

# Queensland Police Liaison Officers

*Originally collated by Georgia Grier, Police Museum Assistant, from resources of the Queensland Police Museum. Attribution required.*

**WARNING: References and images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, now deceased, are contained within this document and within the Queensland Police Museum's exhibition space.**

A history of Queensland Police Liaison Officers (PLO) is best introduced by defining the role and other roles, all inextricably linked with the work of PLO's for the benefit of the communities in which they serve and the Queensland Police Service (QPS). The roles are:

**Cross Cultural Liaison Officer** – a sworn police officer, at the rank of Sergeant or Senior Sergeant, employed to ensure the safety of all persons living in and visiting Queensland with a focus on Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islander people and other people of ethnic descent,

**Police Liaison Officer** – an unsworn Queensland Police Service employee of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Island or ethnic descent, recruited as a conduit for best possible communication between members of a distinct community and the QPS,

**Community Police** – are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders employed by local councils to liaise with their community members in efforts to convey the needs of those members to police, and to give the police a cultural perspective when working with the community,

**Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Police** – a transition from the Community Police role, QATSIP's are employed by the QPS in an unsworn capacity to enforce local Community By-laws and local laws, provide a policing presence within prescribed limits and to maintain public safety by ensuring the preservation of law and order, and prevention and detection of crime on the Community.

## 1984 – 1990

In 1984 the *Queensland Police Service* introduced an Aboriginal/Islander and Ethnic Liaison Section. The section comprised police officers who worked closely with First Nations and other community members in efforts to improve relationships. Known as Aboriginal/Islander Community Officers, these residents volunteered their time to aid communications between police and community members which increased confidence on both sides.

The Queensland Police Annual Report for the Financial Year ending in 1988 reported the appointment of two full time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Police Liaison Officers in Townsville and Cairns. Regular meetings of Liaison Officers were also conducted, three located in Brisbane. A structured training program and video was introduced for Community Police, and policy began being drafted to guide their involvement and duties.

During the year, the Assistant Commissioner for Operations visited many regional and remote communities around Queensland, coinciding with the development of Police – Aboriginal/Islander Liaison Committees in Brisbane, Rockhampton, Mount Isa, Ipswich and Gympie. Police Liaison Officers were attending seminars pertaining to alcohol and drug use within communities, child abuse, and allied government services to examine policing and justice within communities.

Operating in Cherbourg since May 1988 was the successful Aboriginal-police liaison committee, and the principle was extended in efforts to set up community liaison committees in police divisions in the Region.



In 1989, a trial of Police Liaison Officers for the Torres Strait Islands was commenced in response to recommendations from the Fitzgerald Inquiry, for increased community policing by Queensland Police [Queensland Police Department, 1990, *Vedette* No. 135, page 8].

## 1991 - 2000

A Community Policing Branch developed in August 1990, and by March 1994 it complemented functions delivered by the Crime Prevention Bureau (later became the Crime Prevention Unit). Much like present day crime prevention programs, the 1990's welcomed collaboration between police in Queensland with local communities, government agencies and non-government services to identify and avert crime and promote effective education aimed at maintaining safe communities.

The Community Police of Palm Island received new uniforms during 1990, photographed for the August edition of the *Vedette* [Queensland Police Department, 1990, *Vedette* No. 139. Page 8].

Townsville received PLO's in early 1992 when Cross Cultural Liaison Officer, Senior Sergeant Trevor Adcock, Sergeant Ken Eustance and Senior Constable Brett Munn '*worked with community members to organise funding for 13 people to be employed as Police Liaison Officers in a trial project*' [Police Bulletin, March 2010, Page 24]. The positions were confirmed, and the program expanded to Rockhampton and Townsville, Mt Isa, Cairns and Brisbane. Both male and female PLO's were sought, chosen for their standing in their communities. One of the project aims was to address concerns about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness. There were many reasons people found themselves without suitable housing, but at that time the majority were inhabitants of Palm Island, transferred to Townsville for legal matters, medical appointments, to visit family or escape from family, and PLO's were able to effectively convey these underlying causes to police and welfare agencies. The allied approach worked, with the rate of homelessness reducing and 25% less community complaints.

