



CORRUPTION AND CRIME COMMISSION

MEDIA STATEMENT

CCC report identifies issues with use of Taser weapons

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A Corruption and Crime Commission report has identified a growing trend where Taser weapons are being used by the Western Australia Police for the wrong reasons even though it found the majority of uses are reasonable and that they are effective weapons.

The report tabled in the Parliament today shows that the weapons are increasingly being used for compliance when they were initially introduced to prevent injury, and to reduce the use of firearms.

The Commission's Director of Corruption Prevention, Roger Watson, said the report found:

- The police use of firearms has doubled in the two years since the introduction of Taser weapons in 2007.
- The use of other force options such as capsicum spray has significantly decreased since Taser weapons were introduced.
- Injuries to police officers increased by 22% in the same period.
- Taser weapons have become the force option of choice representing 74% of reported uses of force in 2008.

Mr Watson said while potential misuse was involved in only 7% of cases, the report found Taser weapons are being increasingly used for compliance. This is represented by:

- The increased use of Taser weapons against people resisting arrest. That increased from 20% of Taser deployments in 2007 to 43% in 2009.
- A four-fold increase over the period in the use of Taser weapons being used to threaten people.

“Examples of this are highlighted in the report, which includes video footage of an incident at East Perth Watch House where Taser weapons were deployed eight times against an unarmed, non-threatening man surrounded by nine police officers”, Mr Watson said.

“Taser weapons were deployed against him a further five times off video.”
(this is the 2nd incident on the DVD included in the report and the 5th case study in the report)

This incident was brought to the attention of the Commission personally by the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mr Chris Dawson, when he became aware of it.

“As a result of an internal police investigation of the incident, two police officers were subject to disciplinary charges for using undue and excessive force and two senior officers were found to have provided inadequate supervision,” Mr Watson said.

“The Commission is currently reviewing the police internal investigation into the incident.”

The report also expresses concern about:

- The increasing and disproportionate use of Taser weapons against Indigenous people. This increased from 16% of Taser weapon use in 2007 to 30% in 2009.
- The use of Taser weapons against particular groups such as those with mental illness and drug users.

Mr Watson said the report makes 10 recommendations including that Taser weapons only be used by police when there is an imminent threat of serious injury.

“This would bring the use of Taser weapons in Western Australia into line with other Australian and international police jurisdictions.”

There have been no reported deaths from Taser weapon use in this State but there have been deaths in other jurisdictions.

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