



Recent trends in recorded crime and police activity in Cabramatta

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Over the 24 months to December 2001, trends in recorded crime in Cabramatta for all major violent and property offence categories were either downward or stable. Most notably, motor vehicle theft offences decreased by 37 per cent between 2000 and 2001, and steal from motor vehicle offences decreased by 25 per cent over the same period. Also significant were the decreases in robbery offences: unarmed robberies decreased by 5 per cent, while robberies with a non-firearm weapon decreased by 7 per cent. Consistent with the drop in crime, there was a downward trend in the total number of offenders proceeded against to court for offences committed in Cabramatta between January 2000 and December 2001. Other forms of police activity in the area, however, have increased. Since July 2001, there was a substantial increase in the number of knife searches performed, and in the number of move-on directions issued by police in Cabramatta.

INTRODUCTION

Crime and policing trends in Cabramatta have received considerable public attention over the past two years. In June 2000, the NSW Legislative Council established an inquiry into Cabramatta Policing. In July 2001, the Committee tabled its Cabramatta Policing report and is presently examining developments in Cabramatta over the past 12 months in relation to the recommendations of the report.¹ In this paper, we examine recent trends in Cabramatta in (1) recorded crime, (2) formal charging of alleged offenders, and (3) the application of search and move-on powers by police.

RECORDED CRIME

In this section, we summarise the trends in recorded crime statistics over the 24-month period January 2000 to December 2001 for Cabramatta.² These data are based on the numbers of criminal incidents recorded by NSW police each month, and represent trends in reported crime rather than trends in victimisation. In examining these trends,

it is important to note that changes in recorded crime are affected by factors other than changes in victimisation, such as the willingness of the public to report crimes to police, and shifts in policing policy and practice. Police practice especially affects trends in recorded drug and weapons offences, and trends in offensive behaviour, so changes in the number of incidents for these offences may reflect shifts in policing, rather than in actual crime rates. The availability of particular drug types in the community may also be reflected in recorded crime statistics for drug offences.

For the purposes of this paper, it is useful to separate the offences under consideration into two categories: (1) those which primarily reflect underlying crime trends and public willingness to report crime ('Group A') and (2) those where policing activity significantly affects the observed trend ('Group B'). Note that this distinction is not rigid, nor is it used in official crime statistics publications; it is presented here for convenience.

Table 1 shows the results of statistical tests for a sustained upward or downward monthly trend over the two

years from January 2000 to December 2001 in Cabramatta (postcode 2166) and NSW overall.³ Where a statistically significant monthly trend is detected, the annual percentage change in crime incidents is calculated between successive 12-month periods (i.e. between January to December 2000, and January to December 2001).

TRENDS IN GROUP A OFFENCES

Although affected by the willingness of people to report crime, trends in the group of offences examined in this section generally reflect trends in underlying crime rates.

For all Group A offence categories shown in Table 1, the two-year trend for each offence in Cabramatta was either stable or downward. Between January 2000 and December 2001 there was no statistically significant upward or downward trend for the offence categories of assault (non-domestic), robbery with a firearm, break and enter (dwelling and non-dwelling), stealing (from retail store, from dwelling and from person) and malicious damage to property.

Over the same time period, four of these offences were also stable in NSW overall (break and enter – non-dwelling, steal from retail store and from dwelling, and malicious damage to property). One offence, break and enter—dwelling, showed a contrasting downward trend in NSW, while three offence categories showed a significant upward Statewide trend (assault, robbery with a firearm, and steal from person), compared with stability in Cabramatta between 2000 and 2001.

It should be noted, however, that while there was no upward trend in Cabramatta for any of the three offences of assault, robbery with a firearm, and steal from

person, for two of them the rate of the offence (per 100,000 resident population) in 2001 was higher in Cabramatta than the average NSW rate.⁴ In 2001, Cabramatta recorded a rate of robbery with a firearm of 48.0 per 100,000 (compared with the NSW rate of 13.5), and a rate of steal from person of 387.5 per 100,000 (compared with 253.7 in NSW).

