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CHANGES IN CRIMINAL OFFENCE CATEGORIES IN NSW RECORDED CRIME STATISTICS 2004

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This year the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research have made substantial changes to some offence categories reported in the annual publication NSW Recorded Crime Statistics. This paper outlines the nature of these changes. The most significant change has occurred within the offence of robbery which is no longer comparable with previously reported data.

THE PROCESSING OF RECORDED CRIME STATISTICS

The Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) has responsibility for publishing recorded crime statistics in New South Wales. The recorded crime statistics that we publish are sourced in their raw form from the COPS database (Computerised Operational Policing System) of the NSW Police. The raw data is then processed by BOCSAR for analysis and publication. The COPS database contains detailed records of all criminal incidents that come to the attention of NSW Police. As the COPS database is principally a tool for use in operational policing, however, the offence categories that it offers are those that are useful to police and do not correspond directly to offences defined in legislation or those used in standard crime reporting. The COPS database categories criminal incidents according over 200 detailed offence descriptions.

In order to report on crime, BOCSAR recodes the detailed police incident categories to criminal offence categories that align with accepted offence classifications such as ASOC (Australian Standard Offence Classification, Cat. No. 1234.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics). Hence, as part of our processing of the raw police data we map more than 200 police incident categories to 61 BOCSAR offence categories.

Table 1 shows an example of the mapping undertaken for three offences.

Table 1 illustrates why it is necessary to aggregate the police incident categories into broader classifications for reporting purposes. The police incident categories are very detailed and not necessarily independent of each other. Also, most people have an understanding of what constitutes, for example, an assault. However many people would not know the difference between actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm and probably do not require information at this level.

REVIEW OF OFFENCE CATEGORIES

In 2004 the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research undertook a review of our offence categories. The three main aims of the review were to:

1. Reduce the size of the miscellaneous or 'other' offence categories reported;
2. Improve the composition of existing offence categories; and
3. Better align the offence categories with ASOC.

This review has led to a number of significant changes in the offence categories reported by BOCSAR. The major changes have been:

Table 1: Composition of BOCSAR offence categories assault, break and enter – dwelling and fraud

<i>BOCSAR offence category</i>	<i>Police incident category</i>
Assault	Actual bodily harm Grievous bodily harm Assault officer Common assault Shoot with intent other than to murder
Break and enter – dwelling	Break, enter and steal Break, enter and intent to steal Break, enter and commit other felony Break, enter and intent to commit other felony
Fraud	Larceny clerk/servant / bailee Make / use false instrument Embezzlement Fraudulent misappropriation Company / corporate offence Deception offence Posses false instrument Publish false misleading statement Corrupt commission / practices Counterfeit currency offence under Crimes Act 1914 (Cth)

- Significant changes to the composition of the three robbery categories;
- Creation of nine new offence types: *harassment, threatening behaviour and private nuisance, receiving or handling stolen goods, trespass, criminal intent, liquor offences, pornography offences, escape custody, resist or hinder officer and transport regulatory offences.*
- Separate identification of drug offences that involve ecstasy or amphetamines.
- Reduction in the size of three miscellaneous offence categories: *other offences against the person, other offences against justice procedures and other offences.*

The natures of these changes are outlined in detail below.

Robbery

The most significant changes arising from the review are to the three types of robbery: *robbery without a weapon, robbery with a firearm and robbery with a weapon not a firearm.* The changes that have been made to the composition of the offence are as follows:

1. An additional police incident category has been moved within robbery increasing the total number of robbery incidents by about five per cent. Under the new counting rules the police incident

category *demand money with menaces* is considered to be a type of robbery, whereas it was previously presented as an individual category. Legislation and ASOC suggest that demand money with menaces can be appropriately considered within robbery.

2. BOCSAR reports on three types of robbery which are differentiated by the type of weapon involved in the incident. In the course of the review we saw that improvements could be made in the way in which weapon involvement is identified. When recording an incident on COPS, police record the incident type (eg. armed robbery, robbery, robbery with wounding, robbery with aggravation, other robbery) as well as separately recording whether a weapon was involved. In the past BOCSAR has only considered the type of weapon involved in offences described by police as 'armed robbery'. There are however other police incident types which can also involve a weapon. Consequently, we have now decided to search for weapon involvement in all types of robbery (including demand money with menaces). This has resulted in an increase in the number of robbery incidents that involve weapons

Table 2 shows the effect of the change on the number of reported robbery incidents. The table shows the number of robbery incidents that would have been

Table 2. Number of robbery incidents under the new and old counting regime

	Old counting rule	New counting rule
Robbery without a weapon	5226	4925
Robbery with a firearm	583	655
Robbery with a weapon not a firearm	1953	2597
Total Robbery	7762	8177
Demand money with menaces	415	-

expected in 2004 under the old and new counting rules. It can be seen that there is a sizeable increase in the number of *robbery with a firearm* incidents (up 12%) and *robbery with a weapon not a firearm* incidents (up 33%). The number of incidents of *robbery without a weapon* has fallen slightly (down 6%).

