

**New Zealand Police Association
83rd Annual Conference
Wellington Oct 10 – 12, 2018**

**Welcome Address
Association President Chris Cahill
Wednesday 10 October, 2018**

*Tihei mauri ora!
E nga mana, E nga reo, E rau rangatira mā
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa
Kua hui mai nei kia tautoko ai te kaupapa
O Te Rōpu Kaitiaki o Ngā Pirihimana Aotearoa*

Minister Nash, guests, delegates and media

Welcome to this 83rd conference.

It is set against an extraordinary time for policing in New Zealand. We are witness to a once-in-a-lifetime staffing commitment from the government, and at the same time, our members are in the midst of discussing, and voting on, the recent pay offer from Police.

The association has recommended the pay offer because it delivers real gains in remuneration and incentives, and in the current environment, it is the best that can be achieved.

We do not believe further negotiations or final offer arbitration will deliver a better outcome for our members but ultimately, that is for them to decide.

During negotiations and then the communication of the offer to members, it has become clear that the government cannot bury its head in the sand over the serious economic pressures facing Aucklanders.

Meaningful steps need to be taken to address the rising costs of living in Auckland. If that does not happen, there is a serious risk of losing the ability to provide core government services to the greater Auckland area, and policing is most definitely one of those core services.

The other piece of this puzzle is the growing level of poverty in Auckland. If it continues at its present rate, poverty will have a long-term effect on the balance of New Zealand society, to the detriment of us all.

On the optimistic side of the ledger, the boost in Police resources is a tangible recognition of what our members do, and how close to breaking point they have come. They have told us unequivocally that staff shortages are their number one concern, and they have every right to see that concern genuinely addressed.

Policing is no ordinary job.

Over the last few years the task of keeping New Zealanders safe has become increasingly stressful and more dangerous.

This reality is front and centre of everything the association does.

It is with a mix of relief and appreciation that we thank the minister for building on the previous government's package, and delivering on the coalition promise.

So what will 1800 extra police and 485 extra Police employees look like?

It will mean:

- Relief on the frontline
- Less everyday stress for officers and Police employees
- Safer working conditions
- Reduced police-to-population ratios
- Diversity amongst the ranks
- Proactive policing – preventing crime

The 1800 extra officers are 1800 on top of the number of officers at the time of the government's announcement a year ago this month.

Back then we had a police-to-population ratio of one to 545. In three years that should be down to one officer for every 468 New Zealanders.

It is an impressive change and we will keep the pressure on, to make sure it is achieved. We accept it is aspirational. We do not accept it is a five-year process as has been suggested recently.

I am sure Minister Nash will address this subject shortly.

Police is doing a great job with recruitment, despite what has made headlines this morning. The attack on a young constable is half-baked, with incomplete information, and subjective comments from unnamed sources.

The public can be assured that the standard of behaviour demanded for recruits, and for officers in general, is very high.

Police is very hard on its officers, and these recruits have learned the hard way that for the rest of their policing careers, they will be under extraordinary scrutiny, not only from their employer but from social and mainstream media.

Attending graduations, I am truly encouraged by the ethnic, age, talent, education and gender diversity amongst our new officers.

If they are the face of modern policing, we will be in a good space.

However, I am concerned at how many experienced officers we are losing. We need those with ten, fifteen and more years in the job because they are the mentors and on-the-job-trainers for all these recruits.

Part of the challenge of this recruitment drive is therefore to focus on training of supervisors and specialists such as detectives.

Police reliance on Tē Puna online-modules also needs to be re-evaluated. We are talking about thousands of new, raw recruits who will need actual and on-going training, not just instruction via online modules. There is a very real difference between training and instruction, and if ever there is the time to acknowledge that, it is now.

The association is anxious to see detailed plans for equipping the new recruits in their stations and, out in the community. Stations throughout the country must be fitted-out to ensure they can

appropriately accommodate the extra staff, and officers must have access to all the safety equipment and tactical options required for them to protect our communities, and to keep themselves safe.

