

# Explanatory Notes

The interpretation of police crime statistics is not a simple task. Before an appreciation for the value and utility of crime statistics is possible, it is necessary to understand the conventions and bounds of police crime statistics as well as the various external variables which may affect them. These include the procedures used by the Queensland Police Service (QPS) in the compilation and collation of crime statistics, the definitions and rules the QPS follows in producing crime statistics, and the social and environmental factors that may have an impact on the statistics.

Once an understanding of the scope of police crime statistics is achieved, the value of the information they provide and its worth as a research and planning tool becomes evident. The QPS strives to maintain absolute integrity and accuracy in the production of these statistics and publishes the Annual Statistical Review as its official public record of statistics pertaining to police, crime and related matters. To assist in using the information contained in this publication, a detailed summary of the above-mentioned definitions and conventions is provided over the following pages.

## *Reporting and Detection Rates*

A major environmental factor that impacts on the use of police crime statistics as an indicator of total crime levels in Queensland is the level of reporting by the community. The *1991 Crime Victims Survey*, conducted by the Office of the Government Statistician, Queensland (OGS), suggested that no more than 30% of all crime was reported to the Police Service, while only 51% of the crimes recorded in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1995 Crime and Safety Survey were reported to Police.

The rate of crime reporting may vary according to many factors. This includes the perception by members of the community as to whether an offence has actually occurred, and whether the offence is reported by the victim or a community member to the QPS.

According to both the OGS and ABS Surveys, the most common reason for not reporting crime was that the offence was considered too trivial. The second most common reason was that the victim doubted the police could or would take action.

Another factor which has a major impact on crime statistics is the priorities and activities of the QPS. An

expansion of the Drug Squad, for example, may result in an enhanced ability to detect drug offences within Queensland. An increase in the number of drug offences recorded in police crime statistics may, therefore, be directly related to the effectiveness of the Squad rather than an actual increase in drug offences in Queensland.

In order to gain a more comprehensive picture of the nature and extent of crime, QPS crime statistics should be examined in conjunction with information from other sources such as Victims of Crime surveys and criminological research.

## *Recording Offences*

The crime statistics presented in this Review were derived from the Crime Recording Information System for Police (CRISP).

Within CRISP, the reporting officer contacts the Information Management Division (IMD) by telephone as soon as practicable after becoming aware of an offence. A twenty-four hour data entry service exists within IMD to facilitate this process. The offence is recorded, classified and counted by the data entry staff. CRISP provides the benefits of reducing police officers' administrative workloads as well as providing an accurate and immediate computerised record of crimes.

## *Crime Statistics Collection*

### *Reference Period*

For the purposes of this Annual Statistical Review, the reference period is the financial year, 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003.

### *Reference Date*

From 1 December, 1994, the reference date for reported offences is the date an offence is reported to or detected by police.

For cleared offences, the reference date is the date the offence was cleared by police.

For offender statistics the reference date is the date an action is commenced.

## Data Source

### Crime

All QPS crime statistics from 1 December, 1994, are derived from the data contained in official crime reports, as recorded in CRISP.

Crime statistics prior to December, 1994, were derived from data entered into the crime statistics database maintained by the Statistics Section of the former Information Management Bureau (and its precursors) prior to the introduction of CRISP.

“Cancelled” and “Not substantiated” or “unfounded” reports are excluded from QPS published crime statistics information.

### Population

The population data used to calculate the number of victims and offenders by age and sex per 100,000 population was taken from *Population by Age and Sex, June 1997 to June 2002* (ABS Catalogue No. 3201.0)

All other rate calculations throughout the publication are based on a projection of the Estimated Residential Population as at the 30 June 2003 as provided by the ABS and the Office of Economic and Statistical Research, Queensland.

## Rates and Numbers

### Methodology

Numbers of offences are simply the number of offences occurring (reported to or becoming known to police) within a specific area and for a specified period of time. These are presented as simple counts. The problem with using crime numbers to gauge the true level of crime is that areas with larger populations will presumably have higher numbers of crime than areas with smaller populations.

Rates displayed in this publication are always presented per 100,000 population. Calculation of rates allows direct comparisons of crime to be made across different geographical areas (State, regions and districts) and across time since the size of the population is taken into account in the calculation.