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In addition to 136 recruits of diverse heritage, a cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were sworn into the Queensland Police Service in June 1993. Not Police Liaison Officers, these Constables had undertaken 12 months training, jointly through Griffith University and Queensland University of Technology, North Queensland's Johnstone TAFE and the Queensland Police Academy. Recruiting seven new Indigenous Constables marked a first for Queensland, being the largest group inducted together.

In 1994, there were an estimated '50 PLO's operating throughout the State' [Police Bulletin, March 24, 1994, Page 8]. The Queensland Police Academy held PLO training courses, commencing in January 1995, with only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants initially.



Police Liaison Officers Paul Coolwell and Floyd Doyle from the Fortitude Valley Police station visit Kelvin Grove High School, c1995.

Liaison officers have had a positive effect on students and classroom manner at the school.

A Quest Newspapers photograph catalogued to the Queensland Police Museum PM0062.

The Sector-Wide journal of March 1995 featured more detail about the Cross Cultural Training and Communication Program delivered through enrolment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies at the Johnstone College of TAFE. The program gave police officers strategies for overcoming cultural misunderstandings. The March 1995 police publication Vedette, No. 160, painted a busy picture of the Thursday Island Police Division; *42,000 square kilometres between Cape York Peninsula and Papua New Guinea with a population of 10,000 at that time in 19 individual communities, with Murray Island the furthestmost community being 140 nautical miles north east of Thursday Island.*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officers graduating in 1995.



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By 1997 there were 94 First Nations Police Liaison Officers throughout Queensland; 20 in the Far Northern Region, 25 in the Northern Region, 12 in the Central Region, 2 in the North Coast Region, 8 in the Southern Region, 15 in the Metropolitan North Region, and 12 in the Metro South Region.

In 1998 the first non-Indigenous PLO was employed, Loc Tran from Vietnam, serving the Metropolitan South Region.

February 2000 saw the introduction of a 12-month trial of transition from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Police employed by local Councils, to become Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Police. Badu Island, Woorabinda and Yarrabah participated in the trial, with QATSIP officers promoting safe communities under police direction. During this time, PLO's worked with the Railway Squad police to counteract crime on train services and the rail network including the work of graffiti artists, other vandalism and robbery.

### 2001 – 2010

Through community and Torres Strait Shire Council consultation, an Action Plan identified initiatives such as a Crime Stoppers program, the reintroduction of Neighbourhood Watch, Blue Light Discos and revitalised Adopt-a-Cop in schools. An additional crime prevention strategy targeting domestic violence (DV) introduced a weekly radio program and column in the Torres News, this approach continuing today as the Queensland Police Service delivered the successful third *Australasian Indigenous Family Violence Policing Conference* (2019), which used both radio and print media to promote the conference aims and solutions to DV for First Nations families.

During the Financial Year ending 2001, six additional PLO's were appointed, bringing the total to 124. [*QPS Annual Report* 2001, Page 9]. In 2002 the cultural diversity of PLO's expanded, with Chinese, Filipino, Pacific Islander, Samoan, Australian South Sea Islander and Vietnamese people joining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander PLO's working within their unique communities beside police personnel. By 2003 there were 126 PLO's with a State Development Officer responsible for coordination of their work across Queensland.



The PLO program began on Thursday Island in Torres Strait in 1991. Cyril Pau and Tony Bani, pictured here in 2004, continue to uphold the Service's commitment to delivering appropriate policing services to the remote island community. Image courtesy of the Queensland Police Museum, PM3732.

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Additional positions were being created and to fill gaps in communities without representation, and in 2004 the number had increased to 135 PLO's. Also during the year, 5 members graduated with a Certificate II in Public Safety (Police Liaison), 8 graduated with a Certificate III in Public Safety, and the remainder were progressing their study in the course.

In 2005 the Queensland Police Service reported the largest Police Liaison Officer intake, with 17 new liaison officers from Sudanese, Muslim, Chinese, Spanish, Vietnamese and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, [*QPS Annual Report 2004-2005*, Page 2]. Taking staff-initiated changes into account, the total number of PLO's was 138.

Current PLO's wear a police uniform of light blue shirt and dark blue operational trousers or formal pants/skirt, with Aboriginal and other cultures PLO's wearing yellow shoulder epaulettes, and Torres Strait Islander PLO's wearing blue and green shoulder epaulettes.

