Getting Just Deserts?

Policing, Governance and Rurality in Western Australia

Dr Richard Yarwood

School of Geography

University of Plymouth

Drake's Circus

Plymouth

PL4 8AA

UK

r.yarwood@plymouth.ac.uk

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01752 233083

Abstract

This paper examines the perceived shift from police to policing in developed world countries. It focuses on the development of multi-agency policing in rural Western Australia and, using ideas from governance theory, questions whether these partnerships are leading to more inclusive policing and new forms of rural governance. Evidence is taken from the development of a Rural Crime Prevention Strategy and interviews with various stakeholders in rural Australia. It is concluded that multi-agency work does offer a more inclusive way forward but that it is still mainly driven by government, rather than radical changes in rural society and power.

1. Introduction

In the twentieth century, it was possible to trace how the police in many countries used a nested spatial hierarchy of constabularies, districts and beats in order to enforce control over particular, defined spaces (Fyfe, 1991). Today, however, the job of policing no longer rests, if it ever did, with the police alone, but with multiple agencies that police different places in different ways. This is evidenced by the use of, for example, private security (South, 1988), closed circuit television (CCTV) (Norris and Armstrong, 1997), crime and safety partnerships (Goris and Walters, 1999), indigenous officers (Winfree and Newbold, 1999), voluntary schemes (Fyfe, 1995; Fyfe and Milligan, 2003) and exclusive legislation (Young, 2002). Consequently, complex spatialities of policing are emerging that demand greater scrutiny by geographers and policy makers. Three key questions emerge.

First, what or who is being policed? Increased policy emphasis is being placed on policing rather than the police. While the police can be defined as 'a state agency mainly patrolling public spaces in blue uniforms, with a broad mandate of crime control, order maintenance and service function' (Reiner, 1994, p. 1003), policing is a broader concept that refers to 'an intricate, almost unconscious network of voluntary controls and standards among people themselves and enforced by people themselves' (Bowling and Foster, 2002, p.981). It is crucial to realise whose standards are being policed (Bowling and Foster, 2002; Waddington, 1999).

Policing is therefore concerned with more than just the prevention of criminal activities. Commentators have recognized a blurring between crime, disorder and activities that simply threaten hegemonic standards and lifestyles (Cloke, 1993; Lupton, 1999; Young, 1999, 2002; Sibley, 1994, 2003). As Young (1999, p.139)

notes 'one person's order is disorder ... one group's normal behaviour creates intolerable conditions for others'. Efforts to remove beggars from city centres (Atkinson, 2003; Belina and Helms, 2003; Williams et al., 2000) or nomadic people from the countryside (Halfacree, 1996; Sibley, 2003) confirm not only that policing can exclude from space, but that it does so according to moralistic, rather than criminal, criteria.

Second, who is policing? Over recent years, policy changes have witnessed the responsibility of policing moving from the police towards a much wider range of state, private and voluntary organisations (Garland, 1996). The terms 'plural policing' and the 'extended policing family' are widely used to describe the increasingly hybridised forms of policing employed in particular localities (Crawford *et al.* 2005). The state police force has changed with increasing use of civilians (Reiner, 1994), privatisation (South, 1988) and the introduction of auxiliary posts with limited powers, such as Community Support Officers in UK and Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers in Australia. The private sector has taken over the policing of private space to such a degree that it is estimated that, in the UK, there are more private security guards then police officers (Jones and Newburn, 1998). Voluntary policing (Fyfe, 1995) and partnership working (Hughes, 2002) have also increased with the aim of improving community safety (Hughes, 2000).

Third, why is policing changing? Changes in the style and direction of policing can be traced to economic, social and political changes in late-modern society (Garland, 2000, 2001; Garland and Sparks, 2000). Politically, the shift from state to multi-agency policing parallels or, more accurately, reflects new-right ideologies that emphasise networks of governance, rather than government, in decision making and service delivery. This principle envisages the police enabling,

rather than delivering, policing *through*, rather than *to*, active citizens and communities (Rose, 1996; Goris and Walters, 1999). Economically, new forms of policing are essential to the creation of safe, sanitised spaces to necessitate the redevelopment of urban areas (Raco, 2003). Socially, it has been suggested that a post-Fordist transformation to late modernity has led to an 'ontological insecurity' caused by diversification of lifestyles, wider travel, glimpses of other cultures and immigration (Young, 1999). In turn this has led to an 'exclusionary society' that has sought to remove particular groups from particular spaces using policing and legislation. Greater attention should therefore be paid to the reasons why policing is changing and the implications of these developments.

Post modern geographies of policing are therefore complex and offer many directions for geographical research. However, this paper focuses on the development of policing partnerships, which have become a central strand in many countries' policing strategies (Gorris and Walters, 1999). Some evaluations of partnership working have started to question their legitimacy, effectiveness and inclusiveness (Crawford, 1997, 2002; Hughes and Edwards, 2002; Hughes et al., 2002), yet their importance in community safety strategies continues to grow (Palmer, 1999). While many partnerships have been established and evaluated in urban places, they are only recently being implemented in rural areas, reflecting the considerable neglect of rural policing by the police, policy makers and, indeed, geographers (Yarwood, 2001). If the countryside is to be policed in an inclusive and effective manner, the challenge for new partnerships is to police the law, rather than particular hegemonic visions of rurality. Failure to do so may contribute to an 'exclusive society' where certain groups are labelled and excluded from rural space by policing partnerships because they are

'out of place', rather than because they pose a criminal threat (Gray and O'Conner 1990; Cresswell, 1996; Young, 2002).

To begin exploring these issues, this paper examines the development of a multi-agency policing strategy in rural Western Australia (WA). It is divided into three main parts. First, it draws upon theoretical understandings of governance to provide a conceptual framework for the analysis of policing partnerships. In particular, Jessop's (2000) use of complexity theory is used to provide these foundations. Second, the paper traces some of the complex spatialities of crime and policing in Western Australia and argues that cultural and racial conflict, rather than isolation, have had have the biggest impact on policing in rural WA. The final section traces the development of WA's Rural Crime Prevention Strategy. It uses Jessop's conceptualisation of governance to trace whether partnership working can be used to develop, implement and maintain a 'world view' on multi-agency policing.