As our conference opening video made sickeningly clear, firearms possession and shootings are now everyday incidents in New Zealand.

Only weeks ago we were all jolted when an offender allegedly aimed a cut-down rifle at two officers and pulled the trigger twice.

Through sheer luck, the gun's safety catch was on and the officers were not seriously injured or killed.

We should not be "sheer luck" away from an officer fatality.

The reality though, is we have a combination of a massive arsenal of illicit weapons, and offender recklessness

Most of the firearms incidents we are aware of are in direct reports to us from members and it has always surprised me how few of the incidents make the headlines.

That's changing.

The Association has been monitoring that change, and we are now seeing regular mainstream media reports of shootings - some fatal, some causing serious injuries, others, in which people fleeing police, have shot at the officers. Firearms are regularly used in armed robberies and to protect gang and drug activities. In many cases there were numerous firearms involved...and that's not even counting those found daily on offenders, in cars, and in houses during routine policing.

The potential dangers to us all are stark. . Without doubt, this is the most concerning safety issue for our members.

The firearms are mostly stolen from legitimate gun owners, but not always, and while Police has committed to improving firearms reporting in NIA, there is a very, very long way to go.

Unless we know how many illicit weapons are out there, we cannot possibly have an informed debate to drive credible firearms law reform.

That debate is now dangerously overdue.

Conference theme

This conference heralds the beginning of another debate that is significant for our members.

I want today to kick off thoughtful discussion on how we believe policing will be affected, if the upcoming referendum results in a vote in favour of legalisation of cannabis for personal-use.

The association should not take a pro or an anti- legalisation stance.

If the law changes, our members will enforce it.

If New Zealanders vote 'No' we will continue with the status quo, although I suspect if that is the outcome, we will be taking a close look at the effectiveness of current policing of cannabis.

Our role in this democratic process is to establish ourselves as a strong and informed voice, involved in an open, honest and evidence-based public discussion in the lead up to the referendum.

We have been assured by the justice minister that the association is considered an interested party, and will be consulted.

The referendum will be held on, or before, the 2020 election. It is crucial to the legitimacy of the referendum, that the question asked is accurate and without bias.

That process must navigate a minefield of definitions, including the scope of 'legalisation'.

What is the definition of 'personal use'?

Will individuals be able to grow their own?

If so, how many plants per person?

If not, how will they access their cannabis? And on it goes...

We bring to the debate frontline experience of policing cannabis and first-hand experience of the social harms of drugs, the particular needs of young offenders, and the role and impact of gangs and organised crime in the drug trade.

Everyone in this room knows Māori are over-represented in arrests and incarceration rates for drug offences, so tikanga Māori needs to be a voice in the pre-referendum debate.

We are not the first police association to face the possibility of this change, so we have others to consult.

The **Canadians** have just started policing under a legalised cannabis regime. In the lead up to legalisation, the Canadian Police Association saw little point in opposing the policy, and more worth in outlining the challenges and resource needs legalisation would create. These included:

- Frontline policing resources and trained drug recognition experts
- Tools for roadside drug testing
- Establishment of a standard of impairment
- Rules around edibles and oils
- Clarification of how many plants an individual could grow at home
- Recognition of the potential drain on police resources for monitoring the limits set for plant numbers and amounts of dried cannabis

Tomorrow Canadian Association President Tom Stamatakis will update us on progress.

In **Australia**, cannabis remains an illicit drug, but as in New Zealand, police can exercise discretion for minor cannabis offences, and Australian has established drug courts to divert people to rehabilitative services.

As is the case here, diversion programmes are available across Australia, and South Australia, ACT and Northern Territories have moved from criminal penalties to civil penalties such as fines.

Our Australian colleagues will update us on Friday.

In the **UK** there is an escalating call for Britain to join Canada and US states where cannabis is legal for recreational and medicinal use.

