



“We deal with very weird, like just strange, not always, policing matters”: Small town policing in rural, regional, & remote communities in Tasmania

The Police Perspective

Pilot Study Report

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Most knowledge of policing, and of the relationship between police and the communities they serve, is urban-centric. The focus since Peel's 'Bobbies' in the early nineteenth century has been on inner-city, culturally heterogeneous communities. Even when regional policing is considered—in the work of rural criminologists—the focus is predominantly on rural crime, offending and victimisation rather than how police do their work in remote and isolated communities.

With the (re)invention of community policing in the 1980s—and the mainstreaming of these approaches across policing organisations in Australia—it was pertinent to ask how the goals of community policing are achieved in culturally homogenous communities where the estranged relationships of the inner-city are exceptional. While policing in remote Indigenous communities remains fraught, for most rural, regional, or remote communities, the animosities with police are for the most part historical, episodic, and/or related to local contexts alone.

In the everyday working lives of rural, regional, and remote (RRR) police officers, and in their engagement and relationship with the communities they serve, we are offered evidence of the critical importance of propinquity in the co-production of law and order. Propinquity refers to the closeness between police and the community in terms of place (proximity), time (shared events), relation (kinship), and affinity of nature (similarity).

The research detailed in this report clearly illustrates that policing by consent is reliant on propinquitous relationships. This has a variety of implications for Tasmanian Police in relation to the training and preparedness of officers to work in RRR communities, as well as the existing policy that requires officers to be re-deployed to other stations and commands after their term in RRR communities. While some RRR officers have been able to remain in their posts beyond the normal tenure, others have been redeployed or have been asked to be re-deployed before the end of the term. This approach to staffing in RRR communities may be counterproductive to co-production of, and community engagement in, public safety—whether in the city or the rural town.

The “propinquitous policing” undertaken by rural and remote police officers present us with a different vision of policing that does not see community engagement as a value-add to reactive crime control. Community policing in RRR communities becomes propinquitous in large part due to the broad and deep connections fostered by these types of deployment. Community policing in RRR communities is not

something *done* to—or even, *with*—communities. Rather, it is a set of propinquitous relationships that are fostered organically from the proximal, kinship, affinity, and shared events created by the closeness between police and the RRR communities they serve. The line between police and communities is blurred, and in some cases erased, by the integral part played by RRR officers who are embedded in their communities.

The tyranny of distance can be a barrier for policing; yet, this distance can, by necessity, create the propinquitous relationships that enables RRR officers to know their communities well enough to know what is needed and when. These relationships also provide RRR officers with “deputies” in extreme or critical incidents when time and distance preclude immediate police back up.

However, the “rural horror” of policing cannot be ignored. The “rural idyll” that often beckons officers to RRR postings can hide the “rural horror” of crime outside of the city, especially the family and domestic violence that goes unheeded because of the tyranny of distance. Beyond the “rural horror”, RRR postings come with their own problems that city police are not required to consider, such as privacy and anonymity, surveillance by community, and the significant impacts of these postings on family.

Despite these disadvantages, most RRR officers who participated in this research would not have it any other way. “War stories” from the frontline of rural crime were consistently offset by the moments when RRR officers knew—and were told—they have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of communities. A more robust approach to preparing officers for these postings, and a greater emphasis on the unique skills required for RRR policing, may avert some of the issues identified by police and community participants.

With the increased relocation of people from the mainland to rural, remote, and regional Tasmania—in part as a response to COVID-19 and the rising costs of housing in Tasmanian and mainland cities—greater attention to the problems and advantages of propinquitous policing will need to be given. Sea and tree changers bring with them the expectations of life in the city, even when their desire is to escape the problems of city life. These service expectations, along with the community upheavals that adhere to sudden fluctuations in community dynamics, necessitate that Tasmania Police consider the development of an evidence-based approach to policing in rural, remote, and regional communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF RRR OFFICERS

- ❖ That Tasmania Police (re)creates a bespoke training program to be completed prior to any application to work in RRR communities
- ❖ That Tasmania Police creates a manual for RRR officers and their families detailing the unique conditions of these deployments and the support available
- ❖ That Tasmania Police creates a liaison officer between RRR officers and the organisation to assist in addressing the unique conditions of these deployments (such as school options for older children, personal and carer's leave, inadequate housing conditions of police housing)
- ❖ That Tasmania Police audits the position description and conditions of these postings for gender bias, which may preclude female officers from considering the option of a RRR posting
- ❖ That Tasmania Police considers the viability of police houses attached to RRR stations, especially with regard to security, surveillance, and the age of buildings and their suitability to the climate in remote regions
- ❖ That Tasmania Police excludes RRR deployments from the regulations on redeployment after a set term
- ❖ That Tasmania Police mandates wellbeing checks and counselling for RRR officers at least once a year to identify and respond to latent or vicarious trauma
- ❖ That Tasmania Police reviews the position description for RRR postings and considers integrating essential criteria around willingness and capacity to engage communities
- ❖ That Tasmania Police works with existing RRR officers to create a promotional package highlighting the advantages of working in RRR communities
- ❖ That Tasmania Police carefully considers the deployment of officers to RRR communities who have recently attested or are undertaking studies for promotion to a higher rank

### ENABLING PROPINQUITOUS POLICING

- ❖ That Tasmania Police works closely with RRR communities to create a community map of local services, specialist skills, and family networks to enable newly deployed RRR officers to understand the contexts of their work
- ❖ That Tasmania Police considers the development of a volunteer program similar to that run by the Tasmanian State Emergency Services to provide trained support for RRR officers

- ❖ That Tasmania Police considers the development of a community engagement strategy that seeks community input and advice on critical issues on an annual basis
- ❖ That Tasmania Police, working with other allied community services, closely considers the opportunities that arise in extreme events (such as bushfires) for facilitating the relocation of rural DFV victims (and their animals) away from violent partners and family members

#### THE LIMITS OF PROPINQUITOUS POLICING

- ❖ That Tasmania Police creates an evaluation tool to be used with police officers and communities to assess if/when a RRR posting has been extended too long for the wellbeing of the community
- ❖ That Tasmania Police works with RRR officers annually to identify and resolve any community animosity or distrust, and/or any conflicts of interest that have emerged in the preceding 12 months

#### TYRANNY OF DISTANCE

- ❖ That Tasmania Police considers the refurbishment of hub stations to enable overnight detention, which will bypass the need for RRR officers to leave their communities without an officer when suspects are required to be transported to the nearest city
- ❖ That Tasmania Police considers the creation of a “fast responder squad” for each hub town to enable the timely deployment of multi-member response teams in incidents of violence
- ❖ That Tasmanian Police considers deploying members of a “fast responder squad” to RRR communities when RRR officers are transporting a detainee, on rostered days off, or when on leave.
- ❖ That Tasmania Police works closely with the Tasmanian Department of Health to build the capacity for local health staff to act as forensic nurses in cases where blood tests are required in a timely manner
- ❖ That Tasmania Police work with the Department of Health to develop local hub capacity to provide support to DFV victims to avoid the need to travel to the nearest city to access services

## ABBREVIATIONS

AFP	Australian Federal Police
DFV	Domestic and family violence
IPV	Intimate partner violence
NSWPF	New South Wales Police Force
NTP	Northern Territory Police
NZP	New Zealand Police
QPS	Queensland Police Service
RRR	Rural, remote, regional
SAPOL	South Australian Police
TasPol	Tasmania Police
VicPol	Victoria Police
WAPOL	Western Australian Police



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## CHAPTER 1: RURALITY, CRIME & POLICING

In Tasmania's RRR communities, Peel's seventh principle that "the police are the public and that the public are the police" is writ large, with remote stations often requiring the practical assistance of community members to undertake their duties in times of crisis. In reverse, police officers in these communities are forced by *propinquity*—nearness in terms of place (proximity), time (shared events), relation (kinship), and affinity of nature (similarity)—into a relationship with community that exceeds the formulaic and mediated community policing of the inner-city. In this sense, policing by consent in RRR communities is reliant on propinquitous relationships, and without these police-community links the work of the police may be counterproductive to the co-production of, and community engagement in, public safety.

There is no singular definition of small town policing (Sims, 1988 in Falcone, Wells, & Weisheit, 2002). For the purpose of this project, small town policing is defined as policing where there are only one or two police officers for the whole town. Existing research in this area is sparse and often couched in other work on policing in isolated areas (see, for example, Anderson & Dossetor, 2012; Fenwick, 2012; Slade, 2013). As such, this review considers literature from a range of disciplines and approaches, with a focus on the topic of rural, regional, and remote (RRR) policing.

Rural criminology recognises that the nature of crime differs in RRR spaces, and thus requires context-specific examination (Donnermeyer, 2016). Before considering the current context of small town policing, the historical context of rural policing in Australia is considered. This discussion informs a consideration of the emblematic features of rural policing as influenced by the concepts of the "rural idyll" and "rural horror". Understanding the conceptual framework of small town policing facilitates a critical analysis of the practical rural policing strategies that aim to benefit rural police officers as they attempt to balance the fine line between being an effective officer and a good citizen in small town Tasmania. Overall, this project seeks to reignite the need for research to better aid the practice and policies governing not only RRR policing but also urban community policing practices.

### RURAL, REGIONAL, & REMOTE SPACES

Australia has a unique rurality in terms of geography, history, and culture. As highlighted by Hugo (2012, 18), upwards of 81% of the nation's population live within 50 kilometres of the coastline and just 0.8% of people live within the 70.5% of "uninhabited" land that hosts a population density of less than 0.1 persons per square

kilometre. That geographic spread of the population simultaneously makes Australia one of the most rural and most urban countries in the world (Jobes et al., 2001).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2014) classifies areas according to their population size, relative distance to an urban centre, and access to goods and services. Roufeil and Battye (2008) define regional, rural and remote as:

- ❖ regional: non-urban centres with populations over 25,000;
- ❖ rural: non-urban localities with populations under 25,000;
- ❖ remote: communities with fewer than 5,000 people and with very limited access to services

According to the ABS classification, most of Tasmania is categorised as regional, rural, or remote, yet distance from the two major cities—Hobart and Launceston—is relatively small (2.5 hours) in terms of mainland Australian geography.

Ceccato (2015, 157) notes that defining rural, regional, or remote areas purely by their geography is problematic as they are not “homogenous entities”; rather, they are a diverse collection of communities that share some unique challenges while also creating their own unique contexts. As a simple geographical marker, rurality fails to capture not only this variety of rural localities, but also that it is measured by its distance from what it is not (the city), which fails to account for the richness and density of Indigenous habitation of this remote land.

Overlapping these geographical and demographic definitions of the rural, economists and political scientists also mark out the territory that is not the city by use of administrative and economic zoning. When the land use gives way to farming, mining, and pasture, and the economy is driven by agrarian production, it is marked out against the consumptive city. Along similar lines, rurality is also defined by the political boundaries carved out of the landscape—where rivers and mountains mark one electorate from another—and divide neighbours closer to each other than to the city. For the purpose of this research, the term ‘RRR’ will be used in place of ‘rural’ to better encapsulate the varying distinctions of what is ‘rural’, ‘remote’, and ‘regional’. As highlighted, rural is not just a shorthand term used to describe zones that reside outside of major cities, but rather, it is a fluid notion that takes on a number of complexities (Harkness, Harris, & Baker, 2016).

The geographical and demographic definition of RRR makes criminal justice and its resourcing challenging. When the varying cultural and social variables are added, the complexity of RRR crime necessitates a different type of approach; one that is cognisant of the time, space, and contexts of rurality (Harkness et al., 2016, 16). Thus, it is important for current and prospective RRR police officers to consider the

compounding definitions of rurality to ensure that a “cookie cutter” approach to policing is not applied across all communities to which they serve. Policing practices need to be contextualised to the specific needs and characteristics of RRR communities.

Following Campo and Tayton (2015), and informed by the ABS (2014) and Roufeil and Battye (2008), the researchers define RRR spaces as all non-urban areas.

### THE “RURAL IDYLL” & “RURAL HORROR”

RRR spaces are imbued with a variety of stereotypes that inform popular imagination and are relevant to the study of rural policing. The “rural idyll” represents a safe and quiet crime-free place with a sparse population, but a close community (Bell, 1997; Scott & Hogg, 2015; Somerville, Smith, & McElwee, 2015). In terms of policing stereotypes, think *Blue Heelers*, *Heartbeat*, or the “village bobby” or “country bobby” (Smith, 2010). The closeness of community is regarded as a point of safety due to mutual knowing and surveillance (Somerville et al., 2015). Tönnies’ (1887) concept of a *gemeinschaft* community encapsulates the rural idyll as one of close-knit, intimate connections, and relatively crime free. Propinquity is a key aspect of *gemeinschaft* communities, as the links between community members provide an informal social control network, which requires little formal policing to ensure order and safety. In these contexts, outsiders are perceived as the threat (Brownfield & Waid-Lindberg, 2017; Ceccato, 2015; Scott & Hogg, 2015).

Contrasting the “rural idyll” is the “rural horror” (Bell, 1997), which is a rurality of a myriad of hidden dangers (of catastrophes, criminals, and uncivilised “natives”) (Hogg & Carrington, 2006). Supported by the tyranny of distance and isolation, the closeness of community becomes the point of horror in the form of pathology or violence (Bell, 1997). In a popular culture context, think *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* or *Wolf Creek* (Scott & Hogg, 2015). Isolation combined with the unusual or unexpected presents danger (Bell, 1997). Danger might also lie in the closeness of community, where ties can simultaneously invade privacy (small town gossip, everyone knowing everyone) and uphold privacy (not divulging secrets or crime to outsiders or police). The “rural horror” re-codes the pure Australian countryside by presenting the barren land as a place of potential isolation, which harbours “gothic villains” and provides opportunity for crime to flourish in the privacy that the landscape offers (Scott & Biron, 2010, 320).

This particular “architecture of rural life” has led to the under-policing of some activity, particularly in isolated settings where crime can go unnoticed (Hogg & Carrington, 2006). This is (in part) due to the fact that the “rural idyll” can only be threatened from the outside; from outsiders, transients, seasonal workers, and those who share a proximal propinquity but not affinity. These so-called outsiders—or in Tasmanian

vernacular, “mainlanders”—are urban and know little of the ruralities they encounter. In this particularly Australian “rural idyll”, even those Indigenous to the land are constructed as outsiders. The construction of deviance as a city problem that breaks the “rural idyll” complicates policing, and creates barriers to the service provided to victims of localised crime.

The geographic isolation of rural communities, with solitary properties dispersed across large swathes of land, facilitates a dark figure of crime and the silencing of interpersonal crime such as domestic, family, and intimate partner violence (DV/FV/IPV). Given the romanticised imagery attached to the rural idyll and the cohesive social structures that make up RRR communities, victims of DV/FV/IPV may prefer to preserve the stigma of “having problems” in order to avoid the “small-town” talk that comes with reporting these types of incidents to the police. The myth of “rural idyll” silences victims and creates the conditions for “rural horror” to go unnoticed by the police. Embedded with a colonial milieu, the contemporary ruralities of Australia, including that of rural policing, cannot be understood without the acknowledgment of the nation’s historical development.

## THE COLONIAL CONTEXT

Policing in colonial Australia exemplified the dissonance between the militarised nature of policing in the colonies and the enlightened Peelian system of policing employed in Britain at the same time. The decentralised and repressive practices of military policing were critical to the “war of extermination” against the first peoples of Australia. Armed conflict against the Indigenous resistance to dispossession and colonisation of their land entrenched a toxic relationship between law enforcement and Indigenous communities that has heavily impacted on the dimensions of rural crime and rural policing in Australia ever since (Clements, 2014b; Cunneen, 2001).

Drawing inspiration from the United Kingdom, 1862 marked an important point in the development of policing in Australia; during this year, a concerted effort was made to amalgamate the fragmented police forces across Australian states. As part of this process, rural landowners and Indigenous trackers were deputised. This helped to rectify the estranged relationships between the police and the (Indigenous) public (West, 2009). Settlers, ex-convicts, and Indigenous peoples were utilised for their bush skills and adept knowledge of the landscape to assist in the apprehension of convicted criminals and to adjudicate the conflict between the original custodians of the land and colonial law enforcement (Harkness et al., 2016; West, 2009). Yet, for some—particularly Indigenous populations—collaboration with police and the military did not diminish the “rural horror” that preceded these reforms to policing the colonies.

## Colonial war in Tasmania: The Black War, the Black Line

The history of policing in Tasmania must also be situated within its specific colonial context, including the Black War and the Black Line. The Black War refers to the frontier conflict with the Indigenous peoples of Tasmania as part of the colonial project from 1823 to 1834 (Clements, 2014a; Connor, 2002; Ryan, 2008). At the time of the first occupation of Tasmania by the British, 1803, there was about 6000 Indigenous people living as nine autonomous tribes (Connor, 2002; Harmon, 2019). Introduced diseases quickly reduced these numbers (Connor, 2002). During the early period of the Black War there was violence with deaths on both sides; Indigenous people killed colonists and stock in retaliation to occupation, and the colonists kidnapped and sexually assaulted Indigenous women and children (Calder, 2008; Connor, 2002; Pearson, 2017; Ryan, 2008).

Police districts were doubled from five to ten and the police magistrates were designated increased powers over district constables, field police and local detachments of soldiers (Ryan, 2008). This also involved a Government Notice detailing the legal conditions that allowed colonists to hunt down and kill Aboriginal Tasmanians who attacked them and/or their stock (Ryan, 2008). During this period, massacres of Indigenous people included those in the Meander River region in June 1827 (Ryan, 2008) and the Cape Grim Massacre in 1828 where 30 Aboriginal people were killed (Pearson, 2017).

The Black Line refers to the final coordinated stage of these efforts, which attempted to move the last of the Tasmanian Aboriginal population off the Tasmanian mainland into the Forestier and Tasman peninsulas (Connor, 2002). Over 2000 troops, police, and civilians participated in the action; this was around 10% of the island's settler population at the time (Connor, 2002; Ryan, 2008). Convicts were given conditional release as part of these efforts to drive the local population from settled districts (Connor, 2002).

After approximately seven weeks, the Black Line failed in its aim to drive Indigenous Tasmanians ahead and towards the coast, and the colonial participants lacked stealth moving down the island (Calder, 2008; Connor, 2002); however, between 1831 and 1834, more than 200 Indigenous Tasmanians were captured for internment on Flinders Island (Ryan, 2008). Estimates put the population reduction of Indigenous people within this period (1803 to 1834) from 6000 to 200 (Clements, 2014a; Connor, 2002; Harmon, 2019). The police thus played a critical role in the Black War, the Black Line, and releasing convicts to participate in the Black Line. This situates police as key players in the Tasmanian colonial project.



The colonial police project is particularly important in understanding RRR policing and its impact on RRR communities, where the vastness of the environment, limited resources, and the embedded nature of rural communities makes policing far more complex than that of an urban environment (Wooff, 2015). Given the rich historical context of Australian and Tasmanian policing, a more nuanced understanding of “rural”, not just as a locality, but as a concept, is essential.

## RURAL CRIMINOLOGY

Rural policing has evolved since early colonisation and will continue to change as the demands of the RRR environment diversify—especially in the post-pandemic rush to escape the cities. While present in early colonial policing, one notable shift in rural policing is the formal inclusion of various actors and agencies that have come to form part of the relational approach to RRR policing. This includes fire and emergency services (including search and rescue), community patrols (Farm Watch), and more specific entities like the RSPCA and the food/production authorities for example, which assist in RRR-specific environmental crime (Yarwood, 2015). From nineteenth century bushtrackers, to the amalgamation of technologies, agencies, and actors that assist in crime prevention in RRR settings in the twenty-first century, it is clear that rural policing is not a carbon copy of urban centric policing practice. It demands a community-based approach that empowers local residents to work in partnership with police to maintain social order across a complex landscape.

### Policing the rural idyll/horror

The dualism of the “rural idyll” and “rural horror” is critical in understanding how the rural landscape itself exemplifies the need to address RRR policing practice in a unique manner. Given the geographic location and seasonal movement of people in some RRR communities, RRR townships have been subject to periods of depopulation, economic downfall, fierce natural disasters (such as bushfires, droughts, and flooding which can cause mass forced displacement) and, as a consequence, poverty (Ceccato, 2015; Pennings, 1999).