2. Rurality, policing and governance

There is increasing evidence that the fear of crime is problematic in the rural localities of many first world countries and this has led to demands for improvements in policing (Gray and O'Conner, 1990; Anderson, 1997; Hogg and Carrington, 1998; Dingwall and Moody, 1999; Yarwood and Gardner, 2000; Carcach, 2002; Aust and Simmons, 2002). One response has been the introduction of initiatives aimed at encouraging active citizenship and partnership working across a range of rural spaces (Hughes et al., 2002; Crawford, 1997, 2002; Goris and Walters, 1999). In the UK, for example, the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act requires all parish councils to plan local

crime prevention strategies in partnership with other agencies (DETR, 2000 Dean and Doran, 2002).

The widespread use of partnerships to plan and deliver rural policy has been seen as indicative of a shift from government to governance (Goodwin, 2004). They mark a departure away from top-down hierarchical forms of government and towards more hetrogenic forms of governance involving agencies from the public, private and voluntary sectors (Goodwin, 1998, 2004; Stoker, 2000; Woods and Goodwin, 2003).

Some commentators have argued that this emphasis on community-based approaches has signalled that the responsibility for crime prevention appears to be passing from the police (or state) to the individual (active) citizen or community (Lupton, 1999; Hughes et al., 2002; Crawford, 1997, 2002; Yarwood, 2003). However, these partnerships do not represent the withdrawal of the state but, rather, are evidence of an 'advanced liberal' form of governance (Rose and Miller, 1992; Rose, 1996; Higgins and Lockie, 2002; Lockie et al., 2006; Woods, 2006). Partnerships remain closely regulated by central government and, in practice, are driven by state actors, particularly local governments and police forces, rather than voluntary or private actors (Phillips 2002).

While direct government intervention may be reduced, the state continues to be influence 'at a distance' or 'through community' by making communities more responsible for their own protection (Garland, 1996, 2000). This process of 'responsibilization' has seen the state adopt new roles to encourage, persuade, enable, and support community-based groups to contribute to the policing of their own localities (Rose, 1996). This is leading to 'a new mode of governing crime with its own forms of knowledge, its own objectives, its own techniques and apparatuses' (Garland, 2000 p.454). Far from being autonomous, the performance of crime

partnerships is subject to surveillance and scrutiny by government agencies (Higgins and Lockie, 2002). Thus, centralised funding for local partnerships often relies on completing assessments of crime using recognised data and devising crime-prevention strategies that can be monitored and assessed by local and central government (Phillips, 2002).

In this way, governance may be recognised as an assemblage of different knowledge, technologies and practices that seek to shape conduct in particular ways (Foucault, 1991). Community partnership therefore represents a form of 'technological agency' in a wider system of governmentality that aims to ensure that policing is conducted in particular ways. The re-deployment of community does not represent a withdrawal or hollowing out of the state but, instead, a technology that can be used to govern effectively 'from a distance' (Higgins and Lockie, 2002). Community is 'a means of government: its ties, bonds, forces and affiliations are to be celebrated, encouraged, nurtured, shaped and instrumentalized in the hope of producing consequences desirable for all and for each' (Rose, 1996, p.335). 'Government through community' represents a re-positioning of social responsibility away from central government and towards local people (Murdoch, Rose, 1996). Citizens assume the co-roles of consumers, providers and governors of local services (O'Toole and Burdess, 2004).

This is part of a discourse that views local communities, rather than wider social structures, as the cause and solution of the problems facing rural places (Lockie et al 2006) and, consequently, rural citizens are being encouraged to be less reliant on the state (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000; Woods 2006). This form of governance has been widely adopted in Australia to address a range of environmental (Lockie et al., 2006) and social issues in rural places (Hebert-Cheshire, 2000; O'Toole and Burdess, 2004

Higgins and Lockie, 2002). The establishment of community-based crime partnerships in rural places reflects these broader changes in Australian governmentality. It is important to understand the impacts of these changes on rural society and four inter-related issues need to be addressed.

First, it has been recognised that the power and direction of governmental networks are determined by the 'bargaining games' played by different actors within and between networks (Rhodes, 1996). Woods and Goodwin (2003, p.256) note that 'constituted locally specific notions of rurality and territorial identity … have acted to enable and constrain elite responses to structural change and partnership working'. Partnerships are more likely to be dominated by local elites that may seek to further their own interests, intentionally or otherwise. In Australia, the farming agenda continues to dominate rural governance, with an assumption that what is beneficial for farmers is beneficial for rural community (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000). Those that are not included in partnerships may become further disempowered as government support is withdrawn and they come to rely more closely on community rather than state support. Governance through community may, therefore, enforce historic hegemonic power relations.

Conversely, Woods (2006) points out that since traditional rural community relations have been weakened, efforts to re-engage rural citizens may lead to new forms of local power relations developing. Significantly, he suggests that idlized discourses of rurality may significantly influence the identity and direction of these movements. Greater attention is therefore needed on the micro politics of rural change and the role of different agencies within emerging structures of governance (Woods and Goodwin, 2003)

Second, new community groups can also provide a forum for making greater demands on government for service provision (Woods, 2006). Closer liaison with parish councils in the UK for example have improved police-public relations, but have also required police officers to listen demands by parish councils for improvements in rural policing (Yarwood, 2005).

Third, questions have also been raised about the de facto importance of new community partnership. Empirical evidence suggests that while the police and local authorities make efforts to consult, and even welcome the involvement of, voluntary actors, the burden of auditing and planning crime and disorder falls largely on their shoulders (Phillips, 2002). Surveys by Newburn and Jones (2002) also confirm that the consultation and auditing process relied heavily, but not exclusively, on police data. Despite a legal requirement for parish councils to be involved in the development of the UK's crime and safety partnerships, evidence from one British constabulary suggests that their knowledge of, let alone involvement in, these partnerships is minimal (Yarwood, 2005).

Finally, Hughes (2002) is critical of crime and safety partnerships, arguing that they do little more than address symptoms rather than causes of crime. The participants of crime and disorder partnerships come from elite groups who are unlikely to live in high crime areas. Consequently, the social bias and operation of partnerships is leading to consultation of some people and the control of others.

