

Good afternoon.

Today I want to outline a number of challenging threats that are drawing on our resources.

These threats have the potential to impact on our social cohesion, the safety of our youth and our democracy, but we are confident that our operational strategies and dedicated members can continue to protect Australians and Australia's interests.

Since July 2021, the AFP, alongside our Joint Counter Terrorism Team partners, has initiated investigations and operational activity in relation to 27 youth who were 17 years old or younger, with the youngest being 12 years old.

Of those youth, more than 60 per cent have been charged with Commonwealth or state-based offences including:

- * advocating terrorism;
- * possess/distribute extremist material;
- * acts in preparation for a terrorist offence;
- * membership of a terrorist organisation;
- * drug-related offences;
- * firearms offences;
- * possession of child abuse material; and
- * possess, supply or making of explosives.

To give an overseas example, the latest data released by the UK's Home Office shows that 2023 recorded the highest number of terrorism arrests of young people since records began on 11 September 2001.

Of the 219 arrests for terrorism-related offences in the UK last year, 19 percent – or 42 - of those were young people aged 17 and under.

The AFP's caseload also reflects a highly-concerning trend of youth being radicalised online by other individuals they are engaging with, or through self-radicalisation.

We are concerned about the activity identified online, as well as what is happening in the real-world, including violence in schools, such as planning possible attacks on students and teachers, and the production of explosives or possession or use of weapons.

When possible, and where there is no immediate threat to the community, the AFP prioritises early intervention and disruption strategies ahead of prosecuting young people.

Once there is a prosecution and conviction, many lives are severely disrupted.

It is in everyone's interests, including the AFP's interests, that early intervention is prioritised.

For example, it takes significant resources to manage high risk terrorism offenders once they are released back into the community after a term of imprisonment.

The management of each offender requires dedicated resources, with planning typically starting two years before their release date.

The extent of those resources will depend on risk to the community, conditions of post sentence orders and location.

For example, the AFP managed and enforced extended supervision order conditions on an adult between 26 August, 2022, to 21 January 2024.

This required about:

- 80 members, and
- 10,300 operational hours.

As of today, there are 25 high risk terrorism offenders due for release within the next five years.

Last month at the National Press Club, ASIO Director-General Mike Burgess and myself, were clear about the challenges we face, in particular to terrorism, end-to-end encryption and the online radicalisation of youth.

We are working with agencies, therapeutic services, communities and leaders of faith, but we also need parents to be invested in their children's online nutrition, because there is a lot of junk and rubbish on the internet and social media platforms.

What young people digest online can have a significant impact on their health, including their mental health.

This is where we need the community to understand the expanse of organised crime and the commodities they target.

Yes, transnational organised criminals continue to flood Australia with illicit drugs. The nexus between drug trafficking and organised crime is well known.

Some of the downstream effects of illicit drugs are contributing to what many leaders, agencies and governments are diligently trying to address right now, including domestic and family violence.

Since 2019, domestic drug seizures have prevented more than \$45 billion in harm against the Australian public, including preventing 4 tonnes of methamphetamine coming into Australia in the past five years.

But importantly, we also need the community to understand that the term organised crime does not just refer to criminals trafficking drugs.

What is less known is how organised criminals are directly targeting our superannuation nest eggs, our children and the vulnerable.

Sextortion organised crime gangs are pushing our youth to suicide for money, and in our region, organised criminals are responsible for crimes like human trafficking, such as sexual servitude.

These drug traffickers, cyber criminals, human traffickers and sextortion gangs risk fraying Australia's social fabric through the crimes they commit, and the direct and indirect impact of those crimes.

Unlike illicit drugs where profit is generated once, when the commodity is a human being, their abuse or exploitation can become a regular income stream. This type of organised criminal is certainly a motivated offender.

This is not just a problem for Australia. This is a global crime.

Another one of our challenges, which is also mirrored in other countries, are the growing threats against parliamentarians.

In the past four years, reports of harassment, nuisance, offensive and threatening communications against Australian parliamentarians has increased by 160 per cent.

In 2020-21, there were 279 reports. So far this financial year, there have been 725 reports.

I am concerned about this trend – and we have seen recent world events that always keep the AFP alert.

The AFP's role is to ensure the safety and dignity of our parliamentarians.

We never take it for granted, but it is testament to our CPP – our Close Personal Protection officers - and the teams that support them, that we have not had an incident where we have had to save a politician from serious harm or death.

Our Protection Assessment Teams undertake intelligence-informed, risk-based assessments for parliamentarians or their offices.

These teams provide the initial assessments of risk.

More activities and events in 2023 attracted a heightened level of security risk, which required the implementation of additional resources and risk treatments.

As of March 31, we recorded a 35 per cent increase year-on-year from 2023 relating to parliamentarians' movements assessed as a significant risk or higher.

Threats against Parliamentarians are a threat to democracy and we are starting to plan our response given a Federal election will be held within a year.

Finally, for Federal parliamentarians here today – and this is applicable to all Federal Parliamentarians - if you feel unsafe or need advice, please contact the AFP's Security Protection Diplomatic Liaison team.

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We are here to protect you and every day we do it with professionalism and dedication.

Thank you.

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