

2023

# AFP Federal Crime Threat Picture



**AFP**

## Commissioner's foreword



This is the AFP's first annual Federal Crime Threat Picture, designed to bring awareness to the range of criminal threats targeting Australia now and in the near future, and the role that the AFP plays in maximising impact on the criminal environment. As your national police force, the AFP strives for the protection of Australian lives, livelihoods and our way of life.

Criminal threats are increasing, the range of threats is diversifying and the likelihood of harm occurring continues to grow. Australia's general level of wealth, compounded by, technological, economic and geopolitical factors, contribute to Australia being an attractive target for criminals across the spectrum of transnational serious organised crime, terrorism, cybercrime, espionage and foreign interference, fraud and corruption and human exploitation.

Unconstrained by ethics, criminals are able to quickly pivot the way they work and adopt new technologies to maximise their impact and evade law enforcement. We know Australia's most significant organised crime figures are based offshore, are highly resilient and deliberately seek to operate beyond the reach of Australian law enforcement.

The AFP's operating environment is expected to become increasingly complex over the coming years. We are required to respond to a growing range of threats that will impact the life and livelihood of all Australians at home and offshore. An increasing amount of mis and disinformation, which is quickly spread through the Internet, is providing a vehicle for violence, potentially contributing to degrading trust in government and law enforcement.

The AFP will continue to adapt to meet evolving and emerging threats – innovating to stay a step ahead, and keep the community safe from harm.

**REECE P KERSHAW APM**  
**COMMISSIONER**  
**AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE**

## Supporting our community from harm through partnerships

**Strong relationships and enduring partnerships are at the heart of achieving operational outcomes. Crime and policing increasingly involve dealing with evolving, multi-disciplinary problems that require multi agency and multi-jurisdictional solutions.**

The AFP works across the full spectrum of harms that have the potential to significantly and negatively impact Australians and Australian interests at the individual, community and national level. These harms are broad and complex, ranging from antisocial behaviour to violent extremism, trafficking in illicit drugs, the sexual exploitation of children online, financial loss, the infiltration of state institutions and undermining of global economies. These crimes threaten the security, prosperity and political stability of our region, degrade Australia's diplomatic position, and risk our own cohesive and inclusive society.

The AFP is on the frontline in addressing and mitigating these threats. But it does not do it alone. As Australia's national policing agency, the AFP works hand in glove with domestic and international partners spanning: policing; law enforcement, regulatory, intelligence and security agencies; the private sector; and the community. By adopting a multifaceted approach to fighting crime – including prevention, detection, disruption, investigation and prosecution – these partnerships target serious criminals seeking to do harm to Australians and Australia's interests.

Internationally, the AFP supports law enforcement partners in our region to deliver professional policing services, share intelligence on transnational crime threats and strengthen regional resilience. We are unified by our shared goals of preventing harm to our communities in all forms and aim to build and strengthen relationships with our neighbours to remain a policing partner of choice.

Continuing our work with key partners maintains the rule of law, supports Australia's position as a trusted partner in our region, and protects our community at home, especially those more vulnerable to criminal threats including women and children, First Nations people and diaspora populations.



The AFP operates in an evolving and volatile criminal threat environment which enables criminal activity in new and complex ways. These are the key threats within this environment.

## Transnational serious organised crime (TSOC)

**TSOC poses a significant threat to the health, safety, financial and physical security of all Australians. The size, scale and impact of TSOC elevates it to the level of a national security threat. TSOC costs Australia approx. \$60 billion a year. Of Australia's serious and organised crime threats, at least 70% are likely based offshore or have strong offshore links.**

Criminals operating globally produce and import large quantities of drugs, contributing to overdoses, drug-fuelled violence and road fatalities. These criminal actions are often used to bankroll other serious crimes such as terrorism, human trafficking and child exploitation.

