Executive Summary

The highlights and trends from the report, Crime and Justice Statistics for WA: 2000, are:

General crime

Compared to 1999 figures, the total number of offences reported to and recorded by the WA Police Service for 2000 rose by 6.2%. When population growth is taken into account, the rate of recorded crime in WA increased from 15,692 to 16,465 offences per 100,000 persons (a rise of 4.9%). However, while the rate of reported property crime increased from 13,242 to 14,021 offences per 100,000 persons, the rate for against the person (that is, violent) offences declined from 1,258 to 1,240 offences per 100,000 persons. The robbery rate (armed and unarmed, combined) fell slightly during the 12 months to December 2000 from 112.8 to 109.6 offences per 100,000 persons (see Chapter 1, Table IV).

Once again, Aboriginal people accounted for a disproportionate number of victims of violence. Based on crimes reported to the police, the victimisation rate of Aborigines for violent offences in 2000 was 5,453 per 100,000 persons – more than five times the rate of non-Aborigines (1,054 per 100,000 persons). Women accounted for over 70 per cent (71.3%) of Aboriginal victims, compared with 46% of non-Aboriginal victims.

The distribution of crime varied across the state. Overall, about three quarters of all reported crime was located in the Perth metropolitan area. However, for different types of crimes, the distribution varied from region to region. Violent offences were highest in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Central and South Eastern regions – no doubt related to the high levels of Aboriginal victimisation. Perth recorded the highest rate of robbery offences. The Kimberley region had the highest rate of sexual offences and the South Eastern region had the highest rate of property offences (see Chapter 1, Table IX).

In comparison to other Australian states and territories, Western Australia (WA) had average or below average recorded crime rates for most offence categories in 2000 (see Chapter 1, Tables I & II). Queensland had the highest homicide rate, while the Northern Territory had the highest assault and sexual assault rates. New South Wales had the highest rates for robbery and kidnapping/abduction, the ACT had the highest rate for motor vehicle theft, while WA had the highest rate for burglary offences. WA has had the highest rates of recorded burglary offences since the start of the ABS national recorded crime series (1993). Until recently, WA also had the highest rate of motor vehicle theft. However, since 1996, the WA rate has been declining and is now one of the lowest in the nation.

Police Apprehensions

Compared to 1999 figures, apprehensions in WA increased by 5.7% during 2000. However, while the number of adults arrested by police increased, the number of juveniles arrested decreased slightly. Declines in juvenile arrests, particularly of non-Aboriginal youth, were most evident in the early 1990s. Since the mid-1990s, arrest rates of non-Aboriginal
juveniles have steadied but arrest rates of Aboriginal juveniles increased slightly. For adults, arrest rates have been relatively steady for non-Aborigines but have continually increased for Aborigines, particularly females. The increase in adult female Aboriginal arrests have related mostly to good order offences and driving-related offences including driver’s licence offences.

In the past decade, the level of over-representation of Aborigines in police arrest statistics has steadily increased from a factor of 6.9 to a factor of 9.7. In other words, by 2000, Aboriginal people were almost ten times more likely to be apprehended by police than non-Aboriginal people. In the case of arrests for violent offences, this differential is even more marked. Aboriginal people were about nineteen times more likely to be arrested for offences against the person than non-Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal females were over thirty two times more likely to be arrested for such offences than non-Aboriginal females.

Juvenile justice

Compared with 1999 figures, the number of juvenile cautions issued by police increased by 6.2%. Aboriginal participation in the cautioning scheme has increased since 1995 - from 16% to 22% in 2000. The use of cautioning outside the Perth metropolitan region appears to be comparable with the use of arrest for juveniles (42% of cautions and 46% of juvenile arrests took place outside the Perth metro area in 2000).

In contrast to cautions, the number of juveniles referred to teams by the police decreased by 13% in 2000. However, the number of juveniles referred to juvenile justice teams by the Children's Court remained steady (a slight decline of 0.6% was observed).

More generally, the number of charges and juveniles dealt with by the Children's Court declined in 2000. Compared with 1999 figures, charges finalised by the Court fell by 10.5%, while the number of juveniles dealt with decreased by 5.1%.

As in previous years, burglary/theft offences constituted the most common offences dealt with by the Children's Court (40%), followed by good order (17%) and driving/motor vehicle offences (17%). The most common sanctions imposed by the Court were non-custodial sentences, however, a significant proportion (about one quarter) of burglary/theft offences received custodial sentences.

Overall, about 11% of juveniles who appeared before the Children's Court were placed in detention, and these were responsible for about 17.5% of all offences heard by the court.

At a national level, the WA juvenile detention rate (51.9 per 100,000 juvenile persons) was exceeded only by the rates of Tasmania (66.5) and the Northern Territory (60.7). WA had the highest Aboriginal rate of juvenile detention (590.3 per 100,000 Aboriginal juveniles). This rate was 31 times greater than that for non-Aboriginal juveniles and 1.8 times the national rate. Since 1998, the juvenile justice detention rate in WA has declined slightly.

