



Western Australian Police Force

Submission to the
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement

July 2020

BACKGROUND:

On 24 June 2020, pursuant to subsection 7(1) of the Parliamentary Joint committee on Law Enforcement Act 2020, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement (the Committee) resolved to enquire into and report on trends and changes in criminal activity and law enforcement as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching impacts on the work and operations of individuals and organisations around the world. Criminals and criminal organisations have been forced to adjust to a transformed operating environment - characterised by supply chain disruptions and restrictions on the movement of goods and people. This has also provided new opportunities for the criminal enterprise which they have sought to exploit to their advantage.

Just as the nature and prevalence of criminal activity have changed in many and varied ways as a result of the pandemic, so too has law enforcement had to adjust to how it responds to crime. At the same time, the pandemic and related social distancing measures are likely to have affected the capacity of law enforcement to combat crime and enforce the law.

The Committee is particularly interested in how the pandemic has impacted the nature and operations of transnational, serious and organised crime, and the tactics adopted by criminal organisations to adjust to or exploit related changes in their operating environment. Reflecting the Committee's primary focus on Commonwealth law enforcement, the Committee is also interested in how the pandemic has impacted the prevalence of crime types of specific interest to the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, including but not limited to fraud and cyber-crime.

The Committee also welcomes evidence regarding the effects of the pandemic on the work and capacity of law enforcement, and the preparedness of law enforcement in responding to the current pandemic and comparable events in the future. The Committee's full terms of reference were provided.

The Committee is currently inviting written submissions to the inquiry. Organisations are invited to make written submissions and to refer to any individual, group or organisation that you think would like to contribute to the inquiry. The Committee would appreciate submissions by 30 July 2020, although it can consider and receive submissions after that date. Any questions regarding the inquiry can be directed to the secretariat on (02) 6277 3419 or le.committee@aph.gov.au.

CURRENT STATUS:

The Western Australia Police Force (WA Police Force) is a State Government agency with a workforce of close to 9,000 across a variety of vocations including Police Officers, Police Auxiliary Officers, Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers, Cadets, Recruits and Police Staff (public servants). The service covers a geographic area of 2,526,646 square kilometres. There are 158 stations across the state and a number of other police occupied buildings within the metropolitan area.

The information presented in the submission is a result of a collation of comments from within the various Police Force Directorates and from intelligence received since the commencement of the outbreak. As part of the WA Police Force response consultation was also conducted with 27 State Government agencies, key utilities and infrastructure organisations. 16 responses were provided, many of these correlated with information received through WA police sources and have been incorporated in the submission.

RESPONSES:

1.	The nature and operations of transnational, serious and organised crime, including the impact of border controls and other policy responses to the pandemic that have impacted supply chains and the movement of goods and people, and tactics adopted by criminal organisations to adjust to or exploit changes in their operating environment during the pandemic;
a.	<p>The closure of state and regional borders significantly restricted the movement of people between regional districts, this consequently resulted in disruption in the movement of illicit drugs across regional WA. Illicit drugs became increasingly difficult to source increasing prices within the Metropolitan and South West areas. It was reported in May 2020 that methylamphetamine was extremely difficult to source. The price of methylamphetamine effectively doubled at this time.</p> <p>Addicted users are suffering the effects of reduced supply, with reductions in purity also being reported to maintain drug sales. The State of Emergency restrictions have undoubtedly impacted on the capacity of drug trafficking syndicates to import illicit drugs into WA. A significant Misuse of the Drugs Act arrest was made in April 2020 in the South West. Offenders bypassed several regional travel checkpoints to escape detection but a vehicle search recovered approximately one kg of methylamphetamine, a sawn-off single barrel shotgun, ammunition and cash.</p> <p>Recent internal WA Police Force Waste Water Testing (WWT) undertaken by a reputable University, during WA border restrictions, evidenced significant reductions in Methylamphetamine use across Metropolitan Perth and regional WA locations. This has provided support to long term beliefs that a significant quantity of methylamphetamine is transported from the Eastern States into WA by vehicle. The impact of the hard border closure on drug supply supports the understanding that the vehicles being used for drug transportation were associated with the broader transport industry. The WA Police Force is undertaking a review of state border policing to determine opportunities post COVID-19 to minimise the transport of methylamphetamine across internal state borders.</p> <p>There has been an increase in the domestic manufacture of methylamphetamine, evidenced by a moderate increase of low-level clandestine laboratories detected. Users have turned to alternative drugs as evidenced by an increase in the detection of alternative drug types (DMT, mushrooms). These increases are likely the result of the scarcity of methylamphetamine and other drugs.</p>
b.	<p>Adult Prisons – reporting indicates ongoing tensions related to a lack of drug availability in the custodial environment, possibly caused by travel restrictions and or vehicle checks impacting wholesale supply in the community, therefore reducing the available quantity of drugs to be trafficked into prisons. Although the cessation of social contact visits is known to have contributed to a decrease in drug availability within the custodial estate as this is traditionally the method by which most drugs enter the estate. An increase in attempts to secrete drugs via alternative methods</p>

