

QPS response to COVID-19

During 2019-20, the COVID-19 health pandemic has emerged as a significant issue for the Queensland community. The QPS continues to play a critical role in the whole-of-government response by ensuring compliance with public health directions, while maintaining business as usual policing activities. Since the declaration of the public health emergency on 29 January 2020 under the *Public Health Act 2005*, the QPS has performed a pivotal role in the whole-of-government response to protect the community from the spread of COVID-19 in Queensland. The highly effective compliance activities performed by QPS to give effect to and enforce the public health measures are fundamental to Queensland's success in flattening the curve and keeping case numbers low. The extensive and ongoing QPS contribution to the Queensland Government's COVID-19 response has comprised the following (to 30 June 2020):

- establishing Taskforce Sierra Linnet within the State Police Operations Centre (SPOC) to prepare, plan and coordinate the QPS's contribution to the whole-of-government COVID-19 response. The operation of the SPOC and other various functions associated with the COVID-19 response has required the allocation of a significant number of police officers and staff members at short notice to duties dedicated to the COVID-19 response;
- standing up the State Disaster Coordination Centre at the Kedron Emergency Services Complex in Kedron, District Disaster Coordination Centres and Local Disaster Management Groups;
- leading the whole-of-government planning groups across a broad range of disaster management issues through its legislative responsibilities under the *Disaster Management Act 2003* and Queensland's disaster management arrangements which included the temporary appointments of the State Disaster Coordinator, District Disaster Coordinators, State Disaster Coordination Centre Commander and Chair of the State Coordination Group. The disaster management arrangements have been used to activate support from the Australian Defence Force who have provided significant commitments to the operationalisation of border plans;
- effectively implementing state border controls at international and domestic airports, state roads, and establishing vehicle check points and restricting access to remote communities prescribed as 'designated areas' under, initially, Commonwealth biosecurity legislation and later, a public health direction of the Queensland Chief Health Officer;
- appointing approximately 12,000 police officers as emergency officers (general) under the *Public Health Act 2005* which enables police officers to assume delivery of emergency officer (general) roles, including the service of quarantine notices at Queensland's state and international borders;
- providing a security overlay for quarantine arrangements at hotels and accommodation facilities for international and domestic arrivals to Queensland;
- conducting residential quarantine and business compliance visitations, including targeted operations and ongoing monitoring;
- establishing dedicated intelligence and investigative functions to detect and address offending that endangers public health;
- delivering various policing operations, including dedicated high visibility operations to enforce social distancing requirements in public places, including shopping centres, markets, parks, picnic areas, waterfronts, beaches etc;
- conducting proactive patrols, general compliance and community education about public health restrictions;
- maintaining business as usual policing functions; and
- enforcing social distancing.

The QPS has maintained business as usual policing operations with some adjustments to certain activities to reduce the risk of potential transmission of COVID-19. To prioritise the allocation of frontline resources to the COVID-19 response, the QPS deferred police attendance for some standard operational duties including:

- static breath testing and drug testing operations (random breath and drug testing continued through vehicle interceptions);
- practical driver testing in regional and remote areas;
- mobile operations component of the Camera Detected Offences Program (to re-allocate police officers normally staffing mobile speed camera vans to COVID-19 related tasks);
- diverting support staff from non-essential duties to support COVID-19 related tasks.

The guiding principle for QPS's contribution to the COVID-19 emergency has been to support the public health response through an organisational enforcement posture of '*compassion, communication and compliance*'. The QPS has issued warnings, penalty infringement notices or commenced prosecution for blatant and serious breaches of relevant *Public Health Act 2005* offences. Maintaining community confidence and cooperation is crucial to achieving the public health objectives, however, behavior that recklessly or deliberately endangers public health has been the subject of appropriate enforcement action.

The rapid and frequent changes to public health measures in Queensland have required unprecedented levels of responsivity and scalability from QPS, including legal resources to interpret and apply the measures in an operational context and communication to, and training of, frontline police to ensure the changes are understood and applied correctly. Large-scale planning activities undertaken in the preliminary stages of the QPS response enabled the operationalisation of these functions and continue to inform and be adapted for later stages of the COVID-19 response.

The QPS has taken a proactive approach in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of its employees throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Risk mitigation measures have been implemented including:

- adjustments to operational procedures to minimise physical contact;
- supply of personal protective equipment to ensure the ongoing delivery of effective policing services to Queensland communities while safeguarding the wellbeing of QPS members;
- development of safe operating procedures to minimise risk of potential exposure to COVID-19 during routine policing functions. This includes procedures for general interactions with members of the public and specific instructions for conducting finger printing, roadside breath testing and drug testing, DNA sampling, and prisoner transportation;
- development of the COVID-19 Safe Strategy and Planning Framework, which sets out enablers for safe, healthy and sustainable workplaces; monitoring and responding to potential outbreaks of COVID-19; and delivering a protected and resilient workforce that is capable of sustaining business operations within the COVID-19 environment.

The Service continues to review and adapt its operational capabilities and priorities based on the risk profile of COVID-19 in the community. The QPS acknowledges the COVID-19 pandemic presents a significant public health and safety issue which is likely to continue into the future, at least in the short term and policing in Queensland will continue to reflect the risks to the community and QPS employees. The QPS remains committed to supporting the public health response to the declared disaster situation and public health emergency for COVID-19 through its law enforcement functions and public safety capabilities to ensure the safety of all Queenslanders.