Greater attention, then, is needed on the micro-politics of partnership working (Woods and Goodwin, 2003). As well power relations, concern should also be given to the ways in which partnerships strengthen (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000) or weaken (Woods, 2006) particular discourses of rurality. It is necessary, then, to examine the political and cultural structures that drive partnerships. Jessop's (2000) use of

complexity theory provides a suitable framework for examining these issues. He argues that actors and agencies in self-organising networks are required to develop 'rules of the game' in order to gain and use power. Four actions are needed. First, it is necessary to develop simplifying practices that reduce the complexity of the world, are congruent to real world practices and are relevant to the goals of actors. This process of simplification requires actors to agree with specific terms of references that may, or may not, reflect hegemonic discourses. Thus, rural partnerships may subscribe to a particular vision of rurality. It is therefore important to understand how ideas linked to rurality, criminality and policing are culturally constructed by actors in crime partnerships (Yarwood, 2001; Bowling and Foster, 2002) and the political implications of these constructions. Second, actors should develop capacities for social learning, responsibility and action. Questions need to be raised about the extent to which new structures of governance allow actors to from alliances with each other to maintain cultural hegemony (Fyfe and Milligan, 2003). Alternatively new structures of governance may create new capacities for actions, allowing the development of discourses that challenge traditional or powerful viewpoints (Woods, 2006). Third, partnerships should build methods to co-ordinate actions across a wide social and spatial spectrum. While police-public relations are often better in rural areas (Yarwood 2003, Winfree and Newbold, 1999; Hughes and Edwards, 2002), it has been harder to establish policing partnerships in rural areas. In the UK, only 16% of Crime and Safety Partnerships established under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act operate in rural areas (Aust and Simmons 2002). Scarce resources, problems of distance and organisational difficulties are seen as problematic in rural areas of Australia and New Zealand (Winfree and Newbold, 1999). Although some guidelines have been published on good partnership working in the UK (Newburn and Jones,

2002), there has been limited research on developing good practice in a specifically rural context. Finally, according to Jessop (2000), partnerships should establish a common world view to regulate individual action and to develop a system of governance to control key players' actions and expectations. Although this view will inevitably reflect constructions of rurality, policing and criminality used by crime and policing partnerships, it should be a common, not an exclusive world view. If the countryside is to be policed in an inclusive and effective manner, the challenge for policing partnerships is to adopt a world view that includes rather than excludes particular social groups. Failure to do so will mean that partnerships will contribute to an 'exclusive society' where certain groups are labelled and excluded from rural space by policing partnerships because they are 'out of place', rather than because they pose a criminal threat (Gray and O'Conner 1990; Young 2002). Partnerships based on exclusion may achieve some short-term goals but, ultimately, will only contribute to a divisive society that contributes to, rather than solves, crime (Hughes, 2002)

The successful implementation of these four moments will lead to a 'heterarchic' system based on interactive learning amongst a plurality of autonomous but interactive agents. However, given the complexity of these tasks, these systems of government may ultimately fail, resulting in social exclusion and incoherent, ineffective policy delivery (Jessop, 2000).

It is therefore essential to understand the impacts of new forms of governance on society (Stoker, 2000) and, consequently, there have been calls for closer empirical examinations of governance in (Goodwin, 1998; Kearns and Paddison, 2000). In order to contribute to this task, this paper examines the development of crime and safety partnerships in Western Australia. The following section outlines complexities of

criminality, rurality and policing in the state. Following this, Jessop's framework is used to evaluate the development of a multi-agency rural crime prevention strategy.

3. Crime, policing and Governmentality in Western Australia

3. 1 Introduction

The state of Western Australia (WA) covers approximately 2.5 million kilometres (one third of Australia) and, in terms of territory, is the largest single police jurisdiction in the world (Figure 1). Although it has been argued that cultural rather than physical aspects of rurality have a greater bearing on the policing of rural areas (Yarwood, 2001), the shear scale of WA provides a significant challenge for policing and the provision of justice. In the north-east of WA, for example, there is only one officer per 3,345 km^2 or one police station per 45,779km^2 (compared to 1 officer per 2 km^2 and one station per 55 km^2 in Perth). However, the ratio of police officers per head of population is higher in rural (1 officer per 240 in Northern Region) than urban areas (1 per 600 in Perth), although officers are mainly stationed in larger settlements. Remoter places, such as pastoral stations and Aboriginal communities, are policed with four-by-four long-distance patrols that last over a number of days and undertake a range of tasks from issuing licences, investigating crimes to community liaison.

Recorded crime rates are as high in rural areas (10.2 per 1,000) as metropolitan ones (11.4 per 1,000) (Harding et al., 1997), although there are significant geographical differences in the rates and types of crime. Harding et al (1997) note that regions in the south west of the state enjoy relatively low crime rates,

while those to the east and north, which are more isolated, suffer from relatively high rates. Significant variations also occur between urban and rural places within the same region (Harding et al., 1997). For example, Kalgoorlie has high rates for assault, yet these are much lower in more rural areas of the Goldfields-Esperance Region. This is not to say that crime rates are always higher in country towns: drug offences, for example, are significantly higher in rural areas of Goldfields-Esparance than Kalgoorie (Harding et al., 1997).

Despite the size of WA, 'race, not rurality, is the touchstone of local experiences and explanations of crime' (Hogg and Carrington 1998, p.167). A striking feature of crime in rural Australia is the high arrest rate of Aboriginal people. In WA there are 3,911 Aborigines per 100,000 in custody compared to 99 per 100,000 for non-Aboriginals (Western Australia Police Service, 2004). These arrests occur, in part, because of a clash of values about rural space. Many Australian country towns are re-imaging themselves to encourage gentrification or tourism using sanitised, suburban constructions of heritage and rurality (Tonts and Greive, 2002). By contrast, Indigenous groups view public (open air) spaces in towns as places to congregate, negotiate kinship responsibilities and drink (White, 1997; Cunneen, 2001). Drinking in particular is problematic for constructions of white rurality, because it occurs in *public* spaces and clashes with the commercial and service functions of towns. Aboriginal people are consequently seen as 'disrupting' (white) rural interests and ways of life and are constructed as non-citizens and 'untidy' (Cunneen, 2001). They are excluded from imagined rural spaces and situated, both physically and imaginatively, on the edge of or outside rural communities. High levels of policing and arrest rates are used to enforce these ideals.