There were four offence categories for which a statistically significant downward trend was detected in Cabramatta between January 2000 and December 2001. The incidence of robbery without a weapon offences decreased by 4.9 per cent between

2000 and 2001; robbery with a weapon not a firearm offences decreased by 7.1 per cent between 2000 and 2001; motor vehicle theft offences decreased by 37.0 per cent, and steal from motor vehicle offences decreased by 24.8 per cent. Each of these downward trends contrasts favourably with the overall NSW trend of stability. However, for three of these four offence categories, the crime rate is higher in Cabramatta in 2001 compared with the average NSW rate in the same period. In particular, the rates of robbery without a weapon and of robbery with a weapon not a firearm were considerably higher in Cabramatta than the NSW average.

**Table 1: Recorded crime statistics in Cabramatta and NSW
Comparison of 24-month trends in 2000-2001, and 2001 crime rates per 100,000 population**

<i>Offence categories</i>	<i>Cabramatta trend 2000-2001</i>	<i>NSW trend 2000-2001</i>	<i>Cabramatta rate 2001</i>	<i>NSW rate 2001</i>
Group A offences:				
Assault - not domestic violence related	Stable	Up by 6.4%	642.1	690.9
Robbery without a weapon	Down by -4.9%	Stable	356.1	122.3
Robbery with a firearm	Stable	Up by 34.1%	48.0	13.5
Robbery with a weapon not a firearm	Down by -7.1%	Stable	239.9	65.7
Break and enter – dwelling	Stable	Down by -3.2%	1,363.5	1221.6
Break and enter – non-dwelling	Stable	Stable	564.6	796.9
Motor vehicle theft	Down by -37.0%	Stable	893.0	822.5
Steal from motor vehicle	Down by -24.8%	Stable	878.3	1384.9
Steal from retail store	Stable	Stable	138.4	316.1
Steal from dwelling	Stable	Stable	234.3	481.5
Steal from person	Stable	Up by 27.8%	387.5	253.7
Malicious damage to property	Stable	Stable	819.2	1471.8
Group B offences:				
Possession and/or use of cocaine	Up by 384.2%	Up by 121.2%	169.8	7.0
Possession and/or use of narcotics	Down by -63.9%	Down by -55.9%	435.4	16.7
Possession and/or use of cannabis	Stable	Up by 29.4%	234.3	219.3
Possession and/or use of amphetamines	Stable	Stable	29.5	32.4
Dealing, trafficking in cocaine	Up by 1366.7%	Up by 146.0%	81.2	3.8
Dealing, trafficking in narcotics	Stable	Down by -45.9%	293.4	7.1
Dealing, trafficking in cannabis	Stable	Stable	14.8	15.1
Dealing, trafficking in amphetamines	Stable	Up by 36.0%	20.3	11.9
Offensive conduct	Stable	Stable	20.3	64.7
Offensive language	Stable	Stable	118.1	91.1
Weapons offences (all)	Down by -19.2%	Up by 12.5%	341.3	160.2
Weapons offences involving firearms	Stable	Stable	25.8	26.7

TRENDS IN GROUP B OFFENCES

As noted above, trends in street and drug offences may reflect significant changes in policing. Furthermore, changes in the availability of heroin (narcotics) in 2000/2001 should be taken into account when examining trends in recorded drug offences.

Figure 1 shows the monthly trend in cocaine offences in Cabramatta over the two-year period January 2000 to December 2001. The recorded number of incidents of cocaine offences (both possession and dealing offences) showed a significant upward trend, although the total number of recorded incidents is relatively low. The number of recorded incidents in Cabramatta of possession and/or use of cocaine increased from 19 incidents in 2000, to 92 incidents in 2001. Similarly, there was a substantial increase in the number of recorded incidents of dealing and trafficking in cocaine in Cabramatta – from 3 incidents in 2000, to 44 incidents in 2001. There were corresponding upward trends for each of these offences in NSW over the same time period.

