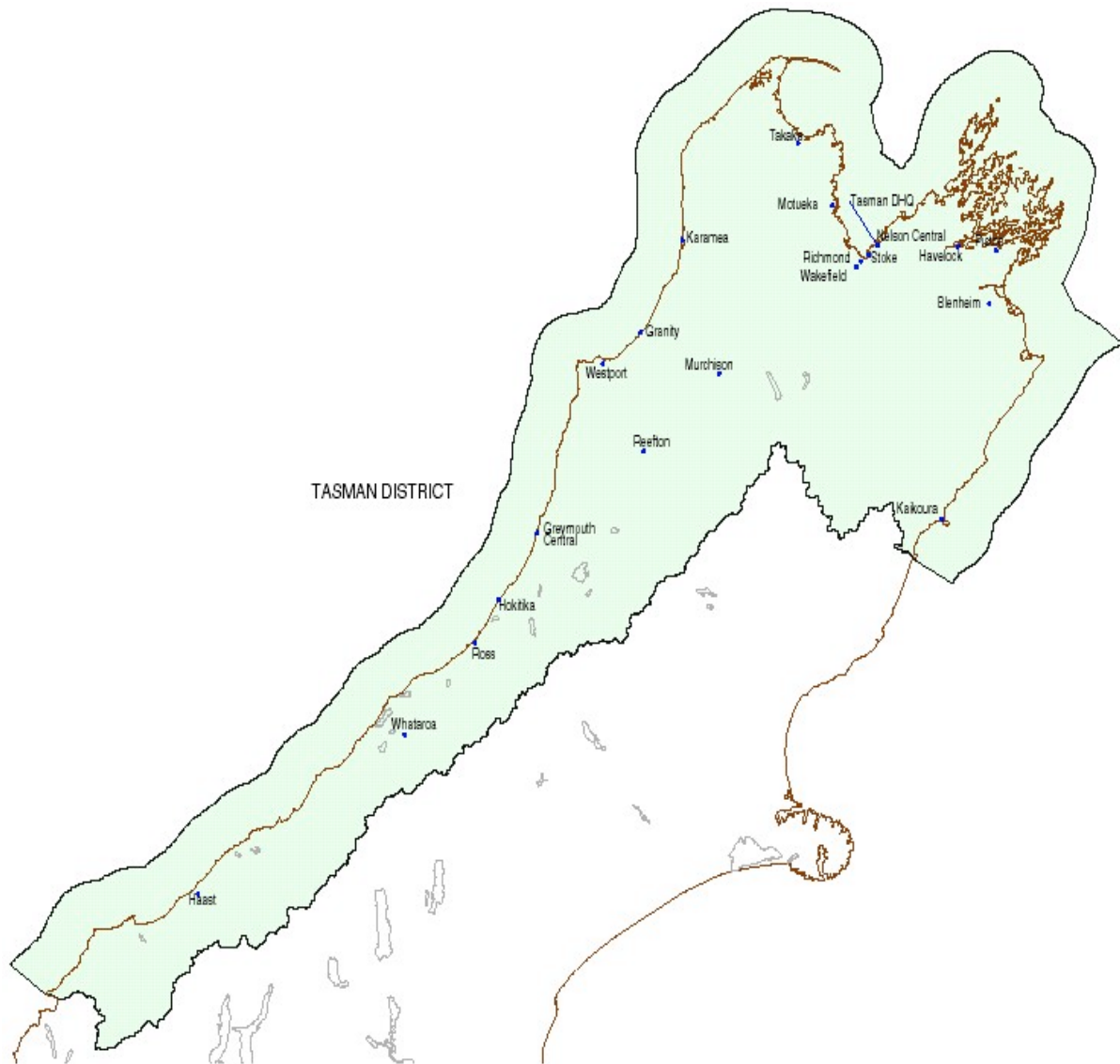


CRIME AND CRASH REDUCTION IN TASMAN POLICE DISTRICT



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1. Introduction.

Tasman Police District is located in the South Island of New Zealand and extends from Haast on the West Coast, north to Farewell Spit and south on the East Coast to Kaikoura.