Other offences against the person.

The offence category *other offences against the person* was considered for review because it was large (6683 incidents in 2003), had been increasing and because the miscellaneous title of the category offers no information as to the character of the offences that it encompasses. In *Recorded Crime Statistics 2003* it was reported that the incidence of *Other offences against the person* rose from 5060 incidents in 2001, to 5939 incidents in 2002 and then 6683 incidents in 2003. This is an increase of 32 per cent over three years.

Examination of the offences that comprised *other offences against the person* shows that in 2003 the police incident category 'intimidation' accounted for 81.1 per cent of incidents. 'Intimidation' can be characterised by threatening behaviour and stalking-type offences.

Response: It was decided to move 'intimidation' out of *other offences against the person* and into a new offence category called *harassment, threatening behaviour and private nuisance*¹.

As a result the number of incidents in the category *other offences against the person* has fallen by about 80 per cent. Applying the old counting rules to 2004 data gives 7892 incidents but with the removal of 'intimidation' the new counting rules result in only 1389 incidents being reported.

Other offences against justice procedures

The offence category *other offences against justice procedures* was considered for review because it was large (6005 incidents in 2003) and because again its name does not inform on the nature of the offences contained within it.

The old category *other offences against justice procedures* included police incident categories 'resist/hinder officer' (about 80% of the total) and 'other judicial offence' (about 20% of the total).

Response: It was decided to move 'resist/hinder officer' into a new offence category called *resist or hinder officer*².

As a result the number of incidents in the category *other offences against justice procedures* have fallen by nearly 80 per cent. Under the old counting rules, in 2004, 6111 incidents would be identified, however, under the new counting rules only 760 incidents of *offences against justice procedures* are reported.

Other offences

The offence category *other offences* was considered for review because it was extremely large, had been increasing and because the miscellaneous title of the category gives no indication as to the character of the offences that it contains. In *Recorded Crime Statistics 2003* it was reported that the incidence of *other offences* rose from 54,127 incidents in 2001, to 76,553 incidents in 2002 and then 97,850 incidents in 2003.

Table 3 shows the composition of *other offences* in 2003. The table shows that there are some extremely high volume offences within this category that have contributed to its size. This is particularly true of 'transport offence' (fare evasion and other regulatory offences on trains), 'telecommunications offence' (nuisance and obscene phone calls) and 'trespass'.

Response: The high volume incidents within *other offences* that have distinct meanings have been established as new independent offence categories. The new offences and their composition are shown in Table 4.

The revisions in the composition of *Other offences* take the size of this category from nearly 100,000 incidents annually to 18,314 in 2004. The size of the category is still large but would be difficult to sensibly disaggregate it further. The largest police incident

Table 3: Major incident categories within other offences, 2003

<i>Police incident category</i>	2003	% of all other offences in 2003
Transport Offence	43,662	44.6%
Telecommunications Offence	12,424	12.7%
Trespass	7,277	7.4%
Other Miscellaneous Offence	4,195	4.3%
Animals – Dog Offences	3,137	3.2%
Consume Alcohol In Alcohol Free Zone	3,030	3.1%
Liquor Act-Offence By Licencee/Employee	2,767	2.8%
Consume Alcohol In Public By Minor	2,559	2.6%
Other Street Offence	2,556	2.6%
Liquor Act-Offence By Minor	1,594	1.6%
Marine/Waterway Act	1,582	1.6%
Liquor Act-Offence By Customer Not Minor	1,551	1.6%
Remaining <i>other offences</i>	11,516	11.8%
Other Offences	97,850	100%

categories that remain within *Other offences* are: other miscellaneous offences (3730), animals – dog offences (3030), other street offence (2220), Marine/Waterway Act (1890) and Local Government Act (1145). These offences do not fit neatly within other categories.

