PROJECT SUMMARY

This will be the first international study of border policing that examines women’s decision making in relation to border policing and aims to develop a more comprehensive understanding of unauthorised border crossing and its policing. It seeks to produce robust evidence capable of supporting a regulatory framework for border policing that is locally grounded and globally connected, adaptable to the changing gender dimensions of mobility, human rights and the future challenges of extra legal border crossing. The evidence base has the potential to achieve more humanitarian and effective border policing policy and practice in promoting national and international security.

The central aim of this project is to understand the impact of gender on unauthorised border crossing and border policing.

To achieve this aim the project has four goals:

GOAL 1: Identify the gender related strategies used by border agents and officials to secure borders, including the gendered character of enforcement practices and gendered cultures of border policing agencies as they relate to unauthorised migrant women’s decisions to cross borders;

GOAL 2: Identify the common features in the border crossing decisions, experiences and strategies of unauthorised migrant women, including experiences of law enforcement practices at different locations and sites;

GOAL 3: Identify, test and apply new analytical approaches to regimes of regulation at the border by integrating theoretical concepts of social control (criminology) and statecraft (international relations);

GOAL 4: Compare and contrast Australian approaches to border policing to like countries: the USA and Italy.

Policing the border has serious implications for national security and human rights concerns. Internationally the fastest growing group of persons undertaking extra legal border crossing are women although this differs by region and other markers.
OUTCOMES
Beyond the central aim of better understanding, the above goals will also have the following beneficial outcomes:

OUTCOME 1: A new knowledge base of migration management for extra legal border crossing;

OUTCOME 2: A robust evidence base for border policing that is locally grounded and globally connected, and adaptable to the changing gendered determinants of unauthorized mobility as well as future challenges of unauthorized mobility.

OUTCOME 3: A rich picture of local and international factors that push and pull unauthorized border crossing.

OUTCOME 4: A new theoretical understanding of social control and state craft

OUTCOME 5: Establish an international network of border policing scholars and practitioners that will lead a new generation of research knowledge around the regulation of borders.

EVIDENCE
This project will engage key university, non-government and law enforcement agencies in the conduct of the fieldwork. It will establish new, and extend existing, relationships with NGOs and law enforcement agencies in the production of this research, ensuring the quality of its policy relevance and application for practitioners.

To achieve GOALS 1 and 2 I will use methodological strategies of qualitative data collection and analysis developed in prior successful research projects with Australian policing agencies (Pickering et al 2008) as well as populations of undocumented migrants and refugees in Australia, Burma and Thailand (Pickering & O’Kane 2002; Lambert, Pickering & Alder, 2003).

To achieve GOAL 1 the evidence to be collected will focus on issues of occupational culture and gendered policing practices by border policing agents. In order to produce the locally grounded and globally significant rich picture (GOAL 4) a semi-structured interview sample will be undertaken in each site and will be comprised of 50 border policing agents in Australia, and 25 each in Italy and the US. GOALS 1-4 require the collection of evidence to investigate the gendered dimensions of if, when, how and against whom the border is enforced. Data gathering and analysis will therefore collect information on the organizational culture on border policing decisions to identify, classify, process, detain and release unauthorized migrants.

To achieve GOAL 2 the evidence to be collected to document and analyse the similarities and differences in experiences of border policing by migrant women and men who have crossed borders. In each country, 50 interviews with border crossers will be sampled in Australia, and 25 each in Italy and the US. Data gathering will collect information on experiences of identification, classification, processing, detention and release in the border policing system. The interviews will be designed and analysed to explore the gendered dimensions of border crossing, understandings of the border, reasons for unauthorized migration to particular locales, experiences of border enforcement, and strategies for survival and empowerment during border negotiation.

To achieve GOAL 3 the project will interpret evidence detailed above to consider criminological and criminological theories of social control (Melossi, 2004, Cohen, 1985) and international relations theories of statecraft (Devetak, 1995, Doty,1996) to develop a framework for the regulation and management of unauthorized migration that is responsive to issues of gender, human rights (including refugee protection and labour mobility) and national security. Social control is an important theoretical framework for it will enable an investigation of both the formal and informal forms of control exerted at the border. Statecraft is important for it locates border policing within broader concern for new approaches to state sovereignty through a range of boundary inscription practices and criminal justice processes. Using these theoretical frameworks this project uniquely examines the border policing of unauthorized mobility by integrating gender in an analysis and by so doing will transform our consideration of the broad phenomenon to better prepare for future challenges.