Rates are calculated as:

$$\frac{\text{No. of Reported Offences}}{\text{Estimated Residential Population}} \times 100,000$$

### Interpreting Rates and Numbers

It is important to note that transient population groups such as tourists are not factored into the estimated population. This would have particular impact on high tourism areas where crime rates would be overestimated.

Caution should be exercised when using either numbers or rates alone to measure crime in specific and different areas. Rates, for example, are sensitive to small populations. Both numbers and rates of reported offences have particular uses and should be presented together to give a clear and balanced picture of the level of crime.

Percentage changes are another type of rate that require caution when interpreting. Small numbers of offences can result in large percentage changes.

Comparisons of crime rates over different areas should be interpreted with great caution due to the many factors which differ from community to community. The level of crime in any community is affected by the number and composition of its population, with particular reference to age, sex, ethnicity and employment. The climate and geographical features of the community are important as is the economic structure including the local industry, the level and distribution of income. The attitude of the public toward crime can also impact upon local crime levels.

Crime statistics for low volume offence categories tend to fluctuate randomly and dramatically from one year to the next. This can cause difficulties in the identification of trends and patterns in the levels of offences. It is, therefore, important to approach these low volume offence categories with caution when looking at trends and even when making comparisons across geographical areas.

## Unreported Crime

Queensland Police Service crime data can only relate to the offences which have been reported to police. Obviously, there is a large proportion of crime that is never reported. Various surveys, for example, Victims of Crime Surveys and Crime and Safety Surveys, are conducted by the ABS and by the QPS to determine the level of unreported crime. The reporting rate can vary dramatically across offence types. For example, approximately 95 per cent of all motor vehicle theft is reported to police whilst only 33 per cent of sexual offences are reported. It is important to keep this in mind when using crime data. Relying on reported offences only can lead to an underestimation of the true rate of victimisation.

## *Offence Classification*

The offence categories used by the QPS for crime statistics are based on the Australian National Classification of Offences (ANCO), prepared by the ABS. ANCO was designed to provide a national framework for classifying offences for statistical purposes. The Australian Standard Offence Classification (ASOC) has been implemented in some jurisdictions by the National Centre for Crime and Justice Statistics of the ABS, and will eventually supersede ANCO. However, the QPS crime statistics collection will continue to be based on ANCO.

Crime statistics are presented under three broad offence divisions: Offences Against the Person; Offences Against Property; and Other Offences. These three primary divisions have been developed to facilitate the understanding of crime statistics by grouping similar offence categories together. Following are the offence sub-divisions located within each of these primary categories.

### *Offences Against the Person*

The offence division of Offences Against the Person includes the following offence sub-divisions: Homicide (Murder), Other Homicide; Assault; Sexual Offences; Robbery; Extortion; Kidnapping, Abduction and Deprivation of Liberty; and Other Offences Against the Person.

### *Offences Against Property*

The offence division of Offences Against Property includes the following offence sub-divisions: Unlawful Entry; Arson; Other Property Damage; Unlawful Use of Motor Vehicle; Other Theft; Fraud; and Handling Stolen Goods.

### *Other Offences*

The offence division of Other Offences includes the following offence sub-divisions: Drug Offences; Prostitution Offences; Liquor (excluding Drunkenness); Gaming, Racing and Betting; Breach of Domestic Violence Protection Orders; Trespassing and Vagrancy; Weapons Act Offences; Good Order Offences; Stock Related Offences; Traffic and Related Offences; and Miscellaneous Offences.

Many offence sub-divisions are divided into offence groups and then offence sub-groups. Reported and cleared offence statistics in this publication are presented to a group level in most sections.

## *Geographical Classification*

Queensland crime statistics are compiled to four hierarchical geographical levels. Firstly, statistics are compiled for the State as a whole. Below this, QPS divides the state into eight statistical regions. The next geographical level is that of statistical districts, of which there are 35 throughout the State. Finally, these districts are divided into 278 statistical divisions. Reported and cleared offence statistics are presented at State, Regional and District levels in this Review.

## *Counting Methodology*

The counting rules used by the QPS in the collection and collation of crime statistics are based on the guidelines published in the *National Crime Statistics Manual* (ABS) and as amended from time to time by the National Crime Statistics Advisory Group.

The national counting rule is that for each victim within a distinct criminal incident, the Most Serious Offence (MSO) per ANCO subdivision is counted. The national data set does not include 'victimless' offences such as those detailed in the QPS division of Other Offences. The QPS counting rule for offences of this type is to count each distinct criminal act per criminal incident.