By contrast, Aboriginal lands and communities are under-policed and lack permanent police stations despite horrifying rates of domestic violence and sexual abuse (Gorden et al, 2002). However, in response to calls from Aboriginal communities, multi-purpose police stations are being built to provide both police and social services in an effort to deal with crime and the causes of crime (Gordon et al, 2002).

Crime and criminality is therefore extremely complex in rural Western Australia. Policing practice is closely linked to historical context, cultural conflict and the imagined geographies of rural Western Australia and it continues to reflect and enforce dominant power relationships in Western Australia. Many discourses of rurality make strong connections between ethnicity and criminality, leading to the criminalisation of Aboriginal people (Cunneen, 2001) and the neglect of other crimes occurring in rural places (such as crime on farms).

However, more recently, greater efforts have been made by the state government to recognise and address past and current injustices (Johnston, 1991; Gordon, 2001). A multi-level approach to policing has been adopted in an effort to improve public participation and, consequently, to try and address the wide range of issues, cultural and criminal, facing people living, working and visiting rural WA.

3.2 Office of Crime Prevention

The responsibility for developing multi-agency policing policy rests with the Office of Crime Prevention (OCP), a department of the state government. It aims to 'coordinate crime prevention initiatives and community safety activities in Western Australia' (OCP, 2005a). Partnership working is a key part of the OCP's work and a

range of multi-agency initiatives have been developed to improve community safety. These have been largely guided by their Community Safety and Crime Prevention Strategy (OCP, 2004) that aims to prevent crime by:

1. supporting families, children and young people;

2. strengthening communities and revitalising neighbourhoods;

3. targeting priority offences;

4. reducing repeat offending; and

5. designing out crime and using technology.

The strategy places responsibility on individuals and communities to tackle crime, albeit with the support of the OCP. Four levels of partnership working have been developed to achieve this (OCP, 2005a). First, there are 'decision making partnerships' that operate at the governmental level and that help to determine policy. Secondly, advisory partnerships draw on expertise from the private, voluntary and state sectors to assess the best ways of delivering policy. Thirdly, policy and research partnerships draw on the police and government agencies to monitor and review policy. Finally, operational partnerships between state and local government seek to apply policy at the shire (local authority) level. These four levels of partnerships form a hierarchy of governance (Edwards et al., 2001) that leads from the development of strategy at the governmental level to the delivery of policy through local communities.

However, these partnerships co-exist with a whole series of longer-standing operational partnerships, including Aboriginal Justice Agreements, Night Patrols, Rural Watch schemes and 'burglary countdown' partnerships that operate against

property crimes in specific local areas. This mix of partnerships represents something of a 'spaghetti bowl' (Johnston and Whitehand, 2004) that has introduced a greater complexity into the provision of policing.

In 2004, the OCP were adding further ingredients to this mix through the development of a 'Rural Crime Prevention Strategy'. This 'policy and research partnership' aimed to address crime prevention issues through the use of delivery partnerships:

> The Rural Crime Prevention Strategy is guided by principles of sustainability; working better together; inclusiveness; targeted efforts; evidence based decision making; focus on results; and sharing knowledge (OCP, 2004, p.1)

The development of the strategy was led by the OCP and an advisory partnership comprising of representatives from six other governmental departments. This strategy was developed between September and November 2004, cumulating in the publication of a Rural Crime Strategy in December 2004 (OCP, 2004).

Methodology

Three primary research techniques were employed to examine the development of the rural crime partnership. First, non-participant observation was conducted in meetings of a steering group established to develop the strategy. The group was led by principal policy officers from the Office of Crime Prevention and comprised of six other representatives from different governmental departments:

- Department of Housing and Works

- Department of Community Development

- Department of Indigenous Affairs

- Department of Justice

- Department of Agriculture

- Western Australia Police Service

The steering group met three times prior to the publication of the strategy. I was invited to attend and observe these meetings, allowing an opportunity to study competing discourses about rural crime and its prevention. Notes were made about the content of each formal meeting and the interactions witnessed in them, which were later written up and analysed using content analysis. My involvement was of a non-participatory nature and I did not contribute to the issues being discussed.

Second, in-depth interviews were held individually with all members of the steering group at later dates. These were held at their places of employment and followed a semi-structured format. The interview schedule was divided into six main sections, which examined: the respondent's organisation and their role in it; how they perceived rurality; what crimes they viewed as problematic in rural areas; their organisation's role in crime prevention; their views on the effectiveness of policing and, finally, their opinions on partnership working and the crime prevention strategy. Throughout the interview, emphasis was placed on examining their agency's role or attitude to these issues, although, in practice, the interviews represented the views of the interviewee rather than their organisation's official line.

Thirdly, it was possible to accompany OCP community-engagement staff on a series of twelve visits to Shire Councils in regional areas of WA. Shire councils are the lowest tier of democracy in Western Australia and are controlled by elected councillors. The purposes of these visits were for OCP to meet shire councillors, discuss crime concern issues with them and to encourage them to participate in the formation of locally-based multi-agency crime partnerships. These discussions took the form of formal council meetings and were held in the meeting rooms of Shire Halls. As well as OCP staff, they were also usually attended by local police officers. Again, my presence at the meetings was non-participatory and limited, with the consent of the Shire Council, to listening and note-taking. These meetings allowed a wide range of discourses about rural crime and policing to be heard, as well as the opportunity to gain insights into inter-agency interaction in the development of multi-agency policing strategies.

All interviews and observations were recorded by tape and/or scratch notes and transcribed post-event. The analysis of these transcripts was grounded by Jessop's (2000) ideas discussed above and were etically (Cloke et al, 2004) coded to highlight different practices of governance. These transcripts were also supported by secondary data including the draft Rural Crime Strategy (OCP) and official documents that detailed the work of the shire councils, government agencies and police departments central to the development of multi-agency policing in rural Western Australia.

