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POLICE-COMMUNITY CONSULTATION IN AUSTRALIA

WORKING WITH A CONUNDRUM

John Casey

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INTRODUCTION

Casey and Trofymowycz (1999) identified a community consultation conundrum in policing that resulted from two apparently opposing dynamics: consultation with relevant communities is recommended as a core strategy to promote accountability, and to strengthen intelligence-driven approaches to the management of crime, whereas, at the same time, evaluations of consultation indicate widespread dissatisfaction on the part of both police and community participants with the processes and the outcomes of consultation. These contradictory dynamics have formed the backdrop for the implementation of consultation processes in Australian policing.

The conundrum has continued to vex policing agencies in Australia and overseas. Important new initiatives in consultation have been launched at the same time as evaluations of consultation in policing and other public service areas continue to identify the weaknesses in the model and the implementation of initiatives (Newburn and Jones 2002, Myhill et al. 2003, Myhill 2006). Given that consultation is based on a series of contested concepts, such as community, representation, and participation (see Wilson 1992), and that evaluations tend to focus primarily on subjective assess-
ments by stakeholders, it is not surprising to find that there continues to be little consensus about the outcomes. Those working with police consultation in Australia can at least take heart in the fact that it appears to operate with the same contradictions in policing overseas (Skogan et al. 2000, Myhill et al. 2003) and in other public sector agencies in Australia (see National Institute of Governance 2004 for a discussion of consultation in urban planning, and Ipsos 2005 for human services).

This chapter examines the current efforts by the Victoria police and the New South Wales Police* (NSWP) to consult with local communities. In Victoria, there have been four recent evaluations that address consultation issues, and this chapter summarizes the evidence from those evaluations. The chapter also reports an internal survey conducted by NSWP in 2002 that audited all forms of external consultation involving NSWP police officers.

The focus of the chapter is generally on local-level consultation that covers a small locality or suburb, and on consultation targeted at a specific social or minority groups (immigrant communities, youth, gay, and lesbian, etc.), particularly where this correlates in some way with locality (e.g. because of ethnic enclaves or specific attempts to dialogue with local youth). The chapter does not directly address higher-level consultation and oversight processes such as police boards, policy advisory groups, or departmental-level liaison with specific target groups. In many jurisdictions outside Australia higher-level and local-level consultation processes often coincide, particularly where the police department is relatively small and is contiguous with a specific locality. However, as this chapter is written in the context of policing in Australia, where the single police agencies in each state are relatively large organizations, there is a significant institutional distance between local-level and higher-level consultative processes.

**DEFINITION: WHAT IS COMMUNITY CONSULTATION?**

For the purposes of this chapter, consultation refers to the processes used to promote any outside input into policing policy and strategy involving individuals or organizations (Casey and Trofymowych 1999). This is a deliberately broad definition, given that consultation occupies little more than a conceptual space determined by the confluence of two continuums: (a) the degree of control of activities by police or outsiders and (b) the source of the information used the consultation process. **Figure 22.1** represents the conceptual space occupied by consultation and indicates the possible location of various consultative activities.

Consultation abuts at one end to processes such as police public relations, which merely serve to communicate a police agenda, and at the other end to community or citizens’ initiatives, such as protest or vigilante activities, which are clearly outside police control. The “balance point” in the definition is that there is significant outside input into policing, whereas at the same time the police organization maintains some level of control over the process involved.

*Victoria and New South Wales are two of the eight states/territories in Australia. Each state/territory is a single jurisdiction with only one police agency (i.e. there are no town, city or county police in Australia). Victoria Police has 11,000 uniformed officers and 3,000 civilian staff; New South Wales has 13,300 officers and 3,500 civilians.*
Another common use of the term *consultation* locates it within a “ladder of participation” (Arnstein 1969), which describes different levels of community involvement in the public policy process and the delivery of public services. In the classic Arnstein ladder, consultation is located halfway between manipulation at the bottom of the ladder and citizen control at the top. Similarly, Davis and Bishop (2001) identify a range of participation processes that include consultation, partnership, and consumer control. In these approaches, consultation is conceptualized as one point along a continuum, somewhere between merely informing and creating full partnership. The choice of the term *consultation* to describe external input into policing may seem to imply a deliberate choice to position activities along a participation continuum, but the reality is somewhat more haphazard. “Poor” consultation processes are essentially public relations exercises, whereas “rich” consultation processes in effect become the basis for partnerships and joint governance of ongoing projects or programs.

It should also be noted that although *community* consultation implies nongovernment input—from individuals, advocacy groups, and community organizations—many of the processes discussed in this chapter, in fact, include the participation of other government departments, such as social services, education, health, and public safety, as well as from other tiers of government, particularly local governments. What is presented as community consultation is often, in effect, interagency and intergovernmental coordination processes, and the distinction between whole-of-government and community consultation approaches may not always be clear. Moreover, the term *consultation* is often used interchangeably with terms such as...
engagement, dialogue, involvement, and participation, although these latter terms—in particular, participation—generally imply the broader range of activities included in the participation continuums outlined above (see Myhill 2006).

