriginal Community Police Officers are an integral part of our Police Force. O'Sullivan has identified that some employment conditions paid to other members of the police force are not paid to ACPOs.

As part of our $75 million plan, the Government has funded the expansion of employment conditions for ACPOs to include housing, or housing allowance, FOILs and freight allowances. This will see significant benefits flow to over 40 ACPOs in the force.

**Overtime to reduce**

Overtime is another important issue for police members and their families.
Some overtime comes with being a police member. But the amount of overtime being worked in our Police Force is too high.

Overnight cures are not available. My Government believes the best way to reduce the need for overtime is to boost both the number of members and the number of support staff available.

For example, the boost in support staff will allow the establishment of an administration unit with civilian employees tasked to assist with patrol related paperwork – improving the capacity of police to deliver the best possible service.

As the record rates of recruitment and other resource-injections kick in, there will be more police available, and this in itself will ease the pressure and reduce overtime.

**Improved Service for Territorians**

Extra resources should also assist in another area identified by O’Sullivan as needing improvement – and that’s feedback to victims.

Territorians have the highest regard for their police. Simply by updating the victim on the progress of their investigation, police can often help people come to terms with the offence committed against them.

I know from my experiences as a local member that residents often have successful closure on an incident if police get back to them about what has happened – even if the news is not positive.

So I urge you – as busy as you are - to wherever possible get back to victims. It is hoped that the extra resources we are allocating to police will make this possible in a greater number of cases.

**Improved Working Conditions**

The state of equipment and working environments can also have a significant impact on the morale and professional effectiveness of police. O’Sullivan found that, long term, under-funding has meant there has been insufficient funds available for routine maintenance and replacement of policing equipment.

To address this, my Government’s $75 million package includes a boost of $2 million a year for the purchase of better equipment for day to day use, including vehicles, communication equipment, station equipment, furniture, and safety requirements for vehicles.

This money will complement the previously announced Capital Works budget, which includes funding for upgrading station facilities at Darwin CBD, Ali Curung, Adelaide River, Oenpelli, Maningrida and Santa Teresa.

I hope you can see that the Government has made a significant effort to fund Police to make a better place to work. We do this to make it clear the value we place on you, and to encourage serving police to stay in the Territory.

The current Consent Agreement for police runs for four years and expires in mid-2005.

In 2001, I said we felt four years was a very long time for a certified agreement and that there would have to be compelling reasons to have any future agreements for such a long duration. This remains my view.

Government has chosen to boost the Police conditions which I’ve outlined for you today, such as the enhancements for ACPOs, death and disability cover and so on, before the expiry of the four-year agreement. We have
done this because we believe that to wait until 2005 would be unfair, and would fail to address the needs that are already apparent.

**Getting Results**

Commissioning the independent O'Sullivan Report was the first step towards a new era for NT Police. The next step is seeing the results.

Time restricts me from going into detail, but is understood that Police resources alone are not enough to address crime and anti-social behaviour. There are many other things that have happened, and are happening, to see our community move forward.

These include:

- The Government’s itinerant strategy, to help tackle anti-social issues;
- The Government’s new drug laws; and
- Our new laws to make it easier for police to seize the proceeds of crime.

Implementing the operational aspects of the O'Sullivan Report, and the Government's $75 million plan, rests with Commissioner White and his team.

To assist in the implementation, Government has endorsed the establishment of an Implementation Committee to be chaired by the Commissioner. The Police Association, to be represented by your President, will play an important role.

The Commissioner is, of course, accountable to the Government. Cabinet will be receiving regular updates on not only how the implementation of recommendations is tracking, but importantly on how key areas of service delivery are improving.

The Government has emphasised that it is absolutely vital that members of the Police Force and members of the community are kept informed about what is happening. No doubt this will be part of the Implementation Committee discussions and actions.

**A new era**

I can understand a degree of excitement, and possibly impatience, about things happening. The police and residents I have spoken to want see the extra resources in their stations tomorrow to ease the load and to increase the level of service being provided to the public.

But the recommendations of the O'Sullivan report are not an overnight fix. From the Government's end we have allocated the full amount of money to enable the maximum level of recruitment to take place. We have given the Police the 'okay' to recruit and train like never before. As soon as the recruits are trained and ready, they will be deployed.

The Territory, as we know, is a fantastic place. The people and the lifestyle are second to none.

As has been the case since I arrived in Darwin 20 years ago, crime rates remain too high, although we are seeing positive trends with break and enters. Assaults, unlawful entries and anti-social behaviour are all too prevalent.

There remains much to do.

My Government's $75 million plan to Build your Police Force shows your
community, and your Government, support you in the difficult and often-thankless job you do.

The resources coming on stream should help make your job of protecting the community more rewarding and more effective in times ahead.

I wish you well in your discussions and deliberations over the next two days and I am pleased to now formally open the Northern Territory Police Association Annual Conference for 2003.

Thank you.

to the top