

23 October 2023

The Hon. Chris Minns, MP
Premier of NSW
52 Martin Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Premier

The policing community was deeply saddened by the news of terrible suffering endured by people in Israel and Gaza.

At the same time police swiftly prepared and implemented strategies to keep people in Australia safe during a time of heightened fear and risk.

In the below document, the Police Association of NSW (PANSW) provides a recommendation for staffing of the policing operations that will be necessary to meet these challenges, including Federal funding for State and Territory operations.

The States and Territories working with Federal Government can play an important role in ensuring our police have the resources they need to provide the high standard of service and protection they have delivered through so many challenges.

We are seeking your support of these recommendations to your federal colleagues.

Your support during this time of heightened fear and danger is greatly appreciated by our membership and will assist them to keep our communities safe.

Yours sincerely

KEVIN MORTON
President

Police Association of NSW

Recommendation for police staffing of operations
for current mass gatherings and heightened
security

The policing community was deeply saddened by the news of terrible suffering endured by people in Israel and Gaza.

At the same time police swiftly prepared and implemented strategies to keep people in Australia safe during a time of heightened fear and risk.

These efforts will be undertaken by police across Australia, in all States and Territories, and the Federal Police.

Police in NSW appreciated the importance of their work when you stated that the realisation of these fears and risk “would be ruinous for Sydney’s sense of cohesion, our multicultural multi-faith community”.

Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Director, Mike Burgess, issued a public statement identifying an increased risk of “spontaneous violence” in Australia.

“We, of course, recognise this is a moment that drives feelings and attitudes in our respective countries and in Australia, so we’re on the lookout for that as we see protests and counterprotests ... but we do anticipate spontaneous violence around these.”

Ensuring the safety of everyone in Australia at this time takes on global significance, and any acts of violence or vilification would reverberate internationally and diplomatically.

Our Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese said:

“I want to assure you, that kind of hateful prejudice has no place in Australia. Our country is better than that – and our country is a better place because of you and your community.

And my government is committed to keeping the community safe.”

Police work to prevent acts of racism and violence around the country therefore takes on national and international significance.

Violence of this kind has occurred and, in some cases, resulted in death in America, Belgium and France.

Across Australia, police are providing increased security for Jewish places of worship, critical infrastructure, locations of community significance and associated businesses. They are also performing operations at mass gatherings and protests.

This will involve:

- Large numbers of police being required to ensure security and safety at mass gatherings and protests. This could involve hundreds or even over a thousand police officers.
- Police officers may also be required to perform identity checks and search operations at protests given the heightened threat and additional measures necessitated.

- Police may be required to enforce powers to lock down large sections of metropolitan areas.
- Static guards of two officers will be deployed at Jewish places of worship, buildings of significance and business premises.

These additional duties will involve thousands of police officers, and this may go on for a long time.

While officers provide this increased security, they also must continue to perform their regular duties: responding to urgent calls for assistance, combating domestic violence, investigating serious crimes along with several other agency duties that police have been forced to take on over the years.

To continue to provide outstanding service to their community, and perform heightened security roles, police cannot absorb the additional work into their normal staffing capacity within local Commands. Command rosters are already stretched, unfortunately interrupting constantly the personal lives of our members on weekends and days they should be spending quality time with their families. Our members are expressing frustration to us at a time when the blue line is already stretched thin and now this added operational requirement.

It is the position of the PANSW, the additional security duties must be performed by police officers working “User Charges” shifts, funded by the Federal Government outside of a normal policing roster.

Any arrangement other than this will see a decreased police presence in performing their usual duties, and therefore risk community safety. It will also significantly impact on daily policing roster and our members who are already frustrated will see a decline in the balance between work and their personal lives. We are seeing this already without this added burden.

As it stands today, the police officers needed to participate in heightened security operations will be drawn from Commands right across the States and Territories. Officers will be “on shift” in their substantive Command but sent to these operations under the staffing orders.

In effect, those Commands lose the services of those officers and are left with reduced coverage. Affected Commands will include local police Commands and specialist units.