The following sections use Jessop's (2000) ideas to examine the development of the strategy further and to evaluate the extent, if at all, to which new forms of policing in rural Australia reflect and affect changing forms of governance and power relations.

5. Simplifying Practices

As this paper has emphasised, rural Australia and crime in rural Australia have many layers of complexity. According to Jessop (2000), successful governance depends on developing a simplified and unified view of complex situations. In order to develop the strategy, it was necessary to simplify two key issues: rurality and criminality.

Geographers have largely resigned themselves to the impossibility of defining a rural area (Hoggart 1990, Cloke, 1994), recognising instead that rurality should be treated as a social construction with different meanings for different groups (Halfacree, 1993). However, for practitioners concerned with spatial policies and the provision of services in remote places, there is still a requirement to define transparently the area in which a policy will operate.

In an Australian context, the term 'rural' is widely used to describe agricultural areas. However, 'pastoral' refers to large-scale pastoral farms, whereas 'remote' refers to outback or wilderness areas (which might contain pastoral stations too). The term 'regional' is used as something of a 'catch-all' term to refer to clusters of settlements and towns. A rural crime strategy might, therefore, have been seen to have applied to agricultural areas, including small and medium sized farms. It was felt at the steering group meetings that there was a danger that particular people would not 'buy into' or involve themselves with the strategy as they associated particular places with particular terms. Hence, a 'rural' strategy might only appeal to farmers (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000).

Consequently the draft strategy suggested aimed to deal with 'crime and crime prevention as it affects the people and communities 'in between' the cities and the

most remote communities' (OCP, 2005b, p.1). However, this did not the most remote communities: 'issues in remote communities have added layers of complexity and are dealt with in other Government strategies' (OCP 2005b, p.1).

This refers to the implementation of the Western Australian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (AJA) in March 2004 by the state government. AJAs seek to reduce over-representation of Indigenous people in the justice system by improving community safety and improving policing and justice services in Aboriginal lands. It is currently being implemented by a partnership of government agencies, the police and indigenous community groups.

In the development of its rural strategy the OCP sought to avoid overlap and replication with the AJA, although the issues covered by AJAs are relevant to crime prevention in rural areas. Rather than joined up thinking, it appeared that departmental and policy boundaries were established and maintained in the development of the rural strategy.

Consequently, the Rural Crime Prevention Strategy applied to areas that were recognised as rural, yet were not covered by other agreements or partnerships. This resulted in rather confusing definitions of rurality. Arguing that 'the question of what is remote and what is rural does not have a clear cut answer' (OCP, 2005b, p.12), the draft strategy made a case for the inclusion of towns in remote locations:

> for example, Halls Creek is by most standards in a remote location. The Rural Crime Strategy is relevant to Halls Creek, however, especially as the Shire of Halls Creek has formed a Community Safety and Crime Prevention Partnership with the state to address priority issues (OCP, 2005b, p.12)

Likewise, economic activity in remote places was also deemed acceptable to include in the policy:

> much of the pastoral and grazing industry takes place in remote
> locations also but it is too addressed in the strategy. Many of the
> serious issues and some emerging issues in crime in agriculture
> industries relate to stock theft, so it is important that a crime prevention
> strategy should cover pastoral stations as well (OCP, 2005b, p.12)

Far from presenting a simplified version of rurality, the rural strategy added another layer of complexity to the policing and governance of rural crime.

A second issue, partly linked to these spatialities, was the question of what crimes should be prioritised. The development of the rural crime prevention strategy appeared to be driven mainly, but not exclusively, by crimes committed on farms or against farmers. Theft from farms is a growing but largely hidden problem in rural Australia. It has been estimated that 13-15% of Australian farms have been a victim of property crime, with many others suffering from trespass, poaching or dumping of rubbish (McCall, 2003).

Although the draft strategy discussed a wide range of crimes and issues, it aimed to target priority offences that it defined as:

> residential burglary on rural properties and in country towns; theft from
> properties (including machinery, livestock and produce); violence and anti-

social behaviour; and other priorities identified through research and consultation (OCP, 2004, p.1).

Much attention was given to farmers, which the OCP viewed as 'the forgotten victims of crimes' (OCP, 2005a). This stance appears to confirm Hebert-Cheshire's (2000) assertion that, in Australian policy, rural discourses tend to reflect farming discourses. However, this focus was driven by political criteria and, in particular, an opportunity to set and meet achievable targets for crime reduction in rural areas. An OCP policy officer noted that:

1. farm crime was high and levels of reporting were low. A rural strategy would help to reduce these;

2. these issues were seen to lend themselves to behavioural solutions and taking personal responsibility for crime prevention, such as locking property or securing valuable equipment. The promotion of these relatively simple measure would allow 'real results' in the reduction of crime figures;

3. this strategy lent itself to an emphasis on individuals, partnerships and co-operation to achieve results

However, this focus provoked a division of opinion amongst the steering group members. On the one hand, some felt that the emphasis on farm and property crime was an important focus:

Farmers have lots of equipment because of the seasons. As the whole of the Wheatbelt ripens together farmers will own rather then rent

equipment so that they can work when it is necessary. There is therefore a lot of equipment on the farms that can be stolen. … Quad bikes are also popular targets. They are unlicensed and popular. It is easy to sell them, move them across State and sell them in a back alley in another state. (Interview with Steering Group Member D).

These priorities were not, however, shared by the entire steering group. Another representative said:

Crime is not seen as a major issue by farmers. They have many more concerns. It is a 'crime' if crops are lost to drought or disease. (Interview with Steering Group Member A).

He suggested that crime prevention was already dealt with by farmers using 'common sense' approaches, such as not putting their best cattle next to a road where they could be seen or stolen.

Others also felt that farm crime was not a priority and that there were far more pressing concerns, such as alcohol and drug based crime, as well as violent crime that needed to be addressed. However, these crimes were discussed almost exclusively in terms of ethnicity. First, crime was often seen to be *caused by* Indigenous people:

Crime in towns is far more of a problem and is linked to Aborigines. People can get beaten up by groups of kids (Interview with Steering Group Member A)

When they [Aborigines] come into town the people in the town do not want them as they 'mess up the neat town' but the township has very little authority to do anything about it. (Interview with Steering Group Member F)

Second, crime was seen as a *result of* wider social problems faced by Aboriginal groups.

