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Karen Webb becomes first female NSW Police Commissioner

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Karen Webb has been appointed the next NSW Police Commissioner, becoming the first woman to hold the position.

Ms Webb is the Deputy Commissioner overseeing the force's corporate services and replaces Mick Fuller at the helm of the oldest and largest police force in the country.



Karen Webb will be the first woman to serve as NSW Police Commissioner. KATE GERAGHTY

An officer with NSW Police since 1987, she beat fellow deputy commissioners Mick Willing and Mal Lanyon for the top job.

She was elevated to the rank of Deputy Commissioner in July and, before that, had overseen the traffic and highway patrol and the public transport command.

Ms Webb has also worked as the Deputy State Emergency Operations Controller and has experience as a detective and as a director of NSW Police Legacy, the police charity.

“It’s a great honour and a privilege to be appointed the next Commissioner of NSW Police,” Ms Webb said on Wednesday.

She described herself as a “career cop” and would lead the force in a “new direction” as officers return to more traditional duties to protect community safety after the pandemic.

“I think the pandemic was a challenging time for everyone. So I think it’s time for everyone to return to our normal lives and certainly, for the police, to re-engage with our communities and understand what the community expects from us,” she said.

She said one of her focuses would be victims of crime – especially those affected by child abuse, sexual assault and domestic violence – while having “zero tolerance” for criminals.

“I really look forward to leading the police force for the next five years, and I’m ready for this challenge,” she said.

“I believe she will do a very, very good job,” NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet said on Wednesday.

Mr Perrottet said Ms Webb demonstrated integrity, honesty and drive and, while her appointment was historically significant, she was not selected based on her gender.

“She was appointed on the basis of her talent and her leadership skills. That was the only determining factor,” he said.

However, he said he expected the appointment would inspire women to join the police.

Ms Webb said only 10 per cent of NSW Police sworn and civilian staff were women when she joined in 1987, a figure that had grown to 35 per cent today.

“I’m sure there’s a lot of other women out there that are contemplating it and I’d say to them to, to come along and sign up,” she said.

The Police Association of NSW, the union representing officers, labelled the appointment a victory for diversity.

“The appointment of Karen Webb is a historic first for the state and a forward-thinking decision by the government,” association president Tony King said.

Officers who have worked with Ms Webb say she is an impressive leader and gives little credence to internal politics.



Outgoing Commissioner Mick Fuller welcomed the appointment of his successor. RHETT WYMAN

Opposition Leader Chris Minns and Labor's police spokesman Walt Secord welcomed the appointment, saying Ms Webb was exceptionally well-qualified.

"The appointment of our state's first female commissioner is an historic moment to be celebrated, although frankly overdue," Mr Minns said.

Mr Fuller said the future of NSW Police, with its 17,500 sworn officers and another 4500 civilian staff, was "in good hands".

"Commissioner-elect Webb is a highly experienced police officer, with 34 years of serving the community behind her," Mr Fuller said.

"She has a strong record in operational leadership roles, and has made both an outstanding Region and Specialist Commander."

Police Minister David Elliott praised Mr Fuller and said he was reluctant to see him leave.

"I have never been sadder to see a man leave an organisation," he said.

Mr Elliott thanked Mr Willing and Mr Lanyon for their distinguished service and said any of the applicants could have done the job.

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