

COMMISSIONER MICHAEL JOHN PALMER

Citation for conferral of a Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*)

The Board of Governors of Charles Sturt University wishes to confer the award of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*) on Michael John Palmer for his contribution to advancing policing in Australia.

There are two facts about Mick Palmer that are not widely known. The first is that he was born in Coventry in England and that as a child, he suffered from rheumatic fever. Both these facts are, however, connected. It was to improve his health that his parents, Helen and Ray, decided to leave England and move their two daughters, Patricia and Jean and Mick, to Raymond Terrace in New South Wales when he was 11 years old. His doctors had told his parents that he needed to live in a warmer and more hospitable climate if he was to have the prospect of a fulfilling life.

These words were quite prophetic, because by any estimation his life has been, and continues to be, most fulfilling.

Mick Palmer has been a police officer for 31 years, with 11 of these as Police Commissioner and Chief Executive Officer in two jurisdictions. Today, he is the longest serving police commissioner in this country and he is Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police. He is also a lawyer, an internationally recognised police leader, a police reformer, educator and a published scholar, with an international reputation for transforming police organisations.

Mick Palmer joined the Northern Territory Police in 1963 and served both in Darwin and Alice Springs, working in the Criminal Investigation Branch and the Training Directorate. In 1975 he was commissioned as an officer and by 1979, he was the Inspector-in-Charge of Recruit and In-Service Training.

Once again, his health was to play an important part in shaping his future. In 1979, he retired from the Northern Territory Police on medical grounds. Whilst undergoing treatment for his condition, he settled in Brisbane and began studying law. In 1982 he graduated with honours from the Barristers Admission Board Scheme and then practised privately at the Queensland Bar until 1983 when his health was restored and he returned to the Northern Territory Police.

Between 1981 and 1983 he was a teacher, lecturing regularly at the Brisbane College of Advanced Education and he tutored external students at the Queensland Institute of Technology.

When he returned to the Northern Territory Police in September 1983, he was reinstated at his previous rank of Chief Inspector and served in a number of management positions including the Legal Services and Prosecutions Directorates, and Head of the Criminal Investigation Branch. He has appointed Deputy Commissioner in 1987.

On 2 January 1988 he was appointed Commissioner of the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services and remained as Commissioner until his appointment as Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police in June 1994.

In this position, he is the Commonwealth of Australia's primary law enforcement officer, with responsibility for leading a federal organisation, which investigates matters affecting the Commonwealth's interests, trans-national and organised crime.

As Commissioner of the AFP, he also leads an international agency with offices in 16 countries and responsibility for Australia's various United Nations peace-keeping activities and the policing of Australia's external territories.

As Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police, he has positioned the organisation well to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in the 21st Century. This challenge has not been without difficulty because innovative transformational leadership has required a total recasting of the organisation's structure and culture.

Under his leadership, the Australian Federal Police has developed a values driven and performance based culture; it has a clear understanding of and commitment to its core business as the Commonwealth's primary law enforcement agency. Members of the Australian Federal Police assume individual and collective accountability for their work and the organisation has adopted an educational philosophy of continuous learning and skills acquisition.

These structural and cultural changes could probably have been anticipated by those closely following Commissioner Palmer's career.

In 1989, and within 12 months of his appointment as Commissioner of the Northern Territory Police, he was instrumental in beginning the debate to transform policing in Australia from an occupation into a profession, and was integral to establishing a national strategic plan to achieve this.

The plan enabled policing to develop a national approach to education and training and was soon underpinned by nationally identified workplace competencies. The plan also positioned policing to negotiate with the Commonwealth and the Vice-Chancellor – Professor Blake – to establish the Australian Graduate School of Police Management, the Charles Sturt University's first graduate school, in 1993. It is therefore most fitting that the University's Board of Governors should now recognise Commissioner Palmer's contribution to advancing policing in Australia.

He was recognised by the nation in 1998 when he was admitted to the Order of Australia for his work in advancing the police profession. And, he was recently nominated by the Prime Minister as Australia's nominee for the position of Secretary-General of Interpol when it becomes vacant next year.

The doctors were right – a warmer climate has been no impediment to a most fulfilled life.

The University is delighted to recognise Michael John Palmer

- Commissioner of the Australian Federal Police
- Former Commissioner of the Northern Territory Police, Fire & Emergency Services
- Member of the Order of Australia
- Recipient of the Australian Police Medal
- Chairman, the Australian Institute of Police Management Board of Control
- Chairman, the Australasian Police Education Standards Council
- Representative of the Commonwealth Minister for Justice and Customs on the Board of Studies, Australian Graduate School of Police Management
- Deputy Chair of the Prime Minister's National Council on Drugs
- Member of the Executive Committee of Interpol

for the conferral of the degree, Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*).

Dated this Fourteenth Day of May One Thousand Nine Hundred and Ninety Nine