There is a “patchwork quilt of day-to-day consultations” (Morgan in Hughes 1994, p. 262), that can include the full range of techniques identified in Figure 22.1, as well as a range of newly emerging policy participation processes such as citizens’ juries, televoting, and deliberative conferences, which are just starting to be used by police (Ward 1995, Myhill et al. 2003). However, almost all discourses on consultation quickly focus on the single technique of consultative committees. Community consultative committees—variously called customer councils, local safety committees, etc.—are by far the most common form of consultative structures (Ward 1995, Myhill et al. 2003), and debates about their efficacy quickly dominate any discussions about consultation.

Police community consultation committees vary greatly in their functioning between jurisdictions and between localities within the same jurisdiction. In addition to the issues of control and information flow that determine the definitions outlined above, there are a number of key parameters that determine differences between committees:

- **Coverage.** Committees may cover local government areas, neighborhoods, or even a single shopping street or business precinct, or they may be focused on a specific target group such as youth or ethnic minorities.
- **Ownership/control.** The “ownership” of the committee (in terms of who initiates, chairs, hosts, provides administrative support, etc.) may reside with the police or with other agencies. In the Australian context, local governments are taking an increasing role in crime prevention, and they often initiate local liaison processes that become the primary means of consultation between police and the wider community.
- **Appointment/selection of members.** Members of the committee may be appointed by controlling authorities or selected through a range of processes that may include elections.
- **Open versus closed participation.** Attendance, voice, and vote at the meetings may be restricted to appointed/selected members or may be open to the public.
- **Relationship to other processes.** The committee may be a stand-alone consultation committee or may be connected to related activities such as Neighborhood Watch and other crime prevention programs.
- **Focus of activities.** The committees may have different primary focuses, such as information exchange, development of local safety strategies, or the management of public safety and crime prevention programs.

Whichever format the committee takes, it must demonstrate its legitimacy as a valid consultation process through its capacity to measure the pulse of public safety and crime concerns in that community. In order to achieve this, committees often employ a range of other consultation processes (surveys, town meetings) to gather additional input into their deliberations, and they often sponsor or manage projects
that engage the police and community in joint problem solving (see for example, Johnston et al 2002).

CONSULTATION IN POLICING

The U.K. Scarman Report (Scarman 1981) is generally seen as the impetus for the wider use of community policing strategies in Britain and Australia. Lord Scarman investigated three days of rioting in the London neighborhood of Brixton in 1981, and while he acknowledged that the root cause of the rioting was poverty and inner city deprivation, he attributed a large part of the blame on the deteriorated state of relations between the police and the primarily black-Caribbean Brixton community. This was both a result of on-going reactive policing tactics and also a response to a specific “accelerator event,” Operation Swamp, in which police had targeted Brixton in a way that was seen as harassing young Carribbeans.

In the Scarman Report, the recommendations about policing were only one section of a slew of recommendations that included policy reform in the areas of housing, education, and employment. Moreover, consultation was only one part of the police-related recommendations that sought to address a range of issues related to working with minority groups (recruitment, training, and addressing prejudice) and the handling of public disorder. The recommendations regarding consultation called for the establishment of statutory liaison committees and exhorted the police and the community to work positively to establish relations of mutual trust and respect. As a result of the report, consultation became enshrined in U.K. legislation. The U.K. Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 created the legal responsibility for the police to consult, and this was confirmed more than a decade later through the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act, which placed an obligation on local authorities and the police, in partnership with other agencies, to audit and consult.

In the United States, the 1980s saw the more widespread acceptance of community policing philosophies that emphasized the need for greater dialogue with the community. However, given the fragmented nature of policing in the United States, including the existence of thousands of police departments serving small local areas, the structure of consultation processes differed considerably between police departments. Many larger police departments have district advisory committees and “beat meetings” (Skogan et al. 2000), which are the equivalent of the consultation structures created as a result of the Scarman Report in Britain.

Consultation is not in itself a process or practice separate from other more global policing developments such as community policing, policing by consent, and the notion of a police service (as opposed to force), which, by definition, imply dialogue with and legitimation by the communities and citizens policed (Findlay 2004). Moreover, consultation is intimately related to other contemporary labels now commonly associated with policing such as problem-solving, proactive, cooperative, partnership, participation, reassurance, and local priority, and it is the basis of a range of strategies considered to be social and preventive responses to crime and disorder, which are part of the multilateralization of policing (Bayley and Shearing 2001).

