

Question on Notice
No. 1836
Asked on 26 November 2008

MS DARLING asked the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Sport (MS SPENCE)—

QUESTION:

Will she advise on the successful operations of the Queensland Police Child Protection Unit and Taskforce Argos, both across the state, and more particularly in the Sandgate area?

ANSWER:

The Queensland Government is committed to protecting our children and enhancing community safety. The highly trained, dedicated officers of the Queensland Police Service specialist Child Protection Investigation Units and State Crime Operations Command Task Force Argos play an integral part in achieving this.

Task Force Argos and Child Protection Unit investigators have been particularly active across Queensland in 2008, executing several major operations targeting over 450 individuals who chose to use the internet to perpetrate the abuse and exploitation of children. Task Force Argos is nationally and internationally recognised as leaders in this field.

In early April 2008 officers from Taskforce Argos, regional Child Protection Investigation Units and the Australian Federal Police commenced the Queensland component of **Operation Golf Cortex** targeting people using the internet to access and download child exploitation material from a European based website. The operation, part of an international operation involving 170 countries, took place over a two month period resulting in the execution of 185 search warrants and the arrest of 66 people on 235 charges in Queensland.

Operation Stingray is another recent operation which used the combined expertise of Task Force Argos and specialist regional child protection unit investigators. A total of 28 warrants were executed in the four operational phases that swept the south eastern corner of Queensland, resulting in the arrest of 13 men on 35 charges, including possession, distribution and producing child exploitation images. During the operation more than 800 000 child exploitation images and movies were seized, as well as differing computer software and hardware used to perpetrate these offences.

Recently, Task Force Argos led the international investigation **Operation Achilles**, resulting in the dismantling of a highly secretive and organised network of international child sex offenders. This operation is recognised as the most significant infiltration of a child exploitation network by a law enforcement agency anywhere in the world.

The Achilles group operated for many years using sophisticated security measures to trade images and finance the live and on demand sexual abuse of children for the group's debased pleasure. Over an eighteen month period, an Argos covert operative was deployed to the FBI Innocent Images Unit in Washington DC to continue the infiltration of the network, with a second member later deployed in support.

In February 2008 the closure of the Achilles group resulted in the rescue of more than 40 children worldwide; the arrest of 22 Achilles network members globally; the closure of 4 commercial child exploitation websites; and the arrest of more than 120 people for the purchase of child exploitation material. In Queensland, ten Queenslanders were arrested on 194 charges and over 2,000,000 child exploitation images seized. One arrest led to the rescue of a four-year-old Queensland child from further sexual abuse by her grandfather.

Another initiative was the commencement of **Operation Echo Quiet** established as a direct result of the operational relationship forged between Task Force Argos and members of the FBI's Innocent Images Task Force, Washington DC. Task Force Argos investigators utilise specialist software to identify child sex offenders who actively distribute child exploitation images on the Internet via the Peer to Peer (P2P) network. To date 75 targets have been generated with 30 people arrested in Queensland on 115 charges.

Task Force Argos maintains a dedicated covert internet presence, **Operation Golf Beau**, targeting offenders who attempt to procure children over the internet for sexual gain or expose children to offensive acts and material. Since February 2008 17 offenders have been arrested in Queensland on a wide range of internet related offences and a further 23 targets disseminated to partner Law Enforcement Agencies globally.

Child Protection and Investigation Units across the Service are working with Task Force Argos to protect children from sex offenders.

Operation Bully which targeted drug and child exploitation offenders commenced in the North Brisbane Police District, which includes Sandgate, on 15 November 2008. As a result of this operation, the Boondall Child Protection and Investigation Unit arrested three people on eight child exploitation material related charges.

Specifically in the Sandgate area, one man was arrested in November and charged with child sex offences and child exploitation material offences.

The significant outcomes achieved during these operations are directly attributable to the exceptional efforts and expertise of the State Crime Operations Command Task Force Argos and regional Child Protection Investigation Unit investigators.