Where the victim based rule applies, the description of a victim varies according to the type of offence. A victim may be an individual person, an organisation, a place/premise, or a motor vehicle (refer to Glossary for definition of victim).

The application of the MSO rule has major implications for the recording of crime statistics. By applying the MSO rule a single criminal incident may result in a number of offences being recorded. For incidents where the same victim is subjected to multiple offences belonging to different subdivisions, one offence, the most serious, is counted within each subdivision. For example, if a person is kidnapped and then raped by two offenders, one kidnapping/abduction/deprivation of liberty and one rape would be counted.

## *Exceptions to Counting Rules*

The offence subdivision of Sexual Offences (which includes Rape and Attempted Rape and Other Sexual Offences) is an exception to the national counting rule. The counting rule applied by the QPS in respect of this group of offences is that for each victim the MSO per ANCO subdivision is counted on the basis of time and place.

The effect of using this rule is that if a victim is subjected to numerous sexual offences over a long period of time by one offender and these actions come to the attention of police at one point in time, the MSO per separate incident based on time and place is counted. Therefore, it is only possible to identify the number of offences, not victims, of sexual offences. A count of ten sexual offences may mean that there were ten victims or that one victim was subjected to ten offences over an unspecified time period by one or more offenders.

Fluctuations in the number of reported offences for this offence category must therefore be considered with caution, due to the effects of the current counting rule.

## *Victims of Crime*

The Victims of Crime statistics presented in this Review are compiled on the basis of one victim per counted offence. The statistics do not provide a unique victim count. For example, where the same victim is subjected to multiple offences belonging to different offence sub-divisions within an incident, then in accordance with the MSO rule, that victim would be recorded for each most serious offence per sub-division.

It is important to remember that these statistics are derived using a system whose primary function is to service operational policing. Consequently, there may be slight variations between offence and victim counts.

Statistics relating to victims of Offences Against Property are not included. This is due to the statistical definition of 'victim' used by the QPS, that is, a victim may be an individual person, an organisation, a place or premise, or a motor vehicle (refer to Glossary).

Offences included in the Other Offences division are also excluded, as these offences are usually deemed to be 'victimless' offences.

There are several offence groups in Offences Against the Person where the victim may be an organisation rather than an individual person. Examples include robbery committed upon a banking institution or business, and extortion committed upon organisations. It should be noted that these offences are not included in the victim count.

## *Offender Counting*

Offender statistics are based on offence counts and do not and cannot refer to individuals. The data refers to the number of offences cleared or solved through an action against an offender. As such, offender data does not equate to a unique offender count and nor does it equate to the number of offences cleared. For example,

an offender charged with motor vehicle theft, unlawful entry, assault and other theft would be included 4 times in any offender breakdown by age and sex.

Only persons aged 10 years and over are deemed to be offenders. Under Queensland law, children under 10 years of age are not held criminally responsible, although they may be involved in the commission of an offence. Juvenile offenders are those aged between and including 10 and 16 years.

Offenders have not been included if their age and sex is not specified in QPS records. Approximately 0.3% of offenders have been excluded for this reason.

## *Drink Driving Offences*

Examples of significant events affecting the Drink Driving time series include:

- 20/12/1982 - Legal limit for blood alcohol concentration lowered to 0.05%;
- 04/05/1985 - Legal blood/alcohol limit for persons under 18 years lowered to 0.02%;
- 1986/87 - Reduce Impaired Driving (RID) campaign introduced;
- 01/01/1989 - Random Breath Test (RBT) formally commenced;
- 04/10/1991 - First two Mobile Breath Stations (Booze Buses) introduced.

## *Drug Enforcement Region*

Offences detected or under investigation involving covert drug operations or sensitive issues such as sexual child abuse are not geographically classified until after the completion of all inquiries in the interest of strict confidentiality. For this reason, a temporary holding geographical classification, the Drug Enforcement Region, has been created. Offences classified to this area are included only in Queensland offence counts in this Review.

## *Other Property Damage - Change in Policy*

In December 2001, the Service implemented a change in policy in regard to the reporting of Other Property Damage offences. Prior to this change, the offence of Wilful Damage was automatically recorded in conjunction with some Unlawful Entry and Unlawful Use of Motor Vehicle offences. As damage to property is an intrinsic part of break and enter offences, the Service altered the policy so that the offence of Wilful Damage is no longer recorded with these offences.