These past and present experiences shape rural crime, including the distinct deviancy encountered. In addition to the normal adolescent delinquency evidenced by property damage and graffiti, and the boundary testing of alcohol misuse and drug use, RRR communities are subject to more explicit and visible environmental crimes such as illegal fishing and shooting, as well industrial crimes such as stock theft and machinery damage (Pennings, 1999). As such, the rural context evokes the need for both specialist and generalist responses to crime prevention and stresses the importance of sensitivity to the atypical characteristics of rural communities to those who police it.

Unlike the traditional urban setting where residence in major cities means increased access to resources and higher rates of employment, RRR communities are compelled to work in partnership with rural police to confront the strain on the social fabric created by these unique forms of crime and disorder (National Rural Health Alliance, 2014). Additionally, the combination of fewer officers, yet broader distance of service coverage means that police officers find it increasingly difficult to respond to emergency situations in RRR communities (Buttle, Fowler, & Williams, 2010). Isolated properties situated far from even the small townships of police outposts make it harder to attend in moments of crisis.

As such, rural police must work in collaboration with community members and establish informal deputisation procedures to appropriately manage life threatening incidents (Hogg & Carrington, 2006). Likewise, communities, knowing the distance between the police and their properties, also understand that they have a duty to assist their neighbours knowing that the favour will be returned. Propinquity—even without affinity and solely the product of geography—empowers an informal deputisation rarely granted to city neighbours.

Remote police stations commonly deploy fewer than five officers, and in some outposts—while less common in times of neo-liberal accounting of police resources—there are only one or two officers. The conditions are unlike the large patrols or area commands in the city, where a single officer is rarely responsible for everything done in that region. RRR policing requires staff who are skilled across a range of attributes and are equipped to organise and manage tasks between themselves, the community, and other external agencies including, but not limited to, Farm Watch, Neighbourhood Watch, CFA/SES, RFS, health services and local schools.

Given the range of attributes required of RRR policing, the current training regime focussed on the regimented and hierarchised divisions in urban policing may not prepare officers for their work outside of the city. For example, few officers are prepared for transporting detainees across large distances and are ill-equipped in dealing with circumstances that are more prevalent in RRR environments like major road closures in severe weather (Jobes, 2002).

## RURAL COMMUNITIES & CRIME

### Demographics & general crime statistics

As noted earlier, the geographic spread of the population simultaneously makes Australia one of the most rural and most urban countries in the world (Jobes et al., 2001). Populations in RRR spaces generally have lower incomes and lower levels of education (National Rural Health Alliance, 2015), and job opportunities can be more

limited than in metropolitan areas (NRHA, 2015). In 2015-16, disposable household income outside Australia's capital cities was on average 18% less (NRHA, 2017b). As such, RRR communities are more likely to be living in poverty (NRHA, 2015).

Proportionally, more Indigenous Australians than non-Indigenous Australians live in RRR spaces, and Indigenous Australians disproportionately experience social and economic marginalisation (Cunneen, 2007). Age is also a key factor impacting income. Compared to metropolitan areas, *rural and regional* areas have more children and fewer young adults (NRHA, 2017a), which results in fewer people of working age, more people of late working age approaching retirement, and more elderly people (NRHA, 2017a). *Remote* communities, conversely, have slightly more people of working age, similar numbers of people of late working age approaching retirement, and substantially fewer elderly people (NRHA, 2017a). As with other RRR communities, often high school-aged children are required to relocate to the city or larger RRR towns to engage in their studies. This movement out of RRR communities is exacerbated in Tasmania by the net-outward migration of younger Tasmanians to the mainland.

There is less crime in RRR spaces than in urban areas generally, but that does not mean there is no crime (Ceccato, 2015). In fact, in the Australian context, offending rates for some crimes are increasing at a faster rate in RRR communities than they are in the city (Carcach, 2000). Further, in their now dated overview of crime in rural Australia, Carcach claims that:

... crime rates are highest in either highly accessible or very remote areas rather than those in between. Distance from a service centre plays a crucial role in explaining the levels of crime in small- to medium-sized localities. Small towns located relatively close to major urban centres tend to have crime rates as high as remote towns. (Carcach, 2000, 1)

While there might also be lower reporting rates (Barclay, 2017; Ceccato, 2015), there are higher clearance rates for reported crimes (Falcone et al., 2002), perhaps as a result of the tighter community networks, and working knowledge of police officers in these communities.

There are different patterns of crimes in RRR communities also. Rural Australia has a higher rate of violent crime than metropolitan areas, particularly street violence and DV (Barclay, 2017; Campo & Tayton, 2015). RRR residents are also more likely to be punitive in their responses to crime (Mulrooney & Wise, 2019). Before considering the policing strategies to address the common and exceptional nature of crime in RRR

communities, it is important to understand the context of crime in these communities.

### **Drugs**

Illicit drug use is higher in RRR spaces and methamphetamine use is more common than in metropolitan areas (NRHA, 2015). The proportion of those over the age of 14 who have used an illicit drug in the last 12 months is 14.9% in major cities, compared to inner regional (14.1%), outer regional (16.7%) and remote/very remote areas (18.7%) (NRHA, 2015). People living in remote and very remote areas were twice as likely as people in major cities to have recently used methamphetamines (NHRA, 2015). Aspects of social disadvantage are strongly associated with drug use (NHRA, 2015), and drug use can contribute to other crime, such as burglary (Jobes, 2003; Pennings, 1999). There may be large scale drug cultivation and drug importation in isolated regions (Jobes, 2003; Pennings, 1999).

### **Alcohol & driving**

Populations in RRR spaces are more likely to consume alcohol at risky levels (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019a). Economic and employment disadvantage is related to alcohol consumption (NRHA, 2014); however, alcohol consumption can also increase around popular tourist places and times (Jobes, 2003). Violence and drink driving can be an outcome of alcohol consumption, and these are crimes with higher rates in RRR spaces (Barclay, 2017; Campo & Tayton, 2015; Lesjak, McMahon, & Zanette, 2008; Miller et al., 2010). Substance consumption can also increase the policing burden in terms of accidents and public safety (AIHW 2019a; Lesjak et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2010).

Given distance and a lack of public transport, drink driving is a particular concern in RRR spaces (Weisheit, 2010). In South Australia between 2014-2018, 28% of drivers and riders killed in rural areas had an illegal BAC level compared to 14% of drivers/riders killed in metropolitan areas (South Australian Department of Planning, 2019). Risk of death or serious injury is several times higher for RRR drivers than for urban drivers (Blackman et al., 2006). Traffic-related problems vary with jurisdiction, often depending on the presence of major arterial roads (Frank & Liederbach, 2005). While not all road incidents constitute crime, they do contribute to the policing burden with police often responsible for first-responder roles, securing scenes, notifying of any traffic signal repairs required, and incident reports.

### **Domestic violence**

DV in RRR spaces is more prevalent than in urban areas (Campo & Tayton, 2015; DeKeseredy & Rennison, 2020). A higher proportion of women living outside major

cities reported experiencing partner violence (23%) compared with women living in major cities (15%) (AIHW, 2019b). Hospitalisation for DV is 24 times more likely for people in remote and very remote Australia than for people in major cities (AIHW, 2019b). Indigenous women are more likely to be victims of DV, sexual assault, and homicide by a partner than non-Indigenous women (AIHW, 2019b; Cunneen, 2007). These patterns of victimisation are more likely where poverty is highest and opportunity to access services is lowest (Cunneen, 2007); namely, RRR spaces. Given the higher likelihood of firearm ownership in RRR spaces, DV is also more likely to involve a firearm (Mancik, Stansfield, & Kinard, 2020).

Further, there are fewer support services for DV victims in RRR spaces, and often women prefer to travel to major cities to access these services in order to maintain anonymity (Farhall, Harris, & Woodlock, 2020). An additional factor in the “rural horror” of DV is that there are few female officers deployed to RRR communities, which may create barriers to reporting to the police. A final factor less considered in the policing of DV in the city is that some victims will not leave the abusive relationships without their animals (Krienert et al., 2012). Perpetrators often threaten abuse of these animals if women seek support, and DV support services rarely have the resources to enable the relocation of large farm animals such as horses.

### **Farm & environmental crimes**

The nature of RRR spaces means there are different types of crimes around equipment, machinery, and stock theft (Barclay, 2017; Ceccato, 2015). Other agricultural related offences include vandalism to crops or infrastructure, arson, and biosecurity offences (Barclay, 2017). Low population density is a factor in creating opportunities for these unique forms of crime (Ceccato, 2015). A survey conducted with 3160 farmers in NSW and Queensland in 2013 found that 74% of 1251 respondents had experienced some type of crime over the last 12 years (Barclay, 2017). Only 50% of these respondents reported the crime to police (Barclay, 2017). Agricultural Liaison Officers are one tool that is successfully bridging the divide between farmers and police (Harkness, 2015).

Environmental crimes in RRR spaces can include dumping of waste, theft of water, trafficking of wildlife, and hunting (Barclay, 2017; Brisman, McClanahan, & South, 2014). This category can also include protestors against environmental crimes, such as hunting, mining, farming, logging, and other developments impacting the environment (Woods, 2016). Baker (2019) states that protests can attract a range of people from different social, class, and political groups, and thus local allegiances become complex. For example, anti-logging and pro-logging perspectives can split a

small community (Baker, 2019). Environmental protests can have a significant impact on local deployments and can leave some communities without police support.

### **Outsiders & fluctuating communities**

Common throughout research studying police and community perspectives is the view that most rural crime is committed by outsiders (Archbold, 2015; Carrington, Hogg, & Scott, 2016; Ceccato, 2015; Contessa & Wozniak, 2018; Jobes, 2003; New Zealand Police, 2021b; Somerville et al., 2015; Yarwood & Cozens, 2004). Tourists, seasonal workers, traveller communities, and new residents are perceived as threats to community peace (Somerville et al., 2015), although Marshall and Johnson (2005 in Somerville et al., 2015) contest that their actual threat level lacks evidence.

Fluctuating communities present a key challenge for policing in RRR spaces. Migrant work communities around resource booms provide an example of this. Archbold (2015) interviewed 101 police officers in eight oil “boomtowns” in western North Dakota. Police perceived mood and behaviour changes from their community including, an increase in the fear of crime, a change in safety behaviour from older residents, an increase in gun permits, and increased reports of “suspicious people” (Archbold, 2015). Similar to Scott et al.’s (2011) findings of the fear of crime in mining towns in Australia, Archbold (2015) argues that there was division between communities based on social oldness; community was defined by long-term residents and the extent they knew each other, and gossip was a key tool in developing perceptions of outsiders.

Tourists, and particularly high tourist seasons (Jobes, 2003; Yarwood & Cozens, 2004), bring another wave of outsiders to RRR spaces. Jobes (2003) interviewed 52 police officers in 52 towns across RRR New South Wales. Police in regions with high people movement commonly associated tourists and migrants with local crime (Jobes, 2003). Those located near leisure spaces reported increases in public disturbances over weekends and holidays. These offences were generally limited to public drunkenness and simple assault, but occasionally the violations were more serious. Popular tourist areas during holiday periods can also emerge as temporary hotspots (Jobes, 2003; Yarwood & Cozens, 2004). These periods also might coincide with police going on annual leave putting further strain on resources (Yarwood & Cozens, 2004).

### **RURAL POLICING**

Rural policing—and the characteristics and roles of RRR police—are rarely considered in the policing literature. To date, apart from the recent research by New Zealand Police (2021a; 2021b), sporadic attention has been paid to the unique context of RRR policing, and the resource and staffing needs that are essential to safe and effective policing outside of the city.

Police are not the only group of people who undertake policing in RRR spaces (Yarwood & Cozens, 2004) and multi-agency policing is a contextual factor when examining policing in Australia. Reiner (2000, 1-2) notes that:

“Police” refers to a particular kind of social institution, while “policing” implies a set of processes with specific social functions ... A state organized specialist “police” organization of the modern kind is only one example of policing.

Private security and government agencies contribute to policing in RRR spaces (Ceccato, 2015; Smith, 2010; Yarwood, 2007). Federal, state, and local government agencies can include those that deal with agriculture, customs, parks and wildlife, fisheries, waterways, animal cruelty, along with officers from local councils (Pennings, 1999; Smith, 2010). This can cause issues around jurisdiction and responsibility (Ceccato, 2015), but also creates opportunities for partnerships in preventing and addressing crime (Pennings, 1999). For example, in 1999, NSW Police Force officers worked with business and the federal Department of Fisheries to develop and enforce a scheme to prevent abalone poaching (Pennings, 1999).

Police in RRR spaces can be insiders or outsiders. They may be sourced from the local community and seen as community members (Falcone et al., 2002; Scott & Jobes, 2007). If officers come from outside the local community, they may be regarded with more suspicion as they are viewed as outsiders (Jobes, 2003), which presents the challenge of earning community trust, as well as learning community norms and values (Griffiths, 2019; Jobes, 2003; Putt, 2010; Wooff, 2015). This might be minimised if they come from a different RRR space, or are able demonstrate rural or cultural knowledge (Harkness, 2015; Joint Standing Committee on the Corruption and Crime Commission, 2018). Of course, the insider/outsider experience is often not mutually exclusive and RRR police might be regarded as both insiders and outsiders; even if RRR police are existing community members, they may still be regarded with caution as they *are* police (Jobes, 2003).

## Rural Policing Strategies

### *Community trust and community policing*

Police-community relations are integral to police legitimacy, and as noted by a participant in the recent New Zealand Police study, “[a] good city cop does not equal a good rural cop” (2021a, 5). The relationships between police and community are amplified in a close-knit and isolated environment with fewer police. Souhami (2019, 45), in her study of policing in islands off Scotland, found this experience familiar to local police, where they “police by consent here”. These findings are common in

studies of RRR policing with police needing to establish trust amongst the community before being accepted (Adorjan, Ricciardelli, & Spencer, 2017; Fenwick, 2012; Griffiths, 2019; Harkness, 2015; Jobes, 2003; Wooff, 2015). Jobes (2003, 12) interviewed an officer who had commenced work in a community with strained police relations:

One respondent told how the previous officer and his wife didn't like the community and the people hadn't liked them. It took several months to regain community trust and confidence. Once he was accepted at the pub and at the bowling club, he knew he was part of the community.

The importance of gaining community trust and developing community relationships means that community policing is integral to small town policing (Cordner & Scarborough, 2005; Fenwick, 2015; Griffiths & Clark, 2017; Harkness, 2015; Jobes, 2002, 2003; Ricciardelli, Adorjan, & Spencer, 2019; Wooff, 2016). Community policing refers to non-crime related engagements with the community with the aim of prevention, capacity building, and relationship building. This might be through formal initiatives, such as school visits to talk about drugs, attending community meetings, or coaching an ice hockey team, or informal engagements, such as chatting to community members at the grocery store, pub, or post office (common in the small-town environment (Fenwick, 2015)).

Formal community policing in RRR spaces may focus on young people (Adorjan et al., 2017; Ceccato, 2015; Griffiths & Clark, 2017; Ricciardelli et al., 2019; Rukus, Warner, & Zhang, 2018). For example, officers in the Yukon region in Canada take at-risk young people out on the land to hunt and fish (Griffiths and Clark, 2017). Informal community policing was observed in Wooff's (2015, 293) study with one officer explaining one of their methods,

I have what I call "the monthly tea spots", these are people in the community who have the gossip and know what's going on—info that's very useful to me. So I pop by Miss Harver's, sit down, have a cuppa ... that way she thinks she's getting good service and I get to hear about all that's been going on ...

An officer in Jobes's (2003) study noted that the job was "impossible" without the community support, and community policing is a critical mechanism for developing and maintaining this support.



### *De-escalation and discretion*

Across studies of rural policing, participants reported commonly using de-escalation tactics due to the lack of back up and the continued need to maintain community relations (Griffiths, 2019; Huey & Ricciardelli, 2015; Souhami, 2019; Wooff, 2015), and generously use discretion for the same reasons (Fenwick, 2012; Slade, 2013; Souhami, 2019; Wooff, 2015). Police officers across rural detachments in Eastern and Atlantic Canada saw peacekeeping as their key role and discussed the importance of talking as a policing tactic: “I would rather settle it verbally than have to throw you in jail” (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2015, 198). The importance of de-escalation used to maintain continued relationships with community members refers not only to relationships with the targets of police attention in a specific instance, but also the wider community (Fenwick, 2015; Souhami, 2019). Officers note that the community is always watching (Fenwick, 2015; Souhami, 2019)

As with de-escalation, discretion is critical for the smooth continuation of community relations (Fenwick, 2012). Challenges to police legitimacy in the community’s eyes can reduce trust and information sharing (Fenwick, 2012), exacerbate community conflicts (Putt, 2010), and negatively impact the family and friends of police (Griffiths, 2019; Scott & Jobes, 2007), all of which have impacts for policing. An officer from rural Scotland provides an example of discretion and its importance:

It’s a minor road traffic infringement and you can use your discretion and say “OK Mike, next time put your seatbelt on or get that light fixed” rather than booking him or giving him a ticket, because tomorrow that person could be a key-witness in something more serious and if you’ve got their backs up they’re no[t] going to come to you with information. (Fenwick, 2012, 8)

From Wooff’s (2015) examination of policing of anti-social behaviour in towns in rural Scotland, he concluded that “discretionary practices, police-community interactions and situated community knowledge form the basis of rural policing” (294; see also, Putt, 2010).

### *Command and control*

Contrasting the community policing approach, some rural police follow a stricter form of policing. In Canada, police who work in isolated First Nations communities were found to hold more conservative views towards the community compared to those working in non-isolated First Nations communities (Lithopoulos & Ruddell, 2011). Similarly, Cunneen and Tauri (2017) and Cunneen and Porter (2019) found that less discretion was applied in predominantly Indigenous communities, and that offenders

were more likely to be detained for minor matters when compared to indigenous Australians in the city. However, the dominance of discretion and community policing discussed in existing research demonstrates its pervasiveness across policing in RRR spaces. The deployment of command and control measures in these towns is rare, and when they are deployed, its targets are often “outsiders”, such as protestors and, ironically, Indigenous communities.

### *Co-production*

For the purposes of this project, co-production is conceptualised differently from “community policing”. Much of what is called “community policing” consists primarily of one-way engagement with the community. Co-production is a two-way process, where community and police work as partners to create safety. For example, Neighbourhood Watch (NW) epitomises this two-way co-production (Brunton-Smith & Bullock, 2019); so too are the partnerships between police and other regulatory practitioners (such as environmental protection officers, and even Country Fire Associations). There has been some work on building capacity for the creation of Neighbourhood Watch schemes in RRR communities (Yarwood & Edwards, 1995). Yarwood and Edwards (1995) examined NW across rural west England and found that although the development of NW reduces the fear of crime and improves feelings of security in rural areas, participation is mostly limited to male, middle class, retired residents. This means that it mostly benefits a limited demographic and there is little evidence to suggest that NW would grow in RRR spaces broadly (Yarwood & Edwards, 1995).

Griffiths and Clark (2017) discuss co-production in the Yukon, an isolated region of Canada with a higher than average First Nations population. One initiative included a program of community mentors made up of local residents that act as contacts for new police officers posted to the community (Griffiths & Clark, 2017). This is important given the regular rotation of officers, many of them new to the region. This example also demonstrates efforts towards maintaining police legitimacy in RRR spaces with tense community-police histories (Griffiths & Clark, 2017). Officers in Fenwick’s (2012) study spoke of developing individual relationships with local directors of social work agencies, health clinics, and headteachers in order to build cooperative responses to health, alcohol, and drug problems.

### *Recruitment and retention*

The broad scope of the police role in RRR spaces was a common theme across studies (Falcone et al., 2002; Fenwick, 2012; Huey & Ricciardelli, 2015; Jobes, 2003; New Zealand Police 2021a, 2021b; Slade, 2013; Souhami, 2019). While in metropolitan policing, there are specialists to manage different tasks and crimes, such as crime scene or murder

investigation, a RRR officer must be able to manage all aspects (Souhami, 2019; Slade, 2013; Fenwick, 2015). The roles of these officers may also include tasks beyond standard police roles, and may extend to those of peacekeeper and social worker (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2015; New Zealand Police, 2021a). This might also include broader justice system support, such as the work that a parole or probation officer would undertake in the city (Griffiths, 2019; New Zealand Police, 2021a).