In contrast to the upward trend in cocaine offences, Figure 2 shows that there was a significant downward trend in the incidence of possession and/or use of narcotics in Cabramatta. Similarly, there was a downward trend for this offence category in NSW overall. These trends in cocaine and narcotics offences probably reflect increased cocaine use and decreased heroin use in the wake of the heroin shortage.⁵

While the number of recorded incidents of dealing and trafficking in narcotics also decreased across NSW, this did not occur in Cabramatta, where the incidence of dealing and trafficking in narcotics remained stable between 2000 and 2001. It should be noted that for each of the four drug offences shown in Figures 1 and 2, the rate of the offence is considerably higher in Cabramatta than the NSW average.

Offensive behaviour offences – both offensive conduct and offensive language – were stable over the two-year period in both Cabramatta and NSW overall. Similarly, the incidence of weapons offences involving firearms was stable both Statewide and in Cabramatta. Weapons offences in total, however, showed a downward trend in Cabramatta compared with a Statewide upward trend.

Figure 1: Possession and use, dealing and trafficking of cocaine, Cabramatta, January 2000 to December 2001

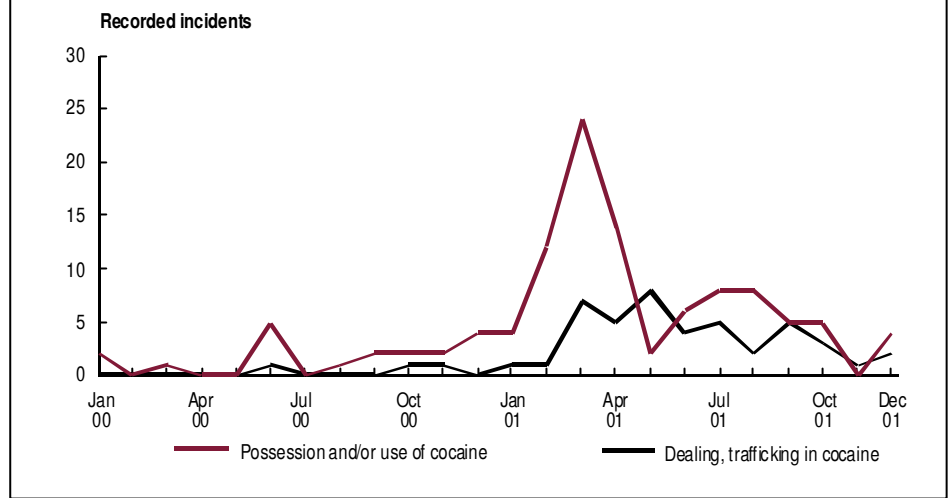
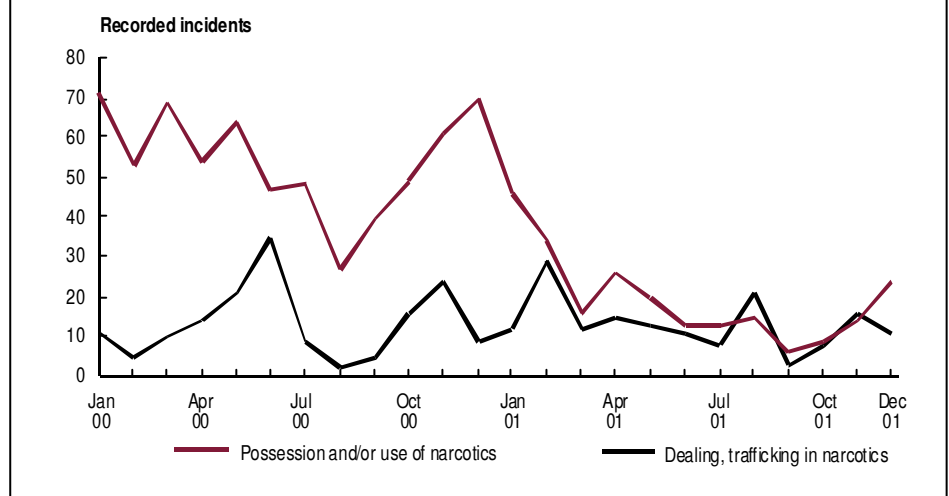