There is also widespread awareness of an operational necessity to maintain an open dialogue with the communities served. Despite popular media representation
of intrepid sleuths deciphering mystifying clues, crime is mostly solved by information gathered in the community from cooperative citizens and informants (Findlay 2004, Dixon 2005), and consultation processes can foster the trust needed to ensure that citizens do cooperate. The current move to strengthen intelligence-driven policing seeks to combine the “objective” data generated by centralized crime mapping with the community intelligence provided by local input, and the possible information flow from consultation processes can be a key to achieving this input (Maguire and John 2006). However, there are real questions about how community consultation can be reconciled with intelligence gathering. Lyons (2002) argues that “until we learn to police in ways that build trusting relationships with those communities where criminals or terrorists can more easily live insulated from observation, no amount of additional funding or legal authority will increase the capacity of our police to gather the crime and terror-related information we desperately need” (p. 530). Working closely with communities, while at the same time observing members of these communities as potential objects of suspicion, arguably produces dissonance in frontline police.

The rise of police consultation has coincided with broader shifts in the relations between state and nonstate institutions. The crisis of faith confronting both representative democracy and Weberian notions of efficiency in the public service have lead to a “legitimation gap,” which Western democracies have sought to bridge through new public management and governance processes (Davis and Weller 2001). An integral part of these new processes is the increased emphasis on the role of community, civil society, and citizens in both policy development and service delivery, which have resulted in profound changes in the way in which all public sector organizations operate. The notion of public agencies directly providing services has given way to approaches that seek greater stakeholder involvement in policy processes, more transparent accountability of public services, and stronger public–private partnerships in service delivery. Internally within government, there is also an increased emphasis on collaboration between agencies and whole-of-government approaches (Bayley and Shearing 2001, Fleming and Rhodes 2004).

Consultation has not been without its critics. As Casey and Trofymowych (1999) noted, criticisms of consultation can be classified as ideological, structural, or operational. Ideological critiques reject what they see as the tokenism of consultation, with progressives claiming that it mainly serves to stifle dissent, whereas conservatives see it as pandering to special interests and diverting police from core policing tasks. Structural criticisms focus on the difficulties of reaching the most marginalized sectors of society, on the uneven power relationships between police and those being consulted, and on internal police procedures, which do not necessarily reward consultation efforts. Operational criticism is focused on performance indicators and the difficulties of documenting the direct impact of consultation.

Do police themselves support consultation? Yates et al. (1997) in a study on the level of support for various community policing strategies, including consultation, among officers in England and the United States see “significant support” for a range of measures. However, their interpretation of the findings appear to be a case of seeing the glass as half full, given that the significant support they identify is expressed in the following terms: “Well in excess of one third to one half of police
officers popularly support the community policing philosophy” (Yates et al. 1997, p. 113). Similarly, Gennaro et al. (2005) found that police middle managers were “ambivalent” about community policing; they adopted the philosophy but appeared unwilling to the make organization changes necessary to support it.

CONSULTATION IN AUSTRALIAN POLICING

Police in Australia have tended to operate at some distance from the communities they serve and have lacked a tradition of local community access to police decisions (Bayley 1986). However, Australian police agencies could not remain at the margin of the international changes in both policing and public management, and so a range of community policing initiatives were begun in the mid-1980s. In 1986, Bayley noted that, whereas the then NSW Police Commissioner John Avery had called for the establishment of community consultative councils in his 1981 book Police, Force or Service? (published three years before he became commissioner) and a 1985 Commission of Inquiry into Victoria police had recommended the establishment of local liaison committees, until then “nothing along those lines [had] been created anywhere in Australia” (Bayley 1986, p. 22).

However, from the late 1980s, all Australian jurisdictions have developed consultation structures, although there have not been any moves to create U.K.-style legislative provisions. Current Australian consultative activities are based solely on policies and guidelines internal to policing. The Australasian Police Ministers’ Council, the coordinating body of those with political responsibility for policing in each Australian state and New Zealand has declared that a key strategy is to “consult and collaborate on policy development and service delivery” (Australasian Police Ministers’ Council 2005: Strategy 2.2.2).

VICTORIA*

Victoria is the Australian police jurisdiction that has made consultation most central to its operating philosophy. In 1998 Victoria police embarked on a major strategic realignment known as Local Priority Policing. The goal of Local Priority Policing was to ensure that the local community became an active participant in shaping police service priorities. As stated by the then Chief Commissioner, the first two of seven key characteristics of Local Priority Policing were:

- The community significantly influences which services are provided.
- Local service issues are the prime focus (Victoria Police 1998)

Local Priority Policing was implemented in three phases: Phase 1 was a State-wide Management Model, Phase 2 was a Service Delivery Model, and Phase 3 was a Community Consultation Model. Through the Statewide Management and the Service Delivery Models, Victoria police aligned the district-level operational boundaries to coincide with local government boundaries and gave local managers more...

