

Write your own laws

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It's said the powerful write their own laws but, in New Zealand, now everyone can.

Due to a new wiki launched by the New Zealand police, members of the public can now contribute to the drafting of the country's new policing act.

NZ Police Superintendent Hamish McCardle, the officer in charge of developing the new act, said the initiative had already been described as a "new frontier of democracy".

"People are calling it 'extreme democracy' and perhaps it is," he said.

"It's a novel move but when it comes to the principles that go into policing, the person on the street has a good idea ... as they are a customer," he said.

"They've got the best idea about how they want to be policed."

NZ Police were reviewing the old Policing Act, from 1958, which had become "anachronistic" and was "written for a completely different age, not policing of today", Superintendent McCardle said.

But drafting new legislation "shouldn't just be the sole reserve of politicians", he said, so the wiki was created to invite input from members of the public.

Social networks strategist Laurel Papworth, who writes a blogs on how online communities change the way society operates, said "participatory legislation" was a "great idea".

"It empowers the voters to have a voice not just a vote, so that they are actually contributing to the dialogue and not just voting on the outcome," she said.

But input into the NZ Police Act wiki was not being limited to New Zealand voters, Superintendent McCardle said.

"The wonderful thing about a wiki is we can open it up to people all around the world - other academics and constitutional commentators interested in legislation - and make the talent pool much wider," he said.

Comment on whether the idea could work for NSW Police was being sought from Police Minister David Campbell.

But Ms Papworth said Australian governments had recently opened up to the public more through the use of online technology, such as forums and blogs.

But she was not aware of the use of wikis to invite public contribution to legislation.

Superintendent McCardle laughed off a suggestion that the initiative invited would-be criminals to write loopholes into the act to be exploited once it became law.

"We have been asked if we are worried about it being defaced, but wikis generally haven't been defaced internationally - people generally are constructive and productive," he said, referring to the success of Wikipedia, the popular wiki encyclopedia.

The wiki version of the Policing Act will be viewed by New Zealand parliamentarians, before an official bill is introduced into Parliament, Superintendent McCardle said.

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