

# The Ethical Standards Command is investigating...

*It's a weekend afternoon during the busy Christmas break on the Gold Coast; a general duties crew driving past a beachside hotel has been flagged down to deal with a man accosting people in the park opposite. The officers locate the man, who appears intoxicated, and take him into custody. Before lodging him in custody his condition deteriorates and they contact the ambulance to attend the station.*

*The man is admitted to hospital and that night he undergoes surgery for a life-threatening head injury.*

*The Internal Investigations Branch (IIB), a unit of the Ethical Standards Command (ESC), is notified and an on-call officer attends the scene and commences an investigation, interviewing police and witnesses from the hotel. No complaint or allegation of misconduct has been received, however the man had been in police custody and he is now seriously injured.*



News reports of any police-related incident where force has been employed or a member of the public injured will usually include the line "Officers from the Ethical Standards Command are investigating..."

Any incident involving serious injury is referred to the ESC. The IIB is the branch responsible for investigating such incidents, and it plays a crucial role in ensuring the public's trust and confidence in the police service is maintained.

The IIB is staffed by officers with experience in serious crime investigation as well as a wide range of operational roles. Both aspects are important—the investigative skills to identify and explore all the 'matters of fact', and the operational experience to provide context and insight into the realities and stressors confronted by police 'in the field'.

Depending on the circumstances of the incident, officers may be required to participate in a walk-or drive-through re-enactment, provide specimens for drug or alcohol analysis, or surrender clothing or accoutrements for forensic examination.

The experience may seem confronting to an officer, however the IIB must conduct their investigations thoroughly and without favour.

It is often the notable actions of a few—good or otherwise—that influences the public's perception or an organisation's image. With around 14,000 members, 10,000 of whom are police officers, the Service is committed to enhancing the safety and security of our community.

The actions of police in incidents involving fatalities or serious injury, or where allegations

of serious misconduct have been made, are reported to the Commissioner of Police and the Crime and Misconduct Commission and, where appropriate, the State Coroner.

Superintendent John Sheppard, IIB, said internal investigations gave the community confidence in the Service's integrity.

"The Service could never discharge its functions and responsibilities effectively without the support of the public," Superintendent Sheppard said.

"The community expects—and trusts—us to ensure their safety by enforcing our laws impartially, exercising discretion where warranted, but never losing sight of individuals' rights."

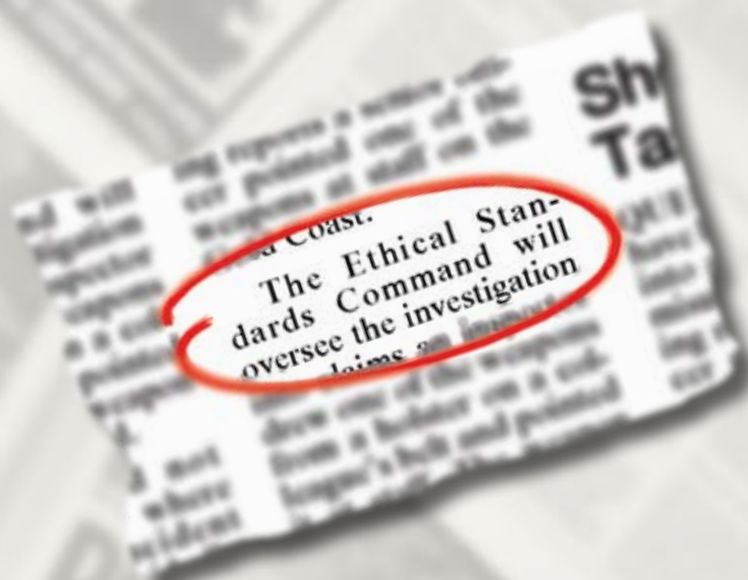
Superintendent Sheppard said the results of IIB investigations also served to protect police

officers from scurrilous complaints or unfounded accusations of improper conduct.

"As an organisation and as individuals, we are always open to scrutiny, and it is only fair that the public would want the actions of police officers scrutinised.

"Just as importantly, when our members are not at fault, they deserve to have the means of withstanding later speculative comment or innuendo about their role in the incident."





The man remains in a critical condition, and doctors advise that permanent brain damage is almost certain should he survive. The IIB follows protocol by advising the Crime and Misconduct Commission and the State Coroner's Office, and coordinates a team of specialist support units to investigate the circumstances.

A Major Incident Room is assembled and IIB investigators, coordinating with homicide and regional investigators, piece together the events of the previous afternoon and evening. They find the man had been behaving aggressively at the hotel during the afternoon and had been involved in several fights and a traffic incident during which he sustained his injuries.

The IIB investigation satisfies concerns that may have been held by the coroner or CMC about the propriety of the police officers' actions. Senior officers from the local region liaise with the man's distraught relatives. They are able to reassure the family that investigations carried out by the ESC, independent of the region, had disclosed not only had the officers not been involved in any improper behaviour, but they had diligently discharged their duty of care to the man.