Rank and file officers have publically declared present laws are not working, and the Police Federation's board has voted unanimously for a new policy on drugs, declaring "100 years of prohibition" to have failed.

And, just a couple of weeks ago, South Africa's Constitutional Court legalised private use of cannabis for adults. The unanimous decision found that the ban on cannabis infringed on section 14 of the constitution, which gives all citizens the right to privacy. Parliament is yet to determine legal plant and leaf limits per person.

New Zealand's '**National Drug Policy 2015 – 2020**' states that minimising harm from alcohol and drug misuse needs to be compassionate, innovative and proportionate, recognising that alcohol and other drug problems are first and foremost health issues.

I believe we are part of a world-wide societal shift in this respect, and it dovetails with recognition that being caught with a joint should not be an entrée into the criminal justice system.

Our prisons are full of people with drug and alcohol addiction, but people are not imprisoned for possession of cannabis for personal use.

However, drugs may well fuel repetitive crime, which escalates in seriousness, culminating in a prison term.

Even then, there are likely to be other contributing factors driving criminal offending, including, mental health, family harm and poor education.

New Zealand's public debate needs solid facts on the physiological impact of cannabis on young people

Let's start with the reality that just because something is legal does not mean it is harmless.

Legal substances or activities can have some pretty serious negatives associated with them, including dependence, diminished performance and other health effects.

In young people, cannabinoids potentially damage functional and structural changes to the developing brain, and there are also strong correlations between cannabis use and smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol.

We need to know if cannabis is legalised, will fears of its harms dissipate?

Is it human nature to engage in an activity more frequently, if the perceived harm from that activity decreases?

Reports from Colorado and Washington, where cannabis use is legal, do NOT appear to indicate a significant increasing prevalence of use amongst adolescents.¹

That said, there is a large body of research recommending an age limit on sales of cannabis and a limiting of the concentration of THC in cannabis available to people under 25.

Impairment

Detecting and testing cannabis-impaired drivers is a challenge police already face. A 'Yes' vote would logically require a concerted effort to upskill officers, and equip them with the latest drug detection devices.

¹ The Canadian Paediatric Society, (2017) *Cannabis and Canada's children and youth: A Position Statement*, <https://www.cps.ca/en/documents/position/cannabis-children-and-youth>

Toxicologists say developing a roadside test for cannabis intoxication is not as easy as it sounds. Briefly, the complications include:

- Time delays between stopping a driver and taking a blood test
- Chronic users still testing positive even after 30 days of abstinence
- Variables in cannabis strength
- Is it inhaled or consumed
- Pairing of cannabis and alcohol –²

From a policing perspective, there is another challenge not immediately obvious to this debate - if cannabis is legal, cops can use it too.

The consequences of THC being detected in a drug test following a critical incident, such as, a Police shooting, are extremely serious for us.

As you are all aware, Police has a policy advising all staff to, amongst other requirements, refrain from reporting for duty when affected by alcohol or illegal drugs.

If cannabis becomes legal, our members need to know exactly where they stand on recreational use themselves.

We cannot have them turning up to work believing they are clean, only to test positive for THC in a critical incident that may have occurred days after use of cannabis.

Defining impairment is going to take serious scientific and legal input, and the sooner we start the better.

Over the three days of this conference I urge you all to debate the issues I have raised this morning.

On the pay offer, take the opportunity to express your views and to ask questions. I know there are concerns and this is a perfect chance to address these.

On the upcoming referendum and the impact a 'Yes' vote may have on your job, ask questions of the panel of speakers we have tomorrow. Each is an authority in their respective areas of drug use and abuse. They will be expecting to hear from you!

I thank the minister for coming to conference, and I now hand over to him for a much anticipated address.

² Huestis and Smith, (2018) **Cannabinoid Markers in Biological Fluids and Tissues: Revealing Intake** in *Trends in Molecular Medicine*, DOI: 10.1016/j.molmed.2017.12.006