*The following section on Victoria police is based on cited evaluations and a series of confidential interviews with key stakeholders.
control over specialist services. Through the Community Consultation Model, structures were established to promote community input (Victoria Police 2005).

As part of the Community Consultation Model, each District Inspector was responsible for the establishment of a Local Safety Committee (LSC) as the key local-level component of the Local Priority Policing strategy. The LSCs were established in 2000 as a means of identifying local crime and public safety issues, as a conduit for input by local agencies into policing initiatives, and as a forum for police to account for local strategies and practices. The LSCs were implemented against the background of the prior existence of the Police Community Involvement Program, first established in 1981; Neighborhood Watch, established in 1983; and of Police Community Consultation Committees (PCCC), a network of community consultation structures first launched in 1991 as the primary consultation mechanism under previous Victoria government crime prevention initiatives such as the Safer Cities and Shires program. There was also a wide array of previously established community safety committees and other community-based crime prevention programs that had been instituted by other public organizations such as local governments, social service agencies, and nongovernmental organizations.

The membership of LSCs comprises a range of appointed representatives from local government, from local offices of statewide agencies and nongovernment organizations, and some community representatives. The LSCs were not intended as forums for grassroots community representation; instead, they are seen more as local government area level “management committees” for local crime prevention and community safety activities (Victoria Police 2004: 17). LSCs generally seek to involve senior staff from participating agencies that focus on strategic issues and high level interagency collaborations. A core task of the LSCs was the development of a community safety plan. The aims of the LSC were:

- Identify and satisfy validated local community needs and expectations.
- Involve the public in shaping policing services and action plans.
- Develop effective partnerships with the community to prevent crime and improve community safety.
- Improve community perception of crime and public safety.
- Increase public confidence in the accountability professionalism and integrity of police;
- provide information on police decision making.

District Inspectors were given flexibility to implement LSCs according to local conditions and local experiences with previous consultation. As a result, in some districts pre-existing consultation structures took on LSC responsibilities, and a range of different linkages were created between the new LSCs and existing PCCCs and Neighborhood Watch. Whereas LSCs were to be the key component of the Community Consultation Model, district inspectors were required to institute other mechanisms for consultation and for strengthening their knowledge of the local community, including the development of community profiles that documented the demographics and the security concerns of their districts.
Although Victoria police now appear to downplay the “brand” aspect of Local Priority Policing (it tends to appear in lower case in current Victoria police documents, except when referring to the 1998 initiative), it is still very much a core philosophy and its structures are still in place. The LSCs continue to be one of the current chief commissioner’s flagship initiatives under a strategic plan known as “The Way Ahead” (Victoria Police 2003).

In recent years, there have been four separate research projects which have evaluated the LSCs, the PCCCs, and the community governance of community safety and crime prevention programs. All four were based on survey techniques and focused on assessments of the outcomes by current participants in the processes. Table 22.1 provides the details of the research projects.

The combined findings of the four evaluations give a comprehensive picture of the operation of community consultation in Victoria. The evaluations of LSCs and PCCCs are considered first, given the overlap between these two police-initiated
structures, and subsequently the evaluations of community governance structures are used to contrast the “internal” structures.

The LSC and PCCC Evaluations

Both evaluations highlighted that there is considerable variation in how LSCs and PCCCs operate and how they interact with other consultation mechanisms. As a result of these variations, LSCs and PCCCs were able to respond to local conditions and generally garner positive reviews. Those interviewed for the PCCC evaluation noted that when they were introduced by Victoria police in 1991, they were an important and ground breaking initiative at the forefront of a shift to a community policing philosophy. The evaluation concluded that some PCCCs have strong, committed, active, and long-term memberships that have been very productive with limited resources. The LSCs, established almost a decade after the first PCCCs, were seen as being able to fulfill a commitment to extend the existing community consultation by building on the past experiences.

The LSC evaluation concluded that they have helped drive the wider community consultation initiatives and promote a wide range of community safety and crime prevention programs, as well as assisting in attracting funding. The two reports found that both PCCCs and LSCs had significantly enhanced relationships with other government departments, local government, and organizations within the community. The LSC evaluation found that there is majority support within police ranks for the LSC initiative as a key component of community consultation. A conflation of a number of survey questions in the report indicates that some fifty to fifty-five percent of officers considered LSCs to be very valuable or generally valuable; some twenty to thirty percent considered the value limited by quality; fifteen percent consider them of little value; and no one considered them to be of no value.

But both reports also indicate that, despite the successes, there is also widespread concern about the functioning of consultation. The signature phrase in relation to the PCCCs was:

The supporters of PCCCs were able to identify many useful projects and initiatives but most PCCCs appear to have been limited by lack of sustained interest and funds or inability to increase the reach of the committee to incorporate the views of local communities with common interests or concerns. In an attempt to identify outputs and outcomes of PCCC the reviewer found a great deal of scepticism and inability to articulate significant outcomes, even from some PCCCs regarded as model performers by their peers [Martin Bonato and Associates 2003: 9].

