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NSW Ombudsman | Special Report to Parliament

Ombudsman audit commends police responsiveness to complaints about domestic violence

An Ombudsman audit of the NSW Police Force's handling of complaints about domestic and family violence issues has found that police are generally responsive when concerns are raised and usually act promptly to identify and address serious issues.

A special report to Parliament, *Audit of NSW Police Force handling of domestic and family violence complaints*, was tabled by the NSW Ombudsman Bruce Barbour today. It summarises findings from a detailed audit of all 289 police complaints received in 2008 that raised domestic violence issues.

NSW Police recorded 25,528 domestic violence related assault incidents in 2008. Given that responding to domestic violence accounts for the majority of police officers' time in a number of commands, the number of domestic violence related complaints was relatively low.

Mr Barbour said that given the prevalence of domestic violence and its impact on families and communities, it is essential that the police response is efficient and effective.

"That includes providing an effective response to complaints about the policing of domestic violence," he said. **"Complaints are an important source of information about key issues of concern and provide insights into areas that might need improvement"**.

"We found that in most cases, police correctly assessed the issues raised by complaints, notified them to us where required, and, when warranted addressed the issues raised," Mr Barbour said.

"In addition, police generally took appropriate protective action on behalf of victims in response to complaints. Action was taken to manage officers' performance when required and we were satisfied with the nature of that action in most matters".

"However, we did identify some instances where complaints were not well-handled by police. The audit also again highlighted the serious consequences that can occur when police respond poorly to incidents of domestic violence."

"Importantly we found police were willing to rectify mistakes and address poor performance in most cases where this was warranted. This finding should send a positive message to victims of domestic violence, their advocates and the broader community."

The audit was conducted as part of the NSW Ombudsman's responsibility to 'keep under scrutiny' the NSW Police Force's systems for handling complaints and builds on his 2006 investigation and report on the policing of domestic violence.

Mr Barbour said police had responded positively and constructively to the audit results, endorsing the 19 recommendations made to improve how domestic violence complaints are handled and the way information from complaints can be used to enhance operational policing.

"My office will continue to take a strong interest in oversighting complaints about the policing of domestic violence, and in working with police, the community sector and other agencies to identify and address issues of concern" he said.