

26 October 2006

MEDIA RELEASE MEDIA RELEASE MEDIA RELEASE

Ombudsman report on the *Firearms Amendment (Public Safety) Act 2002*

The Ombudsman's April 2006 report on the Firearms Amendment (Public Safety) Act 2002 has been tabled in Parliament. This Act allowed police to use firearms and explosives detection dogs (FED dogs) without a warrant to screen for firearms and explosives in public places.

The Ombudsman reviewed the Act's operation for 2 years. During the review period:

- 1618 operations were conducted
- in 1502 operations (92.8%) no indications were made by FED dogs
- in 21 operations (1.3%) at least one indication was made but nothing was found
- in 95 operations (5.9%) an item was found - including firearms, ammunition and fireworks
- in only 16 operations (1%) could it be confirmed that the FED dog indication directly led to an item being found

FED dogs were most successful when deployed in the execution of search warrants. Of 330 warrants searches, items were found on 71 occasions (21.5%).

About one quarter of all FED dog operations (428 or 26.8%) screened locations for bombs.

"I strongly support the continued use of firearms and explosives detection dogs to screen sporting and entertainment venues for bombs and other explosive devices. FED dogs are an efficient use of police resources for these operations, and increase the community's safety. Sometimes police failed to properly lock down premises prior to bomb sweeps occurring. Police have accepted my recommendation to review these lock down procedures," said Ombudsman Bruce Barbour.

Only two indications were made during 519 High Visibility Policing (HVP) operations that used FED dogs – a rate of 1 in every 257 operations. On both occasions police already had information about the firearms before the FED dog indication. The review does not support the continued use of FED dogs in HVP operations unless there is specific intelligence or evidence of firearms or other related crimes.

For a copy of the report or other inquiries, please contact Lisa Du, Public Relations Officer at the NSW Ombudsman. Phone 9286 1008 or 0417 233 320. The report is also available on the Ombudsman's website: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au.