The conclusion was that most PCCCs have not achieved sustained, effective consultation and information exchange with broad representation from local citizens. Most PCCCs had limited reach into the community due to lack of time and resources, and the skills and knowledge on how to approach the wider community were sometimes lacking in committees. Some senior police do not believe PCCCs have a significant impact on their work; whereas some acknowledge the value of the interactions on committees and relationships built, the impacts are generally not considered substantial in terms of their own operational targets.
The subsequent introduction of LSCs somewhat complicated the situation for PCCCs. The evaluation of PCCCs found that their role was “severely challenged” with the implementation of LSCs, as many of the stated aims and objectives of the two committees remain the same or similar, despite the theoretical division between the more grassroots focus of PCCCs and the focus of the LSCs on creating inter-agency forums of managers. In theory LSCs are supported at the local level by a network of PCCCs and Neighborhood Watch Groups (Victoria Police Annual Report 2001/2002), but it appears that in practice the connection is at best loose, and there is no formal requirement for PCCCs to report to LSCs. According to the PCCC evaluation, “there is a palpable divide between many LSCs and PCCCs leading to confusion and at times animosity and rivalry” (Martin Bonato and Associates 2003, p v). Some PCCCs have been disbanded or absorbed into LSCs or other local structures and those that remain are not necessarily complying with requirements or expectations originally laid down for PCCCs. In some instances, however, the continued existence of PCCCs allow the replication of the LSC structure at a lower level so supervisory and frontline staff also have the opportunity to participate in consultation and coordination structures.

There appeared to be a significant division of opinions about the relationship between the PCCCs and LSCs, with many of those surveyed seeing a complementary role but also many considering that the PCCCs are now redundant and should be disbanded. There was consensus that PCCCs need to be realigned within the newer and broader community safety and crime prevention infrastructure, particularly with Local Priority Policing as it now operates within the Victoria police and within a whole-of-government approach to community involvement in service planning and delivery. At the time of the evaluations the PCCCs and the LSCs were operating through different units within the Victoria Police Department and there was only limited coordination between the two structures.

While LSCs were more an integral part of Local Priority Policing, they were still hampered by structural difficulties in the model, and there were few mechanisms to link consultation with other operational process. The LSC evaluation found that the Victoria Police Department’s internal cultures, and current management processes such as COMPSTAT, continued to tie reward and recognition more to reactive crime-fighting approaches than to preventive approaches and to the pursuing cross-agency synergies. There continued to be operational staff, particularly district inspectors, who still had not embraced community consultation and/or did not have the skills or commitment to promote successful processes. Moreover, other government agencies weren’t always prepared to participate in the LSC process, sometimes because their boundaries were not aligned, requiring a single agency representative to sit on multiple committees or because they feel their expertise was not used.

Both the LSC and PCC evaluations identified key elements for successful consultation. For the LSCs, the most successful outcomes were observed in long-established forums with mainly local government leadership, but there were also successful police-driven LSCs. Successful consultation appeared to emerge in response to pressing urban issues, such a drug problems or youth violence, and where such triggers did not exist there appeared to be less incentive to maintain the structures. Success of community consultation was also dependent on the commitment and
capacities of key individuals, usually district inspectors, and terms like enthusiasm, leadership, skill, and level of expertise were used to identify success factors for individual LSCs. The report drew a distinction between “reporting” and “action” LSCs, with committees that helped create on-going crime-prevention activities being seen as the ones that were more successful. For action-oriented LSCs, their capacity to obtain funding for initiatives was seen as the key to success. Similarly, the features of successful PCCCs included: strong leadership through a local “champion”; a clear direction and a sense of purpose; representative membership and continuing attendance; effective chairing of meetings; the availability of resources to support the committees work; and a strong sense of having achieved results.

Both reports made recommendations for strengthening the work of the LSCs and PCCCs, which include the following*:

1. The importance of local flexibility. The LSC evaluation recommended that committees not necessarily be required to use the LSC name, and the PCCC evaluation recommended that they be an optional form of consultation and that any decision to create/continue or discontinue a PCCC should be made with reference to the views and needs of the relevant local community. As part of this flexibility, both reports emphasized the need for all consultation processes to define their purpose, principles, goals, objectives, and performance measures, as well as the rights and responsibilities of members.

2. The need for central coordination and sufficient resources. Both reports called for greater coordination between LSCs, PCCCs, and other consultation processes, and the PCCC evaluation called for greater formalization of the relationship between LSCs and PCCCs.

3. The need for dissemination of information about consultative process and good practices. Both reports called for a range of measures, including regular state-wide forums of staff involved in consultation, the improvement of training materials, and greater presence on the internet and other means of communication by Victoria police.

