

Embargoed until 12.30pm Tuesday 20 December 2016

Ombudsman's report on Operation Prospect

The Acting NSW Ombudsman, Professor John McMillan AO, tabled his *Operation Prospect* report today.

The Operation Prospect investigation comprehensively examined complaints and allegations about conduct of officers of the NSW Police Force, the NSW Crime Commission and the Police Integrity Commission.

Operation Prospect is the largest single investigation ever undertaken by an Ombudsman in Australia. It started in October 2012, when the NSW Government asked the Ombudsman to conduct a thorough, independent investigation of the disputed events that make up the controversy surrounding the work of the Mascot Task Force.

The Mascot Task Force was established in 1999. Police officers were sworn in to assist the NSW Crime Commission with this covert investigation of allegations about serious police corruption. Listening devices and telephone intercepts were widely used to listen to the private conversations of a large number of police officers.

Complaints began to surface in 2002 about police officers, journalists and other people being unfairly named in the listening device warrants as part of a corruption probe. Subsequent investigations into the Mascot warrants failed to provide answers. The controversy has not gone away, but has simmered and expanded.

“I am confident this report provides a thorough and balanced explanation of the Mascot investigation and the controversy that it sparked”, said the Acting Ombudsman. **“Over a four year period, the Ombudsman’s office painstakingly reviewed and analysed all available information, and took evidence from a large number of people and sources. We reviewed more than one million pages, conducted 89 days of hearings, spoke to 131 witnesses, and analysed more than 1,600 pages of submissions. All are reflected in this report that runs to more than 900 pages, presented as six volumes, with 22 chapters”.**

“A large number of people have waited anxiously for this report – complainants, investigation targets, many investigators, parliamentarians, and people in government, the media and the community”, said Professor McMillan. **“The report places on the public record as much detail as possible, while balancing the privacy of a large number of people who have played a role in this controversy. It is a thorough, balanced and fair report.”**

“My report contains a large number of findings about the conduct of agencies and individuals, but acknowledges the context in which that conduct occurred”, said the Acting Ombudsman. **“Hopefully, the public release of a report on this exhaustive investigation will clear the fog, and disperse rumour and suspicion about who was targeted and why.”**

“For some, this report will be a vindication”, said the Acting Ombudsman. **“The report recommends action – including formal apologies to those individuals whose private conversations were improperly listened to, or improperly named in affidavits and warrants.”**

“The report also identifies weaknesses in the Mascot Task Force’s systems and procedures”, said Professor McMillan. **“Much has already been done to address these problems, but the report recommends action to rectify some that persist despite the passage of time.”**

“Hopefully, Operation Prospect will be accepted as a definitive examination of a troubled era”, said the Acting Ombudsman. **“The conclusion of this investigation and the tabling of this report will mean the individuals concerned will finally be able to understand what happened. It is also an opportunity for the agencies concerned to learn from what went wrong.”**

The report also deals with a range of associated events, including more recent unauthorised access to, and release of confidential and restricted law enforcement records.

“My findings about these more recent contentious matters are all included in the report”, said the Acting Ombudsman. **“Those events were an integral part of a long-standing controversy that needs to be explained on the public record.”**

“This report marks the end of an era”, said Professor McMillan. **“In 2017, the Ombudsman’s oversight responsibilities for the NSW Police Force will transfer to a new body called the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission.”**

“I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of many Ombudsman staff who have worked in our Police division over the years, and in particular those staff who worked on the Operation Prospect team.”

“Two people I would like to specifically mention are former Ombudsman Bruce Barbour and Deputy Ombudsman Linda Waugh. Bruce and Linda brought a wealth of knowledge and immense commitment and integrity to this investigation. Bruce led the Operation Prospect investigation for the first 30 months until the end of his term in June 2015. Linda led the Operation Prospect team throughout the entire investigation. Bruce and Linda knew this would be a complex and difficult investigation, and their dedication and professionalism was unwavering throughout.”

The full Operation Prospect report will be available on the NSW Ombudsman’s website after tabling.

<https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/what-we-do/our-work/operation-prospect/Operation-Prospect-A-special-report-to-Parliament>