	such as prisoner mail was observed however no indicators of increased drug use or possession of non-approved items was evidenced in the Women's estate.
c.	<p>During the time the biosecurity zones were effective (26 March 2020 - 6 June 2020), persons whose primary residence was remote Aboriginal communities returned to their communities from the larger regional towns, this reduced crime pressures in the larger regional towns. For example, residents from the NPY Lands and Tjuntjuntjarra returned to their communities from Kalgoorlie, and likely impacted the reduction of volume crime offences in Kalgoorlie:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burglary offences reduced by 71.5% (123 offences) compared to the same period last year • Stealing offences reduced by 59.6% (149 offences) compared to the same period last year • Property damage offences reduced by 33.5% (54 offences) compared to the same period last year. <p>COVID-19 related temporary liquor restrictions for the sale of takeaway alcohol in WA imposed to minimise alcohol-related problems and harm, in conjunction with ongoing policing strategies addressing alcohol and related issues, had a positive impact on alcohol-related offending with reported offences and anti-social behaviour incidents decreasing overall in the Kimberley District during the liquor restriction period 23 March - 19 April 2020.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol spread was limited to vulnerable remote communities in the Kimberley and Goldfields-Esperance District which fell under the biosecurity zone. • During the liquor restricted period, alcohol-related offences against a person and property in the Kimberley District decreased by 8.8%. These figures increased by 24.7% over the four weeks after the liquor restriction period (20 April 2020 - 17 May 2020). • During the liquor restricted period, CAD alcohol-related incident reports decreased by 8.2%. These figures increased significantly by 47.8% over the four weeks after the liquor restriction period (20 April 2020 - 17 May 2020).
2.	How the pandemic has affected the prevalence of certain types of crime, particularly crime types associated with transnational, serious and organised crime;
a.	<p>Since the declaration of the State of Emergency as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent implementation of government guidelines and restrictions, the WA Police Force has observed significant changes to crime statistics and trends. A proxy measure of crime is the number of prisoners in custody. There has been a reduction in the numbers of prisoners in custody during the period that may be linked to reduced crime rates</p>
b.	<p>Metropolitan Region crime statistics have shown a steep decrease in the number of home burglaries, stealing, assaults and drug-related offences since the beginning of the emergency response.</p> <p>The change in community behaviour as a result of the COVID-19 emergency response and government guideline and restriction impacting this downward trend include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the significant decline in Burglary rates due in part, to perceived increased risk to offenders with more people staying at home; • the significant decline in Stealing due to many retail businesses closing;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> significant reduction in Assaults (Non-Family) due to the restrictions of mass gatherings and the closure of licensed premises; and the reduction of drug-related crime due to the closing of state and regional borders dramatically impacting on the availability of methylamphetamine. <p>In contrast, Metropolitan Region crime statistics have shown a significant increase in family violence assaults and threatening behaviour offences since the beginning of March 2020.</p> <p>Contributory factors to this upward trend include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> stay at home requirements; loss of employment resulting in financial pressure; border restrictions; and increased government assistance payments and stimulus packages which, in many cases, lead to increased substance abuse. <p>Likewise, there was an increase in Robbery offences recorded which is believed to be resultant of stay at home requirements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Offenders perceived the opportunity to commit home burglaries now attracted more risk, therefore, burglary rates decrease with offenders favouring more vulnerable targets and Robbery.</p>
c.	<p>Crime statistics in regional WA reduced by 25.4% (3,525 offences) for the period examined compared to the same period last year. This included reduction of volume crime offences including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Burglaries by 51.3% (1,312 offences) Stealing of motor vehicle offences by 44.9% (224 offences) Stealing offences by 48.7% (1,985 offences) Property damage offences by 16.2% (397 offences).
d.	<p>An increase in online shopping and banking has resulted in a compromise of personal credentials and banking details. As the population moves towards home-based activities and social distancing, the demand for online shopping and banking services is expected to further increase. Online customers are vulnerable to compromise their personal and banking data. Major and minor online services and retailers could also be exploited. Some cybercrime syndicates target the online payment platforms and hosts that enable trade on multiple (possibly thousands) of websites. Such compromises expose personal identifiers, payment data and other sensitive information and can go undetected for long periods.</p>
e.	<p>Public transport patronage levels were down to 10% of normal levels, a large majority of those are abnormal user's i.e. transients using public transport for stimulation. Globally this is consistent with normal services as transients travel into the cities on public transport for sensory stimulation and criminal opportunities, now it is just for stimulation as local shopping malls are closed/ vacant. These abnormal users are still engaging in anti-social behaviours, disorderly conduct, assaults and outward shows of aggression. Reduced patronage numbers make these type of offences more visible. Behaviours, prevalent in certain individuals do not subside during a pandemic, the constricting factors of social isolation can amplify them.</p>
3.	<p>Trends and changes in relation to other crime types of specific interest to Commonwealth law enforcement agencies, including but not limited to fraud and cyber-crime;</p>
a.	<p><u>Family and Domestic Violence (FDV)</u></p>