Drug offences involving ‘other drugs’

Police record on COPS the type of drug involved in drug offences. In the past BOCSAR has separately reported on drug incidents involving narcotics, cannabis and cocaine. All other drug types have been collapsed within ‘other drugs’. *Recorded Crime Statistics 2003* reported 2900 incidents of *possession and/or use other drugs*.

Response: Drug offences involving amphetamines and ecstasy are now separately identified. In the 2004 calendar year there were 1943 incidents of *possess and/or use amphetamines*, 563 incidents of *possess and/or use ecstasy* and 906 incidents of *possess and/or use other drugs*. The recorded drug types that remain within the category ‘other drug’ are: sedative (170), other drug (454), no drug recorded (201), hallucinogen (23), steroid (23), stimulant (23), precursor (11) and counterfeit drug (1).

Other changes

There have been minor changes to other offences including:

- Creation of a new offence category *Receiving or handling stolen goods*. The new category combines

the previously independent categories ‘goods in custody’ and ‘receiving’. The new category is consistent with ASOC which recommends that offences relating to the possession of stolen goods be grouped.

- Creation of a new offence category of *Manufacture drug*. This new category includes the police incident category ‘manufacture drug’ which was previously contained within *Other drug offences*. There are only a small number of *Manufacture drug* incidents (56 in 2004) so a breakdown by drug type is not viable.
- Creation of a new offence category *Escape custody*. This new category includes all escape offences that were previously reported separately
- Renaming of the old category *Weapons offences to Prohibited and regulated weapons offences*. The new name is consistent with ASOC and may address the misunderstanding that these offences represent violent crimes involving the use of a weapon rather than offences related to illegal possession, licensing, sale or storage of weapons. There has also been a small change in the composition of this offence. The police incident category ‘carry cutting weapon’ has been removed as it was deleted from the COPS system in the third quarter of 2004
- A new category of *Pornography offences* has been created which contains incidents of ‘child pornography’, previously contained within *Prostitution offences*, and ‘possess/publish indecent material’, which was in *Other offences*.

Table 4. New offence categories included in Recorded Crime Statistics 2004

<i>Offence and police incident categories</i>	<i>Number of incidents</i>
Harassment, threatening behaviour and private nuisance	
Telecommunications offence <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	12,559
Intimidation <i>(formerly in other offences against the person)</i>	6,503
Total	19,062
Trespass	
Trespass <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	7,275
Remain inclosed lands <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	477
Trespass Total	7,752
Criminal intent	
Enter land with intent <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	269
Armed with intent <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	298
Disguised with intent <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	8
Intent to repeat indictable offence <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	103
Possess implements <i>(formerly independent offence category within theft)</i>	938
Criminal Intent Total	1,616
Liquor offences	
Consume Alcohol In Alcohol Free Zone <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	2,478
Consume Alcohol In Public By Minor <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	2,254
Liquor Act-Offence By Customer Not Minor <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	1,757
Liquor Act-Offence By Licencee/Employee <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	3,134
Liquor Act-Offence By Minor <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	1,431
Liquor Act-Supply Liquor To Juvenile <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	170
Reg Club Act-Off By Customer Not Minor <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	515
Reg Club Act-Offence By Club(Pty Ltd) <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	276
Reg Club Act-Offence By Minor <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	131
Reg Club Act-Offence By Secretary <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	235
Reg Club Act-Offence Licensee/Employee <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	35
Liquor Offences Total	12,416
Resist or hinder officer	
Refuse Direction – Drug Related <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	92
Refuse Direction – Not Drug Related <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	1,229
Refuse To Be Searched <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	53
Refuse To Produce Object <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	10
Resist/hinder officer <i>(formerly in other offences against justice procedures)</i>	4,610
Resist or hinder officer Total	5,994
Transport regulatory offences	
Transport Offences <i>(formerly in other offences)</i>	42,489
Total Transport regulatory offences	42,489

CONCLUSION

These changes mean that for some offences, the incidence of crimes published in *Recorded Crime Statistics 2004* and in the future cannot be compared with data reported in previous publications. In order to achieve some comparability BOCSAR have applied the new counting rules to crime data going back to 1995. Comparable data is available on request.

NOTES

- 1 *Harassment, threatening behaviour and private nuisance* also includes the police incident category 'telecommunications offence' which was previously contained within *other offences*.
- 2 The new offence category *Resist or hinder officer* also includes refusing to be searched and refusing a direction both of which were formerly contained within *other offences*.