

## **Assistant Commissioner Kirsty Schofield - May 2025**

### **Australian Federal Police**

Assistant Commissioner Kirsty Schofield began by explaining the AFP role to protect Australians and Australia's national interests from serious criminal threats. Its scope includes enforcing Commonwealth criminal law, protecting airports and national infrastructure from security threats, protecting Australian and foreign dignitaries and providing community policing in the ACT. In addition, it has a global reach through representatives (including some operatives undercover) in 33 countries plus close links with international police agencies, notably in close cooperation with and assistance to Pacific Islands police.

Crimes combatted include fraud, bribery and corruption, serious and organised crime, crimes against children, human trafficking and people smuggling, breaches of international law, crimes against the Commonwealth, airports/aviation, drug crime, terrorism, money laundering & financial crime and cybercrime. Many of these areas are new or rapidly evolving in their sophistication, so the AFP has been expanding rapidly to build expertise and capability, often requiring recruits with skills outside traditional police work, embracing highly specialised computer technologies, forensics, psychologists and AI.

Kirsty's most recent roles in her career have been Assistant Commissioner Eastern Command, based in Sydney covering the populous eastern states, then to Canberra as Assistant Commissioner Crime Command covering overall organised crime, including international activities & drugs and now as Assistant Commissioner Specialist Protection including politicians here and abroad, visiting dignitaries, special facilities, as well as overseeing tactical response teams, maritime response teams and search & rescue. The treatment of several threats to politicians during the recent election campaign was one of the challenges for her team.

An example of her role was the visit to South America. This visit was to reinforce the importance of the relationship between the Australian Federal Police, Columbian National Police and Mexican Authorities. Kirsty was transported into the Columbian jungle in a Black Hawk helicopter to see first-hand how the Columbian National Police operate in this environment. Dismantling drug manufacturing at its source is the most effective way to combat drug importation into Australia. Notably Australia has the second highest cocaine prices globally, hence it is an attractive target for crime groups, who use various means to try to bypass detection, even employing single use submarines.

Kirsty was deeply involved in Special Operation Ironside, in which high technology encrypted mobile phones were developed and released into criminal networks who had believed these phones were secure for their communications. However, in fact the phone's technology had been developed to enable the AFP to monitor the communications. By 2021, there were over 11,000 users in 100 countries (half in Australia), leading to over 14 million communications being intercepted, providing the AFP with extraordinary intelligence on crimes being planned and undertaken. Its success in smashing criminal networks can be seen by Australian statistics such as seizure of over 6 tonnes of drugs, 149 firearms/weapons, \$55M cash, 2,351 offences, thwarting 29 threats to life, etc. Overseas, by mid 2021, Ironside had led to 993 arrests, and seizure of \$58M in currency/cryptocurrency, 220 firearms and 53 tonnes of drugs.

As a further example of her AFP activities, Kirsty oversaw the high-profile case called Operation Elbrus, to uncover and convict the perpetrators in a \$165M PAYG tax fraud, centrally involving the son of the then Deputy Commissioner of the ATO. She described the complicated web of

forensic accounting needed to detect, understand and thwart this complex network of companies which had been set up.

After a wide range of questions showing our deep interest, on behalf of members, Paul O'Sullivan thanked Kirsty for giving such a fascinating insight into the management of the expanding roles of the AFP and its achievements in keeping us safe, whilst balancing it with the rights of citizens and legal processes.

It was comforting to all members present to gain an understanding of the scope, dedication and capabilities of the AFP domestically and globally, and to know that the AFP is led by such capable people as Kirsty Schofield.

All members present expressed to me their great appreciation for Kirsty's outstanding presentation, with several commenting it was one of the most interesting they had heard.

*Peter James*