



Serious Injury collision following Police response to cattle on Old Coach Road

INDEPENDENT POLICE CONDUCT AUTHORITY

INTRODUCTION

1. In the early morning of Friday 1 June 2012, Police received a report that unattended cattle on the highway outside of Maitaura posed a danger to road users. The Police unit dispatched to the scene was unable to locate the cattle. About one hour later a truck struck one of the cattle beasts and overturned. The driver of the truck suffered serious injury.
2. The Police notified the Independent Police Conduct Authority of the incident and the Authority conducted an independent investigation. This report sets out the results of that investigation and the Authority's findings.

BACKGROUND

Summary of events

3. At 2.19am on 1 June 2012 the Police Southern Communications Centre (SouthComms) received a report of cattle on the Clinton-Maitaura Road (Old Coach Road) outside of Maitaura. The caller reported that he had nearly hit two cattle beasts on the road, provided the nearest RAPID number and stated that the location was eight or nine kilometres out of Maitaura.¹ The actual location of the RAPID number is about 13.6 kilometres east of Maitaura.
4. At SouthComms, Police Communicator A received the call and created an event (Event 1) in the SouthComms computer-assisted dispatch system (CAD). In the text for Event 1 Communicator A recorded the nature of the report and the cattle's approximate location. He did not record the RAPID number. In interview with the Authority, Communicator A said that at the time he was unaware of the RAPID number's significance.

¹ The Rural Address Property Identification (RAPID) System is a standard numbering system for rural properties.

5. The dispatcher directed Officers A and B to the general location entered into Event 1 by Communicator A, an area between the intersections of Bristow Road (approximately 9.3 kilometres east of Mataura) and Ferndale Road (approximately 10.1 kilometres east of Mataura). This location is about 3.5 kilometres west of the RAPID number provided in the emergency call to Communicator A.
6. After Officers A and B reached Old Coach Road they travelled as far as the Waikana Road intersection, approximately 11.8 kilometres east of Mataura, while attempting to locate the cattle.
7. At 2.45am the officers advised the SouthComms dispatcher that they were unable to locate any wandering stock and updated Event 1 as K1, which means that Police attendance has been sufficient and no further action is required in relation to an event. The dispatcher subsequently cleared Event 1 from the CAD at 2.55am.
8. At 2.57am Communicator A received a second report of cattle wandering on Old Coach Road. In response to a query from Communicator A the second caller advised that the cattle were about nine kilometres from Mataura.
9. Communicator A informed the caller that Police were aware of the incident. He did not create a new event in the CAD system and as a result the dispatcher was not alerted to the report, precluding any further Police response. In interview with the Authority, Communicator A said that he did not create a new event because, although he should have checked, he believed the job had already been dealt with.
10. At 3.32am SouthComms received a report from the ambulance service that a truck and trailer unit had collided with a cattle beast and overturned on Old Coach Road about ten minutes from Mataura. The collision occurred about 750 metres from the RAPID number provided in the first emergency call to SouthComms. The truck driver suffered serious leg injuries.

Communicator A

11. Communicator A has served seven and a half years in the New Zealand Police. For the last four years he has served at SouthComms as a communicator and dispatcher.
12. During its investigation the Authority found that Communicator A's training records do not specifically detail whether he received training in the use of RAPID numbers. This is because Police do not record all elements of particular training courses for individual staff members.
13. Police have confirmed to the Authority that current communicator training includes training in the use of RAPID numbers.

Police investigation

14. The Police Review of the incident found that Communicator A had failed to understand the significance of the RAPID number and record it in Event 1, which would have identified the location of the cattle. It was also found that Communicator A had failed to follow correct procedure when he omitted creating a new event for the second report of wandering cattle.
15. Following the review, Communicator A attended training in the use of RAPID numbers to identify rural locations.

LAWS AND POLICIES

Police Call Taking Instructions

16. The Police Call Taking Instructions require communicators to enter the details of all calls, except personal calls and those solely requiring transfer, as an event in the Police CAD system.
17. When a communicator receives a call from a new caller relating to an existing event, the Call Taking Instructions require the communicator to create a new event.

THE AUTHORITY'S FINDINGS

Did Communicator A provide adequate information in the CAD?

18. The Police Call Taking Instructions require communicators, when entering an event in the CAD, to include sufficient information to allow the dispatcher to dispatch an appropriate response to an incident.
19. Communicator A failed to record the RAPID number provided by the first emergency caller. He later explained to the Authority that this was because he was unaware of the number's significance. He could not recall whether he had been trained in the use of RAPID numbers.
20. It cannot be definitively established whether Communicator A had received training in the use of the RAPID numbers prior to this incident. However, the Authority does not accept that Communicator A had never come across RAPID numbers in his four years at SouthComms as a dispatcher and communicator.
21. The RAPID number was relevant information provided during a brief emergency call. Communicator A's failure to record the information hindered Police attempts to locate the cattle.

FINDING

Communicator A failed to record pertinent information regarding location.

Did Communicator A follow the Police Call Taking Instructions?

22. The Police Call Taking Instructions require communicators to create a new event when an emergency report is received from a new caller relating to an already existing event.
23. Communicator A wrongly assumed that the incident had been dealt with and failed to create a second event or update Event 1 in response to the second report of cattle on Old Coach Road. As a result the dispatcher was not alerted to the report and no further action was taken by Police.

FINDING

Communicator A failed to record the new information as required by the Police Call Taking Instructions.

CONCLUSIONS

24. Section 27(1) of the Independent Police Conduct Authority Act (the Act) requires the Authority to form an opinion as to whether or not any act, omission, conduct, policy, practice or procedure which was the subject-matter of the investigation was contrary to law, unreasonable, unjustified, unfair or undesirable.
25. Pursuant to section 27(1) of the Act, the Authority has formed that opinion that Communicator A twice failed to record pertinent information in the Police CAD system. The first omission was undesirable and the second, which breached the Police Call Taking Instructions, was unjustified.
26. These omissions hindered Police's ability to accurately locate the cattle which in this instance had serious implications.



JUDGE SIR DAVID CARRUTHERS

CHAIR

INDEPENDENT POLICE CONDUCT AUTHORITY

27 February 2014

About the Authority

WHO IS THE INDEPENDENT POLICE CONDUCT AUTHORITY?

The Independent Police Conduct Authority is an independent body set up by Parliament to provide civilian oversight of Police conduct.

It is not part of the Police – the law requires it to be fully independent. The Authority is overseen by a Board, which is chaired by Judge Sir David J. Carruthers.

Being independent means that the Authority makes its own findings based on the facts and the law. It does not answer to the Police, the Government or anyone else over those findings. In this way, its independence is similar to that of a Court.

The Authority employs highly experienced staff who have worked in a range of law enforcement and related roles in New Zealand and overseas.

WHAT ARE THE AUTHORITY'S FUNCTIONS?

Under the Independent Police Conduct Authority Act 1988, the Authority:

- receives complaints alleging misconduct or neglect of duty by Police, or complaints about Police practices, policies and procedures affecting the complainant in a personal capacity;
- investigates, where there are reasonable grounds in the public interest, incidents in which Police actions have caused or appear to have caused death or serious bodily harm.

On completion of an investigation, the Authority must form an opinion on whether any Police conduct, policy, practice or procedure (which was the subject of the complaint) was contrary to law, unreasonable, unjustified, unfair, or undesirable. The Authority may make recommendations to the Commissioner.



IPCA

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