NSW Police Force is already stretched thin in providing core policing services. Police are being pulled away from their usual positions to assist in frontline first response.

To further drain those Commands to perform security operations will leave communities with significantly reduced police coverage. Units that provide a specialised response to crimes like domestic violence or sexual assault will have officers sent away to mass gatherings.

This could be resolved if the security and mass gathering operations were staffed by police officers on User Charges shifts or cancelled rest days only without it having to impact upon the day to day rostering of the NSWPF.

That would enable police to perform their usual shifts at their substantive command and provide their communities with its normal services. Then, officers can pick up additional shifts to staff security and mass gathering operations.

This is the police resourcing model that enabled world class policing operations to limit the spread of COVID in NSW. Police officers who performed duties in relation to quarantine hotels and border closures did so under this arrangement which allowed the NSWPF to continue to function with its day to day operations not being impacted. Remembering that during the above event, the NSWPF was at capacity with staffing numbers, as you are fully aware the NSWPF is nowhere near a full contingent of staff at this challenging time.

These staffing arrangements permitted the NSW Police Force to create an agile staff capacity for those additional operations while continuing to provide its usual outstanding services to their communities. The then Premier stated:

“The leadership, integrity and strength of the NSW Police has been a shining light during our state's recent challenges. The Police Force has continued to keep the people of NSW safe during the devastating bushfire season and the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you for the care you show to the community each day.

NSW Police has many complex objectives but, in the end, everything you do is about community protection. Across a force of more than 17,000 police officers, every single one of you makes a difference to the strength of our social cohesion and protecting the people of NSW - you touch every corner of this state.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, NSW Police has shown its agility and its understanding of the communities it serves. These unprecedented times have required the authorities to be firm and fair as everyone adapts to rapidly changing social expectations. The professionalism shown by the NSW Police during these challenging times develops a mutual trust and respect between police and civilians which will stand NSW in good stead going forward.

Thank you to every NSW Police officer for your agility, resilience, compassion, skill and dedication to our state and its people. You have been tested in previously unimaginable ways in recent months and have proved adept at managing crises with confidence and consistency. NSW needs its police more than ever and it is a credit to the Force that its relationship with the people has never been stronger.

As boundaries and expectations are reshaped in the coming months and years, I look forward to NSW Police officers guiding our state into an even more respectful, enjoyable, and safer place to be.”

The same agility and community ties are required in addressing the safety fears of our community today.

The Federal Government has acknowledged the risk to peace and safety in Australia, as well as the key role the Federal Government has in responding to it.

There was recently bipartisan support for grants totaling \$50 million of Federal funds to increase security measures at religious places of worship and schools “to keep Australians practicing their religion safe across the country.”

Australian Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus said:

“The Albanese Government is committed to ensuring that people of all faiths can live in Australia free from violence and discrimination.

The \$50 million Securing Faith-Based Places program grants will improve security at religious schools and preschools, places of worship and faith-based community centres.

...

Grants have been approved in every state and territory across different faith communities.

The Securing Faith-Based Places program helps protect Australians from crime and violence motivated by religious or racial intolerance by funding security guards and security infrastructure, including cameras, lights and fencing.”

The Federal Government has the opportunity to also support police across Australia and assist them to protect their communities.

Recommendation

All police operations for mass gatherings or providing increased security for communities in relation to the risks arising from the situation in Israel and Gaza should be staffed by police:

- On User Charges shifts, or
- Cancelled Rest Days.

The Federal Government fund those additional shifts, using an agreed process to grant funds to all State and Territory police forces equitably and according to their required involvement in such operations.

There are precedents for this model of staffing these kinds of police operations:

- Policing operations for the COVID-19 response.
- In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, a similar approach was used for police patrols of key infrastructure.
- Operation Seta in relation to the Cronulla Riots also utilised this approach to staffing police operations.

These operations are crucial to prevent violence and vilification and maintain cohesion in our multicultural community.

The Federal Government can play an important role in ensuring our police have the resources they need to provide the high standard of service and protection they have delivered through so many challenges.