	<p>Anecdotal evidence and information from the refuge sector suggest an increase in FDV rates, however, it is understood that WA Police Force statistics indicate that incidents remain constant and comparable to the same period last year. Stakeholders have raised concerns relating to women on temporary visas and the wider migrant community experiencing domestic violence. These women are also not always picked up in the statistics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Women's Council is expecting a large spike in refuge demand after COVID-19 crisis is over and when women are feeling safer to leave. • During the crisis, demand is expected to be for complex and high-risk clients. • The refuge sector is forecasting an increased and heightened risk of mental health and AOD which has complex intersects with FDV. <p>Concerns have been raised about remote and regional communities, particularly Aboriginal communities. A central triage model is being trialled to assist the Kimberley family and domestic violence response team to address additional volume and complexity of reports in the context of COVID-19. The Department of Communities is developing a data dashboard informed by multiple government data sources and identified service providers. The dashboard will identify trends in demand for support services during the pandemic and support analysis over time.</p>
b.	<p><u>Child Abuse</u></p> <p>Reports of online child exploitation have surged in Australia during the coronavirus pandemic. The Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation's national data shows reports between October 2019 and March 2020 increased by 123% compared with the same period the previous year. This increased the average number of reports from 776 report per month to 1,731 reports per month.</p> <p>As a result of physical and social distancing restrictions, children are spending more time online. Australian Federal Police have reported an increase in grooming of children online, and the identification of a 'handbook' created by and circulated among perpetrators that details how to coerce children to share sexual images and videos of themselves. There has also been an increase in the number of child abuse images and video circulating on the dark web. Nationally, child sexual abuse material reports to the eSafety Commissioner increased 27% in March and 37% in April 2020 compared to the same periods in 2019.</p> <p>Some children are also likely to be at heightened risk of abuse, neglect violence, and sexual abuse during the pandemic, resulting from movement restrictions, loss of income, isolation and high levels of stress and anxiety. Economic hardship has also been identified to be a key predictor of all types of child abuse.</p> <p>The closing of schools and other services and activities at the height of the pandemic in WA may have exacerbated these issues, as these are known protective factors for children at risk. However, the Department is not aware of any evidence of this.</p> <p>Although there may be no change, or even a decrease, in reporting of child abuse during the pandemic, the experience of previous recessions suggests some lag occurs before an increase in abuse is reflected in official figures. A study from the United States identified that child abuse notifications began climbing several months after the recession caused by the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) began, and for every one percent increase in unemployment, there was an increase in child abuse reports of at least 0.50 per 1000 children one year later. It could be that child abuse notifications rise in WA in the coming year. Studies from the GFC in the United</p>