The District has 280 sworn police staff with 3 sub Areas (Marlborough, Nelson Bays and West Coast), 7,512 kilometres of State Highway and is geographically one of the largest police districts in New Zealand.

The District population in 2003 was 165,000, predicted to increase to 168,200 by 2006 (*Statistics NZ 2004*).

During the tourist season the population almost doubles, particularly in the popular beach and camping areas. (In Golden Bay alone it increases by about 30,000).

The tourist season generally runs from December through to March but is increasing year by year bringing with it increased traffic and crash issues and an increase in crime.

This presentation explores previous poor performance in a police District where verbal warnings issued to motorists was the norm rather than the exception.

The presentation also looks briefly at crime statistics, and although Tasman District is regarded nationally as having a low crime rate there is the established correlation between criminal offending and traffic offending.

2. Crime Statistics.

During the period 1999 to 2003, total reported crime in Tasman District rose from 16206 offences in 1999 to 16873 in 2003. With 3 main urban centres where the majority of the population is located, most reported crime occurs in those areas. Rural crime, although less in actual numbers, occurs in wide spread and sparsely populated areas and can consume considerable time and energy for rural police staff to attend to. (*Policing Development Manager/Crime Statistics, Tasman Police District 2004*).

3. Road Policing Productivity/Crash Statistics.

In the period 1999 to 2002, fatal crashes had risen from 30 in 1999 to 40 in 2002. The 2002 toll was equal to the deaths in 1982 with 1984 being the worst at 42.

Injury crashes had risen from 356 to 423, and non injury crashes from 840 to 970. (*Tasman Police District Road Safety Report 1999-2003. Land Transport Safety Authority NZ [LTSA]*).

The Tasman Police District in 2002 was one of the two least productive Districts in road policing enforcement and was ranked the worst of the 12 New Zealand Districts in road deaths. The national road toll in 2002 was the lowest since 1964.

4. Hospitalisation Rates/Social Cost of Crashes.

Hospitalisation rates in Tasman were showing an increase from mid 1999 to early 2002. (The numbers of 'all hospitalised' showed more of an increase than the numbers of 'hospitalised for more than one day'). (*District Health Board data/LTSA*)

In the period 2000 to 2002 the social cost of crashes in the District had risen from \$146.21 million to \$233.64 million. (1999 figures not available).
(*Tasman Police District Road Safety Reports 2000 to 2002. LTSA NZ*).

(Social cost is a measure of all the damage to society that results from road crashes. Surveys determine how much people would pay to reduce the chances of death, injury, and the pain, grief and suffering resulting from crashes. The amount they are willing to pay, together with loss of earnings, the cost of legal, medical and other emergency services and property damage give the cost in dollar terms to society as a whole). (*LTSA Road Safety Progress Report June 2004*).

5. Local Police Practices.

An examination of police practices during the period 1999 to 2002 showed no additional activity or interventions than had previously been employed other than one Strategic Traffic Unit (STU) of 9 staff who were implementing national policies such as the 10kph speed policy and zero tolerance for seat belt offences.

This STU represented 3.2% of the District staff and were supervised by a Sergeant who was prepared to lead from the front and set a good example for others. Unfortunately the majority of staff in the District were not following this example.

Faced with a problem of increasing proportions, it became necessary to find out what the current police practices actually were.

An audit of time sheets and ticket records for the period 1 January to 30 November 2002 showed that the District had issued 17,307 verbal warnings, 1,515 Traffic Offence Notices and 8,842 Infringement Offence Notices.

(*VW: Verbal warnings = no further action & often no record.*

TON: Traffic Offence Notice = court appearance/serious charges.

ION: Infringement Offence Notice = Instant fine/regulation breaches).

Most of the TONs were for driving with excess alcohol and a fair proportion of the IONs were for offences that were not trauma promoting and therefore unlikely to bring about behavioural changes in motorists' driving habits.

The proportion of verbal warnings to total tickets was 62.56% and in some of the individual Areas and Stations in the District the proportion of verbal warnings to tickets was even higher.