- / TSOC is reliant on an exploitative and violent supply chain fuelled by groups competing for dominance and influence. Shootings, destruction of property and gang related violence is expected to continue, placing communities' safety at risk.
- / Australian illicit drug markets remain a lucrative, and therefore attractive, target for TSOC groups based offshore, but the risks of law enforcement interdiction or criminal violence remains very high.
- / Money laundered by TSOC entities can undermine legitimate commerce and distort markets, leaving everyday businesses and citizens at significant financial competitive disadvantage.

The AFP continues to work with our international partners to disrupt supply chains, and target criminal syndicates where they are based to stop these crimes before they reach our shores.



## Terrorism

**Terrorism remains an enduring threat to the safety of the Australian community and the threat is increasingly complex and diversified. The threat of Religiously Motivated Violent Extremism (RMVE) remains whilst the threat from Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism (IMVE) and the caseload from High Risk Terrorist Offenders (HRTO) increases.**

- / Domestic terrorist attacks from small groups or self-radicalised lone actors is an ongoing threat and remains a realistic probability within Australia.
- / The online environment has allowed violent extremists to magnify their impact, particularly during COVID-19, by sharing extremist propaganda and material from anywhere in the world. Australia is experiencing an increase in young people being investigated by the AFP, with the youngest being 13 years of age. Young people are more vulnerable to being targeted by extremists and influenced to adopt extremist ideology.
- / The threat of terrorist acts being committed by a previously convicted offender (HRTOs) is enduring and will continue to increase. There are currently 54 offenders serving custodial sentences for terrorism offences, 19 of whom are scheduled for release in the next 5 years.
- / There remains an ongoing threat of terrorism in our region, with terrorist plots from terrorist groups aligned to ISIS or AQ continuing to be disrupted.

The AFP will continue to work with our international partners to disrupt threats in our region, and keep Australians safe.



## Fraud and corruption

**Fraud damages Australia's economy and deprives honest Australians of the financial stability necessary to survive.**

- / Consumer scams using COVID-19 scenarios emerged as soon as the virus became apparent, and sophisticated phishing scams are expected to continue.
- / Commonwealth fraud is a growing crime, we have seen a rise in offences since the first disaster relief fund in 2019. Offshore actors are increasingly seeking to harvest Australian identities in order to target compensation schemes designed to be processed quickly, with fewer controls, with an increase seen in recent years.
- / Government officials remain appealing targets for corruption as those both offshore and onshore seek to benefit from government information.

## Espionage and foreign interference

**Espionage and Foreign Interference represents a serious and enduring threat to Australia's sovereignty, security and the integrity of our national institutions.**

- / Hostile foreign state actors will continue to threaten certain sectors and information, including our political systems, government information, defence capabilities and industry, critical infrastructure and the research sector.
- / Culturally and linguistically diverse communities across Australia are being targeted as victims of foreign interference and will continue to be subject to surveillance, harassment and intimidation by state actors or their proxies.

The nature of threats from hostile foreign state actors are multi-dimensional, extending beyond the use of agents and shifting towards cyber-enabled espionage and foreign interference.

## Protection and aviation

**Protection of Australian High Office Holders, Parliamentarians and Commonwealth Establishments is a key role of the AFP in safeguarding Australians and Australia's democracy.**

- / Internationally, there have been increased threats and violence against Parliamentarians and democratic institutions from issue-motivated individuals and groups.
- / Global issues will likely continue to influence the Australian protest environment. Sustained global economic headwinds and climate change will likely continue to be major inspirations for protests internationally and in Australia.
- / Whilst the threat environment in Australia remains stable, a rise in anti-government sentiment has seen a rise in protest activity, especially around Parliament House. While most issue-motivated group (IMG) protests are peaceful, the potential for extremist elements within IMGs to inspire small groups or individuals to plan and carry out violent attacks is an enduring risk. An increase in policing resources required to ensure appropriate security overlays has been observed, with this expected to continue.

Australian airports are getting busier each day, and a major security incident at an airport would significantly impact the Australian economy and our way of life

- / The AFP continues to prioritise national security at designated airports. Recently there has been an increase in offensive, violent and disruptive behaviour at airports, including public disturbances because of missed flights, travel delays and baggage issues.
- / The AFP is focussed on preventing, disrupting and responding to security and criminal threats at designated airports and to ensuring the safety of the travelling public.



