

Platypus: Moving with the times

By Gina Bennett

“*Platypus* splashed onto the scene just days after the AFP began in October 1979. More ‘mature’ readers may recall it was the International Year of the Child and we were all humming along to the catchy ‘Care for Kids’ jingle.”

The following pages chronicle the evolution of *Platypus* from its humble beginnings to the highly adapted, internationally recognised journal that it is today. Some things have been lost along the way but much has been gained.

Early days

After a period of dormancy, *Platypus* resurfaced in 1984 with the cheeky monotreme peeking over the green masthead of an eight-page news sheet. It was a ‘changing of the guard’ time for the AFP. Executive profiles, retirements and obituaries jostled for space with stories of heroin busts, sniffer dogs and emerging ‘white collar’ crime. Content was bolstered by a network of *Platypus* regional contact officers.

Themes of international cooperation, community policing and conferences were present from the beginning and expanded over time. The crimes haven’t changed much but the way in which people commit those crimes has morphed astronomically. Technology gave criminals the licence to go global at the speed of light; the AFP’s survival relied on its ability to adapt traditional policing methods to catching cyber criminals.

Platypus has faithfully recorded the AFP’s advances in keeping up with, and hopefully staying one step ahead of, the criminals. It followed those first tentative steps onto the information superhighway and captured a policy and pictorial history of how those thought-to-be shortlived fandangled computers took over our lives, gobbling up human memory space along the way. The pace of technological change has

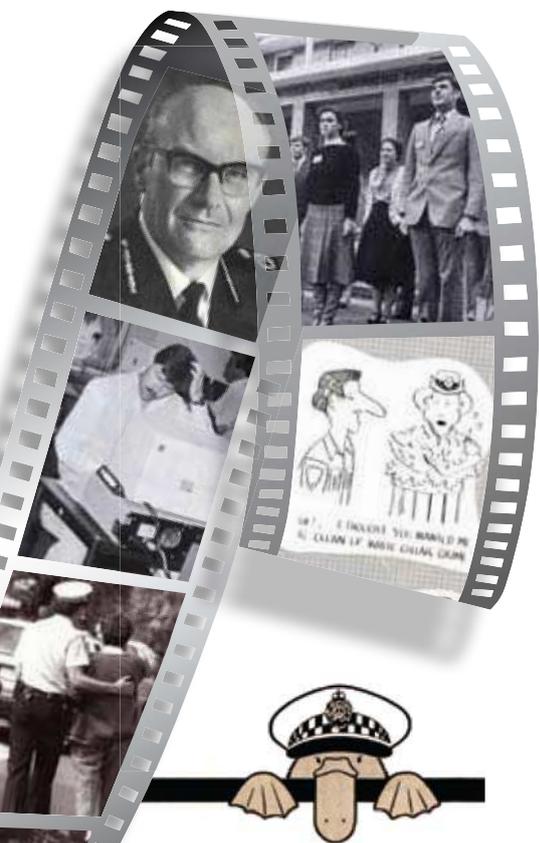
been relentless. Some priceless images of the early *Platypus* editions include a small intrepid group of people scratching their heads on a LAN course, police busting backroom pirating of LP records, and visiting PNG police examining the ‘inner workings of an overhead projector’. Inkpads gave way to digital scanning; identikits to sophisticated DNA-testing machines capable of convicting criminals decades later. No-one could have anticipated the AFP’s leaps in information and communications technology, forensic science and online investigation capability—advanced to the point where current editions are bursting with stories of how the AFP now leads the world in fighting high-tech crime.

The benefit of hindsight throws an almost prophetic slant on those early years of *Platypus*. Published statements that may have raised a few eyebrows in the early 80s such as: “Organised crime is international so an AFP role is inescapable” are simply stating the obvious in 2008.

But it wasn’t all high-brow policy statements, executive speeches and law articles about the changing role of the AFP. *Platypus* regularly reflected members’ irrepressible, if not highly developed, sense of humour. Copsword crossword, a ‘Fuzz Buzz’ gossip column, cartoons and wicked poetry that was very pre-political correctness guaranteed at least one chuckle in every edition.

Mid 1980s

Platypus backflipped from a news sheet format to a glossy-covered magazine in Edition 10 (August 1985). Then





Commissioner Major General Ron Grey introduced the new format as reflecting the professionalism and growing high reputation of the AFP both within Australia and overseas.