Officers in Northern Scotland reported that training had an urban focus and did not prepare them for: having to cover all aspects of policing; geographic isolation and associated challenges; and the nature and significance of community relationships to RRR policing (Slade, 2013). Aligning with findings from other studies that specify the locational nuances of RRR policing (Jobes, 2003; Putt, 2010; Scott & Jobes, 2007; Wooff, 2015, 2016), Slade (2013) concludes that skill development relevant to RRR policing is heavily shaped by the RRR environment.

In its comprehensive evaluation of RRR policing, New Zealand Police (2021a; 2021b) have identified both the enablers and barriers to RRR deployments. They state that RRR deployments can go wrong because the officer is not the “right fit” for these unique positions, in part because they take on these positions for the wrong reasons (additional allowances, increased pay and benefits). As one participant noted, “the community knows when someone doesn’t want to be there, and then they have no trust in them” (NZP 2021a, 6). When officers are invested in their communities and have an affinity for the community’s values, they experience increased trust, compliance, and engagement in facilitating the wellbeing of the community.

## RURAL POLICING & CRIME CHALLENGES

Policing in an isolated location can have a range of specific challenges. Distance between residents, other police, and call-out locations add an element of danger for officers, as well as for those seeking assistance (Campo & Tayton, 2015; Griffiths, 2019; Ricciardelli, 2018). This also means more driving for officers and an increase in associated risks, such as weather and rural road quality (Ricciardelli, Spencer, & Andres, 2018). Officers spoke about limited staffing, and aging vehicles and weapons (Falcone et al., 2002; Fenwick, 2012; Ricciardelli, 2018; Yarwood & Cozens, 2004). Distance can also contribute to challenges around resources, with telecommunications challenges being common in isolated areas, such as poor internet connections, and limited mobile phone coverage (Griffiths, 2019; Ricciardelli, 2018). Community expectations of what police responsibility entails and demands for 24-hour availability can also put strain on officers (Fenwick, 2012; Griffiths, 2019; Jobes, 2002; Mawby, 2004; Yarwood & Cozens, 2004).

In addition to staffing, time, and resource limitations, there are also clashes between state, national, and local priorities (Jobes, 2003; Fenwick 2012; Griffiths, 2019). Officers experienced challenges to their autonomy from performance culture (Yarwood & Cozens, 2004) and standardised practices (Fenwick, 2012), but appreciated managers who avoided micro-managing (Fenwick, 2015). The centralisation of command can challenge local knowledge and approaches (Griffiths, 2019; Wooff, 2016; Yarwood & Cozens, 2004), and as such, it is important to prioritise the experience of local officers (Wooff, 2016).

There are often challenges in police recruitment to and movement within RRR spaces (New Zealand Police, 2021a; Office of Police Integrity, 2011). Financial incentives and housing support can possibly encourage police to RRR spaces (New Zealand Police, 2021a; Office of Police Integrity, 2011); however, transient police also face social and economic costs with short-term rotations, such as the losses involved with house selling and strains on partnerships, family relationships, and wellbeing (New Zealand Police, 2021a; Office of Police Integrity, 2011). Fixed term appointments are an option, but this can considerably reduce the applicant pool and negatively impact the quality of applicants (Office of Police Integrity, 2011). Given the significance of local knowledges and a working rapport with a community, short postings are not conducive to effective policing (New Zealand Police, 2021a; Ruddell, Lithopoulos, & Jones, 2014).

### Challenges of propinquity

Propinquity is a key factor shaping the community relationships that are critical to policing in RRR spaces. Propinquity, however, can also bring challenges to policing in RRR spaces. Ricciardelli and colleagues (2019) note a role tension for officers between their role as law enforcer and community member, which has also been identified in other studies (Falcone et al. 2002; Fenwick, 2012; Jobes, 2003; Scott & Jobes, 2007; Slade, 2013). It can be challenging for community members to maintain trust in officers when there are strong personal relations with the police (Ricciardelli et al. 2019). Similarly, Griffiths (2019) notes that interactions between officers and community members are “high-consequence” with potentially more significant impacts on officers, their family, community residents, and offenders than in metropolitan areas. The challenges of propinquity also extend to victims in RRR spaces, and police must often manage the safety needs of victims (Griffiths, 2019).

The challenges associated with policing DV in RRR spaces provides a good example of some of the impacts of propinquity. DV is associated with the private sphere, traditionally perceived to be family business, and not the concern of other members of the public or the police (Wendt et al., 2017). The perception of the rural idyll and

crime only coming from outsiders strengthens the propensity to ignore crimes within the community (DeKeseredy, 2015; Jobes et al., 2004), which further decreases any attention paid to DV. In rural and remote locations, standard operating practices often mean that a single officer cannot attend a violent incident alone and must wait for back-up. This may provide protection to the officer but may impact on the extent of injuries incurred by the victim, and as a consequence, may impact on the victim's willingness and capacity to report violence.

Owen and Carrington (2015) found that DV in rural NSW is silenced in three ways: through shame of victimisation, family privacy, and community sanctions. Isolation amplified by distance and closeness of community can also increase the social and economic cost in seeking help and leaving relationships (Owen & Carrington, 2015). Rurality also increases issues around anonymity (Ragusa, 2013). Community bonds might impact calls for assistance (Huey and Ricciardelli, 2017), as police may be friends or relatives of offenders and this can increase their discretion to question or charge (Fenwick, 2012; Jobes, 2003). Police may act indifferent towards repeated breaches of intervention orders (Campo & Tayton, 2015; Wendt et al., 2017). Delayed response times due to frustration with the victim (Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2012) is also a particular concern in rural areas and with cases well-known to the police (Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2012). Many of these points exemplify the negative impact of propinquity.

Despite a paucity of research on the work undertaken by police in RRR locations, as illustrated by this literature review, there is significant interest in the ways in which location fundamentally changes the nature of crime, offending, and victimisation, and an increasing attention on how location and the contexts of rurality shape criminal justice systems outside of the metropole. Before discussing the research findings from this study, first we provide an overview of the existing policy and practice guidance on rural, regional, and remote policing.

## CHAPTER 2: POLICY & PRACTICE REVIEW

Proximity is a key factor shaping the community relationships that are critical to policing in rural, regional, remote (RRR) spaces. Proximity, however, can also bring challenges to policing in RRR spaces. Numerous studies identify a role tension for officers in these spaces between their role as law enforcer and as a community member (Falcone et al., 2002; Fenwick, 2012; Jobes, 2003; Ricciardelli et al., 2019; Scott & Jobes, 2007; Slade, 2013). Training on how to manage community relationships is therefore critical to good policing outcomes. Studies also note the locational nuances of these environments (Jobes, 2003; Putt, 2010; Scott & Jobes, 2007; Wooff, 2015, 2016) and that skill development is environmentally specific (Slade, 2013).

As noted above, short postings are not conducive to effective policing (New Zealand Police, 2021a; Ruddell et al., 2014), and fostering officer wellbeing, as they can negatively impact officers in terms of social and economic costs, such as costs involved with house selling, strains on partnerships, family relationships, and wellbeing (Office of Police Integrity, 2011). This review considers how police services across Australia encourage police to deploy to RRR spaces and support them and their families in these placements. Training and policy around single officer stations is also discussed, along with the unique policing techniques required of RRR officers, such as farm crime.

Limited information about Australian police RRR policies and practices is available. Most police services do not have publicly available online policies and procedures. Western Australia (WA) has copies available at public libraries, but that is inaccessible for the scope of this project. Online searches looked for information about single officer stations and patrols, rural stations, and placement, training, and deployment. Some policies and procedures were available from Tasmania (TasPol), Queensland Police Service (QPS) and New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF). Industrial agreements were available for every police service and contained information about the monetary allowances and other benefits for police in RRR spaces. A list of the police policy and industrial agreements used to inform this review is provided below. Other information was obtained from press releases, online news articles, parliamentary documents, existing reviews, and police association reports and websites. In the instance where a source is not referenced, a state or police service will be named and the source can be assumed to be from this list.

## MANUALS & INDUSTRIAL AGREEMENTS SOURCED

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- Victoria Police. (2020b). *Victoria Police (Police Officers, Protective Services Officers, Police Reservists and Police Recruits) Enterprise Agreement 2019*.
- Western Australian Industrial Relations Commission. (2017). *Western Australia Police Industrial Agreement 2017*.

## PLACEMENT & TRANSFER

In 2011, the Victorian Office of Police Integrity noted that certain stations were difficult to staff and considered options to address this. Fixed term appointments were discussed as an option, but this can considerably reduce the applicant pool and negatively impact the quality of applicants (Office of Police Integrity, 2011). There was a provision for directed transfer, which could be used to meet service needs, but this was also accompanied by an option for appeal (Office of Police Integrity, 2011). Appeal was widely used for unpopular placements in VicPol (Office of Police Integrity, 2011). Currently, VicPol policy states that if a position cannot be filled by the standard expression of interest procedure, it will be filled on the method agreed upon by the police union and VicPol. The VicPol Enterprise Agreement does not detail this method. QPS also has directed transfer, and the method of selection must be agreed to by the police service and the police union. For unpopular positions that are not filled, QPS has (maximum) six-monthly rotations.

The Northern Territory (NT) Police Commissioner plans to change policy so that new recruits will be required to work two years in a remote station (Mackay, 2020). Experienced officers who have not worked in remote communities will also be expected to, or they will face limitations on promotions and transfers (Mackay, 2020). The Commissioner aims to fill positions in unstaffed remote stations and build police-community relationships, which he says are negatively impacted by short-term placements (Mackay, 2020). Policy and procedure guiding the process of selection for placement/transfer were not available for the remaining states.

## TRANSFER ALLOWANCES

Allowances for transfer are not limited to placements in RRR areas. If a transfer or promotion requires a change in residence, the QPS provides access to transfer entitlements. This includes reimbursement for travel and accommodation in order to find somewhere to live prior to transfer, costs for temporary accommodation at the point of transfer, furniture moving, and meal allowance. This also covers accompanying family. This is also the case for New South Wales (NSW), Tasmania (Tas), Victoria (Vic) and WA.

NT provides a flat relocation or disturbance allowance with the intention of covering all costs involved in moving. The Australian Federal Police (AFP) does not detail its transfer allowances, but states that it will cover expenses. The South Australia Police (SAPol) Enterprise Agreement does not mention relocation allowances except for the provision of long term furniture storage for those relocating to hard to fill positions in RRR areas. WA also covers long term furniture storage costs.

There are sometimes restrictions on eligibility for coverage of relocation costs. For example, the AFP does not meet relocation costs if an officer requests a relocation. Similarly, in NSW, if an officer has been in a placement for less than five years, costs will not be covered.

## AREA ALLOWANCES

Financial incentives are one option to help meet the staffing requirements of hard to fill positions (Office of Police Integrity, 2011). These allowances also assist with the increased costs of living in RRR areas (Police Association Tasmania, 2018). Most jurisdictions provide multiple allowances that vary based on the remoteness of the placement. These allowances might include a country police or country patrol allowance (South Australia [SA], Tas, WA), an isolated community allowance (Tas), a remote allowance (AFP, NSW, Queensland [Qld], Vic, WA), or a one or two officer station allowance (Qld, SA, Vic). Other benefits include additional leave (NSW, NT, Qld, SA, WA) and funding for transport for leave (NT, SA, Tas).



The Victoria Office of Police Integrity (2011) noted that one incentive to fill hard to staff placements is favourably viewing those who have previously offered to work in unpopular positions when they apply for transfer to advertised positions (Office of Police Integrity, 2011). Most states have provision that allows placement of choice at the end of placement in RRR area or after a certain period of service (NT, SA, WA), or at least consider that the officer has served in an RRR area (Qld)

## HOUSING

The 2011 review by the Victorian Office of Police Integrity notes that housing support is one option to encourage police to RRR spaces. This approach is widely applied in enterprise agreements throughout the states and territories. Free police accommodation or entire rental costs are funded for those who work in RRR spaces in Tas, WA, and the most isolated jurisdictions of SA. QPS employees in one or two officer stations are also funded for rent. Partial supported accommodation costs or subsidised rent in police accommodation is provided to officers in NSW, NT, Qld, SA, and Vic in RRR areas.

In NT, Qld, SA and WA expenses such as water, electricity, phone and satellite television may also be fully or partially funded. SA also includes coverage of disconnection, reconnection of utilities, and mail redirection. In SA's most isolated location, there is also provision for payment of freight of foodstuffs and monthly use of the police plane for respite purposes to and from Adelaide. The AFP enterprise agreement provided no information about long term accommodation provisions. Numerous states (NSW, NT, Tas, Vic, WA) also provide for some of the costs associated with selling and buying a house or land, such as stamp duty and mortgage fees.

## SUPPORT AND FAMILY SUPPORT

The Victorian Office of Policy Integrity (2011) acknowledges that moving often can impact partnerships and family relationships. In addition to the funding for accommodation, meals, transport, and furniture transport for family as part of a transfer, NSW and Tas covers some education expenses for children of relocated officers, such uniforms for a new school. For Tas, this also includes levies and textbooks. For NSW, there is a weekly accommodation allowance for up to two children in year 12 if the new school does not cover required year 12 subjects. Vic has a living away from home allowance when the officer has not been able to find suitable accommodation for family in the new location.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police External Review Committee (RCMPC) (Royal Canadian Mounted Police External Review Committee, 1989) reviewed broad (non-police specific) practice around relocating employees in Canada and similarly

acknowledges the issues of housing, accommodation, children's education involved with relocation of RRR officers. This document also suggests employers consider personal social costs, career of partner, relocation counselling, and availability of health and medical facilities (RCMPC, 1989). Availability of health and medical facilities refers to consideration of any healthcare needs of family members, and also mentions that care for elderly family may also be a responsibility of the employee (RCMPC, 1989). The Committee review (1989) urges consideration of these needs when placing an employee. Employers might assist in finding spouses employment at the new location using third party assistance (RCMPC, 1989). This also raises the complex issue of placement when both partners are police officers (RCMPC, 1989). The review also notes that some employers provide counselling to staff and families before, during and after relocation. This includes stress preparation programs.

In their major study into rural policing New Zealand Police (NZP 2020a; 2020b) identified that RRR officers require two types of support: from their communities, and from the organisation. While the latter enables the former, without the support of communities, the task of RRR policing is all the more difficult. They note (2020b) that rural communities are adept at pulling together in times of crisis, and that this preparedness lays the groundwork for these supportive relationships to foster in the everyday work of police. But as they noted in relation to accessibility of government services generally, officers are often required to do the work of other support agencies even when they do not have the support they need to do their job of controlling and responding to crime (NZP 2020b).

NZP (2020b) notes that in addition to the basic requirements (such as adequate relief staffing, training, the right apparel, and technology), RRR officers require supervisors that understand the context of their work, and know how to source the support required. While accessible counselling and wellness services are critical to address the psychological toll on RRR officers, NZP (2020b, 35) argue that adequate relief staffing is just as important. Additionally, they suggest that the “havoc” on family life requires policing organisations to better prepare families for being perceived as “pseudo Police officers”, “owned” by their communities (NZP 2020b, 41), and that along with the officer, are given a proper handover and introduced to community before deployment (NZP 2020a).

## FARM CRIME

Different types of farm crime specialists are present in NSW, Qld and Vic. Qld has the Major and Organised Crime Squad (Rural) (*Queensland Country Life*, 2017; Queensland Police Service, n.d.), formerly known as the Stock and Rural Crime Investigation Squad (*Queensland Country Life*, 2017). No information is available

about the training these officers undertake. Victoria has Farm Crime Liaison Officers (FCLO) (Victoria Police, n.d.; Webster, 2017) who investigate livestock theft and rural crime. NSW has specialised Rural Crime Investigators (RCI) and Rural Crime Prevention Teams (Cetinski, 2019; New South Wales Police Force, n.d.). In 2015, a formal, structured and nationally accredited NSW Rural Crime Investigators course was launched in Orange (*The Singleton Argus*, 2015). The course involves learning about wool theft, drafting cattle, animal identification process, and biosecurity (Webster, 2017), as well as legislation and cases from Rural Crime Investigators (*The Singleton Argus*, 2015). In 2017, it was the only one of its type in Australia (Webster, 2017). An online news article from 2017 (Webster, 2017) discusses a Victorian FCLO also participating in this training at Goulburn Police Academy. The course is held every two years and all RCIs must attend to keep their specialisation (McKechnie, 2019).

## TRAINING

The unique demands of living and policing in a RRR space require specific training; however, little information about specific training for police working in these spaces was available. According to Australian Industry Standards (2019), training from the Police Training Package includes community policing and working with the community. Competencies include adjusting for audiences, identifying community needs and potential responses, and managing expectations of community members (Training.gov.au, n.d.-a, n.d.-b). There are no modules or competencies focussed on the unique aspects and challenges around these relationships in RRR spaces.

Responsibilities for, or acknowledgement of, formal community and co-production policing initiatives, such as Neighbourhood Watch and Bush Watch, are outlined in the TasPol, QPS and NSWPF manuals. An available example of training around formal co-production is featured in the *Huon Valley Tasmanian Municipal Emergency Management Plan* (Huon Valley Council, 2015). This document covers organisations such as police, ambulance, and fire services, state emergency services, parks and wildlife authorities, utility authorities, and councils. In terms of training, details are lacking, but it is noted that inductions are held for workers with emergency management functions.

Anderson's and Dossetor's 2012 review notes that specific training is given to TasPol officers in single officer stations, although it is not specified what this training entailed. The training package offered to officers, subject to transfer to a one or two person station, was developed and maintained by the Operational Skills Unit at the police academy and was conducted by trained personnel (Tasmania Police, 2009 in Anderson & Dossetor, 2012). Currently, this program is not offered at the TasPol academy.

Internationally, holistic information about training for officers working in RRR spaces was not able to be located. Some online information covered limited areas of training. For example, emergency medical technician training, emotional intelligence, and track and sign awareness (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2018; Prideaux, 2017).<sup>1</sup> Given the challenges around recruitment, South Dakota Highway Patrol focusses on training for leadership in order to build its own leaders and show potential employees there are opportunities for advancement and growth in RRR deployments (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2018).

## SINGLE OFFICER PATROLS

Resource limitations of RRR policing may mean that single person patrols are an everyday reality and, in fact, a norm for many RRR officers. This raises concerns about officer safety, efficiency, and accountability (Anderson & Dossetor, 2012; Griffiths, 2019; International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2018; New Zealand Police, 2021a; Ricciardelli, 2018). In most states single officer patrols are used, but a risk management perspective is encouraged (NSW, NT, Qld, SA, Tas, Vic). There are certain conditions under which they are not advised to proceed without backup, such as incidents involving weapons (Qld) or at night-time (NSW), or situations where they are banned from taking action, such as highway patrols (Vic). WA ceased single person patrols in 2008, despite a vast regional jurisdiction (Anderson & Dossetor, 2012). Yet, some crime prevention, administrative and community duties are excluded from this policy and can be conducted solo. Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Policing policy does not support single person patrols (Anderson & Dossetor, 2012). Information from a 2019 Australian Federal Police Association discussion paper does however suggest that working solo is one of the challenges ACT Policing and AFP officers face (Australian Federal Police Association, 2019).

The most substantive documentation of RRR policing in Australia was provided by Victoria Police. While acknowledging “the unique resourcing arrangements inherent to one-member stations”, the *Victoria Police Manual—Policy Rules* section about one-member stations notes the importance of providing effective policing to local community and working with neighbouring stations. The responsibility to community extends to other parts of the Policy Rules document and the Guidelines document, such as keeping community members informed of visits by other officers if the Officer in Charge is ill, on leave, or a replacement pending.

Cluster Supervisors are required to visit one-member stations at least twice a month, and one of these visits must be a station visit. They must be aware of the welfare of

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<sup>1</sup> The discrete nature of local forces in the United States must be kept in mind for some of these examples.

one-member station officers, and take action if issues arise. If an officer is ill, in addition to providing relieving duty, the Cluster Supervisor must also arrange welfare for the officer if necessary. Cluster Supervisors have responsibilities regarding the rostering of one-member stations in their zones and clusters, and must take into consideration the needs of their zones and clusters. Local Area Commanders are required to approve these rosters, and changes in regards to emergency work away from their stations also require approval. In approving rosters LACs need to be aware of “excess night work” and “unsociable and intrusive” hours, and the impact on service to the local community.