4. The need for integrated performance reporting. Both reports stressed that consultative processes should be better integrated into performance management at all levels. There was particular emphasis on the need to incorporate the outputs and outcomes of consultation into performance processes such as COMPSTAT.

5. The need for skills training. The reports noted that consultative committee members, both police and external, need ongoing training and development in the role, function, focus, and process of committees, and on establishing, maintaining and achieving results from partnerships.

6. The need for varied consultation processes. The reports recommended the use of processes such as surveys, focus groups, inviting people to attend meetings on a short-term basis, or joining existing committees with projects initiated by other groups.

* At the time of writing of this chapter, Victoria police has put into place a number of processes to implement these recommendations.
Evaluation of the Community Governance of Crime Prevention

Three preliminary reports of the joint Crime Prevention Victoria–Victoria University research project on the governance of crime prevention have been published (Armstrong and Rutter 2002; Armstrong, Francis and Totikidis 2004, Totikidis, Armstrong and Francis 2005). The 2004 and 2005 papers focused on the work of LSCs, and whereas they noted that LSCs were launched by the police minister and chief commissioner in 2000, almost no other mention or analysis is made of the role of Victoria police or of the Local Priority Policing approach. From data in the tables and the responses to survey questions about chairing, funding and reporting of the committees, it appears that the “ownership” of the LSCs is attributed more to local councils than to Victoria police. This attribution of ownership to local councils is not inconsistent with the flexibility accorded to by the Victoria police to district inspectors, which allowed them to build on existing local structures when implementing LSCs under Local Priority Policing, but it is also a reflection of an apparent lack of clarity by the researchers about the drivers of the LSCs and perhaps of “turf wars” over ownership.

The 2004 report on the determinants and inhibitors of community governance focused on LSCs and indicated that:

The conclusions are that the LSCs are very effective in generating networks of people. They had input into local government safety plans, and were able to bring diverse resources together to successfully tackle local issues. Limitations to their success were lack of leadership, infrequent meetings, lack of objectives and lack of seniority in the members of participating partners … and data sharing was limited [Armstrong, Francis and Totikidis 2004].

The results of the 2005 report are also generally positive. Almost eighty-three percent of LSC members surveyed agree with the statement that LSCs facilitates partnerships between agencies, whereas fifty-five percent had a strong sense of achievement from their participation and fifty-four percent believed that the LSC was very successful in preventing crime.

Evaluation of Local Government Crime Prevention Officers

The Crime Prevention Victoria–Melbourne University research project did not directly address the work of Victoria police consultative structures, but in assessing the work of the local government based Community Safety Officers (CSOs), it provided some insight to the work of these structures (Sutton, Dussuyer and Cherney 2003). As is to be expected, given the nature of the work of CSOs, the issue of consultation and interagency collaboration by Victoria police surfaced a number of times in the report. LSCs were cited both as the community safety network group that CSOs were most involved with (sixty-three percent of respondents who were members of groups) and the most effective community safety and crime prevention partnerships (thirty-four percent of respondents rate the LSCs as very effective and fifty-three percent rate them as somewhat effective); Victoria police Inspectors and Victoria Police Crime Prevention Officers were cited as the first and third, respectively, most important contacts in the work of CSOs; and Victoria police were seen as the most
active agency in crime prevention. LSCs were seen as generally being effective and working well, but a lack of resources and the lack of relevant experience of members were seen as issues. The effectiveness of partnerships for community safety and crime prevention (in which LSCs which were seen as most effective) were viewed in terms of their capacity for creating change and utilizing scare resources, their adoption of a strategic approach, their ability to add to the core knowledge base of the participants, achieve outcomes, and commitment from members.

**New South Wales**

Consultation with its communities is a key component of the strategic direction of the New South Wales police (NSWP). This commitment was reaffirmed in the recommendations of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into New South Wales Police (Wood 1997), which emphasized the importance of the organization’s not being isolated from the community it serves. The Royal Commission recommended that “each patrol commander … put into effect such form of Community Consultative groups or strategies for community feedback as best meet its needs,” and “that the effective establishment and use of community consultation be regarded as an important aspect in the ongoing assessment of the performance of patrol and regional commanders” (Wood 1997, p 368).

In 2002, Mitchell and Urquhart conducted an audit of all means by which NSWP was represented externally on committees, working parties and other consultation structures (Mitchell and Urquhart, 2002)*. The project was initiated after an initial scoping of the roles and responsibilities of senior staff to act as public spokespersons found that there was no complete listing of the consultation structures on which NSWP officers serve. Requests for information were sent from the commissioner to officers of superintendent rank and above, and to executive directors seeking information about the representation by officers on the bodies in which NSWP participated. These senior officers then delegated the request to officers within their command who participated in these structures. The request asked for the name of the consultation structure, the NSWP officer who attended, who provides administrative support (i.e., who was the holder of the agendas, minutes, and outcomes of the meetings), what was its general purpose, and any other comments. The request was deliberately kept simple in order to maximize the responses.

