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## Wrong to demand justification to extend country tenure

**The** scope to transfer from post to post, amid the multitude of positions which exist within SAPOL, is a key recruitment drawcard. It can be refreshing, even exhilarating at times, for employees to take on both functional and geographical changes.

Country policing is a particularly valuable experience for any police officer. It allows for a closer, more intimate relationship with the community and almost always proves highly rewarding.

But the decision-making process associated with making the move can be complex and challenging. One has to consider his or her spouse or partner, their children, other family members and friends. Financial implications and promotional opportunities also require consideration.

Members frequently plan to transfer to country posts,

for either defined or indefinite periods. But, as we know, circumstances do not always remain the same.

It might be that meaningful new friendships are forged with community members; job satisfaction is particularly high; or the family is settled and content. Perhaps a member wants to continue his or her duties in a familiar working environment, while providing excellent service and enjoying a lifestyle he or she never knew existed.

In other cases, those who came from the country to join SAPOL might long to return, to be close to family and friends.

Naturally, the appeal which some officers find in certain posts will not exist for others. But, as members' careers unfold, they gain experience in different fields and their aspirations can wind up completely different from those with which they started.

Among the great lures to the country are the pristine waters

of the west and south-east coasts, which both offer great fishing, surfing, swimming and sailing. But these areas' climates differ markedly.

In the west is extreme heat and dry landscapes during summer, particularly in the Ceduna area. In the Mount Gambier area are cold, wet winters but also lush, green landscapes and expansive pine plantations.

The Riverland draws officers with, of course, the River Murray, and its abundance of excellent camping spots and fresh-water recreation.

In the Far North, Coober Pedy lies surrounded by the dry desert under a scorching-hot sun, but overnight temperatures fall to near freezing. The appeal of this harsh outback environment, with its limited population, is its serene, isolated setting.

Over the years, many members have chosen to remain in these locations for long periods. They have not only assimilated into the communities but also provided them with exceptional service as police officers.

SAPOL implemented a maximum-tenure policy for some country locations some years ago. The Police Association has not supported certain aspects of that policy since its inception.

Many members have contacted the association to express their deep concern about being required to provide submissions as to why they should remain at their country

locations, after SAPOL has advised them of the pending expiration of their maximum tenures.

This situation has caused those members, and their families, significant distress. Moreover, country members – who receive advice from SAPOL that they are to be transferred within a specified time – often suffer a collective decline in morale.

Members choose to transfer to country locations for a variety of reasons. In doing so, they have to consider their family circumstances and make appropriate financial decisions.

Still, they diligently go about settling into local communities, to which they give committed service. This is despite the poor standard of some government housing, in response to which some members have rightly purchased their own homes in order to meet their needs and expectations.

SAPOL has recently introduced a trial which allows exemptions from tenure for employees who apply for certain country locations at which the employer does not provide housing.

The association view is that the tenure policy should be the trigger point for employees to seek transfers out after completing a maximum tenure of service at a specified location (if they so choose) rather than forcing them to justify why they should remain.

Members have been required to provide detailed

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## High cost for improper access of info

personal information, including:

- » Work performance and achievements.
- » Partners' work commitments and children's school commitments.

The association does not support the requirement to supply these explicit details. Work performance should be dealt with in accordance with the Individual Performance Management Policy. And members should not feel threatened or intimidated by managers linking work performance with tenure.

The association's position is that members should not be required to justify extensions to tenure in country locations.

The association has written to Commissioner Hyde requesting that policies, practices and procedures reflect that the tenure policy can be utilized by members who wish to transfer out of country locations after fulfilling tenure.

Any member who is concerned that he or she is to be forced to leave a country location, owing to maximum tenure, should contact the association for advice.

### Members

may only access SAPOL computers and information systems for purposes deemed to be in line with the proper execution of their duties. SAPOL general orders prohibit any other kind of access. So, clearly, members must have a legitimate reason to access information.

The Police Association is concerned about the number of members being charged with breaches of discipline for allegedly accessing information other than as allowed by general orders.

High levels of accountability, and justification for all actions, have become synonymous with modern-day policing, and certainly apply to members who seek to access SAPOL information systems.

SAPOL has highlighted its position with two front page *Police Gazette* notices (October 8, 2008 and November 18, 2009) and the creation of a general order, *Releasing/Accessing Information*.

SAPOL is also conducting proactive audits of its information systems to identify members who access information on its computers. These audits examine all computer access/enquiries over certain periods.

As a result, a member might be called to justify why he or she has made a certain enquiry or looked at a particular piece of

information. If that member cannot relate the computer access directly to the execution of his or her duties, he or she might be charged with a breach of police regulations.

The association encourages all of its members to think about any access on SAPOL information systems before they conduct any checks. If, in your mind, the slightest doubt exists, check with your supervisor/manager – before you access a SAPOL computer.

SAPOL has, with many examples, illustrated that it is unacceptable to:

- » Access information on your personal motor vehicle.
- » Conduct checks to satisfy your curiosity.
- » Seek information on friends and relatives.
- » Access information without using the correct process.
- » Access information of a personal nature.

Many members have had to approach the association for assistance because a disciplinary or criminal charge has been laid alleging unauthorized access.

If a member is charged with a breach of the Code of Conduct (regulation 25 of the *Police Regulations 1999*), he or she will be served with documents from the Professional Conduct Section. In the documents will be:

- » The charge/s the member is facing.
- » The particulars of each charge.
- » The punishment category (A, B, C) that has been indicated.

(The category is explained in full in section 39 of the Police *(Complaints and Disciplinary Proceedings) Act*.)

- » Commissioner's statement (explaining the summary of events).
- » Police Disciplinary Tribunal forms (1A and 1B). (These forms enable the member to admit or deny the allegations in writing before a Police Disciplinary Tribunal hearing.)

Members should be aware that SAPOL monitors their use of its computer systems, and that they face the possibility of discipline, and even criminal, charges for misuse.

Moreover, if a member pleads guilty to a breach of the Code of Conduct, he or she might well suffer more than just sanction. His or her eligibility for the receipt of police service medals might be adversely affected.

And applications for promotion or transfer could also suffer adverse effects after a guilty plea, or finding of guilt, in relation to the access of information on a SAPOL computer.

The association encourages all members to think carefully about any information they intend to obtain from a SAPOL computer.

Think about the post-access, and whether you will be in a position to explain your actions. Ask yourself whether you are seeking the information in line with the proper execution of your duties.