Cluster Supervisors are also responsible for arranging relief at one-member station ensuring the policing needs of the community are upheld. Workload, the length of absence, and “geographical or other features that result in the station being particularly remote or isolated” must be taken into consideration. This relief is ideally provided by members from the cluster, visits are regular, and the station stays open for a minimum of four hours.

Technology plays a significant role in officer and safety generally and for single officer patrols in particular. Vehicles are fitted with automatic vehicle location technology across Australia (see, for example, Cowan, 2013; Hosking, 2018; South Australia Police, 2016). Cameras in police vehicles (see, for example, Brewer, 2019; Paddenburg, 2019) and body worn cameras (see, for example, Tasmanian Department of Police, Fire & Emergency Management, 2019; New South Wales Police, 2020; Queensland Police Service, 2019) are also used nationally. However, in some regions, internet and mobile phone coverage is limited; in which case, officers are often apparelled with a satellite phone.

Ideally, only officers who want to work in RRR communities are placed there. This would enable longevity of posting and allow community relationships to develop. Where this is not possible, extensive allowances and support could encourage placement. Best practice would be officers (and their families) fully supported in transfer with allowances for:

- ❖ travel,
- ❖ furniture transport and storage,
- ❖ temporary accommodation while finding permanent accommodation, and
- ❖ meals.

Choice of placement on completion of RRR placement could also increase willingness and appetite for RRR deployments. Allowances in the position would include:

- ❖ fully funded accommodation,
- ❖ isolated/RRR station allowances,
- ❖ one or two officer station allowances where applicable,
- ❖ extra leave including transport out of the area for leave,
- ❖ electricity, water, gas, phone, internet, broadband, and satellite TV subsidies or coverage, and
- ❖ free fortnightly transport of goods in isolated areas.

Family support would include:

- ❖ consideration of and assistance with spousal employment,
- ❖ funding of change of school costs for children,
- ❖ accommodation for children if they have to be housed elsewhere to attend school, and
- ❖ living away from home allowance in instances where the family lives elsewhere.

Additional support would include:

- ❖ relocation counselling,
- ❖ consideration of family health and medical needs,
- ❖ no single officer patrols, and
- ❖ specific training.

Unfortunately, information about training for the environmental specificities of working in RRR communities remains limited. Where relevant, training around farm crime and single officer stations is one key consideration. But it is the closeness to community and the challenges surrounding this that remain the key training requirement.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This project **aimed** to:

- 1) Investigate the everyday policing of RRR communities
- 2) Document the propinquitous relationships between RRR police and their communities
- 3) Examine RRR police officers' career histories and their relationships to community now and over time
- 4) Observe how communities engage with their local police to enhance their safety, and how they achieve safety without police engagement.

These aims were achieved through the following **objectives**:

- 1) Undertake ethnographic research in Tasmanian communities to explore the nature of police work in RRR deployments, with a particular focus on:
  - a) How police encounters with the community (and vice versa) shape the co-production of law and order
  - b) The characteristics of RRR policing that facilitate a productive relationship between community and police
  - c) The individual skills and resources required of RRR police officers to navigate the public/police divide where propinquity necessarily shapes these relationships
  - d) How and when community become “police” in managing social order, and when “deputised” in extreme and crisis events
- 2) Provide a fuller account of the work of small town police officers, and how they negotiate the complex propinquitous relationships of small town communities
- 3) Consider what can be learnt about community policing in RRR communities that can be adopted for urban policing, and/or used to reimagine community policing in the city

These aims and objectives were achieved through a mix of qualitative **methods** guided by the principles of ethnomethodology, including:

- 4) Observational research of police encounters with community (predominantly non-crime activities and crime prevention activities)
- 5) Guided career history interviews with police officers on their changing relationships to community, guiding principles, and advantages and barriers to working in remote communities
- 6) Observational research of community events aimed to strengthening the safety of communities (such as Neighbourhood, School and Farm Watch), and community building and engagement events (such as CWA meetings)
- 7) Guided interviews with community members

As with any ethnographic research, the capacity to get the “inside story” of any research question is dependent upon building rapport and trusting relationships. Over a period of 18 months, the study involved the researcher building policing, emergency services, and community links within each of the five pilot sites—three in the southern district and two in the western district—prior to the start of fieldwork in 2018. These pilot sites were identified through a three-stage process, which sought the willingness and approval to participate from:

- ❖ Tasmania Police
- ❖ Local District Commanders
- ❖ Local police officers

The pilot research sites met two of the three initially identified conditions:

- ❖ Remote community
- ❖ Small police contingent (<5)

Whilst none of these sites have experienced recent critical incidents (such as bushfires, floods, violence, political protests), each has a history that includes critical events such as these, and in interviews, many participants referenced this history as an important factor in shaping the local community’s relationship to police. Most notably, participants from all five sites referenced the 1967 fires, and the continuing legacy of these fires on community capacity and community engagement. This is also notable due to the return of bushfires in the months following the initial fieldwork in the southern district, and the critical role of police in disaster management.

The fourth and fifth sites in the western district have a more recent history of critical incidents. During 1982, these towns were host to an influx of political protestors, who sought the cancellation of the Franklin River Dam project. These protests had a significant impact on community as well as policing, and set a precedent in the use



of the Federal parliament to resolve state issues such as environmental protections. The western district has also experienced a variety of other critical incidents, including, bushfires, mine disasters, and most recently, was the site of one of the largest Australian COVID-19 hotspots in the early stages of the pandemic.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This project deployed *ethnomethodology* to answer the core question about the nature of police-community relationships in remote Tasmanian communities.

- ❖ ethno refers a particular socio-cultural group [such as residents of a RRR community],
- ❖ method refers to the various practices that the ethno undertake in its everyday activities [such as strengthening social order], and
- ❖ ology refers to the systematic description of these practices.

Ethnomethodologists often deploy what is called “principled agnosticism” in that unlike other social science research, researchers engage with the topic without an overarching, pre-determined theory. Instead, the researcher allows the participants to set the agenda of the engagement, and the participants frame the contours of the research. This research is therefore exploratory and, given the topic, qualitative methods were necessary to map the relationship between police and the communities they serve.

As noted in the acknowledgements, the fieldwork for this study was undertaken by Professor Nicole Asquith, but all other aspects of the project were conducted collaboratively with Dr Jess Rodgers.

## METHODS

### 1) **Observational research of police practices in remote Tasmanian communities**

Adopting an observer-participant role, this aspect of the research involved the “shadowing” (Bartkowiak-Théron, 2012) of police officers in their everyday duties. The focus of this observational work was on non-crime and crime prevention encounters with the community, with a few low-level crime events observed in each site. The researcher kept a field diary, which documented thoughts, feelings, encounters, and discussions. These diary accounts are not verbatim, and no participant is identifiable in these diary entries. The observational research was not evaluative, and did not seek to analyse police actions against

an expected standard (whether TasPol, or social norms); rather, it investigated how RRR police negotiate their relationships with community.

## 2) Guided career history interviews with police officers

In addition to observing their work with the community, career history interviews were undertaken with police officers. Similar to life history interviews, career history interviews usually proceed from the simple request of “tell me about your life as a police officer in a remote community”. These interviews focussed on police officers’:

- Pathways to RRR policing,
- Relationships to community (and how this has changed over time and deployment),
- Guiding principles of working with community, and
- Individual high points and low points of working in remote communities

What was discussed, the order of topics, and the focus of these interviews, was directed by the interviewees, but facilitated by a series of prompts (see Appendix A) relating to:

- Early Life
- Cultural Setting and Traditions
- Inner Life and Spiritual Awareness
- Education
- Community
- Policing Practices and Guiding Principles

The initial plan was for these interviews to be combined with the use of the SHIG (Social, Historical, Individual, Institutional & Geographic Mapping Tool; Asquith 2008, 2012) to illustrate the various trajectories, and high/low points in their careers. However, on invitation to do so, none of the police officers chose to use the SHIG.

In addition to the interviews conducted with the police officers in each of the pilot sites, interviews were also conducted with Commanders in both districts to investigate how management priorities align with local policing priorities, and to gauge the impact of regional police culture on the practices of local police. Four other interviews were conducted with officers within the districts

who were acting as relief in the pilot RRR sites when permanently deployed staff were on leave.

### **3) Observational research of community organisations and events**

In order to capture the two-way relationship between police and community, it was also necessary to use similar techniques to observe how the community (re)constructs safety. While there were a few police-community encounters where both groups of participants were observed at the same time, at other times, the community engaged in activities that aim to strengthen social order but do not involve police directly (such as volunteer fire brigades, progress associations). The researcher sought and received permission from community organisations and event organisers to attend these events to document the way in which the community builds its relationship with the police.

### **4) Guided interviews with community members**

Initially, the plan was to start fieldwork in each site by holding a town hall meeting about safety in the community. Due to a range of reasons relating to the approval to conduct research, and the need to complete fieldwork in the southern district before the peak holiday season in December, these town hall meetings were removed from the project methods. In their stead, the researcher contacted and met with key stakeholder organisations in each site, provided briefings to their members, and arranged for individual interviews with community members. Interviewees often referred the researcher to other community members, and using snowballing techniques, a broad range of stakeholders and community members were interviewed. Twenty-one interviews were conducted in the southern district, and a further three were conducted in the western district.

Importantly, in some research sites this approach was not successful. In three towns, very few community members agreed to participate, and it was only through direct contacts with stakeholders that any community interviews were conducted. When asked why, community members often answered by way of validating their local police officer, such as “we don’t have any problems”, “our police officer does great work”. In one southern district town, interviews were conducted with a range of community members and stakeholders, which identified a split in the community with participants’ views clustered around the extreme views of policing/crime in the community. This perhaps reflected the divided community in that town—between “old timers” and “incomers” versus the newly arrived “mainlanders”—especially in relation to traffic issues in town.

The most comprehensive survey of the community occurred in one site in the southern district. Interviews were conducted across the community, with many links between interviewees, who often referred the researcher to each other. The snowballing technique in that town was ideally suited to the size and networked nature of this community. Of the 21 interviews conducted in the southern district, 11 were with residents of this one southern district town.

## ETHICS

This research received a full, high-risk ethics protocol (#H12928) from the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. No adverse events occurred during the fieldwork despite concerns from the committee about the presence of a researcher in policing encounters. No critical incidents occurred, and as such, no extraordinary procedures were required for securing the safety of the researcher, police officers, offenders, victims, witnesses, or complainants during fieldwork. When informed by the police officer as to the reason for the researcher's presence, no observed community member requested that the researcher leave; quite the opposite. In most cases the suspect/victim/witness/complainant whole-heartedly agreed for the researcher to remain, and often engaged the researcher in small talk, and in one incident, sought the researcher's advice on victim compensation processes, and was provided with the contact details of Victim Support Services in Tasmania.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data collected in interviews were transcribed and copies provided to participants for review, editing, and/or embargo. The final data set was coded using NVivo qualitative data management software and Leximancer text analysis software. Transcripts were first uploaded to Leximancer to generate key codes in the data and demonstrate relationships between key concepts in the data. However, the complexity of the responses, and the differences between officers and community members, resulted in too many links and too many outliers. As such, the data were then uploaded into NVivo to code qualitative responses in detail, drawing on the codes generated from the existing research and inductively from co-coding between the researchers. Qualitative responses were thematically coded and analysed in terms of key issues. Observational data from the researcher's fieldwork diary provided contextual information to the interview data, and was used to consider reflexively how the observed accounts of the relationships between police and community align or diverge from their mediated accounts in interviews. These diary entries also provided critical information about the feelings and perceptions arising during the observational component of the research.

## CHAPTER 4: PROPINQUITY AND SMALL TOWN POLICING IN TASMANIA

Policing in RRR communities is unlike policing in the metropole. As noted in the existing research, not only are RRR officers required to be specialists *and* generalists, and to engage with their communities on a wider range of behaviours, the cultural and geographical contexts of their deployments also shape their experiences. Closely networked communities, when compared with divided communities, are easier to engage and often have the capacity to impose informal social controls to address unwanted behaviours before they come to the attention of the police. The historical context of the community can also shape policing practices, especially when there has been a history of estranged relationships between the police and community.

In this section of the report, the wider contexts of RRR communities are considered in relation to policing practices and the attitudes and behaviours of RRR officers. As noted in the Methodology section, due to the small number of police officers observed and interviewed, we have not attributed these comments to individual officers, nor noted information that may lead to their identification. In addition to the observation and interviews with police officers, the research also included interviews and observation with community. In this interim report, the focus is solely on police officers, and the comments quoted herein are considered in conjunction with the fieldwork observation diary notes.

Before moving on to specific practices and responses to criminal behaviour, the role of propinquity is considered. The closeness or affinity an officer has with the community they serve informs and is informed by policing practices. Understanding the importance of propinquity helps us to understand when RRR policing goes wrong, but also the unique characteristics of RRR policing. Community policing in the city aims to replicate some of the propinquitous relationships that develop organically in RRR communities. As such, understanding these relationships in RRR communities may assist in not only strengthening RRR policing but also highlight the characteristics and relationships that may strengthen community policing strategies in the city. As noted earlier, propinquity refers to the nearness or closeness between people in terms of:

- ❖ place (proximity),
- ❖ time (shared events),
- ❖ relation (kinship), and
- ❖ affinity of nature (similarity).

While communities in the city may enjoy (or rue) proximal, and possibly kinship, propinquity, it is rare that urban communities share all four forms. This contrasts with RRR communities, where place propinquity is less likely given the dispersion of rural properties across large areas, but the other three forms are common, especially in Tasmania where families often remain in the same community over generations. Outsiders (“incomers” and “mainlanders”) may join these communities, but their membership is commonly provisional until they have proven their worth and commitment to community. During fieldwork, community members often talked about the provisional status of outsiders; noting that it can take generations of residence before an outsider is considered “one of us”.

This provisional status, and the wariness of communities to engage newcomers, is not only important to consider in relation to community members. Even officers born in Tasmania can be considered an outsider when they are deployed to RRR communities. Of note, two of the officers who participated in this research were at the time of the research deployed to communities where they grew up. The community’s assessment of, and attitudes to, these officers were qualitatively different to the other RRR officers. One officer “married into” the community, and as a consequence, his provisional status was abridged, but nonetheless, he too continues to encounter community pushback when his attitudes or behaviours contradict those of the community.

In this respect, whether a RRR officer is Tasmanian, or has come to Tasmania from elsewhere, they will be considered for most of their deployment an outsider by the communities they serve. Short deployments—or deployments of officers who go to RRR communities for the increased allowances or to facilitate a promotion—will not engender propinquity. As will be seen in the comments from RRR officers below, some chose to keep a distance from community to protect their anonymity and safety and to have a life outside of the job—including some officers who chose not to live in the community full time. However, these practices were not the norm, with most officers choosing to integrate into the community by way of building social relationships with the community and volunteering in community activities. Walking the fine line between being a good officer and a good neighbour was critical to their success. This fine line also represents the contrast between positive and negative propinquity. Closeness and affinity can be positive and assist in strengthening communities’ wellbeing and capacity to respond to adverse events (such as crime). Yet, propinquity can also be too much; relationships in RRR communities can be perceived as too close, providing few opportunities to disengage or to have down time that is not closely surveilled by community.

## POSITIVE PROPINQUITY

Before considering the negative impacts of propinquity on policing in RRR communities it is important to first discuss and positive contributions that come with closeness in terms of affinity, shared events, and kinship. As noted by the RRR officers, enlivening propinquity is a juggling act of walking a fine line to enhance community and personal wellbeing. Propinquity also means that officers are required to do things not recognised as police work, and that may not be measurable in police statistics, including the generational effort required for cultural change and crime prevention.

### Walking the fine line

The ability to walk the fine line between good neighbour and good police officer is encapsulated by the simple motto offered by an officer from the southern district:

I've got a basic attitude with country policing that you be friendly with everyone but be very careful who you become friends with. (Officer 1, 2018)

Knowing who is who, and the relationships between community members, does not come in a manual that is provided to an officer when they first deploy to a RRR posting. As noted by Officer 3, privileging friendships as a RRR officer can have significant negative effects:

There's no point thinking "oh I'll let him go through because he's a good bloke" and then it turns out he's in a situation and makes a wrong decision. (Officer 3, 2018)

Over time, officers begin to map the community and their relationships, not only through their policing encounters, but also from local lore and myth. Not understanding the community context—especially generational community feuds—can place RRR officers in difficult and sometimes dangerous positions. But:

the longer you stay somewhere you start accumulating ... well the job becomes a bit easier because you know you got contacts everywhere. You go to a job in the middle of the night, there's a fair chance you know who it's going to be. Or people tell you things and your networking is what it's all about in any business. (Officer 2, 2018)

Officer 1 suggests that even the "usual suspects" need to trust police, and dividing communities between law-abiders and law-breakers and policing each accordingly can diminish the impact that they can have in the community:

But even the people that you might not get on with, they need to know that if they've got a problem that they can come to you, and it's going to

get dealt with properly ... I had a run-in with a few people in [another town], but those people still knew that they could come in and see me if they had a problem, and some did. (Officer 1, 2018)

All officers who participated in this research mentioned the need for them to walk a fine line; too embedded in the community can lead to too much discretion for kith and kin, but too much distance can leave the officer as the only one not knowing what is going on in the community. Small town gossip is often rued by community members, but this same small town gossip is instrumental to RRR officers doing their job and understanding the links and feuds between community members.

### Satisfaction & wellbeing

One positive aspect of working with communities that officers know—and vice versa, are known by community—is the immediate feedback received from communities, and in turn the positive impact this has on officers' satisfaction with their jobs:

So yeah, the frontline officer welfare, that's a big issue. And again, that's why ... it's probably the big reason why I'm going to a smaller area where I'm going to be working with, mostly, [people] I've worked with for a long [time] ... back into a community where you actually feel like they're genuine in their appreciation of what we do. (Officer 1, 2018)

Officer 7 ruminated on the differences between two rural communities and how propinquity fundamentally changes their satisfaction with their job, as well as their capacity to do their job. In rural areas of Tasmania—as with elsewhere in Australia—passing cars often give each other the “steering wheel finger wave” to acknowledge each other. In my observations with police across Tasmania, it was common for most passing cars to wave. For Officer 7, this simple acknowledgement varied considerably between RRR communities:

In [island town], they will literally, some of them were doing full-on waves, and sometimes both hands off a steering wheel. And they'd come up to you in the shop, and they weren't coming up to you to say, “Oh, I've got this problem” or “Oh, I need this” or “Can you do this for me?” They were literally just, “Oh, you're new in town. Where are you from? What's your name? Oh, we might see you around”. It was all really positive engagement, and [we] would walk into the pubs of a night time just to say hello, and everyone was more friendly and I didn't hear one snide remark. Here, unless I had a job to go to, I would not—I don't walk into the pubs to do licensing checks because everyone just makes the derogatory comments ... It just doesn't make you feel good, whereas there I didn't



have a bad interaction. And even the ones that we were nicking for things were actually really like, “Oh, I’m not like this usually. I’m so sorry, and I feel so stupid” They were apologetic. They were nice. It made me not want to charge any of them. I thought it was great. I thought the community relationship they have, excellent .... (Officer 7, 2020)

In their account of the differences between two rural towns in Tasmania, Officer 7 highlights not only the context in which they work changes between rural communities—and as such, that there is no single way to do RRR policing—but also the slippery slope that can come with engaging, productive propinquity. When the community is so close and so comfortable in their police officer doing their job, discretion, ironically, becomes more difficult to calibrate.

### **Easier to come from someone you know**

Just as it is easier to police a community that is known, officers often talked about these encounters from the community’s perspective, arguing that bad news—whether a death notice, or just a speeding fine—is better received from someone known. Softening the blow of an encounter with the police is only possible when close propinquitous relationships already exist. Caring for the other—caring for community members—is facilitated, and is most effective, when RRR officers are embedded in their communities.

Officer 1 talked of their relationship with an elderly resident, whose son had died in an accident, and how there was a reciprocity of care between them, in part because of the existing trust and care for each other:

Now, I had a little old lady at [rural town]. I can’t remember her name off the top of my head, but she was the tea lady for the SES, so she had nothing. She didn’t have two shillings to rub together. She lived in a little hovel of the house ... But she volunteered her time with the fire brigade, making cups of tea at scenes. ... but her son died in the paragliding crash up at the Midlands, and I had to go and tell her. So I rocked up. ... She saw me coming, and she said, “Oh, good day [Officer 1]”. Then she looked at my face; she said, “You’ve got bad news for me, haven’t you?” I said “Yeah”. “It’s my son, isn’t it?” I said “Yeah”. “He’s dead, isn’t he?” “Yeah”. Then I started crying.

