

# Documentary on Pacific policing is a top rater

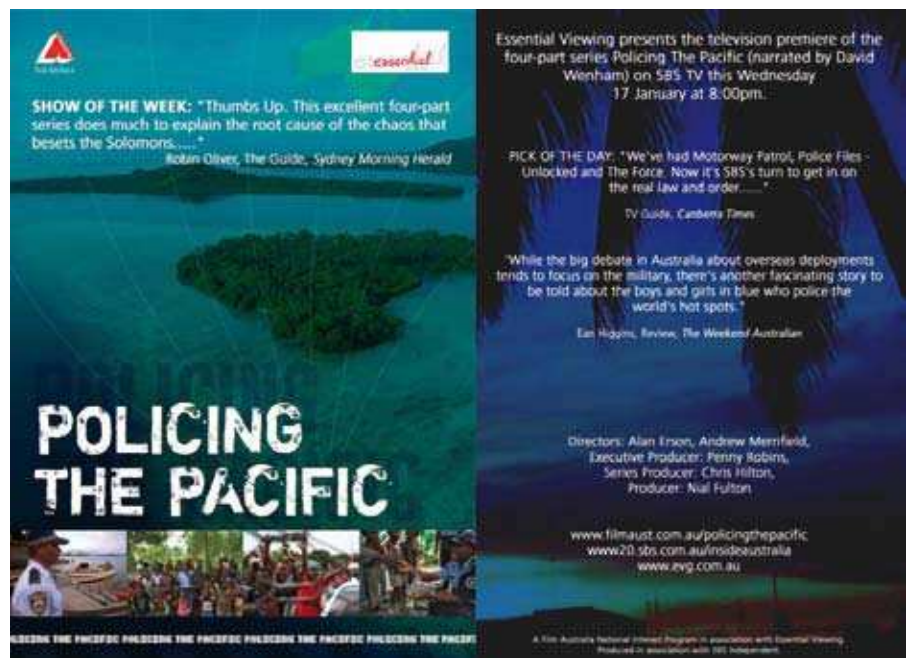
**Compelling viewing, enduring appeal and ongoing relevance – the perfect ingredients for the latest high-rating Australian Television SBS Independent documentary Policing in the Pacific.**

This four-part series aired on Inside Australia, SBS in January and February 2007 transporting viewers beyond a tropical paradise to the realities of law enforcement in the South Pacific. Narrated by actor David Wenham, the series follows several Australia Federal Police (AFP) officers on patrol in the Solomon Islands; investigate killings that occurred during the civil conflict which ended in 2003; and in the last episode, on patrol the streets of Timor-Leste's capital Dili.

*Policing in the Pacific*, by Film Australia in association with Essential Viewing and produced in association with SBS Independent has created history for the SBS.

Producer Nial Fulton from Essential Viewing was pleased that on its premiere night 17 January at 8pm, more than 390,000 viewers tuned into the program, and achieved a first for SBS with a highest rating show in that time-slot. It was also the AFP's first time to allow a film crew access to its off-shore policing operations and record policing officers as they go about their daily work.

"These police officers in the Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste, who came from Canberra and Perth, were worlds apart from their previous everyday positions. In a foreign culture they had to face challenging



circumstances from rock-throwing to riots," Mr Fulton said.

"Our aim was to present a balanced view of how the people of Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste were coping after years of civil unrest and the role which international police played in restoring order. It was not an easy task, in five months on location we had to work hard to gain the trust of local people and police officers and not jeopardise their situations," he said.

Filming and production was conducted throughout 2006 with contributions from the AFP and in particular the International Deployment Group.

AFP Media and Marketing personnel accompanied the documentary directors Alan Erson, Andrew Merrifield and crew at different stages to coordinate AFP officers in telling their stories.

The following is an extract from publicity documentation issued by the producers:

White sandy beaches fringed by coconut palms belie the violence and hatred that for many years wracked the tropical paradise that is the Solomon Islands.

Beneath swaying palms, Melbourne Federal Agent Patrick Veitch tackles a uniformed constable as part of a defence training program for local police. Federal Agent Veitch is one of 450 police from around the Pacific who make up RAMSI, the Australian-led Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands, despatched in 2003 to restore justice to a nation torn apart by bloody civil conflict....

....The documentary picks up Veitch's story seven weeks after his arrival in the capital, Honiara, in the lead-up to the nation's April 2006 election. It captures

the terrifying descent into chaos, when locals riot over what they perceive to be a corrupt result. Violence and lawlessness quickly spreads, fuelled by simmering tensions between Islanders and members of the business community who are predominantly ethnic Chinese.

"Tragic as they were for the people of the Solomon Islands and the police, the riots show the scale of the problems that RAMSI and Solomon Islanders are trying to overcome," director Alan Erson says. "The fact that the Honiara riots happened within our story period made the story we tell much more powerful."

...For the Australians, it's not an everyday policing experience, with riots, rock-throwing and the threat of being ambushed by gangs armed with poison-tipped darts. But despite the difficulties, they are happy to be involved.

"We're doing this as a team for the greater good," Federal Agent Elson explains. "It's not just financial, the reason I'm here. I'm here to do policing that I'm trained for overseas in a totally different atmosphere and climate ... It's exciting and it's a lot more challenging."

Melbourne Federal Agent Danielle Woodward concurs: "It's very, very satisfying and very rewarding work. You feel like you have actually achieved something."

The program can be purchased from Film Australia at [sales@filmaust.com.au](mailto:sales@filmaust.com.au) or contact sales on 02 94 13 8634.



Federal Agent Dave Elson with local village chief on the isolated and dangerous Weather Coast of the Solomon Islands where he walks a 28 kilometre beat – Fred Oliver, Film Australia.



Royal Solomon Island Police and Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands Federal Agents head out to check a logging camp – Greg Primmer.



Federal Agent Patrick Veitch with Solomon Islands counterpart – Alan Erson, Film Australia.



Director Andrew Merrifield within the ruins of the Pacific Casino Hotel in Honiara following riots in April 2006 – Greg Primmer.