	States indicated a marked increase in physical and emotional abuse and neglect towards children during and following the downturn.
c.	<p><u>Racist Activity</u></p> <p>An increase in the prevalence of COVID-19 related instances of racism and racist criminal activity has been reported by CaLD communities in Western Australia—particularly for Asian communities. These crimes range from graffiti to criminal damage, to racial vilification. Aside from monetary loss and the impact on individuals targeted, these instances damage social cohesion and have a cumulative effect on the mental health and isolation of individuals in the community.</p> <p>The Western Australian Multicultural Advisory Group (MAG) notes that Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) individuals and groups have been negatively impacted by an increase in racist and violent behaviour towards their communities. The MAG report that, as a result of this discrimination, CaLD people (particularly Seniors) have felt discouraged from being screened for COVID-19 out of fear of further racism and abuse.</p> <p>COVID-19 has resulted in many people on temporary visas (including international students, asylum seekers and Work Visa holders) losing employment and facing financial hardship. This group are not eligible for Government-funded welfare support and are therefore vulnerable to workplace exploitation (financial and otherwise) as has reported by local service providers.</p> <p>It is anticipated that the pandemic (and other contemporary factors such as the rise of the "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) movement) has increased far-right activity and far-right extremist recruitment. It is anticipated that this growth will have ongoing ramifications for criminal activity post-pandemic.</p>
d.	<p><u>Other</u></p> <p>Falsification and fraud activities relating to the Severe Hardship scheme for the early release of superannuation. While the Severe Hardship scheme predates the COVID-19 early release scheme, investigations have revealed evidence supporting offending against the COVID-19 early release scheme; however, this is undergoing further assessment.</p>
e.	The capture information and investigation of offences relating to restrictions on the import or export of certain items during the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus was on the exportation of disposable face masks, disposable gloves, disposable gowns, goggles, glasses or eye visors, alcohol wipes and hand sanitizer.
f.	Importation of COVID-19 test kits, thermometers, ventilators and other devices intended for respiratory support, personal protective equipment and medicines were also investigated. This is in partnership with ABF and to date, only a small number of attempted export or import of these products listed above, within WA, have been identified.
g.	The restrictions imposed on the movement of people and associated activities due to the pandemic has resulted in a reduction of crime in schools. This is evident when comparing data from February 2020 to June 2020 against the same period in 2019. The reduction is 34%. The reduction is evident across all types of crime, except for small external fires.
4.	The nature and effectiveness of responses by law enforcement to trends and