Assuming that the majority of verbal warnings were genuine contacts with motorists, a 'fudge' factor of 10% was deducted. This still left a high proportion of verbal warnings to tickets. Because of the 'fudge' factor in verbal warnings and 'assists' (motorists whose vehicles had broken down or who sought directions), both items had been deleted on a national basis as 'contact' rates in terms of officers' productivity.

If the remaining verbal warnings were converted to 'live tickets' it would show that the staff were in effect producing more than 1 ticket per hour of traffic patrol time when calculated against the number of traffic patrol hours being delivered. (23% of the Police funding is provided through Land Transport New Zealand for traffic enforcement hours with STU required to deliver 50% of those hours and the General Duties Branch [GDB] required to deliver the remaining 50%).

Faced with a majority GDB attitude that traffic enforcement was for the traffic specialists to do, and issuing tickets was detrimental to the public attitude towards the police, there needed to be a determined effort to change the mind set of most of the staff.

6. Remedial Action.

By December 2002, action was being taken District wide to seek 'buy in' from all staff to increase productivity. This 'buy in' was based on research material obtained from New Zealand, Australia and the United Kingdom.

The material was used to demonstrate that a zero tolerance approach and issuing tickets saves lives and reduces trauma. The presentation of the material was conducted across the District by visiting individual police stations over a period of several months.

7. Operation Life.

In early February 2003, 'Operation Life' was launched District wide. This Operation spelt out previous poor performance, the fact that staff were spending time issuing verbal warnings that could be spent on issuing tickets, the need for consistency and zero tolerance with trauma promoting offending, and a minimum requirement of 1 ticket per hour of patrol time in speed, restraints and trauma promoting offences.

8. 2003 Results.

By convincing police staff that road policing was core police business and verbal warnings didn't work, there was a dramatic improvement in productivity in a short space of time.

This resulted in the Tasman Police District becoming one of the top performing districts by April/May 2003 with the lowest number of deaths, the lowest number of hospital admissions, and the highest percentage of speeding tickets issued in the 11 – 15kph band. (*Road Policing Monthly Performance Reports, Office of the Commissioner, NZ Police April/May 2003*).

As a result of this increased activity it was noticed that crime rates were decreasing, and in particular rural crime was reported as being reduced by the activities of Highway Patrol staff who were visiting out of the way places as well as attending to their core business on the highways.

By 31 December 2003 the Districts' annual road toll was reduced to 20 fatalities (half of the 2002 toll), injury crashes were only up by 24, and non injury crashes were up by 22. The social cost of crashes had reduced by \$40.67 million, hospitalisation rates for 'all hospitalised' and for 'more than one day' were trending down and the 2003 crime rate had reduced compared to 2002. Local emergency health and fire services were commenting that they were experiencing less demand for their attendance at crashes. Productivity in issuing tickets in 2003 had increased by 77%, compared to a national increase of 24%.

The District had also achieved the lowest open road mean speed of 94.4kph and the second lowest urban road mean speed of 50.2kph. (*LTSA survey results 2003*)

9. 2004 Results.

The results in 2003 in traffic enforcement and productivity were due to the efforts of 40% of the staff, increasing to 60% in early 2004. However, having reached a stage where some considerable progress had been made by those who had 'bought in' to the crime and crash reduction concept, there was a noticeable drop in productivity emerging in 2004, probably due to the remaining 40% of the staff having made no additional effort, and some of those that had in the short term made an effort not maintaining their productivity.

An increase in hospitalisations and crashes in 2004 was an unfortunate but expected result of decreased enforcement.

The road toll in 2004 was 33 deaths, an increase of 13 compared to 2003.

Despite these apparently disturbing signs, they needed to be balanced against other considerations relevant to the 2004 road toll. viz: emerging risks of inebriated pedestrians being run over while traversing our State Highways in rural areas or laying down on the road to go to sleep, an increasing number of motorcyclists in their 40's to 60's, most of them overseas visitors who have rediscovered their youth but are unfamiliar with New Zealand's rural roads, an increase in the 15 – 19 year old at risk age group who do not see the need to wear seat belts while travelling at high speed on State Highways and rural roads, an increase in the number of tourists involved in serious and fatal crashes, an increase in fatigue related crashes and the use of drugs in the 15 to 25 year age group.