The original ethos of a PLO continued, the position having no statutory power to enforce laws, their major role to provide a tangible link between communities and the QPS, and for youth club environments, they provide an effective engagement with young people. [*QPS Annual Report 2004-2005*, Page 26].

In 2006, 140 PLO positions represented Australia's First Nations people, and other communities' cultures including Fijian-Indian, Maori and South American. PLO's continue to work closely with Cross Cultural Liaison Police Officers in each region with 30 full and part-time CCLO positions placed across Queensland. [*QPS Annual Report 2005-2006*, Page 27]. Together they maintained a positive engagement strategy, promoting trust and understanding and helping their community members and police to reduce crime rates; PLO's prevented crime by steering vulnerable people from the criminal justice system, they educated the community about available police services, and provided police with cultural perspectives.

Additionally, 2006 welcomed the establishment of the Police Liaison Officers Interagency Program, a joint initiative of the Equity and Diversity Unit and Career Planning Unit, recognised with an Award for Excellence for the Program. Police Liaison Officers were paired with a mentor from another government agency or the private sector, to share inspiration for career progression.

By 2007 there were 146 PLO positions, including those of Croatian heritage, and a Soccer Tournament between Queensland Police Service representatives and members from the Ethnic Community Council Queensland cemented police/community relations further. The event attracted over 5000 people, keen to watch 24 teams competing for the trophy, with a strong emphasis on crime prevention with attendance by Police Liaison Officers, Volunteers in Policing and Crime Stoppers. [*QPS Annual Report 2006-2007*, Page 30].

Police Liaison Officers Moira Davis and Debra De Bree watching over crowds at the Royal Queensland Exhibition in 2009.

Image courtesy of the Queensland Police Museum, PM3623.



The 2009 *QPS Annual Report* accounted for 152 PLO positions in total, with 24 allocated to discrete Indigenous communities including Horn Island, Mornington Island, Thursday Island, Yarrabah, Palm Island and Woorabinda. [Page 32]. The year provided additional programs aimed at ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities remained safe, and PLO's were instrumental in their success; Community of Origin Follow Up, for First Nations prisoners released from Stuart Prison in Townsville to ensure they got back to their communities, and Elder Patrols, with respected Elders maintaining a presence on the street in Brisbane city and Fortitude Valley.

Brisbane West District police officers, PLO's and Indigenous students from secondary schools within the District came together in July 2009 at West Mitchelton Rugby League Club to compete against each other in the Which Way Touch Football Carnival. Sport, sunshine and anti-smoking messages fostered a healthy and fun way for the police, Liaison Officers and students to engage in a relaxed setting, encourage learning, looking after themselves and others.



Mr Barry Port, former QPS Police Tracker since 1981, accepted a position as a Police Liaison Officer at Coen in 2010. He passed away in March 2020.

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The PLO presence continued strongly in 2010, the program extending to include African, Arabic and Japanese representatives. By June 2011, PLO numbers had reduced to 130.

### 2011 - 2020

During the 2014 financial year, recruitment of 31 Torres Strait Island Police Support Officers (TSIPSO) boosted community safety in the Torres Strait, and PLO's were similarly employed for Aurukun, Bamaga, Hopevale, Innisfail, Kowanyama, Lockhart River and Wujal Wujal.



#### PLO's in 2013

Left Side: Top down: Malakai Taumoha'apai (Tongan), Alma Apai-Ball (South Sudanese), Moira Davis (Australian South Sea Islander), Tanya Dallinger (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander).

Right Side: Top down: Roy Hodges (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander), Shane Plummer (Lightfoot), Chi-Kim Wong (Chinese), Unknown PLO, Tam Tran (Vietnamese) is now a Constable.

In 2016 Charles Sturt University hosted the first Queensland PLO's undertaking the University Certificate for Workforce Essentials, a program designed by the New South Wales Police Force as a pathway for PLO's to transition to the role of a sworn police officer. Five participants representing five distinct cultures were chosen to participate with Acting Assisting Commissioner Debbie Platz saying, "The QPS, as a reflection of our community, benefits greatly from increased inclusion and diversity and with such great role models who have already excelled as PLO's".