They have poor parents, poor health and poor education. 'Sniffing' is rife in many communities. There are high death rates and they all have ear infections that make it impossible to hear anything at school. Health is a real issue, including heart attacks, diabetes and so on. Some 13 year olds are mothers. (Interview with Steering Group Member C)

These issues were widely linked to welfare dependency or self-governance:

Crime is caused by giving Aborigines an incentive not to work. It can be profitable to have a family or 9-10 kids as there are so many handouts. The kids have nothing to do and end up drinking or sniffing petrol/solvents. (Interview with Steering Group Member A)

Social security is generous, housing do all the repairs. No one is prepared to strive and there is an attitude that 'someone will fix it'. (Interview with Steering Group Member E)

In 1967 they were given the vote and were eligible for social security and could go into pubs. However they were given too much at one time and were unable to absorb it … self determination is fine but they have no idea what to do with it (Interview with Steering Group Member G)

These discourses tended to emphasis Aborigines as *perpetrators* of crime, rather than *victims* of crime. Nevertheless, some comments recognised that crime was a problem for Aboriginal people, especially women and children:

In the 'Western World' things that are seen as crimes are not seen as crimes by Aborigines, such as underage sex and child abuse. Young girls are 'promised' to older clan members. Often girls who go to cities to be educated do not want to go back home because of this. (Interview with Steering Group Member G)

There are also 'good people' amongst aborigines who, like townspeople, want criminals to be dealt with. (Interview with Steering Group Member A)

Consequently the rural strategy's emphasis on property crimes in non-remote areas represented something of an over-simplification for some steering group members.

The Rural crime strategy will not address any of these issues [domestic violence]. It would be OK if it focuses on farm crime but it can't sit outside these other issues (Interview with Steering Group Member C).

Others felt that it oversimplified crime by associating violent crime with remote areas or indigenous issues. In particular, one member considered that non-Indigenous women had very little support or policing for domestic violence, a concern that has been noted in academic studies (Harding et al., 1997; Ferrante et al., 1996). However, despite efforts to simplify rurality and criminality, there was a feeling that the strategy remained too complex:

'The problem with the rural strategy is that it is too ambitious. It needs to be more targeted. Rural should mean the SW, Wheatbelt and dairy areas whereas a regional strategy should be targeted at Aboriginal issues' (Interview with Steering Group Member C)

The strategy should be aimed at farm crime and issues of theft, trespass, rustling and illegal trade. Farm crime and towns should have separate strategies as too much is being dealt with (Interview with Steering Group Member B)

Despite these objections and a lack of consensus about either rurality or criminality, the draft Rural Crime Prevention Strategy maintained its emphasis on rural areas 'in between' remote places and metropolitan areas, paying particular attention to crimes on farms and crimes in small country towns. It identified five goals to:

1. support families, children and young people in rural areas.
2. strengthen rural communities.

3. target priority offences: residential burglary on rural properties and in country towns; theft from properties (including machinery, livestock and produce); violence and anti-social behaviour; and other priorities identified through research and consultation.

4. reduce repeat offending.

5. design out crime, using new technology and preventing new or emerging crime from becoming a problem (OCP, 2004b).

Although the OCP found it difficult to find consensus amongst government departments, the draft strategy sought to achieve a closer world view with individual citizens and other, local agencies by developing a capacities for learning about the problems posed by crime in rural places.

6. Developing Capacities for Social Learning

In common with many first-world policing partnerships (Gorris and Walters, 1998), the rural strategy emphasised individual and community responibilization through active citizenship and personal action (Rose, 1996). For each of the strategy's five goals (listed in the previous sector), the strategy outlined a series of actions that would aimed to achieve them. In all cases, partnership working between named agencies and community was a high priority.

There was also evidence that partnerships and initiatives led by other agencies were being incorporated into the strategy and that some of the concerns raised by members of the steering group (especially about Indigenous crime) had been listened to. For example, although the OCP's definitions of rurality appeared to steer their

strategy away from Indigenous issues, the strategy noted that existing partnerships would help to achieve the goals of the rural strategy: 'local Aboriginal Justice Plans will be negotiated in priority locations to encourage ways of achieving safer and more just communities through sharing of responsibility' (OCP 2004b, p. 2). This showed a capacity to incorporate learning from within the steering group, as well as to link up with other initiatives being steered by other government agencies.

Similarly, having faced criticism that the strategy was trying to cover too many issues in too many different rural spaces, particular emphasis was put on local actions and for local stakeholders to tailor the strategy to fit particular concerns in their own locality. The Rural Crime Prevention Strategy aimed, therefore, to emphasis the role of local communities and individuals within local decision making. This was not to say, however, that the OCP was aiming to rid itself of any responsibility. Rather, it saw capacity building as a central role and, in particular, to help local agencies to improve their knowledge of rural crime, crime prevention and policing. One of the OCP's functions was to research and disseminate knowledge about crime and much of its day to day working was based around this. The rural crime prevention strategy, therefore, aimed to develop and deploy a range of knowledge against the threat of crime, ranging from local understandings of crime to the centralised statistics of crime data collected and held by the state government. A range of methods are used by the OCP, including the use of community engagement teams to work with local communities and the publication of detailed local crime profiles on its website.

This was evident in the dissemination of a series of twelve information sheets published by the OCP that were aimed at informing individuals and community groups about how to prevent rural crime. These focused exclusively on property crime, perhaps emphasising its importance in the strategy, specifically:

- Crime on farms

- Farm Machinery Theft

- Farmhouse security

- Fuel Tank Security

- General Farm Security

- Rural Neighbourhood Watch

- Identification of Farm Machinery, Tools and Equipment

- Livestock theft

- Reporting crimes to the police

- Seed and grain theft

- Trespassers and Shooters

- State Rural Crime Prevention strategy fact sheet

These leaflets, with their strong emphasis on personal responsibility to 'harden targets' and improve personal security, reflect a trend of individualisation identified in Australia policy that requires rural people to think and act for themselves (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000), albeit with advice from a central agency (the OCP in this case). For example, 'Farmhouse Security Leaflet' notes:

> The boundary is the property owner's primary line of defence …
>
> secure locks and gates .. ditches form a natural barrier, use locking
>
> posts to obstruct large openings to yards.