Another disturbing factor was the low compliance rate for seat belts in fatalities, most of which occur on our rural roads and state highways.

Despite all these 'bad' factors, the District could still be considered to be doing reasonably well.

9. Tourism/Vehicle Growth.

The number of overseas tourists visiting Nelson is expected to grow by 96% over the next 10 years (*Latitude Nelson chief executive Paul Davis, Nelson Evening Mail 21.8.04*) and in June 2004 Nelson had 23,819 visitors during the month (*Statistics NZ, Nelson Evening Mail 21.8.04*). Although figures for Marlborough and West Coast were not available, the trend in Nelson in tourism growth, kilometres travelled and an increase in vehicle numbers is also being seen in these other two police Areas. This will continue to impact on crime and traffic trends.

10. 2005 Results.

Because of the noticeable decline in performance in 2004 there was obviously a need to remind staff of their obligations and to reinforce the need to recover and maintain the gains made in 2003.

This was done by appropriate messages being attached to productivity reports, Area Commanders applying suitable pressure and culminating in a District NCO seminar in early July 2005 to again reinforce the need to maintain our 'hard line' approach in order to achieve a reduction in road trauma.

The NCO seminar was used as a means to re-launch Operation Life and speakers from outside agencies were invited to address the staff and reinvigorate them.

A 3 month operation from November 2004 to 31 January 2005 using unmarked Highway Patrol cars to target serious offenders appears to have had the desired affect with only 1 fatality during this period.

This was followed by a combined Police/ACC rural drink drive campaign in February 2005, also using plain cars, and there were no fatalities during this period.

Both of these operations appear to have created the desired deterrent effect and also appear to have created a reasonably long term halo effect with the deterrent.

As at mid September 2005, Tasman still maintains its' high ranking in productivity in strategic enforcement areas, and detection of criminal offences through traffic stops is fairly common.

Tasmans crime clearance rate of 53% in 2003/2004 has increased to 55% for the 2004/2005 financial year and is still the highest in New Zealand.

Although traffic enforcement has contributed to an improvement in this area, there has been considerable increases in bail checks, thereby deterring criminals from venturing out or resulting in more arrests for those that did.

(Nelson Bays Police Area increased their bail checks by 192% for the year ending 30 June 2005 with their monthly average of 600 to 700 bail checks increasing to 1200 to 1400 a month. Most of this effort was carried out by GDB staff but has also been contributed to by STU members and dog handlers).

There has also been an increase in targeting recidivist offenders, with many of them feeling the pinch in their pockets through traffic offences as well as facing criminal charges.

Our non injury crash reporting rate is increasing as staff see the need to report crashes for statistical data and roading improvements.

Injury crashes are trending down, as are hospitalisations (lowest in NZ *) and therefore social costs.

Serious injuries to June 2005 are down by 8.9% against the previous 3 year average, and deaths are down 21.7% against the previous 3 year average.

(Road Policing Quarterly Performance Report, Office of the Commissioner, June 2005)

Fatalities for the calendar year to date to 12 September 2005 are 10 compared to 30 at the same time last year.

Financial year fatalities to 12 September are 0 compared to 11 at the same time last year.

Restraint compliance rates for the District have improved to 95% for front seats and 91% for rear seats (*).

(* *Road Safety Progress report to June 2005, Ministry of Transport NZ*).

Restraint compliance rates in fatalities has markedly improved with Tasman now ranked as second best in NZ.

The percentage of fatalities involving alcohol is the second lowest in NZ.

(Road Policing Quarterly Report, Office of the Commissioner, June 2005).

The 60% ratio of staff contributing to Operation Life in 2004 has increased to 70%.

Increased patrols, better deployment and roster changes in Highway patrol units has also had the desired effect on the state highways with a noticeable improvement in traffic behaviour.

11. Outlook for the Future.

Provided that the District can maintain consistency in enforcement and improve on its' crime and traffic interventions the indications are that Tasman will retain its' current high ranking compared to other Districts, or may improve even further. The initial 'fear factor' of being ticketed that was created in 2003 needs to be consistently maintained. ("Best safety lies in fear." *William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 3*).

There is certainly no room for complacency.