Platypus in the mid 1980s was a mixture of triumph and tragedy. Light-hearted fun items such as cartoons, trivial pursuits and the Billabong P.D. comic strip featured regularly with heartwarming letters to the editor chronicling acts of the AFP's heroic kindness. And there was no shortage of heroes. Australian peacekeepers had been in Cyprus since 1964 and their exploits to contain civil violence became the stuff of legends. Jack Thurgar stepped along tyre tracks in a minefield to rescue Cypriot farmer, Chrysos Seas, whose tractor had struck a landmine. Jack featured again when he was awarded the Star of Courage and then again in 2006 when he had an emotional reunion with the ailing Chrysos.

The joy and sadness of retirements, passing out parades and award ceremonies mixed with the tragedies of fallen police comrades such as Angela Taylor killed in the Russell Street bombing. Closer to home, the force was shocked to its core by the slaying of Assistant Commissioner Colin Winchester in his driveway in January 1989. The corporate wound felt by the shooting remained raw for many years.

In moving with the times, *Platypus* has been a frequent witness to the changing of the guard. Four commissioners have come and gone—one, Peter McAulay, sadly passed away only 18 months after handing over the reins to Mick Palmer. And it wasn't just the kingpins exiting the corridors of power ... *Platypus*

regaled the contribution of regular people like the last of another endangered species—the tea lady—with the retirement of Nancy Palombi in late 1988.

Blowing bubbles

The AFP started out with 2582 members and 245 public servant support staff. A heavy emphasis on recruitment and training sometimes saw more than 1000 graduates a year pass through the AFP College. And with up to 15,000 competing for an intake of 300 places, the competition was fierce and the pride was great.

For serving members, the days where expanding your qualifications led to suspicions that you were looking for a better job, crumbled under a push for professionalism during the 1980s. The focus of recruitment policy changed from 'mechanical skills and qualifications' to 'qualities and values'. Graduate intakes increased to the point where these days often—mature aged recruits have at least one degree and are encouraged to get more.

Stories depicting presentation of awards, medals and international recognition regularly bubbled to the surface. The heights of professional achievements have been matched with a long history of sporting accomplishments. On land and water, from tenpin bowling to kayaking, shooting to athletics, *Platypus* has shone a permanent spotlight on the blood, sweat

and tears of members in full pursuit of their goals.

Hearts of gold

Platypus has heralded the compassion and generosity of AFP members publicising countless examples of good deeds and money being raised for worthy causes, both in Australia and overseas. In January 1988 Andy Hughes took nine Canberra teenagers on a bicentennial tall ship expedition across Australia. In Edition 39 (Autumn 1993) members risked life and limb taking to the skies for a hot-air balloon race and then competing in a triathlon to raise awareness for children-with-cancer charity, Camp Quality. The strong tradition of AFP charity work also featured in Edition 87 (June 2005) with APS officers completing a long-distance run from Sydney to Canberra raising \$7000 for kids with arthritis.

Overseas experience

Perhaps one of the most regular and popular features of *Platypus* since day one has been articles about life overseas. The AFP's international reputation has been built on the efforts and qualities of those lucky enough to be posted in fine and not-so-salubrious locations—starting with four drug officers at the AFP's inception to more than 300 members currently posted



in 28 countries. Their colourful ‘postcards’ have made *Platypus* a window on the world as members generously shared a kaleidoscope of adventures and life-changing personal experience. Readers have been entertained with tales of setting up a mounted police unit on semi-broken Timorese ponies; Steve Polden’s family outing to Pakistan’s wild frontier; and peacekeeping triumphs in Haiti and Cambodia. On the flipside, *Platypus* pages have often been overshadowed by shared memories of disaster relief, body identification and war crimes investigation.

Keeping the peace

Peacekeepers have been a crowd favourite of *Platypus* since its inception. Its pages have borne testimony to the AFP’s willingness to play global citizen sending contingents to Cyprus, Cambodia, Mozambique, Haiti, Somalia—just to name a few hotspots. Being non-military, unarmed and sometimes unwelcome has posed some significant challenges to personnel since AFP peacekeeping began in Cyprus 1964.

Show me the money!