## Human exploitation

**Human exploitation encompasses a multitude of crimes against a person, including child exploitation and a range of modern slavery offences.**

- / Unstable governments, low employment options, increasing cost of living and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are amplifying vulnerability to human exploitation, including particularly people smuggling.
- / In the 2021–22 financial year, the AFP received 294 reports of modern slavery and human trafficking, an increase of 31% on the previous financial year. There was a 50% increase in debt bondage, a 6% increase in forced marriage after a decrease the previous year (likely due to COVID), a 29% increase in sexual servitude and exploitation, and 20% increase for forced labour compared to the previous year.
- / In person abuse of children will increase with the reopening of international borders due to an increase in travelling child sex offenders heading to destinations where child sexual exploitation often goes unreported.
- / Live streaming of child abuse is likely to continue to increase both on the Clearnet and the Darkweb. The AFP-led Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE) has identified over 800,000 registered accounts utilising anonymised platforms solely for the purposes facilitating child abuse material
- / Self-generated child exploitation material, produced as a result of a child being groomed, extorted or deceived, will continue to increase due to more time spent on the internet, with a significant increase seen from 2019– 2021.
- / Human trafficking and slavery is a global problem and exists in Australia and Victims of human trafficking and slavery can be of any age or gender.



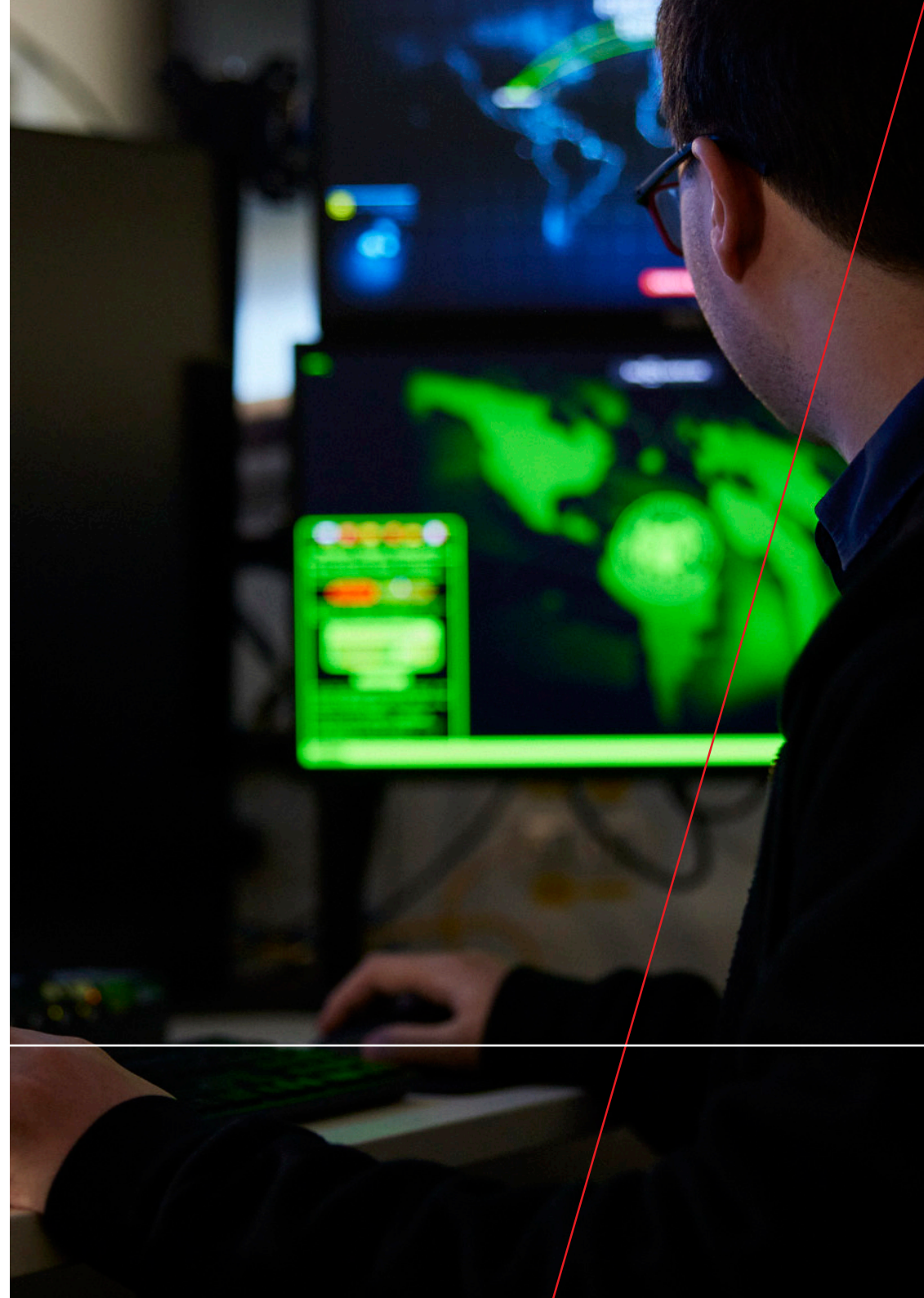
## Cybercrime

**Cyber-attacks targeting critical infrastructure, government systems and individuals will continue, with the potential to weaken Australia's economy and threaten the privacy of Australians. Recent high profile incidents, impacting millions of Australians, highlight the magnitude in both size and consequence that this threat poses.**

- / Ransomware attacks on Australian businesses will increase in both frequency and severity, with an increase of 15% on reported attacks from the previous year. Cybercriminals exploit publicly disclosed security weaknesses, and this will continue to evolve in integrity and sophistication.
- / Malicious cyber activity against Australia's national and economic interests is increasing in frequency, scale, sophistication and impact. Over \$33 billion was reported as lost from cybercrime in 2020-21 and this is only expected to increase.
