

# Resident agent established in south-west WA

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**A**nother link in the chain of AFP resident agent locations has been established in Albany in the south-west corner of Western Australia.

Seven months ago, Detective Sergeant Steve Hill started a 12-month feasibility study into establishing the Albany office and after only six months believes there is a need for a permanent AFP presence.

Detective Sergeant Hill has travelled extensively throughout the region in order to get himself and the AFP's role as widely recognised as possible and took with him more than 15 years experience to the resident agent's position. He began his career in Canberra as a uniformed officer, before moving to CID as a detective. He then spent two years in Sydney with the Internal Investigations Division before moving to the Drug Squad in Perth.

He is currently attending a TAFE Italian language course with a view to one day being able to serve overseas at a liaison post.

Detective Sergeant Hill said when he first arrived in Albany it became even more apparent with his travels



*Detective Sergeant Steve Hill*

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throughout the region that the general public had very little, if any, comprehension of the role of the AFP.

Just a little more than 33,000km and seven months later, he is changing all of that. Of the 18,000 people who live in Albany, there are few who do not know him personally or know of him.

Albany was chosen as the site for the post because of its central location in the area to be covered and because of its long distance from Perth. Detective Sergeant Hill has clocked up thousands of kilometres since arriving in Albany. The town is central to an area that he covers from Bunbury to Esperance.

The AFP resident post is located in Albany's Customs House. Detective Sergeant Hill shares space and equipment with two Customs officers. Albany is the third resident agent post established in WA after Broome and Port Hedland and he says that the



*Detective Sergeant Steve Hill works in close co-operation with Customs from an office in Albany's Customs House.*

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*The town of Albany is the location of the third resident agent post on the remote WA coastline.*

other posts, which also work closely with Customs, have fostered a good AFP and Customs working relationship which he intends to continue at his location.

Although the AFP shares office space with Customs personnel, separate telephones and computer equipment are provided for the AFP resident agents. There are occasions, however, when Customs equipment can be used through the Canberra mainframe. The majority of the time, however, the AFP is self-sufficient.

During the course of his feasibility study, Detective Sergeant Hill called on more than 17 police stations between Bunbury and Esperance. He found that in all locations he was well received by local police who were very positive and were willing to assist wherever possible.

Detective Sergeant Hill has been guest speaker at meetings of Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, a Justice of the Peace Conference, Conservation and Land Management (CALM) regional meetings, and regional banking forums. He has given interviews on the ABC and the local radio network and has been the subject of two newspaper articles about the activities in the south-west region.

To date, he has concentrated on information gathering, but said he has been amazed at the amount of work generated in the brief time he has been in Albany.

In terms of the type of police work Detective Sergeant Hill has



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encountered during his time in the south-west, the jobs have been wide and varied.

A good deal of time has been spent on drugs, fraud and intelligence. This type of work has meant an increase in the liaison networks between the AFP and other agencies such as ACS, the DSS and the WA Police (WAPOL). Detective Sergeant Hill said WAPOL were "1000 per cent on side" and the co-operation he had received from them has been invaluable.

One interesting job which was not all it appeared to be at first was a possible drug importation at a nearby beach. A concerned caravan park owner notified Detective Sergeant Hill that several suspicious people had been using the camping ground and that a small boat had recently moored close to shore and had caused a flurry of activity among the suspicious parties.

After passing on this information to WAPOL, Detective Sergeant Hill and his WA counterparts began surveillance on the suspicious men. It soon became clear that the boat was of no concern, but that the men were spending a good deal of time in bushland around the caravan park. A possible drug plantation was the next theory.

Finally after many days of surveillance, the men were pulled over leaving one area of bush with a trailer and utility stacked high with cardboard boxes. Police were convinced they were onto a major

drug haul. As it turned out the boxes contained wildflowers, illegally gathered from surrounding bushland. Although the haul was not what had been expected it was nevertheless a criminal breach and Detective Sergeant Hill will be called as a major prosecution witness when the case goes to court. This is just one of many examples of residents now being aware of Detective-Sergeant Hill's presence in the region and the role and function performed by the AFP.

Western Region's Commander Arthur Brown said that the resident agent positions continue to be under review to determine if the positions can be justified in the longer term.

Of the current situation, Detective Sergeant Hill said: "There is sufficient work for a resident agent within this region of WA and the number of files I have dealt with in the short term I have been here attests to this.

"Secondly, the intelligence to be gained has not yet been tapped and investigated.

"Sources of information refer to areas between Albany and Esperance as being ripe for possible illicit importation and other information suggests various fishing fleets are catching more than fish."

There is much work still to be done and many more kilometres still to be traversed, but Detective Sergeant Hill intends to make sure the AFP is well recognised and utilised in this remote corner of Australia.