The policy of improving awareness through leaflets was met with cynicism by some steering group members, one of whom described it as 'whacking out another set of brochures' that would:

> only achieve so much as farmers are snowed under with literature/material and so on. The police need to be more pro-active, perhaps running road-shows or forums (Interview with Steering Group Member A).

He also felt that the scheme was being primarily driven by government:

> Federal and local ministers get their picture delivered to all households in rural Australia: it's good election publicity (Interview with Steering Group Member A).

However, the production of information sheets was only a (minor) part of the strategy and, more significantly, partnership working was the intended means of developing capacity and co-ordinating the actions of different agencies.

7. Co-ordinating Actions

The Rural Crime Prevention Strategy aimed to encourage a range of state, voluntary and private agencies to work in partnership to achieve the strategy's goals at a local level. Some members of the steering group welcomed the opportunities that partnership working brought. One member felt that social housing suffered as a result

of crime but felt that the Housing Department was not able to address these issues fully as a lack of funding had stripped them to their 'core functions' of providing and managing housing. Partnership working and the funding opportunities offered by the crime strategy were seen to offer opportunities for government agencies to take more pro-active measures to develop 'strong families' that would, in turn, reduce damage to housing. Likewise, he also hoped that funds might be obtainable to improve the physical security of their homes. However, he felt that his department had very little real choice about partnership working:

> All local government departments are stretched (financially) and so are
>
> forced to work together. They have been mandated by government to
>
> work in partnership (Interview with Steering Group Member F)

Other representatives from government agencies also felt that they had to focus on 'core business' due to budget restraints. Consequently individual agencies found it difficult to take pro-active measures that might prevent crime or reduce offending. One particular example of this had been the loss of 'homemakers', who, in the past, were able to work with families to prevent anti-social behaviour and truancy.

Although partnership offered opportunities for state agencies, one member of the steering group felt that they would be given more teeth if they were supported by legislation that obliged agencies to work together (as, for example the example the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act does in the UK). Instead, agencies were encouraged to work in partnership by the use of grants, funding and other incentives that would not otherwise be available to them. Indeed, a principal policy officer of the OCP noted that it would be pragmatic for government agencies to be involved in the development

of the strategy and its goals as it would allow them to pursue their own agendas and to also offers agencies an opportunity to 'bolt on' or lobby for ideas that would help them achieve their departments own goals. Thus, involvement in the strategy was seen as a way of employing 'homemakers' that would benefit the Housing Department, Department of Community Affairs and the Department of Indigenous Affairs. Consequently, the need to work in partnership was driven by central government and adopted by individual departments for pragmatic reasons forced upon them by financial restraint.

This also applied to the local as well as strategic level. The draft strategy outlined a range of local partnerships that it hoped would help to improve crime and safety in different rural localities. One of the most significant of these was the development of Community Safety and Crime Prevention Partnerships. These are established between the Office of Crime Prevention, Shire Councils (local governments) and 'other' local stakeholders, such as Aboriginal night patrols, and are ratified by a formal contract.

This places responsibility on the shire (local) governments to research write and implement crime prevention plans for their local areas. These aim to tackle local crime issues with local knowledge and, to an extent, resources. Although local authorities are the 'lead agency', this work should occur in partnership with agencies. The OCP in particular are a key partner and are obliged to provide research, data and advice from community engagement teams on local crime trends and solutions to them. The police are also expected to show backing for these local partnerships and provide information, support and advice to assist in the development and implementation of local plans.

Shire councils are not, however, obliged to sign up to these agreements but a range of financial incentives are offered to encourage them to do so. Thus, the state government, via the OCP, provides some funding, initially $10,000, for the work. This can be supplemented by further, targeted funding from the Community Safety and Crime Prevention Partnership Fund as well Local Government, Community, Indigenous, Research and Development, and Designing Safer Communities Funds to tackle particular issues that fall in the remit of these funding streams. However, local governments are also expected to draw in commercial sponsors and funding to ensure that the work is sustainable.

Interviews with shire councillors revealed some misgivings about this type of partnership working. Three issues were raised. First, it was widely felt that it was a cost-shifting exercise and that the state government was saving money by asking shire councils to undertake this work. Second, and linked to this, there were questions raised about whose responsibility it was to police rural areas in this way. Some councillors felt that responsibility was being shifted from the police and central state towards shire councils. Although the police formally supported the scheme, some local officers were less than enthusiastic in their support, feeling that their authority and expertise were being undermined. Finally, shire councils also expressed fears that these partnerships were not politically sustainable. In particular, it was felt that a change of state government would lead to a change in policy and local policing partnerships being disbanded. However, despite these concerns, most Shire Councils that were approached by the OCP to sign these agreements did so and, by May 2005, 52 Shires had signed these contracts. It appeared, though, that many councils did so because they felt obliged to and that they felt that they might be deprived of funding or resources if they failed to do so.

The development of the crime prevention strategy provides a clear illustration of governmentality and the assembly of knowledges, technologies and practices that seek to shape conduct in particular ways (Foucault, 1991). Shire Councils are a form of 'technological agency' to ensure conduct of particular forms of policing. They are governed from a distance by the OCP through the deployment of finances, incentives and support. The requirement to produce crime audits, targets and audited funding serves to not only develop knowledge, but to provide state government with a means of surveying their actions and activities. Although the Rural Crime Prevention Strategy relied heavily on partnership working at both the strategic and local level, it appeared that these were strongly driven by state government and policy pressure, rather than a genuine desire for agencies to work together in partnership.

Certainly, this kind of policy has the potential to draw a wide range of actors, experiences and opinions together but questions remain about whether this is leading to a common world view or, indeed, the establishment of new forms of governance.

8. Conclusions: A Common World View?

Responsibility for policing in rural Western Australia has undergone significant change. While the Western Australia Police Service still play a significant role in policing the state, especially in the daily enforcement of law and order on a daily basis, it is also clear that policing is now the responsibility of a range of organisations. The establishment of a rural crime prevention strategy has encouraged a range of state and local government organisations to work together to improve community safety. Further, the use of Aboriginal justice Agreements and voluntary

policing measures, such as Night Patrols, have sought to develop a more pro-active role for Indigenous people in decision making and policing.