I spent a lot of time with her over the following week, and I helped her pick her car up from down the road ... So we helped her out a bit, and she gave me ... a fishing rod. She said, “This is my son’s. I’d like you to have it.” I said to her, I said, “Why did you do what you did on the day?” Then she said. “I

could see how difficult it was for you, and I wanted to make it easier for you.” I fucking started crying again ... I said, “You poor Peach.” I’m giving you the worst news of your life, and you’re ... thinking of me. Fuck ... So it’s things like that where ... It wasn’t a situation where I go and say, “Your son’s dead. See you later.” I spent time with this woman. You get a chance to go around and make sure they’re all right. You phone them up. It’s not ... Well, it is police work for me. That’s what I think. You determine at the beginning about, I don’t know, how to police ... and it doesn’t happen a lot in the bigger ... It doesn’t happen at all in the biggest stations ... They talk about it, but it’s bullshit. (Officer 1, 2018)

Officer 1’s affinity with his community was two-way, and the positive outcomes—even in traumatic situations—were shared. While not strictly a policing matter, their work with this elderly mother in the aftermath of her child dying strengthened the relationship between the two. But his actions at this traumatic time, for this one community member, will have rippled out to the wider community sparking increased propinquity and trust between the police and the community.

Similarly, Officer 4 noted that their approach to friends and acquaintances breaking minor traffic rules was to elicit their care, and to highlight the impact that their actions could have on their role as a police officer:

... a mate that doesn’t wear his seatbelt. We’re only talking about minor offences but not the thing that actually shakes the town but, “Oh, mate, where’s your seat belt?” We put him down for it twice. You pull him on to, “Mate, I am busy. I don’t have the time for pulling you over for the seatbelt but I can’t ignore the other people in town think you’re getting away with it. Do me a favour”. And that “do me a favour”, that request is much more powerful than a ticket will ever be. “Do me a favour because I don’t want to be explaining why you get away with it. I don’t want to book you. It’s 400 bucks for a seatbelt. You can’t afford it. I don’t want to book you. I don’t need to book you. I don’t need the stats to impress my boss. I can tell him what’s going on. Just wear it, please so I don’t have to explain why you’re getting away with it while everybody else puts theirs on”. And so I expose problems. (Officer 4, 2020)

Whether it is to notify a mother of her son’s death, or persuading a friend to do the right thing, propinquitous relationships help smooth the path, and elicit compliance and care from the community.

### Community engagement central but not measurable

Much of what RRR officers do on a daily basis does not end up in police reports or statistics. Community engagement could be counted by noting all non-crime encounters an officer engages in, however, this does not capture the impact on preventing or diminishing the effects of criminal behaviour. Much of what goes on in RRR policing is upstream well before a crime is committed downstream. It is therefore difficult for RRR officers to demonstrate their impact. Some felt they needed to “play the numbers game” to illustrate their work to their Commander, but often this had a negative impact on officers’ relationships with community.

... not everything is measurable in statistics and this sort of feedback and what people say it's not a ... you can't measure it. (Officer 2, 2018)

Officer 2 notes the difficulties of measuring this work of RRR officers. Yet, as highlighted by community members in a couple of the southern district patrols, when officers did “play the numbers game” and randomly set up concealed speed checks on major thoroughfares they felt it was all about the show, rather than a dedication to reducing harm caused by dangerous driving. This perception may have been due a lack of communication about why this work is undertaken, but nonetheless, it had a negative impact on the respect and trust in officers to keep communities safe. This dissonance between “keeping the boss happy” and keeping the community happy (and safe) is an artefact of the increasing regulation of police offices’ duties and the collection of data relating to some activities but not others. RRR officers are wedged between meeting the institutional requirements of their position, and the local requirements of communities.

### Proximity increases intelligence-led practices

Knowing the community, and knowing the history of criminal behaviour in a community, helps RRR officers to gather and use intelligence on the “usual suspects”, and to identify when information provided to the police is in fact correct. As noted by Officer 4, his intergenerational knowledge of the community enabled him to secure a conviction when others were unable to do so, primarily because of his “insider knowledge”:

And I knew the guy was a real crook through my old man ... I just knew this guy was no good and [I] ended up nailing him for possessed stolen property for a vehicle in his backyard ... CRB came round and congratulated me because this junior constable's knocked over one of these guys they hadn't been able to get for 15 years. (Officer 4, 2020)

Similarly, Officer 4 was able to identify wrong intelligence gathered by another officer because of his embedded knowledge of the community:

[I] called my partner back and said, “That’s not who he says he is. He said his name’s so-and-so and he’s just dropped his brother’s name and I’m pretty sure he’s wanted by you guys”. (Officer 4, 2020)

Not all RRR officers have this intergenerational knowledge of the “usual suspects”, especially if an officer has migrated from the mainland. However, it highlights the critical importance of shadowing practices in the redeployment of RRR officers. Rather than learning about the community and its propinquitous links over and over again, it is incumbent on officers and Tasmania Police to provide resources to allow incoming officers to shadow outgoing officers. Not only does this approach enable officers to share their community knowledge and relationships between families, it offers a bridge between incoming officers and the community, including the transference of trust and rapport with community.

Learning about these relationships afresh, over and over again, is a waste of institutional knowledge and time, and leads to exasperation and wariness from communities. Often community members talked about their reticence to get to know their local officer because “... they’ll leave as soon as we trust them”. Providing time and resources for a proper handover between officers strengthens the incoming officer’s capacity to use the available intelligence wisely and to start their new position with the trust of the community.

### Crime prevention as generational practice

As with city policing, some officers are aware of the impact they have not just in the moment of the encounter, but the impact on others in the community, and on everyone over time. All officers observed in this research spent much of their time and energy on shifting the perspectives and attitudes of children in the community, knowing that what they do now may in fact divert these young people from a criminal career, and thus, may make life easier for other police.

... you’ve got to have time for the kids and touch base with them for the ease of work for the coppers that are going to be there after you. (Officer 4, 2020)

While some were cognisant of the reasons why young people are more likely to engage in deviant behaviour—such as boundary testing in the transition to adulthood—for the most part, the dedication of these officers to young people was about offering them a different pathway. Officers also talked about the difference

between “wasted effort” with older people set in their ways, and the opportunity to stop young people in their tracks and divert them to a productive life.

However, the officers were also reticent about the use of formal community policing strategies with young people, preferring instead to do this work as part of their everyday encounters. As noted by Officer 4:

Community policing models where you have to go to a school a certain amount of hours and stuff like that, I don't know if there's a lot of reward in that ... I think there's a better way of us doing it. (Officer 4, 2020)

A key point of contact with young people was around not only crime prevention but also health prevention. “Stack hats” or safety helmets for bike riders was a constant in all policing practices observed in this project. Some officers took a hard line and would apply infringement notices, while others took a more engaged process offering the rule-breakers “three strikes” after which a range of actions were deployed. Role modelling to rule-abiders and rule-breakers was critical in Officer 4's response to stack hats:

... we had a program where we were buying helmets and we thought, “oh, man, we're giving them to all the abusive little shits that come from the area that don't have helmets, they get new ones”. So, we also got a bunch of new helmets for the nice kids that didn't have much money and made sure the nice kids got a reward as well and that sort of thing. That worked. Absolutely worked. (Officer 4, 2020).

Put your helmet on. [Officer 4 is] going to get you otherwise and he's going to seize your bike, let down your tyres or whatever ... And they're empowered by being good kids and you disempower the bad ones. (Officer 4, 2020)

Building propinquity with young people—in terms of shared events and values—strengthens trust. Not only trust in the individual officer, but also trust in the criminal justice system. It also creates a dialogue that may increase young people's knowledge of the law, community expectations, and their rights.

Yet, this type of generational change is difficult when RRR police officers are redeployed, often after three years of service. While the majority of officers observed during this research had decided early to choose rural postings, few have had the opportunity to remain in one town for an extended period of time. As Officer 7 notes in relation to their previous deployment to an island town:

They have a much smaller population too I suppose, and I guess a lot of people have been there for longer. I think one of ... [the police officers] has been there for 12 years and the other two have been there for five, six maybe, so that helps too. But yeah, I find that community—And I'm sure [rural town] would probably be similar from what I've seen of it, yeah ... you get a lot of support from the community. That's what I liked about that. (Officer 7, 2020)

Given that most crime and deviant behaviour is learnt rather than the result of a physical or psychological pathology, building the capacity of RRR officers to engage their communities over extended periods of time is critical to re-socialising communities to lawful behaviour. Short deployments inhibit RRR officers to create propinquitous relationships; not only because these types of relationships take time to develop, but also because there is no incentive to do this community capacity building if an officer knows they will be redeployed before they can see any positive outcomes from this work.

### Turning the community around

In some communities observed as part of this research there existed a long history of acrimony between police and the community. In some cases, this was due to lax or disengaged policing; for others, it was about bad policing practices in the past, or a long history of deviance and criminal activity that had not been addressed. But when an engaged officer is deployed and can remain in community over a long period of time, trust can be engendered.

Officer 4 was deployed to a community that had witnessed police malfeasance and corruption (unrelated to policing the community), and found that it was only through sustained community engagement and responding quickly to existing criminal behaviours that he was able to turn the community around:

... when you've got a fatal accident or maybe that large job ... arresting one of the people that were hiding in the town and everybody knows that's a part of the job, when you take on something like that all of a sudden they love [you] again. (Officer 4, 2020)

Similarly, Officer 4 elicits community engagement and trust by ensuring the community understands what the job involves, and its impact. Being vulnerable, in this sense, helps to foster propinquity and care for the other, and in doing so, creates bonds that may survive when the encounter with police results in negative outcomes.

... you must be honest and not indulge in criminal behaviour at all, that sort of stuff. I saw that when I got here was the distrust that this station wasn't working. ... So you may fall out of favour. It's hard to manage that fine line in that cycle to make sure that the balance is right. You come back from a fatal and word will get around the bar ... "How're you going ...?" "Yeah, good, thanks." And then the barmaid or somebody would let out, "Ah, yeah, he went to a fatal yesterday." They go, "Ah, crap." So it's not a lot but it's just probably a little bit of smoke and mirrors there but the guys say, "Ah, fuck, yeah, it's a hard job." Let them think about it and get that through. So I probably farm a bit of sentiment from the community at the same time to keep them thinking about that. (Officer 4, 2020)

Whether it is walking the fine line between good copper and good neighbour, or eliciting satisfaction from work that is unmeasurable and the positive outcomes may come long after they have gone, fostering propinquity with community has many advantages. Positive propinquity can ensure an officer's back is covered when alone facing of an angry crowd. It can contribute to a sense of wellbeing and satisfaction with the job and the positive impact they have on the community. Positive propinquity can also be instrumental in "catching the crook", with small town gossip shared knowing that its source will remain secret. On the flip side, however, each of the positive aspects of propinquity can present as a shadowy rural horror.

### NEGATIVE PROPINQUITY

Small town communities often mean small-town gossip, and the close propinquity—especially kinship and affinity propinquity—between the police and the community can often result in negative outcomes; some of which can impact on the health and wellbeing of the officer. The community knowing too much about their police officer, and the police officer's every move monitored by community can foster a sense of constant surveillance, where every misstep is noticed and noted. Ironically, this hyper-visibility is also used by offenders to know when it is safe to engage in criminal activities as they know when officers are away on leave, travelling to regional cities to deliver a suspect for arrest, testing, and/or detention, or out doing the rounds of their patrol.

A smooth transition into a new RRR community is often facilitated by activities that link officers, their family, and the community, such as school events, parent and teacher committees, sport teams, and Scouts. When a RRR officer arrives without a family, those automatic, routine encounters with the community are absent, and can make the transition much more difficult. This is especially the case for single men. As noted by Officer 4:

As a single bloke in the town here you'd be exposed to a few rumours and whatnot that these people with no lives just come up with in their sleep. I think but definitely being a married man has made my life a little bit easier ... I think that having my wife in the town has made some of the older people ... not that the relationship was bad or anything but I think it's made them warm to me more. (Officer 4, 2020)

While propinquity can be a powerful driver of community engagement in the co-production of law and order in small towns, it can also foster a wariness and a need for distance, especially in relation to friendships and socialising.

### **Together but separate**

All officers talked about the negative impact that too much propinquity can create. City officers are able to finish their shift, drive home, and they are no longer identifiable as a police officer. They can blend in and not have their actions surveilled and dissected by the community. RRR officers rarely enjoy this type of anonymity, and are “on show” all the time, especially if they live in the house assigned by Tasmania Police.

And the other one for them [RRR officers] is the amount of times that they probably had people coming to their own private residence and knocking on the door because most people again just see the police vehicle parked or know that there's a police house attached to the police station. And they just assume well I'll go and knock on the door and let him know. And that happens. And that's ... they have no idea of what the police officer has probably been doing for the last 24 hours. (Officer 5, 2018)

It came all about when the neighbours across the road were using a set of binoculars to look at us through the window. The way the windows were set up in the lounge room when the sliding door to the kitchen was open, and you then had the silhouette of the kitchen window. You can see right through the house. (Officer 3, 2018)

This can create a difficult set of circumstances where the officer wants the community to engage but not to the extent that they come knocking at the officer's home when they are off duty. This lack of privacy and security was felt strongly by an officer who was deployed to a RRR community with his wife and young children. There was no security fence enclosing the police house, and on more than one occasion, members of the community had entered his property and knocked on the front door of his house. In one instance, when the officer was not home, his daughter answered the door to find a drunk and abusive man. His daughter was traumatised by the event, which led him to reconsider the viability of remaining in that RRR community.



The closeness of the community relationships in small towns can negatively impact on officers and their families, including the use of family relationships to create added tension and difficulties:

... I remember going into the pub once with my girlfriend and a group of mates ... and one of the druggies abusing my girlfriend trying to get me to fire up and get me to have a fight with him whilst he's got an extra ten blokes behind him and stuff like that, so trying to draw you into their issues. (Officer 4, 2020)

In addition to requesting more secure housing, a couple of the officers deliberately chose to retain their city properties in order to “fly out” of the community when off shift in order to protect their privacy.

I prefer a bit more of a separation between my work life and my policing in that rural area. (Officer 3, 2018)

Only three of the officers who participated in this research chose to reside in the house provided by Tasmania Police, and all three discussed issues with privacy and security. One senior officer suggested that:

... my personal view is nowadays it's not ... I think having police stations and police houses right next to each other is not good. (Officer 5, 2018)

Officers also protected their anonymity and personal space by not engaging in community events and activities, which had, in a couple of instances, created barriers in fostering the positive propinquity that could lead to more engaged communities.

However, creating a barrier between work and private life was considered by many officers as critical to wellbeing, trust, and legitimacy. As Officer 1 points out, care must be taken in creating local friendships to ensure that their reputations do not adversely impact on the work of RRR police.

I [befriended] people that were never going to compromise me because it would be really shitty to get involved with somebody who was a pisshead, for example, because you just get yourself a bad reputation. You get rumours flying thick and fast when you're single in a country area. (Officer 1, 2018)

... at my ratings at the end of the year, the sergeant had said that I didn't handle myself well when dealing with people I know. (Officer 4, 2020)

Likewise, existing familial relationships and friendships may impact on how the community perceives an officer, especially when they are deployed to locations where the officer previously resided (either before or after attesting). For some officers, the complications attached to these complex personal relationships are best addressed by “[h]igh moral standards that you set and you don’t move from because the town rumours will undermine them regardless” (Officer 4, 2020).

The combination of being too visible and too isolated can create issues around the safety and wellbeing of RRR officers, especially in communities where there is an estranged relationship with police, and the officer is alone. Officer 4 talked of “my experience of backs to the wall, fighting for your life, getting choked out and passing out in the floor of your own police car by a maddening crowd ...”. A lack of back up from either other police officers, or from supportive locals, can create the conditions for serious physical and psychological injury. While RRR officers are compensated for the extraordinary conditions of their deployment, this monetary reward does not address the inherent dangers of single officer patrols in dysfunctional, and sometimes, violent communities.

## PROPINQUITOUS POLICING

Underpinning this study was the understanding that crime and policing looks very different in RRR communities. Not only are there unique forms of crime specific to RRR environments (such as those relating to farm management and equipment), but the way in which police conduct their duties may also vary from that of urban police. One critical issue raised in all sites of this research was the gap between a community who wants to the police to take action on an identified problem and their unwillingness to make a formal complaint.

### **Everyone knows, but no one is willing to speak**

As with policing in any region, police are reliant on the community to report crime, and to follow through with providing evidence or witness statements. Yet, as with inner-city communities who have an estranged relationship with the police, RRR communities are also hesitant to formally engage the police in local matters. This situation may be due to a range of reasons, some of which are not related to the RRR contexts of policing. However, given the high level of kinship and affinity propinquity in RRR communities, this failure to formally engage is more complex especially in relation to the fear and likelihood of retribution.

... [there are] probably a number of reasons why they won’t do it [make a statement] ... because they are concerned about the fact there could be retribution towards them. (Officer 5, 2018)

Well, they'd be known because they were there. They were the witnesses. So the guy doing the stealing and burnouts and everything would've known where all the information come from. So they were just a bit worried about him. (Officer 6, 2018)

When asked if there was anything RRR police can do to get around the fear of retribution, most officers said there was little that can be done in the short term, and it was only through building trust over time that some community members may overcome their fear. Yet, without the community's full engagement in crime reporting, it is difficult for RRR officers to demonstrate what happens when suspects and offenders (and their friends and families) seek retribution.

While "... they're my eyes, and I wouldn't get half the things done or problems solved without their help" (Officer 6, 2018), often RRR officers were unable to proceed with a charge because of the hesitancy of locals to get involved. As noted by Officer 6, an incident may "fall at the last hurdle" because the community refuses to provide formal evidence even when everyone concerned knows who committed the crime:

Then the whole thing just fell over because they decided not to do that formal complaint, so I've just lost everything. So I guess where it went wrong was I had other people coming to me saying ... If all this has happened, and I've said, "Look, I know who it is." But then, because the witnesses fell down, or they weren't willing to give me the information that I needed, the whole thing sort of dropped away, even though I've told people, "Hey, look I know who it is". (Officer 6, 2018)

Similarly, Officer 7 (2020) notes that violence associated with alcohol abuse in their community rarely results in a call out. Drug and alcohol related violence increases around key events (such as football finals), and

... they go a bit off the show, a punch on. [But] no one wants to provide statements ... Every now and then they'll have a punch-up and it'll be reported, but it'll be reported in a very minor way. It'll be like, "Oh no, he's just drunk. He's just angry. This has happened. I don't want to report it. I don't want to do anything about it". So there's a lot of orders that we put out, but not a lot of charges I guess. (Officer 7, 2020)

Officer 5 (2018) noted that in these types of alcohol related incidents, "... the public take responsibility themselves and get involved in assisting us to do something about it". This undelegated power to manage the problems themselves is a powerful device to ensure social compliance in a community. However, depending on the power of these changemakers in the community, and their relationship to offending, this type of

“community justice” can reinscribe pathological and violent relationships between communities and their police.

### Community disengagement

For the most part, the communities studied as part of this research were unwilling to formally engage, or do not know the consequences of not providing supporting evidence. As noted by Officer 5 (2018):

So it's well and good that you ring up anonymously but sometimes you have to be prepared to step up to the plate and give your name and be prepared to go along to court to give the evidence ... And I can't do anything just on an anonymous phone call that's not even going to go to court as evidence surrounding most of that so. And I think that's where the public have this issue of understanding. (Officer 5, 2018)

Officer 5 (2018) also noted that the community does not think carefully through the implications of not giving evidence in matters they have witnessed: “... they'll possibly be the next person [who] will probably be ringing up claiming about what's occurred in their street”. While the community wants RRR police to respond wholeheartedly to their victimisation, they do not make the link between their demand for service and their unwillingness to provide evidence when others are victimised. And failure to fully investigate their victimisation—by collecting supporting evidence from unwilling witnesses etc.—then creates conflict with the community, who perceive the officer as not doing their job.