Figure 2: Possession and use, dealing and trafficking of narcotics, Cabramatta, January 2000 to December 2001



METHODS OF PROCEEDING AGAINST OFFENDERS

In this section, we examine trends in the number of alleged offenders who were proceeded against by NSW police for criminal incidents recorded during 2000 and 2001. Only trends in the use of formal charges and Court Attendance Notices (CANs), each of which result in a court appearance by the offender, are considered in this section.⁶

Figure 3 shows the monthly trend, between January 2000 and December

2001, in the number of persons proceeded against by formal charge and by CAN for any offence recorded in Cabramatta. A statistically significant downward monthly trend was detected over the two-year period in the total number of persons proceeded against to court (by charge or CAN) for offences recorded in Cabramatta. In 2000, a total of 4,083 offenders were proceeded against either by charge or CAN, compared to 2,366 in 2001. This represents an annual decrease of 42.1 per cent. The fall in the total number of alleged offenders against

whom proceedings were initiated is consistent with the drop in crime noted earlier in this paper.

The type of action taken against offenders by police in Cabramatta shifted considerably between January 2000 and December 2001. Over the time period, there was an increased propensity to proceed against offenders by way of formal charge, rather than by CAN. The annual number of charges laid by police in Cabramatta increased by 49.9 per cent (1,164 to 1,745) between 2000 and 2001. This increase in charges contrasts with a decrease of 78.7 per cent in persons proceeded against by CAN (2,919 to 621).

KNIFE SEARCHES AND MOVE-ONS

Figure 4 shows the monthly number of knife searches recorded in Cabramatta between January 2000 and December 2001. While there was no statistically significant upward monthly trend detected in the total number of searches over the whole period, there was a marked increase observed in the monthly number of searches performed in the latter half of 2001. Police in Cabramatta recorded 349 knife searches in 2000, and this number increased to 503 in 2001. Figure 4 also shows the monthly trends in the two possible outcomes of knife searches, 'knife found' and 'no knife found' over the two years. There was no significant upward or downward monthly trend in the number of searches where no knife was found. However, there was a significant downward trend in the number of searches that resulted in a knife being found, with an annual decrease of 30.9 per cent between 2000 and 2001 (from 149 productive searches in 2000, to 103 in 2001).

Table 2 shows the number of knife searches, by outcome, conducted by police in Cabramatta in 2000 and 2001. In 2001, only one in five searches (20.5%) yielded a knife, compared with more than two in five (42.7%) productive searches in 2000.

Suspected drug dealers and users have been the target of a significant increase in the frequency of 'move-on' instructions from Cabramatta police since July 2001. Figure 5 shows a steady increase in the use of move-on directions between August 2000 and June 2001, followed by

Figure 3: Method of proceeding against alleged offenders to Court, Cabramatta, January 2000 to December 2001