The progression of salaries and conditions of service in the AFP has rippled through the pages of *Platypus*. In 1985 the magazine recorded the start of the 38-hour working week; a four per cent pay rise brought a Chief Superintendent’s salary to \$43,389.

The AFP’s often innovative approach to people management continued into the mid 1990s with articles featuring the transformation from a traditional rules-bound hierarchical structure to a more flexible team-based approach. As the wheel turned *Platypus* was there to record milestones such as the national wage case, enterprise bargaining and certified agreements as well as developments in gender, indigenous and family-friendly policies.

Late 1980s

Edition 20 (February 1988) marked the end of an era with Commissioner Ron



Grey signing off after five years in the top job. He left paying tribute to “the young members who will give the force its direction and strength”.

Platypus introduced his successor Peter McAulay in the same edition.

Walking a global beat

The AFP’s longstanding relationships with overseas law enforcement agencies such as the FBI, Interpol and regional partners, particularly Indonesian, Thai and Chinese police forces, have been well documented in *Platypus*. As the size and reputation of the AFP expanded so did the size and profile of the conferences it organised and attended. In 1987 Commissioner Grey became the first AFP Commissioner to visit China.

Big names such as Shultz, Quayle, Clinton and Bush (1 and 2) have waltzed through the pages of *Platypus* on official visits to Australia. Coverage of high-security visits by Queen Elizabeth II, former Pope John Paul II and more recently Pope Benedict XVI have also borne testimony to the AFP’s enviable security record. And who could forget the massive turnout for Expo 88, the Sydney 2000 Olympics, APEC 2007 and the recent Olympic Torch Relay.

The 1990s

Platypus witnessed the reforms that saw the AFP change its traditional hierarchical structure to a flexible, more responsive team-based approach. Successes of this team-based approach frequently hit the headlines—and the crime syndicates—with amazing stories of record drug busts in almost every edition of *Platypus*. A major success of the Federal Government’s *Tough on Drugs* policy showcased in October 1998 when one of the new strike teams seized Australia’s largest heroin haul, 390 kilograms, off the coast of NSW.

The coverage of police drug operations in particular mirrored changing crime trends in Australian society. The hunt for illicit drugs such as cannabis and crack evolved into a new battlefield to halt the flow and

manufacture of the 'new designer drugs' such as ecstasy. The recent success of *Operation Inca*—the world's biggest single seizure of ecstasy—attests that this war is not abating.

Interagency cooperation, especially on drugs and money laundering, cranked up another notch in 1997 when then Commissioner Mick Palmer became the first Australian representative on the Interpol executive committee.

In 1999 Commissioner Palmer stated in his *Platypus* message that "geographic borders are becoming increasingly meaningless". The phrase 'transnational crime' was entrenched in the language of law enforcement, becoming synonymous with 'high tech' crime. One investigator lamented: "The increased use of computer technology has enabled organised groups of criminals to steal more money than armed robbers ever could."

In pursuit of what has been described as the AFP's 'insatiable appetite for technological enhancement' *Platypus* has made a valiant effort to keep readers up to date with advances in crime-fighting technology. The latest in finger printing, identikit and video taping of interviews gave way to the super-labs of forensic testing that have catapulted the AFP into the forefront of global innovation. Even in the 1980s the AFP was described as having 'one of the largest levels of computer use of any police force in the world'; the 1990s saw the trend accelerate. A neverending alphabet soup of oddly-named computer systems splashed the pages—from LANs and WANs to PROMIS, ensuring no-one could escape the network noose.

Internet crime began to raise its ugly head in the late 1990s with the initial focus on copyright protection. People were talking about a 'cashless society', ATMs and EFTPOS, and with this windchange came even more stories of fraud. The information revolution was seen as 'a wild new frontier open to adventurers, explorers and fortune seekers'. A new breed of lawman came in the form of the AFP Computer Crime



Unit—it had five members scattered around Australia. This mushrooming crime type soon spawned an entire division dedicated to tracking 'the trails left behind of criminals moving through the cyber frontier'.

By 1999, the internet was seen as the 'latest spin in the rinse cycle'. In 2008 we know that money laundering did not 'come out in the wash' with greater regulation and international cooperation but instead has become a permanent stain on the fabric of law enforcement. It is now estimated that \$1.5 trillion is laundered annually worldwide.