This situation can be exacerbated if the victim is a core member of the community, who is likely to “spread the word” about the officer's inability to charge the person who victimised them. In many respects, RRR officers cannot win; they are damned and disparaged if they do not fully investigate (knowing that no one will provide a statement), and damned and disparaged for putting pressure on community members to formally report.

Similarly, Officer 7 noted that disengaged communities mean that RRR officers are engaging the same people repeatedly, and that this can feel like the rest of the community is disengaged.

It's just sometimes it feels like you're targeting the wrong people. You go and speak to the ones that are available and they're just all cool. ... whereas it's the ones that disengage that you don't see that are probably the ones that need it the most that you just can't seem to crack into, mm-hmm ... Yeah, look, it's funny because I suppose being here for so long sometimes

it feels like you don't speak to the community. But I guess part of that is exacerbated when you go to jobs and you think I've never heard this person's name before. Who is this person? And then you meet them and you go, "How long have you been here?" And you realise they've been here the whole time, and sometimes it just feels like you haven't been engaged with the community because of that. But it's because you keep engaging the same people over and over. (Officer 7, 2020)

As Officer 6 (2018) identifies, when communities are disengaged from the police, sometimes they will act themselves.

Interviewer: Does the community fill that gap? By local justice?

They don't come to me and tell me that, but I always hear that sort of stuff third, fourth, fifth hand. So they're not coming "Oh, you don't have to worry about ..."

Interviewer: ... the chainsaw's appeared.

Yeah, that's, the chainsaw is back; yeah, that kind of thing. It doesn't always happen, but I think with a longer standing ... The people that have been here the longest, those families that have respect of everyone around, if their chainsaw gets stolen, as an example, then usually that's probably the chainsaw that comes back. (Officer 6, 2018)

Again, this community justice is more likely when the victim is a key member of the community, and everyone knows both the victim and suspect. Community pressure—whether by shaming, exclusion, or threats of violence—can be a strong driver in the community's willingness to report to police, or in worse cases, deputise themselves to resolve the issue.

### **Community leaders and changemakers**

When the community is incapable or unwilling to provide intelligence, a central source of intelligence and community knowledge is the local post office, pub, or store. As noted by Officer 1:

What they don't know is not worth knowing. So you get a good rapport with your post office. They'll tell you where anyone is that you need to know. And your corner shop or your local shop is really important. Your pub's, obviously, really important, and you get a good rapport with people. (Officer 1, 2018)

Similarly, Officers 2, 3, 4, and 6 talked about the important partnerships they had created with staff at local hotels and pubs to ensure safe alcohol consumption and driving. Officer 4 had a two-way arrangement with hotel staff that enabled the officer to ask for early closing when difficulties arose, and in reverse, hotel staff were able to contact the officer when they identified a possible drunk driver or violence escalates. The creation of strong working relationships with key service providers and businesses enabled RRR officers to be prepared, and to respond to the unique issues faced by their communities.

Similarly, while community members were unwilling to, or incapable of, reporting a violent altercation in a local supermarket on the west coast—known locally as the “IGA massacre”—the business owner contacted the police to report the incident and provide video evidence. The incident arose after one person encountered another local person in the supermarket who had taken over the lease of a property that the perpetrator’s family member had been evicted from. The victim had done nothing that would warrant violence, but in small town politics, their decision to rent a property that had been subject to an eviction notice was sufficient to elicit a violent altercation. Without the strong relationship between the business owner and the police, this incident would have become local lore, which added fuel to nascent community unrest.

In an extended discussion about “turning a community around”, Officer 4 narrated a series of incidents where his relationships with community changemakers fundamentally shifted the community’s perspective of him, and Tasmania Police in general:

I talk to the guys at BP, the mechanics and stuff and I enjoy my cars and stuff. That was probably the first place I made acquaintances in the town when I got here. So that was probably the start that the guys at BP had the confidence and they could tell me that information; I would do the right thing with it. And that then becomes a process of the owners. And the managers of the large businesses in town are really a focus I suppose ... And very quickly if they've got a problem at the pub he knows he can call me and they can issue a banning notice. I will serve the banning notice for them and report back here, “so-and-so's got his trespass notice. He won't be in the pub this week and if he is here's my number. Get the staff to call me straight away. I'm on day shift but I'll come out at the night-time, anyway, and I'll arrest him and take him away”. All of a sudden then she goes, “That's great!” So you've got the management on.

Then that filters down through the staff. The staff have got your number and your card on the back of the wall of the bar to call you immediately. And that filters on. The staff saying, “Oh, no, [XXX is] a good bloke. He’s actually alright to come in.” After they’ve said that I turn up at the front door, have a smoke. “Hey guys, take your drinks inside. You blokes are not allowed to have your drinks out here. I might tip them out. Nobody gets booked for drinking on the streets and the minor stuff but they know what my expectation is. So once they learn that I’m half-decent bloke, I’m not booking them from the street, ah, yeah, we don’t want to ruin his night. As I pull up in the police car all the drinks go inside automatically and then I don’t have to ask. That’s the microcosm of how you just switch over the entire town ... So you were talking about that change in the town—there wasn’t a snap change. It is a constant war almost to get it to that stage, just that time and effort to engage and re-engage and re-engage with all the people around the place and that becomes easier. (Officer 4, 2020)

Officer 4 illustrates, in these examples above, a few factors that can drive the propinquitous relationships police have with changemakers in RRR communities. Not only does he illustrate the impact his presence can have on community behaviour by “showing the colours”, but also the time it takes to elicit such a response from the community. Trust that he will do the right thing, alongside the judicious use of fines and charges, has nudged those who engage in low level criminal behaviour, and in doing so built a bridge to these people via the key changemakers in his community.

#### **When it goes wrong, it goes really wrong**

The precarious nature of the relationships between RRR police and their communities—between over- and under-policing; between too visible and alone—often means that one misstep can undo the budding, productive links that officers have fostered. As noted by Officer 7:

It’s weird. You can build some really great relationships with people—and I’ve built a few that I think are pretty solid—but then it just takes one interaction with them where you’re doing something that they don’t agree with. And it feels like all of that work that you’ve built up with them goes out of the window. And then they sort of say—“You’re only as good as your last yes”. (Officer 7, 2020)

Similarly, when bad policing is witnessed by the community, any work done to build trust and legitimacy can be undone and can have ripple effects well beyond any one particularly bad policing practice. Several officers talked about the old days, when previous officers held their RRR position, and the behaviours that contributed to the

current poor community relationships with police. In one research site, a previous officer had engaged in criminal conduct, which was witnessed by not only staff at a local business, but also members of one of the local “usual suspects” families. The actions of the previous officer had a significant impact on the willingness of the community to engage police, and three years after this incident, the current officer is still managing the fallout of the officer’s behaviour.

Building strong relationships with key community members (usually, “old-timers”) and government services and local businesses meant that police had an “ear to the ground” and could predict when they would be needed. This type of community engagement rarely occurs formally (except in Neighbourhood Watch and other similar programs, including business associations), and only emerges over long periods of time. This level of trust is not able to be elicited simply through the position, uniform, or apparelling of officers, and it rarely gets documented or measured in progress or performance reviews. Yet, it is central to the efficacy of RRR policing.

Propinquity in all its forms—negative or positive—is core to RRR policing. These types of links between the police and the communities they service are not unique to RRR policing but are more likely to be part of everyday policing in small towns when compared to the metropole. City police may be able to elicit productive relationships with changemakers and key businesses in their communities, or they may be able to build rapport with particular families in their communities. Yet, unlike their city counterparts, RRR officers’ safety, wellbeing, and capacity to do their job rests on these propinquitous relationships. Without these propinquitous links, RRR policing have only command and control strategies, which are ineffective without the full force of a command to back up this approach.

Working alone, or with one or two other officers, means that RRR officers must rely more heavily on their communities in times of crisis, and thus, cannot risk creating acrimonious relations by policing by the book. This approach to policing is neither traditional command and control, but nor is it community policing as has been developed for disengaged urban communities. It is a unique form of policing that has high personal costs, requires a generalist who can specialise, and knows how to engage others, including those who do not want to be on the radar of police. Propinquitous policing may have emerged from the unique contexts of small town policing; yet, it has much to offer urban police in (re-)building safe and engaged communities in the city.



## CHAPTER 5: RRR POLICING SKILLS & CAPABILITIES

In the review and evaluation of existing policies and practices relating to RRR policing, it was found that no Australian policing service has a capability framework in place to assess the suitability of applicants for RRR policing. Additionally, while there once existed a dedicated training/information program for Tasmania Police officers deployed to RRR patrols, this type of program is no longer provided by TasPol or any other policing service. In the case of jurisdictions with Farm Crime/Agricultural/Rural Crime Liaison Officers, some training is provided to empower officers to investigate the unique characteristics of RRR crime, but this training is in relation to the crime types not the policing practices, skills, and strategies for officers deployed to RRR communities.

It was clear from the observation of, and interviews with, the RRR officers who participated in this research that there are core skills and capabilities that are essential for working in RRR communities. Many of these skills are generic and are skills that policing organisations are increasingly prioritising in recruitment. Other skills and capabilities, however, are not so obviously recruited for, and relate to the ability of officers to navigate the complexity of living in small communities. These more abstract skills may not be things that can be taught; rather, they are characteristics of some individuals, which make them ideally suited to the RRR contexts of policing.

### COMMON SENSE, COMMUNICATION & “THOSE FLUFFY SKILLS”

When asked what skills and attributes officers believed were instrumental in doing the work of a RRR officer, most talked of the skills central to policing in any environment. Communication, common sense, and what one officer called “those fluffy skills”. However, the importance of these generic skills is heightened in communities with high levels of propinquity. When the community knows each other, and the officer is recently deployed, communication—especially active listening—is critical.

Communication. You need to be able to just talk to anyone, no matter what their level of ... Where they're coming in at, at angry, calm, whatever, you need to be able to talk to them. That's that communication and probably patience with the people as well. Just be willing to listen. Wait for all of the information before you order, before you jump in before you start claiming the win. (Officer 6, 2018)

Few people would be willing to tell an officer their life story, and their links to others in the community. It is only in engaging in conversations—formal and informal—with community members that they are able to create a mind-map of all the community interrelationships and the history of these relationships over time. This includes not only the links between friends, business partners, employees/employers, and wider familial networks, but also the intergenerational feuds that seem to be part and parcel of RRR communities in Tasmania.

For other officers, empathy and patience were central to their role in RRR communities. Officer 1, suggested that, above all else, empathy was a critical skill or attribute in RRR policing:

I think that the one trait that a copper needs to have over any other is empathy. I just think it's a really important tool to have, and if you can't put yourself in other people's shoes, then you're fucked. (Officer 1, 2018)

While for Officer 6, it was patience:

Yeah, patience; you might not get the full story this time, but the next person might give you the missing pieces to the puzzle. Communication, patience, and probably confidence I guess, which when I first started, I probably wasn't hugely confident. I still question myself every single day. I think I probably said I don't have anyone yelling at me, saying I'm doing the wrong things, so I must be doing okay. (Officer 6, 2018)

Patience was not only critical to building trust with community members, but also to the wellbeing and safety of police officers. Officer 6 prefaced their comments about patience in terms of the need to keep things in context. Police officers cannot do their jobs if they are injured or hospitalised. Having patience to assess the situation and to assess the risks of taking action can make the difference. Their aim was:

... at the end of every day is to go home to my wife and kids. Unless there's that crazy situation where you actually have to put yourself in harm's way to prevent someone else from getting hurt, if that's not happening but it's getting close, but it's still that buffer, yeah, wait for your backup, which, yeah, I'd say here can be a long time away. You just need to be smarter about the way you approach things. But if you communicate with your town... at that lower level of just conversation every day, there's a good chance that when you show up, you're going to have a reasonably calming effect. It's not always, but you have that ability to be able to "Hey, come on, you're not like that. Calm down. Let's just have a talk about it." Nine times out of 10 that's how it works out. (Officer 6, 2018)

For Officer 4, sometimes all that was required was to “hang out” with the locals. This helped develop a better mind-map of their communities, build rapport, and in the process, possibly acquire some important intelligence about known criminal behaviour:

I'd park out the front of the pub, have a smoke with the guys, introduce myself and just stand around, no gun, no nothing, no offensive talking and let them see that I'm a human and have a laugh, have a talk, whether it's footie or whatever it is. And ... you get the positive ... they know who you are but I'm getting an idea of who it is I've got to deal with and what the attitude of the town is and such things (Officer 4, 2020).

While these skills may be perceived by officers as being “fluffy”, it is clear from their comments that these are critical skills in RRR policing. Being able to talk yourself out of trouble or into the community lore enables officers to do more, and to work more effectively in ways that align with community expectations, values, and culture.

### **Talk is the best tool**

Central to good policing is the capacity for officers to be able to engage people from a range of backgrounds, and to foster interpersonal relationships based on trust and openness. Much of the training and advice around policing considers this central, irrespective of the location. Yet, police are also trained to be wary, protective, and to keep at arm's length from the community—especially the “usual suspects”, and especially in relation to safety and security. As Officer 8 (2018) identifies, talk is the best tool in an officer's apparel:

... the best tool that you've got is talking to people. All the stuff they give us, sprays and guns and batons and rubber gloves ... Some of the best things is just talk and spending the time talking to somebody because they vent. Or, without even realising, if they've told you half of it, what you want to know without even asking them questions ... Sometimes ... it falls into your lap because you've talked to somebody else, not knowing that they knew some of the story. You talk to them, and they say, “Oh, did you hear about this” or “Did you hear about that?” I said, “Yeah, I did hear a whisper about it.” Then they tell you what they know. Then you put the two bits together that you've already got. (Officer 8, 2018)

Officer 8 talked about the need to shift from an interview mode to a conversation mode with the community, and that in doing so, create a context where information may be shared more readily.

Yeah, rather than asking them questions and writing it down because people get freaked out that you're writing stuff down, think they're writing it down about you ... Leave your pen in your pocket, and just talk to them. As soon as you get down the road, get the pen out and write it down as fast as you can, even if it's just a single word. [Officer 2] and I have often done that. As soon as you get a spot to stop, you stop and write down some of the stuff they've said, and then go from there. (Officer 8, 2018)

However, as will be discussed below, sometimes the true story of an incident comes from piecing together snippets of conversations with many community members.

### Open Door policy

Despite the issues raised earlier about the complications that arise from being too visible and living in the housing provided by Tasmania Police, many officers talked about an open door policy. In observing the work of RRR officers, We found that this approach not only built trust and provided community with a “safe place” to discuss their concerns, it also enabled RRR officers to increase the community's knowledge and awareness about crime issues.

On three occasions during observation, Officer 6 was contacted by community members wanting to come in and “have a chat” about a crime matter—all three relating to domestic violence. Officer 6 let them “talk themselves out” before providing a range of strategies to address the behaviour. In the process, the community members were also provided with detailed information about their rights and responsibilities as both victims and possible offenders, and in the case of one DV victim, provided with the direct mobile phone number of the officer for use in emergencies.

This open door approach to RRR policing may increase the workloads of, and impact on, officers but it also enabled them to move upstream before an issue became a criminal matter. This open door policy was not just reserved for victims. As Officer 8 notes below, enabling people who have broken the law to seek advice may result in better outcomes for both the offender and the police.

When I was at [rural town], I made it known that ... The door was always open; you can come. In the three years there I only had three people ... [come] to the front door and said, “I've done this. How can we fix it?”. I fixed it because it kept him out of the shit. They were able to tell me what happened freely without any repercussions, and we sorted it out in one way or another ... I've said that to people here [different rural town] if you want to come and talk to me, come and talk to me. The police station door

is always open. I've never had anybody take that offer [laughs]. (Officer 8, 2018)

The capacity and willingness of community members to engage police before a matter becomes a critical issue is shaped by factors beyond the officers (including fear of retribution). As illustrated by the example provided by Officer 8, in some communities, an open door policy can avert criminal proceedings, but if the community does not feel the officer can be trusted, or there has been a long history of estranged relationships between the police and the community, the open door will be ignored.

### **Piecing together the story**

When community members do not feel safe to report crime, or to make use of the open door policy, officers are required to piece together the story from multiple conversations with the community. All officers talked about the need to educate the community about the importance to report, and spent many hours of their time talking with witnesses and victims about the critical role they played in addressing criminal behaviour. Yet, in most instances they captured the full story—often without the evidence necessary to bring charges against the suspect—from snippets of information provided by the community:

[They] don't want to make a complaint, but sometimes you need to coerce the stuff out of them so you can get to the bottom of it ... but they don't want to get involved, but they'll tell you half a story ... or they fill in the gaps, and you make sense of what it's all about ... Having been here a while, they mention names, and you go, "Yeah, I know that person." Then they start talking to you more, whereas if you don't know them, it's hard for them to relate who they're talking about. So if you kind of half know them, or you've heard that name before, then you can go "Oh, yeah, I know who that is. Oh well, they live here, don't they?" He said, "Yeah, but now they moved out." "Oh. Well, how long ago they moved?" So you put it together, and then they start. (Officer 8, 2018)

Snippets of information from different people end up painting your full picture. It probably doesn't give me enough evidence to proceed in court, or something like that, but it certainly gives me a picture of who I should be watching, and who I should be paying more attention to, as they're getting about their day. (Officer 6, 2018)

While these snippets of intelligence may not be useful in bringing charges, they do provide RRR officers with multiple opportunities to build trust with the community,

and to get a more nuanced understanding of their community and the relationships between community members.

Officer 6 (2018) also talked about the timing of these conversations and the tendency in RRR communities to delay contacting the police; not only in terms of contacting the police to report, but also in terms of giving evidence or witness statements. Delays such as these can enable community pressure and fear of retribution to ferment and lead witnesses to withdraw the complaint.

I know these people, and they [are] going to give me the goods, because I had a few chats with them, obviously, on the night that it all happened. Because it was early hours of the morning, “Okay, look we’ll touch base tomorrow. We’ll get this squared away.” Then it was. “Oh, I can’t make it” ... so it was drawn out a little bit. I think if I had of ... Not that I’m about pressuring witnesses, but if I had of said to them at the night, at the time, “Can I just grab a statement from now” they would, yeah, all day long, and I would’ve had that. I think they would have stuck by it, but given afterwards, maybe they’ve had chats with their family members and stuff like that and were worried. Then that’s what changed their mind, but I can’t help that. It’s up to them (Officer 6, 2018).

Piecing together the story—from the perspective of the victims, offenders, witnesses, bystanders—can take time, and is often the result of conversations over a long period of time. This type of crime mapping requires officers who know their communities and have the trust of those communities to manage their requested anonymity. Relationships such as these do not appear by osmosis nor do they happen naturally. There are important communication skills central to being able to do this work, and too little attention is paid by policing services about these skills when making decisions about deployments to RRR communities.

### JACK AND JILL OF ALL TRADES

As with police in urban areas, RRR police are often the only service available 24/7/365. However, this lack of alternatives is heightened in RRR communities, where police may be the *only* government service in town, irrespective of the day or time. For Officer 7, this means that RRR police are required to become Jacks and Jills of all trades.

We deal with very weird, like just strange—not always policing matters. There’s a lot of community things that just aren’t police matters, and you have to learn to deal with those as police anyway because that’s what the community expects of you ...

Interviewer: Mm-hmm, and there's no other service.

That's right, yeah. So you end up being a lot of things. You put on a lot of hats, so you do have to I guess have that skill, and yeah, just a lot of patience I find. Because it's not like the city where you can just go out and lock them up, and kick them next door to the remand centre and then your hands are washed. (Officer 7, 2020)

Further, Officer 7 notes the frustration they experience when community members deal with criminal issues themselves but come to the police with non-policing matters:

It can be frustrating sometimes because they deal with everything themselves, and some things yeah really, they should've really come for help. So you end up dealing with these people that they're not police issues and you probably shouldn't be dealing with it. But then you hear of this other stuff and you think well no, that really is a police matter. We could've helped you. But yeah, it's strange. It's a strange dynamic in [rural town]. (Officer 7, 2020)

Being a Jack/Jill of all trades also means that sometimes RRR officers engage in pastoral work that would be normally covered by other professionals in the city. Earlier in this report, we noted the encounter Officer 1 had with the elderly mother of a victim of a fatal accident, where he considered the time they spent after the death notice doing pastoral care was central to what he had framed as "police business". Likewise, he narrated an incident he witnessed with another RRR officer when he was temporarily deployed to this officer's island town:

As far as policies and procedures and all that sort of stuff goes, he [rural officer] might not be spot-on ... We're working together, and he's caught a feeder fish. We're going up to the north end of ... [the] island, and he's given this 88-year-old woman a feeder fish. There was about I think three people he dropped ... Old people, he'll go give them some fish that he catches. Anyone that knocks on his door, "Come in for a glass of wine. Come in for food". He's a country boy anyway, but he does it well. ... he just does such a good job in that community in that they all know him. They all love him, generally speaking. He's involved with the SES. He'd do anything for anyone. There's not a lot of [like him] around. (Officer 1, 2018)

As noted previously, some RRR officers thought it was critical to get involved in local community activities, while others were reticent about integrating too much into a community. However, most talked about the thin line between being a good

neighbour and being a good officer, and for Officer 5 that means embedding themselves into community activities and meeting the community's non-policing needs.

