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Ombudsman report on the *Police Powers (Drug Detection in Border Areas Trial) Act 2003*

The Ombudsman's January 2005 report on the *Police Powers (Drug Detection in Border Areas Trial) Act 2003* has been tabled in Parliament. This Act established an 18-month trial of new police powers to stop and search vehicles for drugs, using drug detection dogs at checkpoints along border areas in the south of New South Wales.

“Although police exercised their powers in a professional manner, the new powers in the Act did not help police in effectively targeting drug supply across State borders,” said the NSW Ombudsman, Bruce Barbour.

The Ombudsman reviewed the Act for nine months, during which nine police operations occurred.

- Police searched 8% of all vehicles stopped (291 of 3,809), usually because a drug dog indicated the presence of illicit drugs. However, in less than a third of cases (89 vehicles or 31%) police found drugs.
- Police searched 411 people. Drug offences were detected in less than 25% of searches (101).
- Only two large amounts of drugs were located. However, neither of these cases resulted in a conviction for drug supply.
- Most offences detected (51) were dealt with by way of caution for possession of small amounts of cannabis.
- The average cost of each operation was almost \$20,000. If wages and other costs are included, the total cost of running all operations was estimated at \$669,188.

The review found that police were hampered by some of the requirements of the legislation, particularly the extensive preparation required to set up a check point.

“Our review indicates that the results achieved through this new law do not justify the costs involved. This is conceded by NSW Police. We have recommended that Parliament consider allowing the Act to expire,” said Mr Barbour.

For a copy of the report or other inquiries, please contact Lisa Du, Public Relations Officer at the NSW Ombudsman. Phone 9286 1008 or 0417 233 320. The report is also available on the Ombudsman's website: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au.