



Push for greater police powers at Gold Coast Games

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The Gold Coast Commonwealth Games will be a target for terrorist attacks, a top police officer has warned.

Police Commonwealth Games Group Assistant Commissioner Peter Crawford said there was a "significant threat".

"The Games are an attractive target for political and ideological messaging," he said.

"We'll be getting 24/7 worldwide media coverage by over 3000 reporters from all around the world.

"That is a very good audience if you wish to send a message."

Mr Crawford said terrorist organisations were calling for individuals and groups to attack in their home countries rather than travel to the Middle East.

He said there would be "very highly visible armed police" at the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games in April 2018, tactical response teams, significant intelligence work, airport-style screening, bag searches and plain clothed police.

Mr Crawford was giving evidence at a parliamentary committee hearing into a bill which would give police special powers to stop and search people.

Under the changes, police would have the power to frisk search anyone entering or in a "protected security zone", without needing to prove there was a "reasonable suspicion" of an offence, or that they may have drugs or a weapon.

It would also allow officers to enter premises in the zones without a warrant.

The zones are likely to be entry points to major event areas, pedestrian routes to venues and transport hubs.

Police officers will also be exempt from filling out enforcement registers for searches to stop them from being bogged down with paperwork. This element will not lapse at the end of the Games and will apply for future events under the Major Events Act.

Mr Crawford said the extra police powers were necessary to protect people attending the Games.

"We think the bill strikes the right balance between individual civil liberties and the protection of the community in general," he said.

"A concern for all law enforcement agencies is the unknown offender for whom there is no intelligence of any threat who without warning creates an incident that harms our community to further their ideological beliefs - having a reasonable suspicion to be able to identify these people is very rarely going to be an easy option for us."

Police acting commissioner Peter Martin said in a letter to the committee that the threat of a vehicle attack at the Games was "real", citing the Westminster Bridge, Berlin Christmas markets and Nice truck attack.

"The QPS will employ various methodologies to protect the public from this type of threat including, but not limited to, intelligence gathering, road closures, physical barriers and electronic surveillance resources," he said.

Mr Crawford said the police powers were less intrusive than those granted during the G20 in Brisbane in 2014.

He said the Gold Coast area had extensive CCTV and it was a "rare occasion" for police to act without someone filming them, which meant people would be additionally protected against misuse of the powers.

But Queensland Law Society president Christine Smyth said the powers to stop, detain and search people without the test of "reasonable suspicion" was concerning.

"Without this, the powers are unreasonably intrusive," Ms Smyth said.

Ms Smyth said the exemption from recording searches in a register was also problematic.

"Without that, there are no checks and balances against which people in power must monitor their own conduct," she said.

QLS past president Bill Potts recommended body cameras be worn to assist in recording searches.

"We live in dangerous times, dangerous times require substantial measures but where that balance lies is going to be something which is the subject of proper debate," he said.

Mr Potts said it would be of great "distaste" if people were being targeted for searches on the basis of the colour of their skin or their perceived religion.

"We want to make sure that if there is suspicion it is based on reason," he said.

Crime and Corruption Commission policy and research director Rebecca Denning said recording searches ensured transparency and accountability.

"The concern of the CCC is that in exempting police from recording enforcement acts in a register, such act may not be recorded, leaving the QPS less able to demonstrate that a power was used appropriately," she said.

"I would be looking for us to be investing in... technology and new ways and innovative ways of being able to speed process but not removing that obligation to record what are significant powers."

Queensland Council for Civil Liberties president Michael Cope said he was concerned certain ethnic or age groups may feel they were targeted by police for searches.

"The exercise of police powers should be informed by evidence, rather than personal biases held by police," he said in a submission.

But Mr Martin said police would not search people based on appearance, race, ethnicity, gender or age, and instead it would be based on behaviour.

Mr Cope also argued police should record all instances of the exercise of police powers to ensure officers remain accountable and people unhappy with their treatment have a chance to have their concerns heard.

"The use of a simplified form would be ideal," he said.

The committee is due to report by April 28.

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