... [you] have the time to listen to what people have got to say. Get involved in your community I think is an important thing. It goes back to the volunteering. I personally think every police officer should ... be on something yeah, yeah. I just think it's a really good thing to do. You just have a completely different feel and understanding for both other volunteers you're working with but also when you're in your professional role you have a different mindset and understanding. (Officer 5, 2018)

Feeding his community is not policing, but engaging with the community—whether formal volunteering, or just dropping off a few fish he has caught—fundamentally shifts the relationships between RRR police and their communities. Rather than a symbol of the state's authority, these types of RRR officers are perceived by their communities as advocates and good neighbours.

#### **Confidence but also confidence to know when you do not know**

Often junior officers choose to take up a RRR deployment early in their careers for financial or promotion reasons. Yet their newfound confidence as a police officer can also be a barrier in undertaking their work.

So, out of that, I learned that don't count your chickens before they hatch. When people ask me, for me, I was so confident in myself that they were going to come to me with the information. They were, yes, had [an] appointment and everything to come in and to give me that. Then just at the last minute, they decided not to. So, all these other people had come in. I went, "Yeah, look, I know who it is. We should get a win out of this." I was confident. What I learned there was just don't say anything until I have this person, and he will be sent to court, or whatever it might be. (Officer 6, 2018)

As Officer 6 found in the early days of his deployment to a RRR posting, before an officer can be confident in their actions, they need to know and understand the community dynamics and how existing relationships between community members may inhibit formal action. This confidence in themselves and in their communities requires time to foment. Short deployments and moving officers into and out of communities can forestall this important work, and lead to less effective policing.



As noted throughout this section, there are unique skills and capabilities required of police in RRR communities. Applications to work in RRR communities are difficult to elicit, and at times, Tasmania Police are required to mandate an officer's deployment to one of these communities. The shortage of willing officers further hinders the capacity of Tasmania Police to deploy the right type of people, with the right mix of skills and capabilities for RRR policing. At the very least, additional training at recruit and promotion level may assist Tasmania Police to identify the right candidates for RRR postings. Yet, it may also promote RRR deployments as a career pathway for the right type of officers.

## CHAPTER 6: RRR POLICING STRATEGIES

Policing strategies are framed as universal strategies to be deployed no matter the context. Yet, what has been documented thus far in this report, clearly indicates that policing in rural, regional, and remote communities requires different policing strategies. In this section, these alternative approaches to policing in RRR communities are considered in detail, especially as they relate to discretion, command and control, co-production, and community policing.

As well as being Jacks and Jills of all trades, RRR police also need to be able to deploy their “fluffy” skills to work with the community even after an altercation or policing intervention. Unlike city police whose “hands are washed” (Officer 7) after a suspect is detained, RRR police must work with the tension of engaging with the community in their everyday lives outside of work and engaging the same people when they have detained or arrested. They also need to weigh the consequences of pursuing a matter with a suspect, as it often requires an officer to travel away from their communities in order to arrest and process the suspect. As Officer 7 identifies:

... we've got a lot of challenges, I would call them. If we lock someone up long term we have to drive up to [rural city], as I'm sure that people have told you, that we have to transport that far and leaving the community obviously without police. You see them the next day. You're the one who ends up going to court with them, and yeah, it can be quite awkward (Officer 7, 2020).

Not only are RRR officers removed from community when they pursue these arrests, they must also manage the long awkward drive to and from the city, and the everyday contacts they have with offenders in the days after the long drive to town. This extra contact between RRR police and offenders can change the relationship significantly—and for the better or worse.

As noted by Officer 4, developing a personal strategy with how they engage with community and making this clear to the community ensures that effort is not wasted, that the “soft touch” is used when appropriate, and that the community understands the line that cannot be crossed. For some officers, the line was family violence, or others, it was driving whilst drunk or drug affected. For Officer 4, there was a better way of doing things:

So I think there's a better way of us doing it ... making it part of the fabric of how you go around weaving your way in between the different societal groups and going about your business. Patrol hours, having the police car sitting out there. Most the new coppers that come through these country stations are doing their exams and ... spend most their time sitting at the station doing their units' assessments for uni and then piss off and the police cars have barely been seen around the town. The people like to see the police cars, the good people. (Officer 4, 2020)

Officer 4's strategy was to be seen and to engage the community irrespective of the matters they raise. He noted that often the community wanted him to address minor matters of incivility, and all he wanted to do was ignore the "petty bullshit" and get on with making his community safer. But this strategy does not work in RRR communities, where unaddressed incivility can flourish into interpersonal violence. His strategy was to let people talk themselves out and to keep focussed not on the pettiness of the matters brought to his attention but on the "... impact on the people and try and treat them as a human" (Officer 4, 2020). This approach "pays rewards"; maybe not today or tomorrow but over the long term, and having time for "petty bullshit" contextualises the lives of his community.

## DISCRETION

A critical factor in the strategy deployed by Officer 4—and other RRR officers—is discretion. All police have a certain level of discretion for crime matters; even if, in some types of violence, a policing response is mandated. As noted above, when a suspect is detained, RRR officers must transport them to the closest city for processing. In some cases, this trip to the city is a five-hour return journey. Finding alternative ways to get a problem solved—or at least, deferred until a more suitable time—is critical to their capacity to respond to the needs of the community. Travelling for five hours in one day means that the community is without a policing presence or police response for extended periods of time. Even if a colleague in their hub town can take over a local matter whilst the officer drives to the city, this is often at least an hour away, and that team member is now trying to cover two towns.

Using their discretion wisely can also mean that mandated action is averted. For example, as Officer 2 notes in relation to family violence:

If you think family violence has occurred and you haven't got the power to arrest them ... we have an unwritten rule ... when we go out, we're not leaving here without taking one of them away even if it's just for the night to a mate's house ... So for that night ... "We'll do this and we'll do this and tomorrow's another day. You can't resolve all your problems but for the

moment you're safe, you're safe, you're not going to do something that you regret" ... That's not saying we're taking you away because you're in trouble because you're not making good decisions at the moment. We're going to stop you making a decision that means our hands are tied and we're going to [have to act]. (Officer 2, 2018)

But equally, "[o]nce you start getting a little bit grey they'll be somebody who will just take advantage of it" (Officer 2, 2018). Knowing when it is safe to divert suspects away from criminal justice processes and knowing when there is simply no other option, not only requires a clear understanding of the law, but also an embedded understanding of their community. Helping community members not to make the wrong decision, and preventing harm and crime is central to RRR policing. So too, though, is an awareness of how too much discretion can harm the community and themselves—whether professionally, psychologically, or physically.

Officer 7 notes that sometimes discretion is necessary for the community optics and politics. A large part of being a RRR officer in Tasmania is to liaise between the forestry industry and the anti-logging protestors. Officer 7 suggests that "soft kid gloves" are required to manage the fraught relationships between industry and community over logging, and sometimes that means "... a lot of summonses rather than arrests". Officer 7 was aware that money talks, and that:

[t]hey're hard-line in the sense that they won't allow disruption... It's a business. A lot of the protestors, they want their media grabs, so a lot of them actually move on once they get that. So they're not actually trouble. They're not too much trouble. There's very few that have to be arrested... We don't want things like – Well, obviously, Bob Brown being arrested... We don't want that screengrab that makes us all look horrible. So we do our best to just move people on peacefully, and give them a lot of chances, a lot, a lot of chances, mm-hmm (Officer 7, 2020).

Finding the right balance is difficult; if officers are seen to privilege the economic wellbeing of companies (and the local workers who are employed in the industry) over the rights of other Tasmanians (some of whom may also be locals) then the matter can quickly become front page news.

It also means having a "thick skin". Officer 1 (2018) was greeted by a community member with, "what do you cunts want?". Knowing his community, and knowing what this person meant that he was able to ignore the comment as he knew that there was no offence meant— "that's the way he talks". In the city, officers "...would lock him up for speaking like that" (Officer 1, 2018) as they may not know their

communities as well and may not understand the cultural context where this type of language was acceptable. However, as noted above, there is a line that once crossed, the response will be with the full weight of the law, no matter the damage to community relations.

For Officer 1, that line had to do with driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. In relation to these matters, Officer 1 illustrated the strategy used by RRR officers when deploying discretion.

... as long as you're consistent across the board and people know where they stand, then they can't have any complaints. So if you want to be a copper that goes in and hammers everyone, then that's fine ... then you got to be consistent with it. You can't let a mate go. As soon as you do that, then they'll be all over you, and you get a really bad reputation. Whereas, I've got a basic attitude where it's like if you want to go and have a couple of beers and drive home, fine. If you get pissed and drive, then you're fair game. (Officer 1, 2018)

Officer 1 had this exact situation play out with an older woman who was driving whilst affected by new medication. She was not far from home but had a child in the back seat. Instead of charging her and then needing to identify a responsible adult to take custody of the child, the officer instead contacted the woman's partner to come and pick them up. Using discretion with the full knowledge of the consequences for (not) taking action was a dangerous decision that may not have been supported by his superior officer. For Officer 1, however, he had assessed that this was not deliberate action to drive drug affected, but warned her and her partner that the registration number was noted in his book and that if she was caught again driving under influence then he would take further action to arrest and charge her. This strategy is only possible in RRR communities where people are known to each other, where the contexts of people's lives are known, and where the follow up in cases of recidivism is relatively easy because everyone knows everyone.

RRR officers constantly walk a tightrope, especially as it relates to discretion. Too much discretion and matters can escalate beyond the control of the officer. Not enough discretion, and the community will close down and not engage the police when required. The use of discretion can save lives, but can also put officers in a position with the community where they feel indebted. This was the case for Officer 4, who was supported by community members when an outlaw motorcycle gang had targeted him in the local pub. "... you think oh, shit, thank God for that. Am I going to have to let all these guys off for speeding now because they've backed me up at the pub ... have I compromised myself?" (Officer 4, 2020).

## COMMAND & CONTROL

Policing strategies devised for city conditions may not work that well in RRR towns. Command and control strategies, such as hot spot policing (especially in relation to driving offences), or targeted policing, such as that conducted by many RRR officers around safety equipment for bike riders, can be just as problematic as the inappropriate use of discretion. As noted by Officer 4 (2020):

If the town's been running too good for a long time... they just get a bit antsy about you being around all the time and just maybe pulling them over for small things.

Several officers talked about their commitment to safe roads and driving as central to their work in RRR communities; but they also reported that the community often becomes critical of their work when they engage in RBTs or speed checks, preferring instead that they focus their attention on “real crime”.

In communities with a small degree of separation, the need for command and control strategies are significantly reduced. Instead, the propinquitous relationships between community members is normally sufficient to compel behaviour change. As Officer 7 notes:

... a mistake that some people have made is to come here and tear stuff up and just start arresting people, and it doesn't work out long term for them at all. Even though they're just doing their job, yeah, there's definitely soft kid gloves that go on. (Officer 7, 2020)

This “soft kid gloves” approach was raised consistently in relation to driving offences. Often RRR officers talked about how their approach to driving and vehicle offences differed from those in the city, where community ties and affinity is significantly reduced.

Knowing their communities, and knowing the context of their lives, led to high levels of empathy and care for the outcomes of their actions. For example, Officer 1 contrasted his approach to that of another officer he knew:

... I put this guy in a category of being born with a silver spoon, and his attitude was “I'm going to pull every shit box car over and book the shit out of everyone”. I thought, “well, why would you do that?” Just because somebody's driving in an unregistered car doesn't mean they're a scumbag. It might mean that they're broke and they can't afford to do it. So you give them a \$300 fine, and they've still got to register their car ... so

you're just creating a further problem. It's not as simple as that either.  
(Officer 1, 2018)

## COMMUNITY POLICING

In urban environments, community policing was developed as a strategy to increase the involvement of community in safety and wellbeing, and in many respects, was an attempt to replicate the propinquitous relationships that are thought to exist automatically in RRR communities. Some officers took a more formal approach to engaging community in RRR towns by involving themselves in community activities and organisations. Yet, few RRR officers believed that traditional community policing would address the gap.

Community policing models where you have to go to a school a certain amount of hours and stuff like that, I don't know if there's a lot of reward in that. That's got to be down to the people. You can send a copper into a school and get negative results out it. So I think there's a better way of us doing it. (Officer 4, 2020)

Formal engagement activities often associated with community policing approaches seemed redundant to RRR officers given the significant level of daily engagement they had with their communities.

Over time, with snippets of information consolidated into the full story of the community, officers are enabled to make informal interventions early to ensure community members are diverted from criminal behaviour. For example, Officer 5 (2018) suggests that:

We can actually spend a lot more time with people generally. Sometimes and I'd see it on a regular basis down here as well where the police officers that work from this station live in the community. They know families, they see, say younger teenagers ... that might be going off the rail a little. And they know ... that they are good kids just a bad choice or choices and influence. And they know that they can spend that extra bit of time with them to try and steer them in the right path. And I've seen some great successes down here in my time where our police officers have spent that extra time and effort with the kids with their families and stuff like that. In Hobart while working in those areas you just don't have the time to do that. (Officer 5, 2018)

City police do not have the luxury or capacity to get to know their communities sufficiently well enough to know that they have the community's support. RRR

communities engage their officers in the café at lunch, at the bank, post office, or just by waving down the officer when they are patrolling. This propinquity offsets the need for formal community policing strategies developed by and for city communities.

Officer 2 (2018) narrated an incident that best illustrates this everyday form of community policing:

... just yesterday it really dawned on me. I was coming home from coming up the town to get my tablet replaced ... And I was heading back I stopped at [regional town] to get some fuel and I was like “oh I’m just looking forward to getting home”. It was going to half past six—well now it’s ten to seven oh I’ll be home in ten minutes. And I see a fellow there he pulled up and I know he wanted to talk to me. I know who he is. His gun safe’s all up to scratch and a good bloke. And I said “I just want to go.” So I chatted to him and organised that [gun safe check] for Sunday. And I was about to get into my car and another fellow comes over to me. I said “Oh yeah I recognise him.” Again it was something about his gun safe that happened some time ago and he was just having a bit of a chat about it, it’s all sorted or whatever. And so I thought to myself particularly in relation to what we’ve been doing I’m getting fuel in the police car they’ll come and talk to me. They don’t stop to think (and why should they) that he’s probably tired he wants to go home he’s probably working police work all the time. I’ll just let him know what I’m doing. (Officer 2, 2018)

The preventative work done over the petrol bowser goes unrecorded and would not be perceived by Tasmania Police as “community policing”, but in the 15 minutes at the end of a busy day, this officer was able to engage community members about gun safety, and possibly avert bigger problems later. Similarly, Officer 3 noted that “Yeah, they just want to see you doing the shopping at 10:00 a.m. on a Saturday morning. They won’t even necessary approach you”. Simply being present in the community has a ripple effect on the community, and demonstrates clearly that they are part of the community and easily available if needed for a policing matter.

Being available and being present for the community, no matter their needs, is central to the success of RRR officers. City police make time to meet with communities to hear their views on specific matters, but rarely do they have the time to “let them talk themselves out”. Officer 6 notes that:

There’s 24 hours in a day. I would just let that person say or whatever it is they need to say, whereas I think our previous officer would let them say what he needed them to say, “Okay, that’s all you need to say. That’s all I



need for me to go down this track to do whatever needs to be done”. Whereas I would sit back, and if they want to start having a chat about their childhood, and ... All of it, I mean probably not ... and tell the whole story, then I’m more than happy just to sit there and listen to that, ask questions. You’re learning about them. They’re getting everything off their chest. I think with that approach you solve a lot of issues right there and then, and also get to know the community, who you’re working with, or for. (Officer 6, 2018)

Having the time to get to know the community, and to understand the wider social and historical contexts of the community reduces the need for formal community policing strategies because RRR officers are available and have the time to do this as part of their everyday job.

Officer 2 noted that while it would not be recognised or rewarded—and may even be considered excessive—their capacity to engage and monitor the community before a problem arises is rarely even considered as policing work. For Officer 2, the knowledge of their community enabled them to engage in policing strategies not available to city police. For example, they spoke of doing a “drive-by” to ensure that a person they know has been disqualified from driving is not in fact driving around the community:

You don’t get a statistic for driving up and down a person’s driveway in the middle of the night ... Or even if you’re thinking I’ll come back on for an hour and I’ll just drive down there and back because I think that’s when he might see me. You don’t get a statistic, but my motivation too is I’ve had to tell someone their loved one is dead and it’s shit. And if my actions can stop him driving and killing somebody else and stopping either me or one of my colleagues having to do that job that’s why if anyone says you’re picking on me and stuff. Because of all those reasons I say “Yep I am.” (Officer 2, 2018).

The breadth of “community policing” and preventative policing in RRR communities far exceeds that of city police primarily because of the close connections between the police and their communities, even when the community may think that they are monitored too closely. Being present and seen does the work of ‘community policing’ without the extra hours needed to attend and participate in formal community policing groups, such as Neighbourhood Watch and Farm Watch.

As Officer 3 identifies, being available to the community, and taking the time to engage them socially means that

... if people have a gripe, it's far easier that they can knock on your door rather than ministerial that goes through the Commissioner's Office, back down ... It's a lot easier form of policing too when people can knock on your door ... If you put in some hours there, you could save years of actual police effort, so there's no waste of effort. (Officer 3, 2018)

RRR communities may still have local groups that focus on building the capacity to co-produce safety, but the need for the involvement of RRR officers in this work is significantly reduced. When “community policing” is an everyday part of the job, RRR communities are better prepared and more willing to co-produce safety.

## CO-PRODUCTION

Community policing is often adopted to engage communities in co-producing safety in their communities. But the lack of propinquity within city communities and the lack of propinquity with their police officers can reduce the opportunities for formalised community policing programs to shift to co-production of safety. But for RRR officers, this shared model of responsibility for safety is fostered simply by being present and available. Trust is not something that has to be orchestrated by formal encounters with community because trust is elicited by being “one of us”, and being present for community when they need police. Officer 6 told his community that he was “a tool for you to use. This is our community. Yes, I'm the police officer, but you need to use me to solve the issues that you have.” So I'm not I'm not here to do it on my own. It's your town”. Understanding that the police need the community as much as the community needs the police was raised by many of the officers who participated in this research.

For some RRR officers, being able to “deputise” community members was critical to the extreme conditions of their work and the isolation of some communities. RRR officers talked of utilising community members present at traffic accidents because “... I can't clear a road and stop traffic 2km away with my OC spray and a torch” (Officer 4, 2020). Deputising the community can empower them and assist police:

when shit happens ... when a serious incident happens and it is impacting at a wide scale, you need those members of community to help you have a good outcome, reduce the impact on the community. And the more the community works with you, that has an affect that they've done something positive towards that incident and so that reduces harm for them as well. So if you've got a fatal accident and you're giving guys jobs there, rather than them standing around and feel like they're useless, they're doing stuff so it's double-edged sword there and it's a win-win that those guys can help. (Officer 4, 2020)

Other RRR officers talked about the importance of community members looking out for their neighbours after a DFV incident, and their critical role in BOLO for future violence. Officer 4 narrated an incident, which would have ended very differently if he did not have the assistance of the community:

Like that day we had a boat rescue in shithouse weather and YYYY's reasonably seaworthy local ... I didn't have any crew here because of the cutbacks at the station. Needed to do this really quickly and YYYY's son-in-law works in the fish farms so I've got two crew. I can enable this rescue if we get out there. ... We got out there and it was only because we were quite fast ... that we found a boat that was ten miles away from its last reported position and going like hell in this 40 knot breeze the other way. Another 10 or 15 minutes we wouldn't have found it ...a bloke and a young boy rescued that day because I was able to call instantly and had resources that I know that were reliable and good... I could trust. As I'm running, I'm on the phone to the inspector... [and he] says, "What are you doing?" I said, "We're going to go and save some people." "Is it rough?" "Yes, it's bloody rough." "Where's the coppers?" "There are none. These guys are coming. They're seaworthy. They have fish farm experience and they are safer than any of the crew I could get for the police here, anyway." "Oh. OK. He thinks that the police are the people that do the rescues because ... we're supposed to be so cool but we're not. Those guys are better ... than any of the constables (Officer 4, 2020).