Adult Court activity

As in 1999, there was a sharp rise in the number of charges finalised by the Higher Courts in 2000 (a 22% increase, mostly in the District Court). About half (45%) of all charges dealt
with by the Higher Courts involved property offences (mostly fraud and burglary offences). About two fifths of charges (38%) involved offences against the person (violence) – of which, more than half (58%) were sexual offences. There was a substantial increase in the number of fraud charges dealt with by the Courts, however, reasons for this increase are not clear.

Conviction was the most likely outcome for charges heard in the Higher Courts (in 79% of charges, either the plea or the court outcome was ‘guilty’). A further ten per cent of charges resulted in acquittal and about six per cent were withdrawn (nolle prosequi). Compared with 1999 figures, the proportion of withdrawn charges halved in 2000 (6.1%, down from 12.2%).

Conviction rates varied according to offence type. The lowest conviction rates were for homicide, sex offences and assault (about 65%), while robbery (83%), property offences (89%) and drug offences (86%) had the highest conviction rates. Conviction rates for homicide offences have increased slightly since 1996, while conviction rates for robbery and burglary offences have declined slightly.

Following conviction, imprisonment continued to be the most common sentence handed down by the Higher Courts (67% of convicted charges received this penalty). Prison sentences were most likely for violent (against person) offences – about 80% of such offences received a custodial sentence upon conviction. For some types of offences (assault, robbery, burglary and motor vehicle theft), the use of suspended (prison) sentences has increased since 1996.

The Report also includes statistics about the adult lower courts (Courts of Petty Sessions), which deal with about three quarters of offences brought before Western Australian criminal courts (usually the less serious offences).

Compared with 1999, the number of charges dealt with by the Courts of Petty Sessions in 2000 increased by 11%. The most common offences dealt with by the Courts of Petty Sessions were driving offences (37%) and good order offences (21%). In the main, conviction rates were high in the adult lower courts (95% overall; 99% for driving offences and 95% for good order offences).

Reflecting the less serious nature of offences dealt with by the lower courts, the most common sentences imposed by the court were fines (68%), followed non-custodial orders (17%) and prison sentences (9%). Compared with other types of offences, burglary/theft offences and violent offences were the most likely to receive prison sentences, while driving offences were most likely to receive fines. Burglary/theft offences and violent offences were also more likely than other types of offences to receive longer prison sentences (i.e., terms greater than 12 months).

Of the most common offences dealt with by the courts (that is, driving offences), charges of driving while under suspension (DWUS) constituted the largest sub-category (31%). Most DWUS offences received fines as penalties (77%), but 10% received prison sentences and, of these, more than half received relatively long sentences of six months or more.

General prison trends

Compared with 1999 figures, prison receptions in 2000 increased by 8.1% - due to
increases in offenders serving parole sentences (up 12.3%), fine-defaulters entering prison (up 15%) and offenders entering prison on remand (up 7.8%). Prison census populations also continued to rise (up 8.8% on 1999 figures), reflecting the growing number of prisoners serving generally longer prison sentences.

Aborigines accounted for two fifths (40%) of prison receivals but only one third (33%) of prisoners on census night – indicating a higher 'throughput' of Aboriginal prisoners (for comparatively shorter sentences) than non-Aboriginal prisoners.

Driving/motor vehicle offences accounted for a large proportion of prison receptions (18%) - the majority of these were licence-related offences, primarily driving while under suspension. Good order offences, burglary/theft and violent offences accounted were the next largest categories, accounting for 14%, 12% and 12% of receptions, respectively. More than half (55%) of all prison receptions for motor vehicle/driving offences were of Aboriginal offenders.

As in previous years, female Aborigines featured in the general prison trends for 2000. Although they accounted for a relatively small proportion of total prison receptions (7.3%), their presence in the statistics is noteworthy because a significant percentage (23%) of sentenced female Aboriginal prisoners were in prison for fine-default.

**Lock-up trends**

The number of admissions into police lock-ups increased by 3% in 2000 – due mostly to increases in police arrests. However, there were slightly fewer drunken detainees placed in police lock-ups in 2000 (3,111 detainees) than in 1999 (3,285). Since 1996, the number of drunken detainees in police lock-ups has fallen considerably (down 65%) - from 8,845 to 3,111 admissions. Note, though, that drunken detainees made up 7% of all lock-up receptions in 2000 but comprised only 4% of all distinct persons received; thus indicating a small but highly repetitive population.

**Community-based orders**

Compared with 1999 figures, the total number of community-based orders issued to offenders in 2000 rose by 10.6%. Specifically, work and development orders (WDOs) increased by 7%, intensive supervision orders (ISOs) increased by 20%, community-based orders (CBOs) rose by 14%, and parole orders rose by 12%. Home detention, however, declined by 7%.

The profile of offenders serving these orders differed according to the type of order issued. For example, a large proportion of WDOs were served by Aborigines (68%), ISOs were served mainly by young offenders aged 25 years or less (59%), while a significant proportion of CBOs were served by female offenders (29%).