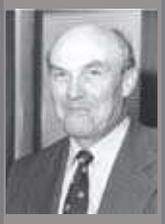
Other highlights of the decade included the AFP hosting the first Australasian Women's Conference in September 1996. Part of its agenda sought to address why women were leaving the policing profession.

Dawn of a new century

As the new millennium ticked over, the AFP was firmly positioned for crime-fighting in an age of globalisation and high technology. In February 2000, it was estimated that more than half of Australian households had a computer (now we're lucky to find a pocket that doesn't have one!). *Platypus* became even more diverse, resonating with themes of 'high tech crime' and 'online exploitation' as well as coverage of 'traditional' crimes such as drug trafficking and the usual mayhem facing community policing. One of the more interesting stories covered a murder trial on Christmas Island where a man was run down at the Poon Saan Club over a \$6 gambling debt. AFP members stationed on Christmas Island were also kept busy with the influx of illegal boatpeople—more than 75 boats arrived in 1999/2000 stuffed to their gills with human cargo.

Towards the end of the century a new wind was ruffling the fur in *Platypus*. Before the paint was even dry on the Atlanta stadiums, the AFP was focused on the Sydney 2000 Olympics. VIP protection, special events and generally 'planning for the worst' stretched AFP





resources like never before. Organised crime was running its own race with credit card fraud its preferred event.

The 'best ever' games did a lot to showcase the breadth and depth of the AFP's capabilities during its 21st year of operation. In Edition 69 (December 2000) then Minister for Justice and Customs, Amanda Vanstone, rated the AFP as "a force second to none". The dark days of budget crunch in the mid 1990s had brightened, and in the words of former Deputy Commissioner Adrien Whiddett the reforms flowing from the 1998 Ayers review were "revitalising the AFP after a long enforced period on starvation rations".

Storm clouds brewing

The basking was shortlived. In January 2001 the AFP's first Commissioner, Sir Colin Woods, died in London. A Pacific Rim conference story highlighted the stain of money laundering spreading to the point where organised crime groups could move billions of dollars into a country—"swallowing entire national economies in one gulp".

Terrorism

At the close of 2001 *Platypus* articles were focused on performance evaluation and the pursuit of 'value for money'. 'Do more faster, better and for less' was the catchcry of the times. The name Osama Bin Laden had fleetingly appeared in the magazine as early as December 1999 but the events of September 11, 2001 guaranteed counter terrorism operations would never be far from the headlines. *Platypus* readers didn't have long to wait—the Bali bombings of 2002 brought 'terror to our doorstep'.

September 11 featured prominently in the magazine on the first anniversary; counter terrorism or 'CT' was redefining the role of the AFP. Various articles on *Operation Alliance* appearing since have chronicled a tragic saga that continues today with the convicted Bali bombers lobbying for 'humane' deaths. Against this backdrop *Platypus* has reflected the AFP's attempts to scuttle distorted images of Islam and



Muslims, and to engender impartiality and a healthy respect for diversity. The recent Unity Cup held in conjunction with the Essendon Football Club has shown the value of forging new partnerships.

In 2002 *Platypus* welcomed the recognition that the uniqueness of Australian wildlife was increasingly under threat by environmental crimes – from smuggling and waste dumping to oil spills.

Edition 74 in March 2002 was bursting with pride after Canberra hosted the first international women in policing conference. The spirit of togetherness and cooperation must have been contagious because May saw the AFP corporate logo tweaked slightly to read 'To fight crime together and win'.

Terror of a different kind darkened the pages of *Platypus* in early 2003. The 18 January Canberra firestorm left the sleepy bush capital looking like a war zone—it was the day 'the thin blue line took on a wall of red'. Canberra recovered but not before some dedicated AFP stalwarts lost their eyebrows during the frantic evacuation effort.

Forget telephones, radio and TV ... in 2003 the internet was being recognised as 'the fastest instrument of communication in the history of civilisation'. The flipside of this revolution saw a new sexy side of the AFP emerge. The Australian High Tech Crime Centre (AHTCC) had a mandate that went way beyond computer crime—it was expected to take the fight against cyber criminals to 'unprecedented levels'.

2004

The 40-year anniversary of peacekeeping in Cyprus made some waves in March 2004. Edition 82 was also memorable for the then head of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Dr Peter Shergold's 'good news, bad news' quote: "the AFP is now firmly located at the centre of government".