Knowing the skills and capacities of their communities is an artefact of the propinquitous relationships some RRR officers foster. Being able to "deputise" trusted community members can, as in this case, make a significant difference to the outcomes, and to the sense that RRR officers are supported by communities that are both capable and empowered to co-produce safety. Despite the advantages of RRR policing, and the ways in which RRR police can use their discretion to build community capacity to co-produce safety, there are many pitfalls and problems in walking the fine line between being a good officer and a good member of the community.

## CHAPTER 7: PITFALLS AND PROBLEMS OF RRR POLICING

The tyranny of distance is a repeated theme throughout the interviews and observations of RRR officers, as it is in the research literature on rural crime and policing. As noted in the literature review, the “rural horror” of crime points to the one form of propinquity that is missing in RRR policing. Proximal propinquity is an artefact of geographic closeness, and of communities who tread the same paths each day and know the people who live in their street, or on their block. In rural Tasmania, the distances between neighbours far exceeds anything city police need to grapple with, and distance complicates not only policing responses, but also the capacity and willingness for victims to engage police. RRR officers often talked about the DFV that often goes unnoticed until it results in serious harm or homicide. These crimes are inconspicuous because there is no neighbour to hear the violence, and no easy and quick escape route for victims.

Tyranny of distance, however, also hampered RRR officers to be present in their communities, which ripples across the community to create a sense that local police do not care. Policing strategies adopted with city police in mind can forestall RRR officers to be what their communities needed them to be, which generates hesitancy and an unwillingness to engage. The vicious cycle between closeness and distance, where officers are only as good as their “last yes” and (perceived) absence enables distrust to permeate, means that RRR officers feel that they are constantly failing either their community, their families, and/or Tasmania Police. The tyranny of distance, and RRR officers’ absence from their communities because of distance, was identified by participants as a determining factor in their willingness to remain in RRR deployments, in part, because of the impact their job has on their families.

### THE TYRANNY OF DISTANCE

The tyranny of distance for RRR officers impacted their capacity to be present for their communities, created isolation that contributed to unresolved trauma, and made some policing strategies unworkable. As Officer 8 identifies, unlike other Australian states, Tasmania Police are fortunate in that “... there’s nowhere to go in Tasmania ... people hide, but if they run, there’s nowhere to run to”, however, “... while 18 or 22 Ks doesn’t sound very far, it’s a long windy road ... the tyranny of distance can be a big barrier to patrolling areas when there’s only one of you (Officer 8 2018). As noted previously, RRR Officers in Tasmania are required to transport detainees from rural communities to their closest city for processing and overnight detention. They are also required to deploy and multi-response team when called to an incident involving

interpersonal violence; especially, in the case of DFV. Being alone, and leaving the community alone without an officer, played on the minds of the RRR officers constantly. Strategies adopted by Tasmania Police to offset the dangers and pitfalls of single officer patrols were considered by some RRR officers to make the job harder, even if it protected their safety and wellbeing.

### Single officer stations and distance

Both community members and RRR officers talked often about the advantages and disadvantages of single officer patrols. For the communities with only one officer, the presence of that one officer is critical, and often, the only government service in town. When promoting the research to communities, for example, I was regularly contacted to ask whether this research was to provide evidence to Tasmania Police that the single officer in their town was not going to be redeployed and the station closed. For RRR officers in single patrols, there was a tension between “being your own boss, in effect” (Officer 6, 2020) but also, “[y]ou don’t think of it when you first go to the job, but once things start to get dicey you do start thinking, yeah OK, I probably do need that second person” (Officer 7, 2020).

Officer 7 noted that while communities wanted to retain their single officer (and police station), which was “fair enough” as “I can see why communities would be upset about [closing single officer stations]—I don’t necessarily think that that needs to happen, but maybe just a second officer in that town (Officer 7, 2020). Many of the officers in single officer patrols defended the community’s need for a local station and suggested that while there are some “hairy moments” (Officer 4, 2020), not having an officer in town would mean that the propinquitous policing that happens as part of everyday life in those towns would cease. Being present averts crime escalating and removing this one point of support from resource-poor RRR communities may deepen the “rural horror” of rural crime. Many RRR officers thought the closing of single officer stations was inevitable; if not now, then as a consequence of “... people get[ting] relaxed about it, and that’s when they get into trouble ... (Officer 7, 2020). Officer 7 was clear that they believed that single officer patrols would be phased out because “I don’t think it’s safe, full stop. I don’t think it’s a gender thing. I think it’s just not safe”.

Bruny Island and Flinders Island were mentioned by officers even though neither island was included in this study. Some cherished the opportunities adhered to these deployments as it enabled them to get to know and work closely with these communities. But they also saw these deployments as a case study in how things can go wrong so easily with these remote postings. In speaking about the need for multi-member response teams, Officer 7 (2020) noted that:

... it surprises me a lot that Bruny Island has only one. That's ridiculous. I find that totally ridiculous ... Well, if something big happened there, you would literally have to get a chopper in ... that would be the quickest response you can get ... And I just think that's crazy. ... It seems crazy to me that we would allow one person to be in charge. And I understand that it won't become an issue until something happens, but something's going to happen.

The island context of RRR policing was perceived as both an asset and a problem with many pitfalls. Officer 1 (2018) reminisced about "... a bit a stint, somewhere like Bruny Island". But that deployments such as Bruny Island should be term limited because of "[t]hat feeling of isolation when that last ferry goes. I don't know ... Even on your days off, you can't, you can't leave the place (Officer 1, 2018).

### **Multi-response team and distance**

Most single officer patrols are supported by a hub town, where more officers are based and can be deployed to support single officers with violent incidents, especially DFV. However, depending on the circumstance, and the distance between the single officer, the incident, and the hub town, it could be up to two hours before sufficient officers to arrive for a multi-member response. As the adage goes, occupational health and safety rules are written in blood, and this strategy was devised because of the times when single officers responded and were harmed or injured. To avert the possibility of an officer dying during a response to violent incidents, Tasmania Police have instituted the two-person rule. It is sound policy but, in practice, it is difficult for RRR officers to concede when faced with a call for help from a woman being assaulted by her partner on a remote property. One RRR officer stated that while they have not yet been forced to make this decision, they had a policy of attending the scene with his "blues and twos" on whilst waiting for the multi-member response team, and if they witnessed any violence, they would intervene irrespective of when their back up was due to arrive.

Officer 1 (2018) narrated a similar, though more extreme pitfall, arising out of the multi-member response teams. In this case, Bruny Island was again provided as a case study of the inadequacies of this approach to protecting the safety of RRR officers. The RRR officer based alone on the island was required to deploy the multi-response team due to an altercation at the caravan park. Officer 1 noted that the offenders would not leave when asked by the owner of the park, and because it involved violence, the Bruny Island officer was required to call for back up. By that time in the evening, the ferry was not running, so:

The job ended up going for hours, and they got the helicopter down there ... No, actually, they had to can that. They ended up getting the boat down because the weather was too bad [for the helicopter]. But the cost involved with this one job, by the time they got down there it was about 5 o'clock in the morning ... [Bruny Island officer] goes round and deals with it in five minutes, and it was all over Red Rover ... There's always going to be that exception that they're trying to cover, but, yeah, sometimes you get the ability to use your common sense taken away ... (Officer 1, 2018)

The rules on multi-member response teams are clear and laudable but RRR officers felt conflicted about not responding immediately to a critical incident. They were conflicted not only because they felt complicit in the violence but also because failing to act immediately to such a critical incident would ripple out to the whole community and damage the trust and propinquitous relationships fostered. When questioned about what other strategies could be adopted to address this gap between rules and practices, some officers talked of “flying squads” deployed to hub towns, whose only job is to provide back up in critical incidents. As noted by Officer 7 (2020), there “... used to be something like that [flying squad]. I've heard of something like that, but I've never seen it, so I don't know if it's one of those pipe dreams or something (Officer 7, 2020).

In theory, this is what the hub stations are meant to provide, but as these they have their own crime problems—often too many even for the extra staffing allocated to hub towns—single officer patrols were required to call on the assistance of other single officer patrols. This stretched the resourcing for RRR communities beyond breaking point, especially when staff were on rostered days off or personal leave. At one point during observations, there was a single officer covering not only their expansive patrol area but that of two other patrol areas because one officer was on sick leave, and the other on annual leave; neither of which were backfilled. This officer was concerned that he—let alone, the multi-member response team—would not get to a critical incident in time. This latent fear was obvious and shared by most of the RRR officers who participated in this research. When combined with the significant trauma that all officers encounter as part of their job (which is amplified for RRR officers who know and care for their community), this fear can become embedded and is likely to contribute to the high level of vicarious trauma and PTSD carried by RRR officers in this project.

### **Transport of suspects**

Just as with the multi-member response team, the rules about not detaining suspects in RRR stations and transporting them to the closest city was raised consistently

across the research sites. While some larger hub towns are able to detain people for a limited time and can draw on the resources of local health services, in some cases, suspects needed to be transported simply to have a forensic nurse collect blood for a drug or alcohol test. Officer 7 (2020) notes that they have:

... a cell but it's not compliant, so we can't actually hold them. There are ways around it. We sometimes have to just—If someone's just a drunk or something you can find ways of holding them just until they're sober. But for the most part, yeah, they go to [the city] or you find some other alternative. There's a lot of arrests by appointment ... [We] figure out when is a good time for them, and then you take them up. (Officer 7, 2020)

In Officer 7's patrol area they have access to a forensic nurse, and make use of saliva tests when the suspect's drug or alcohol use has not harmed anyone (i.e., in case of violence stemming from alcohol or drug use). But “[i]f it was a victim, and we're talking sexual assault or something like that, no, we would probably go to the city” (Officer 7, 2020). Policing strategies and regulations devised for the resource-rich context of city policing clearly have their disadvantages when applied to the context of RRR policing.

In a case narrated by Officer 8, where a child had been killed in a traumatic farming accident, the father who had been driving the farm equipment was taken away from his grieving family (and leaving his wife alone with their dead child) and driven to Hobart for a blood alcohol test. At the most critical point in the grieving process, this father was taken from the scene for three hours, and was not present when his child's body was removed by ambulance staff. The child's grandparents, who were interviewed, stated that they would never forgive Tasmania Police for what they perceived as being an uncaring response to this trauma. Two years after this incident—when both the grandparents and the first responder<sup>2</sup> were interviewed—all parties were still highly traumatised by this incident and the policing response mandated by Tasmania Police.

## THE POLICE FAMILY

A related factor to the tyranny of distance was the impact of RRR deployments on the families of officers. Some RRR officers had partners also serving with Tasmania Police, which raised issues about rosters and working together. However, it was officers with non-policing partners, and officers with children, that raised a variety of issues that are not considered by either the officer when accepting the posting, or Tasmania Police in supporting that deployment. The toll of policing on families of police officers was

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<sup>2</sup> Who was a RRR officer from another patrol covering this area due to leave that was not backfilled.



not the focus of this study, but was raised consistently by participants—as well as some community members. In single officer patrols, officers are on call except for their rostered days off; and sometimes even when they are meant to be on leave or rostered days off. RRR Officers are paid in excess of their similarly ranked peers in the city for the inconvenience of being on call, but monetary reward rarely helps families manage the fluctuating patterns of RRR officers' workloads. Some officers talked about the impact on simple things like dinner with the family, or trying to get to sleep after a long overnight incident when their children just wanted to play, or their partner just needed to clean the house. However, there were other matters for which monetary reward would never fully compensate for the negative consequences of being a RRR officer.

One RRR officer with young children had made the decision during the time of the research to seek a redeployment back to the hub town due to issues with safety of the police house attached to the station. As noted previously, RRR community members were not good at recognising the impact of always being available, and would often knock on the police house door if they received no response at the station. The RRR officer may have been on patrol, or on leave, or even a rostered day off, but the proximal propinquity of the house to the station meant that the community had no hesitations in crossing the line between home and work. For this officer, that propensity of community to enter the property when they got no response at the station went a step too far. As noted earlier, this officer's young daughter answered the door to find a drunk, belligerent and abusive man, which frightened her so much that she was constantly afraid of this man coming back to hurt her. The line between home and work, for this officer, was too flexible.

Similarly, another RRR officer and their partner were unprepared for being constantly "on show", and to have their everyday lives open to such extreme levels of surveillance by the community. As with Officer 3, who had identified that a neighbour had a telescope aimed at their police house, Officer 8 had made the decision to retain their family home in the city, and relocated on rostered days off and personal leave in order to have some privacy. For many RRR officers, the costs of RRR postings were borne disproportionately by their families, especially as their children aged out of primary school, and needed to travel out of town (or board) for high school. A related issue for the police family was the assumption embedded in carer's and paternity/maternity leave provision offered by Tasmania Police that RRR officers were men with a family architecture that precluded them from needing to be present for their families. In one case, the premature birth of a second child left their partner requiring long-term hospitalisation, which left no one to care for their other child. In this case, because of the context of RRR deployments, the officer was not granted carer's or paternity leave

to look after their toddler. This family, already distanced by hospitalisation, were required to transport their toddler to grandparents on the mainland, where he stayed until his mother was released from hospital.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The problems and pitfalls of RRR policing are significant, especially in light of the budget pressures faced by Tasmania Police. Crime rates in many RRR communities are lower than in the city, and single officer patrols are perceived as being sufficient to address what crime does occur. However, as illustrated throughout this report, their presence in RRR communities—and officers' propinquitous relationships to their communities—can divert people from criminal offending before it becomes a matter for conventional police intervention. Fewer RRR stations may reduce the staffing and infrastructure costs but may equally increase the costs and consequences of crime in these communities. The balance between these competing interests leaves RRR officers in the middle of a tussle between Tasmanian Police and the communities they serve. Sometimes this tussle leaves officers feeling complicit because they are not authorised to act (alone), but at the same time, RRR officers know all too well of the costs when situations escalate beyond their control alone.

As noted in the Executive Summary and Recommendations, the problems with adequately resourcing RRR patrols will not go away on their own. Building the capacity of Tasmanian Police officers, and their families, to make informed choices about whether to accept a RRR posting—with full knowledge of the possible problems and pitfalls—will reduce the number of deployments in and out of RRR communities due to the wrong fit for these roles. Police officers play a significant role in rural, regional, and remote communities, and are sometimes the only government service in these towns. RRR officers are often required to take on roles and duties that city police never have to consider. This means there are core skills and competencies that are fundamental to the success of these deployments. Finding the right people to undertake RRR policing will be essential in maintaining the trust of communities and responding to the unique and local crime and safety issues of RRR communities.

The “production line” in city policing means that urban police are rarely called on to do the work of fostering and maintaining the wellbeing of the community. In the city, there are other services within and outside of Tasmania Police that are responsible for this work. RRR officers do not have this luxury, and despite the “rural idyll” that beckons them from the verandah of the police house, the close and propinquitous relationships with community can be costly to individual officers even when they are an asset for the organisation. Understanding the limits of propinquitous policing, and knowing the impact these roles have on RRR officers, is critical in the development of an evidence-based approach to policing outside of the city.

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## APPENDIX A—CAREER HISTORY INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### Birth and Early Life

1. When were you born?
2. Where were you born?
3. What is your earliest memory?
4. Is your family close?
5. Has your sense of family changed since becoming an adult?
6. What do you remember most about growing up?
7. What would you say was the most significant event in your childhood?
8. What was the most trouble you were ever in as a teenager?
9. Did you have an encounter with the police as a child as a witness, victim or offender?
10. If so, how did that experience shape your ideas about policing?

### Cultural Setting and Traditions

11. What is the ethnic or cultural background of your parents?
12. Was culture and/or religion an important part of your family life? In what ways?
13. Was your culture/religion important in your beliefs about the law and policing?
14. Was your family different from other families in your neighbourhood?
15. What beliefs or ideals do you think your parents tried to teach you?
16. Was respect for the police an important value in your family?

### Inner Life and Spiritual Awareness

17. What primary beliefs guide your life?
18. Do you have a concept of God or a higher power?

19. Do you feel you have an inner strength?
20. Do you feel you are in control of your life?
21. Do you feel at peace with yourself?

### Education

22. What is your first memory of attending school?
23. Did you enjoy school?
24. What are your best memories of school?
25. What are your worst memories of school?
26. How far did you go with your formal education?
27. What did you learn about yourself during these years?
28. Did you go to a school in your community?

### Community

29. Did you grow up in a close community?
30. Were you able to get help from people other than your family when growing up?
31. Do you currently live in a close community?
32. Do you know your neighbours?
33. Have you shared meals with your neighbours?
34. Do ask your neighbours to help out when you plan to be away?
35. Do your neighbours have a copy of your house keys?
36. Would you trust your neighbours to look after your children or infirmed relative (if you have any)?
37. Does your community have shared events where the majority of your neighbours attend?

38. Do you volunteer in your community?
39. If so, what volunteering work do you do?
40. Why do you volunteer?
41. Do you use any support services or organisations provided by your community?
42. Are you involved in organisations such as CWA, Neighbourhood/Farm/School Watch?
43. Are you part of any volunteer emergency services?
54. How does the community hinder your work as a police officer?
55. Tell me about your best encounter with the community
56. Tell me about your worst encounter with the community
57. What role do you think the community should play in public safety?
58. Could the community do more to assist you in your work as a police officer?
59. Have you worked in a metropolitan patrol before moving to a small town?

### **Policing**

44. Did you have a career before joining the police?
45. If so, what jobs did you have before starting your policing career?
46. When did you first think about becoming a police officer?
47. Why did you want to be a police officer?
48. Do you have family members or friends who were police officers before you joined?
49. If so, did they influence your decision to join the police?
50. What were the core values of policing imparted to you during recruit training?
51. How has the community shaped your work as a police officer?
52. What community resources to you draw upon in your work as a police officer?
53. When would you trust the community to help you in your work as a police officer?
60. If so, what are the major differences in your role as a police officer between metropolitan and RRR patrols?
61. What skills are most important in small town policing?
62. How do you negotiate living and policing a small community?
63. Do you have to limit your community activities because of your role as a police officer?
64. Do you disclose your job as a police officer in your community relationships?
65. If so, why; if not, why not?

### **Closure Questions**

66. Is there anything we've left out of your story?
67. Do you feel you have given a fair picture of yourself?
68. What are your feelings about this interview and all that we have covered?

## APPENDIX B—GUIDED COMMUNITY INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### Community

1. Do you consider this community as being close?
2. Are you able to get help from people in the community if you had any problems?
3. Do you know your neighbours?
4. Have you shared meals with your neighbours?
5. Do ask your neighbours to help out when you plan to be away?
6. Do your neighbours have a copy of your house keys?
7. Would you trust your neighbours to look after your children or infirmed relative (if you have any)?
8. Does your community have shared events where the majority of your neighbours attend?
9. Do you volunteer in your community?
10. If so, what volunteering work do you do?
11. Why do you volunteer?
12. Do you use any support services or organisations provided by your community?
13. Are you involved in organisations such as CWA, Neighbourhood/Farm/School Watch?
14. Are you part of any volunteer emergency services?

### Policing

15. What do you think are the most important tasks that police do in your community?
16. What do you think about the police?
17. Do you trust the police?
18. Can you rely on the police in times of emergency?
19. Have you contacted the police?
20. Was the contact about a crime matter?
21. Have you contacted the police about a non-crime matter?
22. Do you have family members or friends who were police officers?
23. If so, do they influence your ideas about the police?
24. How have the police impacted on your relationships to the community?
25. Tell me about your best encounter with the police
26. Tell me about your worst encounter with the police
27. What role do you think the community should play in public safety?
28. What do you do to help create public safety?
29. Could the community do more to assist the police in creating public safety? In what ways?

### Closure Questions

30. Is there anything else you would like to add about police in your community, or your relationships with the police?

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The Police Perspective

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