	changes in criminal activity related to the pandemic, including any changes in the practices, methods and procedures of law enforcement;
a.	Within the ports, there was an enhancement of directives to staff with consideration to safety factors in the application of operational duties. Continual review of environment, patronage levels, incidents at hand, trends and risk mitigation strategies and the effects of such.
b.	Since the State of Emergency came into effect in March 2020, staff involved in enforcement activities have noted a slowing in the progression of matters through the court system and reduced availability of Justices of the Peace.
c.	WA Police Force are more aware of potential COVID-19 symptoms especially in terms of handling, transport, management and custody of alleged criminals. The information transfer from WA Police Force to the Department of Justice - Corrective Services (DoJ-CS) has improved especially regarding prisoners displaying COVID-19 like symptoms. This has improved the reception and management of prisoners received from WA Police custody into DoJ-CS custody.
d.	The COVID-19 emergency response resulted in the increased availability of frontline police officers due to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police officers leave being voluntarily cancelled • Face to face training suspended • Fast-tracking of recruits to the frontline • Court cases minimised
5.	The impact of the pandemic and related social distancing measures on the capacity and operational ability of law enforcement, and the extent of law enforcement preparedness in relation to the current pandemic and similar future events;
a.	The WA Police Force Community Engagement Unit has worked cooperatively with other State and Commonwealth agencies (including the Office of Multicultural Interests, DLGSC; and Department of Home Affairs) to quickly respond to issues as they arise and ensure CaLD communities are made aware of police reporting processes.
b.	<p>As a result of the pandemic health services executive resources were diverted/ re-focused to develop a comprehensive pandemic plan, clinical processes and procedures, providing continuing direct support and guidance to clinicians at all sites across the WA Prison Estate and the Corrective Services COVID-19 Taskforce.</p> <p>Health Services are screening all new prisoners on intake for COVID-19 like symptoms, as well as any potential exposure and contact with positive cases before the reception. All new intake prisoners are tested for COVID-19 and influenza if displaying symptoms and isolated pending test results.</p> <p>The new screening process also extends the arrival time of all prisoners which impacts on the overall time taken for the reception and nurse assessment processes.</p>
c.	Due to the risk of infection Regulatory agencies postponed all pro-active work (e.g. inspections) however other regulatory activities continued. Pro-active work recommenced in most areas on 15 June 2020. The utilisation of virtual inspections

	<p>in some situations during the 'lockdown' and are currently assessing whether this can form part of our standard operational approach.</p> <p>Fieldwork by Regulatory Enforcement teams was slowed by the temporary regional travel restrictions but has otherwise continued. Surveillance activity, which relies on remote cameras, has been uninterrupted.</p>
d.	<p>The requirement for WA Police Force to engage in border control functions (inclusive of physical controls and permit vetting and approval) and enforcement of both health and social distancing directives at short notice has necessitated the redirection of significant operational resources from core law enforcement activities. The inability to devolve these functions to persons other than police has adversely impacted on organisational capacity and delivery of policing services.</p> <p>Significant numbers of Metropolitan frontline operational Police Officers were redeployed to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operation Protect – State and Region border control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vehicle Check Points at state and regional borders as a result of government travel restrictions, ▪ security at Ports and quarantined vessels, ▪ security at Airports providing administration and directions for those subject to mandatory isolation/quarantine. ▪ security of travellers returning to WA quarantining on Rottnest Island Operation Sequester - ensuring social distancing requirements and restricted numbers to areas of mass gathering including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ retail business areas ▪ licenced and hospitality venues ▪ beaches ▪ parks ▪ other public open spaces
e.	<p>In relation to preparedness, well-established systems of command and control and incident management structures exist and are applied irrespective of the nature of the hazard. The WA Police Force provided coordination and support to the Hazard Management Agency (HMA) for the pandemic and leadership in the incident management of the pandemic event.</p>
f.	<p>All policing responses were impacted, particularly with respect to accessibility to and appropriate use of PPE. It also resulted in usual face to face engagement of registered offenders being undertaken in ways more respectful to the COVID-19 distancing standards. An example is the Sex Offender Management Squad would place a registered offender attending for their "Notice of Reporting Obligations interview", in a monitored room and undertaken the conversation via phone external to the monitored room. Feedback from Police Officers performing this role was whilst the reporting obligations were met, the quality of information obtained from the registered offender was of a lesser standard than pre-COVID-19 engagement methodology (i.e. face to face).</p> <p>COVID-19 hygiene protocols used by the Random Breath Test Units (RBT) impacted on the volume of RBTs that could be completed in an hour.</p>
6.	<p>The extent to which trends and changes in criminal activity during the pandemic, and related changes to law enforcement methods, practices and</p>