The fight against drugs gained more prominence in 2004 as *Platypus* explored the early phase of a methamphetamine

epidemic under the banner 'The Irony of Ecstasy'. It wasn't all bad news though—2004 drew to a close with a full roundup of the AFP's 25th birthday celebrations.

2005

Platypus had the unenviable task of recording a series of tragedies that rocked the AFP in 2005. Just six months after 1300 Australian Protective Service officers were welcomed back to the fold, APS officer Adam Dunning was gunned down on a routine patrol in Honiara. A Fijian officer died on a training exercise at Wee Jasper and was returned home with full honours.

The ebb and flow of AFP activities saw *Platypus* celebrating a series of new beginnings: the opening of the much-lauded state-of-the-art IDG training complex; the beginning of work on the National Police Memorial; the launch of the Confidant Network and the resurrection of the 'work-life balance' concept.

2006

Platypus had a makeover in March 2006 switching to the current 'white layout' and greater adherence to AFP branding. Articles publicised the many successes of the AFP's overseas operations: RAMSI in the Solomons; assistance after the Boxing Day tsunami; the evacuation of Australians from Beirut; and the debut of the Operations Response Group following the 2006 riots in Timor-Leste.

2007

With almost pendulum-like regularity the mood of *Platypus* once again became mired in tragedy. On 7 March 2007 Federal Agents Brice Steele and Mark Scott became the fourth and fifth AFP members to die in plane crashes. The pages of the July 2007 edition were dedicated to the memory of ACT Chief Policing Officer Audrey Fagan who died soon after. Edition 96 celebrated her life and featured the colour purple as a mark of respect for her advocacy for women in policing.

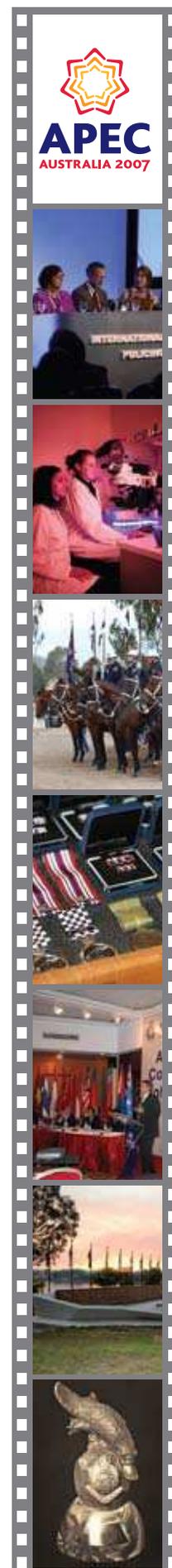


As the shockwaves subsided, the AFP was distracted by preparations for APEC—the largest security operation in Australia's history. The next talkfest to grab the spotlight was the International Policing: Toward 2020 Conference. Under the provocative gaze of futurist Watts Wacker, 300 delegates from 30 countries converged on Canberra and were challenged to imagine their law enforcement role in rapidly evolving societies. Some attention fell on Commissioner Keelty when he was named among the 10 most powerful people in Australia.

2008

And so it goes ... *Platypus* has recorded the highs and lows of a highly adaptable organisation. It was once said that the AFP's 'best assets walk out the door every night'—now they walk a global beat. The magazine will continue to follow their trail, reflecting the triumphs and tragedies, the anniversaries and milestones, as members tackle those people finding new ways to commit old crimes. Future editions will explore recurring themes of partnership: 2008 represents one year with Europol, 60 years with Interpol and 100 years of the FBI.

Platypus will continue to bear witness as changing government and community expectations ripple through the AFP's operations, shaping and re-shaping the organisation as it adapts to an ever-changing environment.



Platypus's 'sixth sense'

By CRAIG CORMICK

A TEAM of Australian researchers has proved that the platypus possesses a sixth sense.

The sense, based on a series of electroreceptors in the bill enables the platypus to detect faint electrical impulses, and to navigate in murky water and locate its prey.

The movement of water creates an electric field, as does the motion of a fish or shrimp moving its muscles. The research team, from Monash University, has shown that these electrical impulses can be detected by the platypus's sensors.

(Canberra Times)