The results indicated that there were over 2,500 separate consultation and meeting structures in which primarily sworn officers, and some civilian staff, regularly participated. Given that the survey documented all structures, it included a range of statutory or required committees that dealt with whole-of-government and inter-agency matters, and these consultation structures were primarily attended by senior officers. There were also working parties and groups set up to deal, usually in the short term, with a particular emergent or critical crime or legislation issue the deliberations about which required external input and/or cooperation. In addition there are numerous specific-focus committees dealing with such issues as local youth,

*These data, and the analysis and discussion of these data, have been previously presented at two conferences (Mitchell 2003, Casey and Mitchell 2003).*
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domestic violence, aboriginal matters, drug issues or school liaison. Each geographical area also appeared to have its own structures dealing with the broad range of community crime and safety matters, including small business and representatives from chambers of commerce. It was evident from the results of the survey that NSWP was fulfilling its commitment to consult with the community and that, as a result, an enormous amount of police time was spent on these necessary consultative groups. Each meeting of such groups requires research, review, and preparation and often yielded recommendations and outcomes that needed to be acted upon. Included also were meetings on programs of long standing such as Neighborhood Watch, most of which were attended by one or more police representatives and could take place as frequently as bimonthly.

Apart from obtaining an overview of the large number of committees and consultative structures, other insights into the processes were derived. It was found that the police representative may not always be the same individual. This appeared to be the direct consequence of the fact of shift work, pressure of more urgent police work, the frequent changes in responsibility and location that characterizes much of police work, illness, vacations, and other reasons why a delegate or new representative would be sent. The occasions when this did not occur were when community consultation was part of the officer’s job, such as meeting with the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers, Youth Liaison Officers, and Crime Prevention Officers. Even here there was movement in jobs with new staff being appointed to these posts.

Often, other than at high-level peak meetings attended by senior government officials and senior police commanders where resolutions and agreements could be reached and committed to, police representatives attending the meetings were often not, nor could they be, those with the necessary decision-making authority. It was also the case that there was some fluidity in the participants from the community, this also leading to some problems of discontinuity.

This review of NSWP community consultation, in addition, demonstrated a degree of duplication of effort. Importantly, it was also apparent that there was little coordination, across the police organization or among interested parties within the organization, of the rich information emerging from these structures. To achieve that outcome would be a mammoth task in such a large organization. There was no overarching system to centrally manage issues and solutions as they emerged, to incorporate information about interagency projects and programs, to share good practice from other law enforcement agencies, or to provide consistent guidance on corporate issues.

Some of characteristics of community consultation suggested that rationalization of the number of community consultation structures might be advisable. However, it was found that these structures were considered important to the participants and, in general, both community and police members felt that to amalgamate one process with another, or to disband it, would result in a loss of “voice” by the community. It is evident that consultation with the community and the community’s engagement with the police are both seen as an important component of civic engagement.

The information gathered through this survey offered a concrete opportunity to maximize the benefits of the consultative structures. Another common theme of the responses was that technological solutions, i.e., computerized solutions,
were sought to address the problems of inconsistent attendance by police representatives, and lack of coordination of the issues and outcomes of the various consultative structures. As a first step, the main themes of the consultations were documented, which included such issues as transport, traffic, housing, rural crime matters, police input into community planning through the Safer by Design program, and relationships with minority groups such as gay and lesbian community issues or particular ethnic groups. By far the greatest number of committees and consultation exercises concerned mental health issues and matters concerning youth.

These themes were then designated as Key Policing Issues and were used as a basis to augment the already-existing NSWP Corporate Spokesperson Program. The Corporate Spokesperson Program had been in place with NSW police as a corporate initiative to ensure that a senior officer was dedicated to a particular area of policing and could therefore support and lead change and new programs, and also speak to the media on topics in that area. Through analysis of the community consultation themes, a strategic plan of portfolios, each with a spokesperson selected according to that person’s areas of interest, their expertise, and their corporate responsibilities was developed. The Corporate Spokesperson Program then had a comfortable strategic fit with the range of community consultation structures and facilitated information sharing. Internal corporate Web pages, called Knowledge Maps, were also enhanced and developed under the name of the theme and the relevant corporate spokesperson. These “maps” contained policy and practice information, and as much information as was available about relevant structures and standing committees for community consultation. Through this online mechanism, those attending consultation meetings were able to access a consistent and current resource that reflected corporate knowledge and understanding of an issue. In addition, representatives could feed back discussions from consultation to influence future corporate directions. The drawback of course, is the considerable amount of effort in research and time—as is the case with any Website—to ensure currency. Nevertheless, its aim was to solve some of the issues that had emerged from the survey and to overcome potential frustration that may have been felt about whether time spent in consultation was productive.