- / Malware development and sale has emerged as a key threat to Australian interests as it serves as a scalable model of crime, whereby single developers have a damaging effect to substantial numbers of victims globally.
- / Emails, text messages and websites that appear to be from a legitimate source will remain a key tool for criminals to gain initial access to unknowing victims and their personal information.

Cybercrime is increasingly being professionalised, with skilled actors performing cybercrime as a service or creating malware packages for purchase by other criminals.

The AFP works collaboratively with domestic and international partners to enhance the AFP's cyber capabilities to make Australia a costly and hostile environment for cybercriminals. The AFP is also demonstrating its ability to work and support commercial entities when attacks of national interest occur.





## What we do

**As Australia's national policing agency, we protect Australians and Australia's interests.**

Our role is to enforce Commonwealth and Australian Capital Territory criminal law and protect Commonwealth interests from criminal activity in Australia and overseas.

## What we need to stay ahead

**The AFP's Blue Paper articulates the following priorities for the AFP's Future State to enable the AFP to continue to fulfil its mission and role into the future:**

- / Our policing insights are highly sought domestically and internationally.
- / We are flexible and agile to defeat threats.
- / We are leaders in embracing and leveraging innovation.
- / We are the employer of choice across law enforcement.
- / Our embedded partnerships accelerate disruptions to achieve outcomes.

## Recruitment

**The AFP is looking for the brightest minds and most committed people to outsmart serious crime through intelligent action.**

The officers who work for the AFP come from a vast range of backgrounds, and work collaboratively to address the unique challenges to protect Australia and Australian interests from serious crimes. We offer not only uniformed police officers, but protective service officer roles, as well as a range of specialist, intelligence and support staff positions. Officers at the AFP are agile, innovative, adaptable, creative and driven.

**If this sounds like you, visit [jobs.afp.gov.au](https://jobs.afp.gov.au)**







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