



INDEPENDENT POLICE CONDUCT AUTHORITY

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MEDIA RELEASE

INDEPENDENT POLICE CONDUCT AUTHORITY PRAISES OPERATION AUSTIN

The Independent Police Conduct Authority has praised Operation Austin, the Police investigation into allegations of sexual offending by former Assistant Commissioner Clint Rickards and other officers, saying the operation reached a high standard of excellence for an historical criminal investigation of its scale.

The Authority, in its *Review of Operation Austin*, released today, also rejected complaints by Rickards and by Steve McDowall about the Operation, and praised the investigation's 'ground-breaking' processes for dealing with victims of sexual offences.

Key findings of the Authority's review included:

- leadership of Operation Austin was of the highest standard
- all members of the Operation Austin team applied the highest standards of ethics and professionalism – there was no bias towards any desired or preconceived outcome
- the policy for dealing with victims' complaints – for example, the use of a Victim Liaison Officer for each complainant – was 'ground-breaking' and went well beyond what had been the norm in the past
- the decision to prosecute was made after a 'thorough, independent and objective analysis of all available evidence' by the Crown Solicitor, Christchurch
- given the number and complexity of the allegations investigated by Operation Austin, criticisms that the Operation took too long were unfounded.

The report said Operation Austin was an exceptional, major investigation of serious historical sexual offending committed by Police officers and others in New Zealand. The standard of investigation, support for victims, quality assurance, attention to detail, completeness, innovation, command, briefings and best practice achieved by the Operation were ‘clearly of a level of excellence several grades above what would normally be expected of an historical criminal investigation on this scale.’

‘The Operation... left no stone unturned in its efforts to rectify the damage to the victims and to the Police’s reputation by a few rogue elements within their ranks,’ the Authority’s review said.

Operation Austin was established in February 2004 under the command of Detective Superintendent Nick Perry, to investigate allegations of sexual offending in the early 1980s by Mr Rickards and former colleagues Brad Shipton and Bob Schollum against Rotorua woman Louise Nicholas. The operation also considered a large number of other historic claims of sexual offending against other women by the three men and other officers.

An independent investigator from the Independent Police Conduct Authority monitored Operation Austin from February 2004. Once the Operation was completed, two further independent investigators – former Commissioner Richard Macdonald and former Acting Deputy Commissioner and Acting Assistant Commissioner Roger Carson - were engaged to conduct the overall review.

The independent review considered Operation Austin’s handling of 50 victims’ cases, carrying out in-depth reviews of 25 and referring 10 back to Police for further follow-up. The review also considered 15 complaints by Mr Rickards, and one complaint by Steve McDowall, along with public statements by Mr Rickards criticising the Operation. The Authority’s investigators interviewed all material witnesses in the Operation Austin cases.

The Authority has recommended the Police Best Practice Manual be changed to incorporate Operation Austin policies and practices for dealing with victims, and practices for file management and disclosure of information to the Authority.

Authority Chair Justice Lowell Goddard said the review considered all aspects of Operation Austin, including its integrity, standard of investigation, whether there was any evidence of bias, whether appropriate decisions were taken, and whether all matters were dealt with according to Police policy, best practice and procedures.

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