Although there was a clear and energetic commitment to consultation by managers and commanders, each clearly sought more efficient and effective ways to achieve its purposes.

The review also raised many questions. Consultation is “required” and considered essential so that the community may have input into operational matters, but are face-to-face committee meetings the best way to achieve that goal? In other words can “local policing solutions for local crime problems” actually be achieved through a committee? Efforts need to continue not only to find more efficient and effective ways to consult but also to address some ideological issues to ensure that consultation is not seen as a “soft” option that takes time from real policing. Any review of consultation also inevitably raises the question discussed earlier in this chapter about who is being consulted. Of what community or community interests are the participants “representative” and is this meeting what those requiring that police consult with their communities (such as Justice Wood in the Royal Commission recommendations) intended?
CONCLUSIONS

In 1999, Sarre and Tomaino observed that:

What is conceptualized in theory, however, many not translate well into practice. Asking police to become problem-solvers and expecting them to be constantly engaged in widespread community consultation involves a fundamental challenge to police leadership and culture. Given the current culture, reward structure and community expectations, translating rhetoric into reality has proved to be a formidable task [p. 103].

The case studies of Victoria and NSW presented in this chapter suggest that perhaps Australian policing has started to surmount the “formidable task.” Considerable challenges remain, but there also seems to be a majority opinion that police agencies have made significant strides in the move to incorporate community consultation as an institutional commitment. Some twenty-five years after the Scarman Report inaugurated consultation as a major policing strategy in Britain and Australia, the conclusion is that it has become a key element in strengthening the relationship between police and the wider civil society. Even though Casey and Trofymowych (1999) suggested that consultation may be under threat as a tactic as politicians and communities demanded more measurable outcomes, it appears to have become even more consolidated as a core policing strategy over the last five years.

As consultation is evaluated in a wide range of government services, we find that another conclusion is that policing is certainly not doing any worse than many other agencies. A recent review of the consultation by the ACT Planning Department concluded that it was “characterized by strengths worth retaining and building on … but also by low levels of trust and confidence among stakeholders … [and it was] not always conducted in a transparent and accountable way … and was subject to problems in communications and the effective dissemination of information” [National Institute of Governance 2004]. The Victorian Department of Human Services in an evaluation of its consultation process concluded that sixty-three percent of nongovernmental agencies they dealt with were very satisfied with the processes, twenty percent were neutral, and eighteen percent were dissatisfied (Ipsos 2005) These figures are similar to the Victoria police figures quoted above.

In 1990, at an Australian Institute of Criminology on community policing, the acting director of the Institute posed the question of how we get police organizations to take such approaches seriously (Wilson 1992). At the same conference Moir (1992) asked whether it was possible for police to use consultation processes to work with communities to become coproducers of public order, and Sarre (1992) asked why evaluation of community policing does not occur. Fifteen years later, those questions perhaps have not yet been fully answered, but there are crucial differences that need to be considered. In 2005, community policing philosophies and the consultation processes that underpin them are entrenched as core policing strategies. In fifteen years we have moved from wondering if community policing and consultation will be implemented, to a situation where we are now looking back at their implementation and evaluating their continued development.

We can conclude that, despite possible shortcomings as both a local priority setting mechanism and a means of intelligence-gathering, consultation continues to
garner success as a process that creates dialogue and interchange on local crime and disorder issues and serves to assist polices in meeting local accountability and oversight imperatives. Although the link to crime reduction of these outcomes may be hard to measure, these are an important value in themselves. Fleming (2005) questions the current wisdom that Neighborhood Watch programs are of little practical use by reframing the criteria for their assessment of in terms of relationship building, community participation, and reassurance, and these criteria can also be applied to consultation programs in general.

It is unlikely that police agencies will abandon consultation in the near future, as it continues to form an integral part of a wider movement of citizen participation and public sector reform. It establishes legitimacy with key stakeholder communities such as business and community elites, local activists, and specific ethnic and racial communities, and it continues to be an integral part of the new public management and governance frameworks that are being applied to policing. Public police no longer have a monopoly on policing (Bayley and Shearing 2001), and they now function within a framework of continual democratic dialogue with the communities they serve (Fleming and Rhodes 2004, Myhill 2006). Consultation processes continue to be essential for mobilizing support for the police among the “middle and respectable working classes” (Squires 1998) and for responding to the consumerist rhetoric that dictates perceptions of effectiveness and demands an ethos of service and responsiveness to clients.

Despite its flaws, consultation continues to reinforce the current agenda of serving the community and provides the basis for intelligence-driven and problem-solving approaches to policing. Consultation is a lynch pin of both operational effectiveness and public accountability, and there continues to be widespread support for consultation, which accepts the contradictions found by researchers and commentators. Considering the great effort that is expended on consultation, police agencies should be continually exploring creative and flexible approaches, including using the many technical solutions now available, to ensure that consultation goals are being met.

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