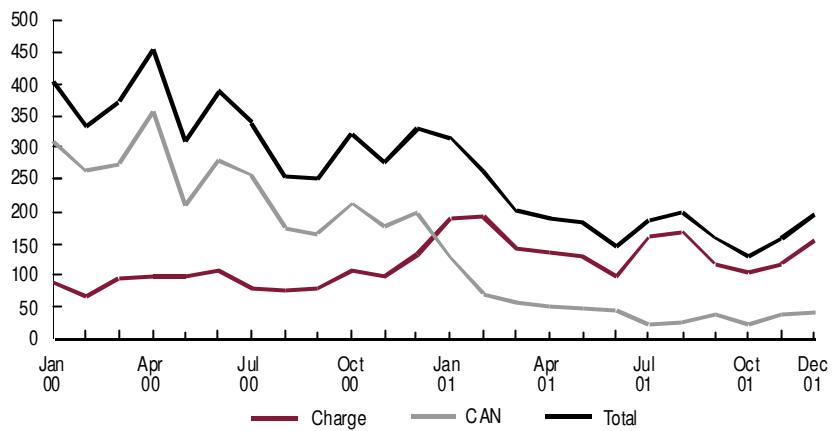
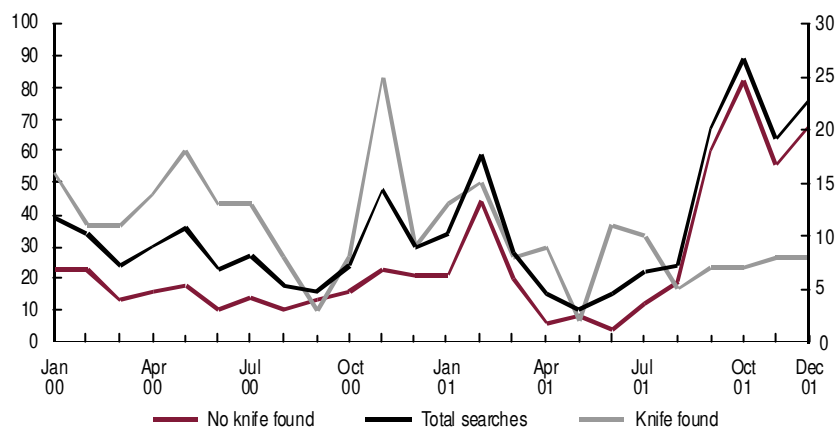


Figure 4: Knife searches by police, Cabramatta, January 2000 to December 2001*



* The series 'No knife found' and 'Total searches' correspond to the scale shown on the left-hand axis of Figure 4; the series 'Knife found' corresponds to the scale on the right-hand axis.

Table 2: Knife searches by police, Cabramatta, 2000-2001

Outcome	2000		2001	
	No.	%	No.	%
Knife found	149	42.7	103	20.5
No knife found	200	57.3	400	79.5
Total searches	349	100.0	503	100.0

a sharp rise thereafter. Between comparable six-month periods over the two years (i.e. July to December 2001, compared with July to December 2000), police increased their use of this power

with almost a ten-fold increase, from 257 incidents in 2000, to 2,200 over the same period in 2001. Significant upward monthly trends were detected for both outcomes related to move-ons. The

number of directions to move on that were obeyed rose from 251 (in July-December 2000) to 1,938 (in July-December 2001), and the number of directions that were refused increased from 6 to 262 over the same period.

Table 3 shows the numbers of move-on directions issued, and the rate of compliance with directions, in successive six-month periods since July 2000. While the majority of requests to move on are obeyed, there was a higher rate of non-compliance in the latter half of 2001, when the number of directions issued increased substantially. In 2001 overall, more than 270 move-on directions issued by police were refused.

SUMMARY

This bulletin examines trends in crime and police activity in Cabramatta (postcode 2166) between January 2000 and December 2001. Firstly, the monthly recorded crime statistics for a range of major offence categories, including drug offences, were examined. Overall, the trends are favourable. For the majority of offences, the trend was either downward or stable. In particular, recorded incidents of robbery (both without a weapon, and with a non-firearm weapon) decreased significantly. Motor vehicle thefts and stealing from motor vehicle offences also showed a significant downward trend in Cabramatta over the period.

In the second section of this paper, monthly trends in police proceedings against alleged offenders for crimes recorded in Cabramatta were examined. The trends show that police have increasingly used formal charges in preference to other proceedings, such as Court Attendance Notice, to bring offenders to court. The total number of alleged offenders against whom legal proceedings to court were initiated by police declined over the period. This is consistent with the drop in crime observed in Cabramatta. The trend may therefore reflect the decrease in offending in Cabramatta rather than a decrease in police activity in the area.

