



BIG TURNOUT FOR POLICE COMMANDER

Superintendent Charles Haggett, Commander of the new Port Stephens Local Area Command, was the guest speaker at the packed first meeting of the Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association for 2009, held at Nelson Bay Bowling Club. Concern in the community over a range of anti-social behavior and violent attacks had prompted the invitation to the Commander to speak and address these worries.

Members, while noting and appreciating improved response times to police calls, voiced concern at the recent spate of vandalism and violence fuelled by alcohol and drugs. Concerns were expressed at the ease of access to drugs on the Peninsula and the prevalence of underage drinking. Members also expressed worry at the cost and degradation of the area by graffiti and vandalism. Discussion was held on means of reducing this.

In his address Superintendent Haggett described the background to the formation of the new Command and the organizational units that have been formed to deal with crime in the area.

He noted that a number of factors had significantly reduced a number of crime statistics over those of the previous year, these being: the increased numbers of police in Nelson Bay Station (from 12 to 25); the ability to have two cars working the area 24 hours a day; the closer proximity to the action; and the Crime Management Unit which allowed information to be sifted and passed on to operational police. Due to these factors and police targeting there had been a significant decrease (25%) in break and enters, in stealing from motor vehicles (41% decrease) and in assaults in licensed premises. However, due to an improvement in reporting, there was an increase in reported incidents of graffiti and domestic violence.

Crime prevention was an important element of the police program and the Community Safety Unit had been formed to brainstorm solutions and work with other agencies. There was also a Statewide Antisocial Behaviour Program, combining all agencies, to target problem offenders in most need. A school liaison officer has also presented to most schools in the area this week and talked to students on a variety of issues.

Superintendent Haggett reported on progress with the planned new Local Area Command Centre in Raymond Terrace and the concept that was being explored for a replacement of the now inadequate Nelson Bay police station with a combined facility for all emergency services including the fire brigade and ambulance.

Commander Haggett stressed that the police wanted to work closely with the community and urged the public to report incidents, using the 000 emergency number. Reporting of graffiti was an especially high priority in identification of offenders as it enabled police to trace patterns of incidents and tags.