

NT police say officer fired gun six times at Indigenous man allegedly armed with a spear

Nineteen-year-old fighting for his life in Darwin hospital after incident at Palmerston on Tuesday morning



A 19-year-old man who was allegedly armed with a spear is in a critical condition after being shot by police in the Northern Territory city of Palmerston.

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An Indigenous teenager is fighting for his life in a Darwin hospital after allegedly being shot at by a police officer six times during an incident in the Northern Territory city of Palmerston.

Two officers attended a park in the suburb of Gray about 9am on Tuesday morning where they found the man allegedly armed with a spear, NT police said.

Assistant commissioner Michael White alleged on Wednesday that the 19-year-old from Palmerston attempted to throw the weapon at police officers.

White said the officers called on the man to drop the weapon, after which one officer pulled out a taser and the other fired six rounds of bullets. Both were wearing body cameras at the time of the incident.

“At this stage, we’re not sure how many shots struck the person in hospital,” White said.

“It will form a major part of the investigation as would the distance between the man and the officer at the time the shots were fired.”

The man was taken to Darwin hospital where he underwent surgery. A hospital spokesperson said he remained in a critical condition on Wednesday afternoon.

“We certainly know today that his condition has improved from his injuries and the work that the hospital has done to provide all the care necessary to him is nothing but exceptional,” White said.

“We’re providing all assistance available to all members involved in the shooting – all members who responded to it and more broadly we’ve reached out to the family and are doing everything we can to engage with them ... to ensure they have a full appreciation of what occurred.”

White said a critical incident investigation had been launched into why the man was allegedly armed and the response of the officers. All oversight bodies had been briefed.

The investigation will examine the use of force by officers, including what other options were considered or deployed. Investigators will liaise with the injured man’s family and the wider Indigenous community.

White said at least 45 detectives were currently working on the investigation, door knocking and examining the scene of the incident with forensic analysis.

Roads were closed around the scene of the shooting on Tuesday night, while on Wednesday morning the immediate area was cordoned off.

White said police also worked with a school nearby to ensure all students returned home safely amid ongoing activity at the scene.

“What occurred yesterday was a critical event where police used potentially lethal force to subdue a person,” White said.

“Clearly that can cause angst in the community and we’re doing everything we can to ensure officer safety, the safety of our families and the community more broadly.

“Police are doing everything they can to investigate it and get to the bottom of what occurred so we can assure the community this isn’t going to happen again.”

A report released by the Australian Institute of Criminology last year found fatal police shootings were at a record high since documentation began in 1989-1990.

The data showed there had been a 78% increase in fatal police shootings Australia-wide between 2018-2019 and 2019-2020.

Of the 164 police shootings since 1989-1990, 10 victims were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, representing 6.1% of incidents despite Indigenous people accounting for 3.3% of the Australian population.

There have been 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody in Australia since a royal commission aimed at preventing Indigenous deaths in the justice system was handed down in 1991.