	procedures, might endure beyond the pandemic;
a.	The pandemic has caused Port facilities to put stricter controls in place with regards to port access. An operational need for that particular visit is now required. Whilst this hasn't led to a specific reduction in crime, safety or security incidents, the port has a much better idea why people are in site and why.
b.	<p>From a logistics perspective, the State must maintain a contingency of necessary equipment and supplies at a co-located facility for day-to-day use and when emergency situations arise. This will be an innovative approach due to the move away from a 'just in time' inventory control, it will be the equivalent cost of approximately 6 months usage additional administrative oversight to ensure inventory use by and replenishment are managed. The WA Police Force responded well compared to other organisations based in WA.</p> <p>As with CT exercises across jurisdictions, the innovation hub should consider on-going exercises to skill-up or refresh Australia's emergency responders, front and back-office.</p>
c.	Departments have utilised Working from Alternative Locations policies enabling staff to spend their working hours at an alternative location (including at home). During the Pandemic there has been increased take-up by the staff of this opportunity, allowing staff to spend up to 100% of their hours at alternative locations, to maximize social-distancing. This has meant that tools and techniques for remote work, communication and collaboration were developed. Therefore disruption to capacity was minimal.
d.	The Pandemic has shown WA Police have the capacity to utilise increased diversionary powers and alternative communication methods to decrease numbers in custody and manage appropriately in the community.
e.	IT rollout – the pandemic also showed that the WA Police Force were able to quickly adapt and roll-out new technology from the use of Microsoft Teams to the development and implementation of the G2G app.
f.	Emergency Management Act amendments now provide stronger provisions to enforce directions. This is a legacy that will endure for other critical incidents and provide a tool to encourage the community to comply with directions in future incidents.
7.	Changes that might be desirable, in light of any current and possibly longer-lasting trends and changes in criminal activity related to the pandemic, and in view of the preparedness of Commonwealth law enforcement in undertaking its work during the pandemic, to the functions, structure, powers, and procedures of the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission;
a.	Need to continue to develop and resource diversionary tools and the use of technology to increase communication between agencies and the community stakeholders.
b.	The State Emergency Coordination Director developed a COVID community of best practice where information and intelligence are collated at a central location and advised the State Emergency Coordinator on matters relating to various

	Government agencies.
c.	Regulatory agencies see the benefit in the increased use of mobile technology to assist its existing activities.
d.	Through the response to COVID-19 and the implementation of the State of Emergency, WA police and Government agencies developed and tested the coordination role across government, and the new approach adopted, should be maintained as a standing part of the State EM arrangements for all disasters.
8.	Any related matters
a.	The ports would like to achieve a better-defined process with other regulatory stakeholders for crew change for ships.
b.	There has been a sudden repositioning of many businesses and individuals attempting to take advantage of the situation – e.g. making and selling hand sanitizer. In many instances, this was people who had little or no experience in the manufacture, handling, storage and transport of the chemicals, particularly around the quantities and concentrations involved. Further, the packaging used to market these products were often not compliant with standards. This needed coordination between a range of Commonwealth and State agencies for consistency and enforcement.
c.	As mentioned earlier, we would like to emphasise the apparent importance of internal border Policing and the very positive impact it has had on reducing methylamphetamine consumption. Significant effort will be undertaken by the WA Police Force to better understand how the effectiveness of the COVID-19 hard border can be replicated in a soft border environment.

CURRENT AS: 17/07/2020

ENDORSED BY: CHRIS DAWSON
COMMISSIONER OF POLICE
STATE EMERGENCY COORDINATOR