

MEDIA RELEASE



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AUSTRALIA'S FINGERPRINT DATABASE IN TSUNAMI DVI EFFORT

A version of Australia's National Automated Fingerprint Identification System (NAFIS) is now being used in the post-Tsunami Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) process.

CrimTrac's Acting Chief Executive Officer Cliff Van Lohuizen said two of the agency's personnel were in Phuket working closely with Interpol and the Australian Federal Police forensics team to commission the system. (CrimTrac operates and manages NAFIS on behalf of Australia's police services.)

Federal Justice and Customs Minister Senator Chris Ellison ensured CrimTrac's services were available to Australian Police and that the required legal framework to use the DNA DVI system was in place.

Preliminary DVI systems for DNA and fingerprints were ready for use within 48 hours of the minister's request. These systems were based on the experiences of the Bali bombing but the scale of the tsunami DVI requirements made it apparent that new and larger systems were quickly needed.

'Interpol requested CrimTrac on 7 January to supply a stand-alone fingerprint identification system to help international police post-mortem efforts in Thailand as a matter of urgency,' the Acting CEO said.

'Four user workstations and the NAFIS central database server environment were built using new and existing equipment and configured, tested then shipped to Thailand and was operational within 72 hours of receiving the Interpol request.'

'Input of post-mortem information has already started and agency personnel will stay on site to ensure the system is properly administered and that international staff get systems training before returning to Australia.'

'The involvement and commitment of SAGEM (CrimTrac's finger printing system vendor) was instrumental in assisting the NAFIS system's deployment,' he said. 'The company pulled-out all stops to ensure we could deploy and commission the system in record time.'

Mr Van Lohuizen praised state and territory police services' input and co-operation throughout the process of configuring and deploying the system.

'We've got to remember CrimTrac's primary role is to provide national systems for state and territory police, which means that the potential impact of this extra work on Crimtrac's existing policing systems required careful consideration and support from all stakeholders.'

'The manner in which this was done and the commitment of CrimTrac's stakeholders reflects very well on everyone involved.'

'The agency also established a fully functioning DNA system to receive and cross-match DNA profiles as part of the DVI process. It has not yet been determined if this system will be required because a significant number of other countries are participating in DNA aspects of the DVI process.'

Mr Van Lohuizen said the agency's experience in assisting the AFP and other state and territory police services with the Bali bombing DVI process had proven most valuable. For Bali, CrimTrac's DNA and fingerprint DVI systems assisted in identifying victims.

'The downside of such experience is that it's only gained amid tragic circumstances. The role the agency plays in assisting the police services correctly identify victims is small solace amid the heartbreak of such a tragedy,' he said.

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