Finally, the use of police powers to conduct searches, and to issue move-on instructions, in Cabramatta was examined. There was a substantial increase in both the number of knife

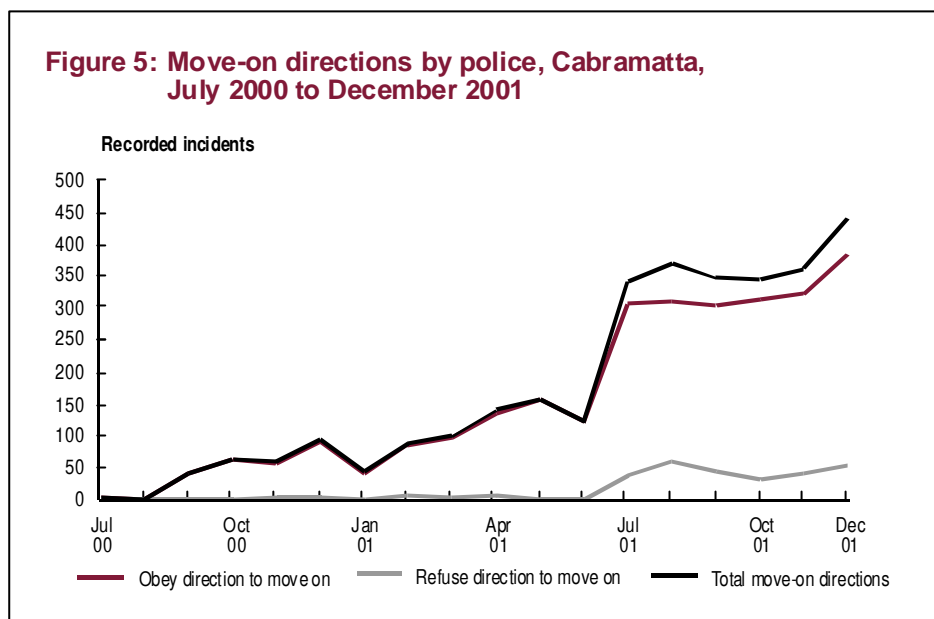


Table 3: Move-on directions by police, Cabramatta, July 2000 to December 2001

Outcome	Jul-Dec 2000		Jan-Jun 2001		Jul-Dec 2001	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Obey direction to move on	251	97.7	634	98.1	1,938	88.1
Refuse direction to move on	6	2.3	12	1.9	262	11.9
Total move-ons	257	100.0	646	100.0	2,200	100.0

searches undertaken, and in the number of move-on directions issued since mid-2001. There was a significant downward trend in the number of searches that resulted in a knife being found.

NOTES

- 1 NSW Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No. 3 2001, *Cabramatta Policing*, Report No. 8, Parliament of NSW, Sydney.
- 2 The analysis in this paper is for postcode 2166, which includes the suburbs of Cabramatta, Cabramatta West, Canley Vale, Canley Heights and Lansvale.
- 3 In this paper, the trend test used is Kendall's rank-order correlation test (see, for example, Conover, W.J. 1980, *Practical Non-Parametric Statistics*, 2nd edn, John Wiley and Sons, pp. 256-260).

- 4 Rate calculations for NSW are based on 2001 estimates of resident population, while rate calculations for 2001 in Cabramatta are based on actual 1996 population.
- 5 See Weatherburn D., Jones, C., Freeman, K. & Makkai, T. 2001, *The Australian Heroin Drought and its Implication for Drug Policy*, Crime and Justice Bulletin No. 59, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Sydney.
- 6 The method of proceeding against offenders to court by summons, which was infrequently used in Cabramatta, and those methods of proceeding which do not result in a court appearance (such as Youth Conferences, Cautions, Infringement Notices, and Warnings) are not considered in this paper.

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