

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE

Question No. 51

Senator Ludlum asked the following question at the hearing on 8 February 2010:

Complaints management practices and procedures:

Please provide an update regarding the implementation of recommendations made by the Ombudsman after the 2008 review (three recommendations); and the 2008/09 review (two recommendations).

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

2008 Review Update

Recommendation 1

The AFP Commissioner endorsed an IT project to upgrade and enhance the functionality of the Complaint Recording and Management System (CRAMS) as an organisational priority to give affect to this recommendation. The CRAMS Upgrade Project has delivered a number of IT solutions to enable CRAMS to record the method by which a complaint has been received.

The AFP has a robust governance framework around complaint management which includes Commissioner's Orders, National Guidelines and Practical Guidelines. These guidelines are subject to ongoing review and the issue concerning complaint letters as stated in this recommendation has been incorporated into that framework.

Recommendation 2

AFP Professional Standards (PRS), through its Complaint Coordination Team, maintains regular engagement with all of the AFP's Complaint Management Teams (CMTs) concerning all aspects of AFP complaint management to ensure best practice is being observed and there is organisational consistency. In support of this engagement, PRS convenes bi-annual CMT forums to enable discussion on key issues involving AFP complaint management and to provide additional training.

The issue raised in this recommendation has been addressed through that forum with CMTs requested to place greater emphasis on tracking and recording the outcomes of complaint issues, including the increased use of Performance Development Agreements to monitor the implementation of complaint outcomes.

A representative of the Ombudsman is invited to each forum to discuss the recommendations arising from each Review and to discuss other key issues arising from the Ombudsman's perspective on AFP Complaint Management.

Recommendation 3

The Practices Register has been centralised to the PRS Operations Monitoring Centre in order to improve the identification of any conduct trends or practices issues. Recommending appropriate measures to address the issues and to transmit outcomes, the quality assurance process undertaken by PRS ensures that any practices issues identified during the investigation are properly recorded in CRAMS and the recommendations are implemented.

In support of this recommendation, the Manager, PRS has also incorporated an AFP Practices section into the format of his written adjudication of all category 3 conduct issues to clearly articulate such issues. Where practices issues are identified, the Manager will make recommendations in relation to addressing the issue/s including where appropriate, improving policies and procedures.

PRS is also upgrading its organisational reporting on AFP conduct and practices issues which will incorporate enhanced focus on practices issues and outcomes.

2008/09 Review Update

Recommendation 1

Initiatives implemented by AFP Professional Standards include:

- The IT Upgrade Project for CRAMS, as outlined above, has enabled PRS to streamline the quality assurance process where all draft outcome letters prepared by CMTs are reviewed by PRS prior to being sent to the complainant and member(s) subject of the complaint. This ensures that letters contain comprehensive standardised information that fully explains the decision making process in relation to complaint outcomes, as well as providing information about the Ombudsman's role, including their contact details (recently included as a result of a recommendation made by the Ombudsman in their fifth review).
- Quality assurance measures have been increased. PRS continues to provide additional support and training in a number of areas to CMTs. During the Ombudsman's most recent review, he noted improvements in outcome letters from the AFP to complainants. The improvements from the new quality assurance process will not be evident until future reviews.

Recommendation 2

PRS has a Communication Strategy which states that, in relation to Category 3 (serious misconduct matters investigated by PRS) investigators will, throughout the period of an investigation, contact the complainant every six weeks. Supervisor reviews, which are conducted on each matter on a regular basis, ensure that the investigator complies with this requirement. CMTs are also regularly reminded that complainants must also receive regular updates as to the status of an investigation, for Category 1 and 2 misconduct matters (being minor matters investigated in the workplace). This is done through regular emails from PRS and at the bi-annual CMT Forum.

The Ombudsman's office has also provided a presentation to the CMTs and PRS on the 'Better Practice Guide to Complaint Management' which was published in 2009 and focuses on contact with complainants. Copies of this guide, including an electronic link, have been forwarded to all CMTs for their reference.

All investigators have also been reminded, through email and at regular forums, to ensure that all communication with a complainant, including any explanation provided in relation to the status of a matter, is formally recorded within the appropriate case management system.