The introduction to this paper drew attention some of the fears that academics have raised about multi-agency policing and, in particular, that it may lead to exclusion of particular groups that do not fit hegemonic rural ideals. The adoption of multi-agency policing and partnership working through Justice Agreements and the Rural Crime Prevention Strategy has shown a willingness on the part of the state government to develop inclusive policing polices and, in de jure terms at least, go some way towards providing what Blagg (1998) has described as 'liminal spaces' where dialogue can be generated and hybridity and cultural difference accepted. Consequently partnership working offers a hope that a more inclusive approach may be developed.

The draft of the Rural Crime Prevention Strategy is very admirable for its efforts to engage a wide range of actors and provide opportunities to fund joint working. The Rural Strategy should also be given credit for its efforts to address a wide range of rural issues in a wide range of rural and regional environments, despite the immense cultural complexity of Australia's rural social geographies. Consequently, the development of multi-agency policing in Western Australia would seem to allay some of the fears raised in the literature of partnership working.

However, crucial questions remain. In particular, the research in this paper revealed a strong association between crime and Aboriginal people in the minds of many government agents. This is not to deny that offending rates amongst Aboriginal people are high and that crime is problematic for them, but such a strong connection between ethnicity and criminality neglects that other crimes, committed by other people, are *also* serious issues in rural Western Australia. While the OCP have made

strenuous efforts to inform agencies and individuals about the nature of rural crime (based on research and data), it appears that the most commonly held world view of rural crime is one that associates it with ethnicity. Given that all members of the Rural Strategy steering group and that nearly all shire councillors are non-indigenous, there is a strong danger that this discourse of rural crime may continue to dominate the development of local policing plans with the danger that Aborigines will continue to be scapegoated and, just as importantly, other crimes in rural areas, such as farm crime, will continue to be overlooked. Individuals working for other government agencies, Aboriginal groups and individuals living in Western Australia do not, as yet, share the 'world view' of crime that the OCP is attempting to present. Certainly, more research is needed on the differences between the perception of crime in Western Australia and the 'reality' of crime presented in OCP's data. Specific attention should be paid to the ways in which the imagination of rural crime influences partnership working and the development of local policing plans. In particular, ways must be found to make the information held by the OCP significant and of relevance to those making local policing decisions.

The development of crime partnerships occurred at four different scales, from the strategic to the local (OCP, 2006). Collectively and individually, these partnerships represented the assemblage of various knowledges and technologies (such as monitoring, funding and selectively available crime data) to tackle crime. Their combination may point to a new form of governance through community.

However, the extent to which this is leading to significantly different and long-lasting forms of governmentality is debatable. As this paper has highlighted, the OCP found it very difficult to distil the considerable complexities of rurality and criminality in Western Australia into a simplified viewpoint that was readily accepted

by either those working at a strategic level, or those implementing community-based policing plans at a local level. It was more successful, however, at developing capacities for social learning and action by establishing strategic and local partnerships. However, in each case, the state government, via the OCP, provided very strong leadership on their formation. Although other agencies were not obliged to join these partnerships, the exclusive use of funding, information and advice to those who did ensured that many agencies 'signed up' to multi-agency working. The OCP itself is driven by political pressures and monitored by performance targets (ultimately the reduction of recorded crime rates), pointing to a post-Fordist systems of government, rather than a radical restructuring of governance. Consequently, these partnerships resembled homogenous policy communities rather than more radical assemblages of actors and discourses.

The developing of policing partnerships consequently reflects some of the key concerns associated with the development of governance through community. Although radical shifts in power have not been achieved (nor were they intended to), the use of partnership working has more potential to include than exclude. Given the exclusionary history of crime and policing in Western Australia, this is ground for hope. However, the rural strategy and the use of community partnerships are still at an early stage. While their intentions are admirable, future research on the gaps between de jure and de facto implementation of policy is a priority. Only then will it be possible to gauge whether Western Australia will get its just deserts.

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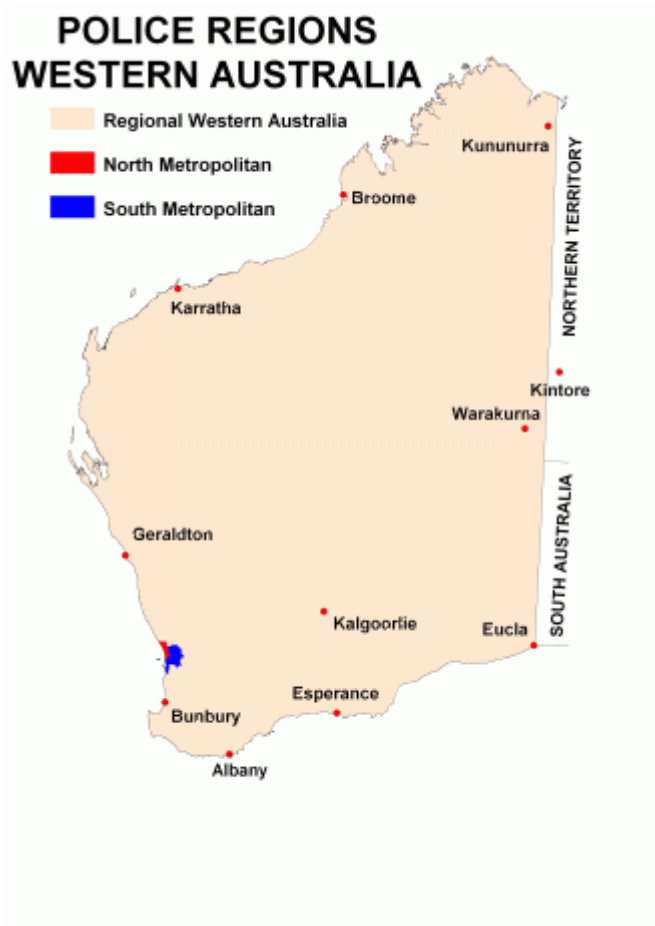
Figure 1: Police Regions in Western Australia. Source: Western Australia Police

Service. (NB Draft figure).