



Police Federation of Australia

The National Voice of Policing

ABN 31 384 184 778

Level 1, 21 Murray Crescent
GRIFFITH ACT 2603

Tel: (02) 6239 8900
Fax: (02) 6239 8999

19 September 2014

The Hon Tony Abbott MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

COUNTER-TERRORISM AND EMERGENCY CAPABILITY IN AUSTRALIA

The Police Federation of Australia, representing 58,000 officers across all jurisdictions, would like to commend your Government and State and Territory law enforcement and security agencies for the decisive and effective counter-terrorism efforts to date in the face of extremist threats to public safety.

If there is one further measure your Government could take to materially improve the capability and effectiveness of law enforcement and emergency services in this country, it is to urgently provide 20 MHz of the 700 or 800 band spectrum so that our forces can deploy dedicated, inter-operable mobile broadband communications nation-wide. This would be deployed for counter-terrorism investigations, in the event of a terrorist incident, and for natural disasters and other emergencies, as well as for more effective and efficient every-day policing.

This capability will be in place for the G20 Leaders Summit in Brisbane in November by special arrangement with Telstra, but if the capability is essential for that important meeting of world leaders, it is also essential for Australian security, law enforcement and emergency services and for counter-terrorism, such as in other Australian capital cities. (Telstra has advised us that they now support dedicated spectrum for Australia's public safety agencies.)

As the nominated spokesman for Australia's Police Commissioners on this matter, NSW Commissioner Scipione told a Parliamentary Committee inquiry into public safety mobile broadband communications:

"This is an issue because of the critical role that we believe that police play in emergency management within and across each of the jurisdictions around Australia. We are here because we have an interest in this but more importantly because we believe that there is a need to ensure that emergency services – and that includes the police and other emergency services – should be placed in a position that will enable them to best serve Australia well into the future. We simply propose that 20 megahertz of the digital dividend be reserved for police and other emergency services so that we have an effective and modern 21st century communications capacity. That is especially important during emergency incidents.....Within a New South Wales police context, we have seen the importance of communications in times of a crisis....when times are bad and you need something going for you, we believe that a small allocation of some 20 megahertz will make a crucial difference for us, potentially, right across the nation.....when I talk about the Lamborghinis of criminals, we are dealing with the worst case situations. If we are really going to be able to cope in the 21st century then we need to get access to 21st century technology as opposed to what was allocated to us in the 20th century."

I am sure that Commissioner Scipione would be more than happy to confirm with you that he remains of the opinion that this capability is essential for our police services.

After three years of investigation of this issue, and two bipartisan Parliamentary inquiries unanimously recommending dedicated spectrum for our public safety agencies, the Australian Communications and Media Authority was poised to provide at least 10 MHz of spectrum, and possibly 20 MHz immediately prior to the November 2013 election. The Minister for Communications, Malcolm Turnbull and the Minister for Justice, Michael Keenan have been discussing this matter, and it is clear that the Minister for Communications has the power to direct the ACMA to allocate spectrum for public safety. A number of prestigious universities have conducted cost/benefit analyses and each has concluded that at least 20 MHz of spectrum is warranted.

Furthermore, under the *Radiocommunications Act 1982* the government is obliged to provide adequate spectrum for defence, national security, law enforcement and emergency services. That statutory obligation is currently not being met in the case of police and emergency services.

Since the election of your Government the matter has regrettably stalled, but all State and Territory jurisdictions remain convinced that this capability is vital to ensuring our police and other emergency services have 21st century communications to protect public safety. They

are prepared progressively to invest in the national network and are actively planning a governance framework for its implementation.

The PFA is convinced that if you were in a position to bring this matter to a successful conclusion you would make a material, and generational, improvement to the capacity of police and emergency services to keep Australians safe.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "m A Burgess". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Mark Burgess
Chief Executive Officer

Cc: Minister for Communications, Malcolm Turnbull MP
Minister for Justice, Michael Keenan MP