

# Interpol — Sixty years in Australia

**It's 1948, the Second World War has been over for just three years, the Cold War has not taken hold and Australian law enforcement takes the first major step to engage internationally with police around the world.**

In a move that foreshadowed the transnational cooperation that is now part of the day-to-day life of the AFP, representatives of the Victoria Police travelled to Europe to attend the 17th General Assembly of the International Criminal Police Commission – an organisation we know today as Interpol.

Australia's membership of Interpol dates back to the General Assembly of the International Criminal Police Commission (ICPC) held in Prague in 1948. Later that year, the ICPC was a topic for discussion at the Conference of Commissioners of Police held in Wellington with representatives from Australia, New Zealand and Fiji.<sup>1</sup>

The first Australian representative to join the ICPC was Victoria Police Commissioner Alexander Duncan. In the same year, the National Central Bureau for Australia (NCB) was established in Melbourne. It joined 19 other countries in the ICPC and joined a membership of more than 20 countries dedicated to international police cooperation and to prevent international crime.

For the next 27 years, the Australian NCB was hosted by the Victoria Police who facilitated communications via telex, mail



Photo courtesy of AFP Museum

and facsimile between Australian police and their counterparts around the world.

In 1946, a new headquarters was set up in Paris and Interpol was chosen as the organisation's telegraphic address. In 1956, the ICPC changed its name to the International Criminal Police Organisation and officially became known as ICPO-Interpol.

On 1 January 1975, the Commonwealth Police Commissioner became the Australian representative and the Australian NCB relocated to Canberra. When the AFP was formed in 1979, the responsibility for the bureau was passed to the new force and the Commissioner for the AFP has been since then the Australian representative for ICPO-Interpol.

The NCB for Australia represents all

Australian police services. Membership enables a direct link with the other 185 NCB member countries of Interpol. Interpol fosters a strict code of confidentiality and provides police and law enforcement agencies with a secure communication channel for enquiries relating to criminal matters.

Criminal enquiries are limited by Interpol's constitution, which places a strict prohibition against the network being used to facilitate investigations of a political, religious, racial or military nature.<sup>2</sup>

The role of the NCBs is defined by Interpol: 'Each INTERPOL member country maintains a National Central Bureau staffed by national law enforcement officers. The NCB is the designated contact point for the General Secretariat,

<sup>1</sup> "Conference of Commissioners of Police, 1948" *Australian Police Journal* (April 1949), pp 95-96.

<sup>2</sup> Art III, ICPO-Interpol Constitution and General Rules



Photo courtesy of AFP Museum

regional offices and other member countries requiring assistance with overseas investigations and the location and apprehension of fugitives.’

Activities conducted through the Interpol network range from humanitarian assistance (sudden death notifications and missing person enquiries), international police enquiries within the full range of police activity (including obtaining police and witness statements), to the provision of statistics, strategic and tactical criminal intelligence gathering and reporting, the monitoring of international law enforcement conferences and workshops, and researching and reporting on changes to criminal legislation and government policy.

High-profile Australian cases which have

benefited from Interpol’s assistance include the decades-old hunt for Lord Lucan – accused of murdering his children’s nanny in 1974<sup>3</sup>, the chase for failed Qintex boss Christopher Skase – who fled Australia in 1991 leaving behind \$1.5 billion in debts – and the murder of British tourist Peter Falconio in the Northern Territory in July 2001.

National Manager Border and International, Assistant Commissioner Tim Morris, said that these were just a few of the many cases which were referred to the AFP. Commissioner Mick Keelty highlighted some of the benefits of the membership in a speech to the Dunlop Research Medical Symposium in 2006. “Another important achievement for

<sup>3</sup> British political scandal: The man who faked his death” The Independent (29 December 2005). Accessed from <www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/british-political-scandal-the-man-who-faked-his-death-520935.html> on 31 January 2008.

the AFP was actually based on Interpol standards,” Commissioner Keelty said in the speech. “The Disaster Victim Identification protocols concept we adopted in Bali, developed in conjunction with the Indonesian authorities to adhere to international Interpol standards and while addressing the local needs and conditions, have since been employed by authorities responding to mass casualty incidents – both natural and man-made – around the world.”

The Australian NCB-Interpol Canberra operates across two portfolios within the AFP and on average receives 30,000 messages in a year. The portfolios include the:

- AFP’s Operations Coordination Centre (AOCC) which handles all operational and



humanitarian enquiries on a 24/7 basis; and

- Newly formed International Police Organisations (IPO) desk in Border and International. IPO manages Australia's obligations at both a strategic and operational level for Interpol, Europol and ASEANPOL. Interpol's responsibilities include: maintaining information exchange, facilitating enquiries and managing the training and education of users of the various computer systems. This is supported by Interpol and various other secretariat and administrative duties, including policy, database access, conferences and the General Assembly.

Over the past 60 years, the AFP has seen many technological changes since the Australian NCB first began. Telexes have given way to email, paper files have been computerised onto the AFP's case management system PROMIS and fingerprints are now supported by DNA. This is just a snapshot of some of the changes. See below for a brief timeline showing the history of Interpol.

Assistant Commissioner Morris said the AFP looks forward to continuing its relationship with Interpol and being part of the world's largest police organisation, "facing and embracing challenges together as we look towards the future".

For more information on Interpol and its role, history and core functions visit: <[www.interpol.int](http://www.interpol.int)>

For further contact with NCB - Interpol Canberra email: [Interpol.canberra@afp.gov.au](mailto:Interpol.canberra@afp.gov.au)  
Or, alternatively the IPO Desk can be contacted at [IPO-Desk@afp.gov.au](mailto:IPO-Desk@afp.gov.au)



### A brief history of Interpol

- 1914 First International Police Congress held in Monaco
- 1923 Formation of the International Criminal Police Commission and based in Vienna with a membership of 20 countries.
- 1935 International radio network launched
- 1939-45 Ceases operation during World War II
- 1946 Commission re-established in Paris and Interpol (a contraction of 'international police') is chosen as the organisation's telegraphic address.
- 1948 Australia becomes a member of the ICPC
- 1956 The organisation changes its name to the International Criminal Police Organisation and its official name is ICPO-Interpol.
- 1989 The headquarters move from Paris to Lyon
- 2002 I-24/7 web-based communication system launched and improves NCB access to Interpol's databases and services.
- 2008 The organisation has a membership of 186 countries

Left to right small square images: Assistant Director, Public Safety and Terrorism - Interpol F/A Jenny Hurst, Interpol memorabilia, Counterfeit currency index, Lord Lucan, Christopher Skase; Bottom right: Skase red alert; Previous pages: Interpol - 33rd General Assembly, 1964, Caracas; Article - *People* magazine; Interpol transmitting centre outside Paris.



Photos courtesy of AFP Museum and Interpol team, Canberra.