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CASE STUDY · MARLUC SYNOPSIS

WA Police live facial recognition trial

IMPLEMENTED 2025–2026 · GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICES · AUSTRALIA · BAND D · CLAIMED ONLY

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Australia's first police trial of live facial recognition in public places ran for five months in 2026. Police report 122 arrests and nine incorrect alerts; privacy and Aboriginal legal groups raised concerns, and an internal evaluation is under way.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

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The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

AI used: Live facial recognition: real-time matching of faces from overt cameras against a police alert list.

Implemented: 2025–2026. Grade: band D, Task support, Claimed only.

Headline result, as reported: Five-month trial scanned 1,380,882 faces, generated 292 alerts and led to 122 arrests, by WA Police's account

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 6 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

Western Australia Police Force. State police force of Western Australia. The trial was run by its Innovation Division with metropolitan and regional districts. Canvas block: 4. Operations and process. Also 8. Governance and risk, 6. Data and technology.

Business challenge

The challenge. WA Police said it wanted to find and manage high-risk people in busy public places, and to identify and locate people more quickly. Its privacy impact assessment lists objectives to improve the identification and location of people wanted for arrest or subject to legal restrictions, and to reduce reliance on manual and reactive methods. AAP reported that about 8,000 people in the WA community had an outstanding arrest warrant or a child sex conviction.

Who implemented it

NEC (Software vendor): Supplied the facial recognition technology, per the privacy impact assessment and the ABC.
In-house (In-house): WA Police Innovation Division: owned and ran the trial with metropolitan and regional districts.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: T8 Predictive / ML models. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: NEC, NEC NeoFace.

Where it was built in: Cameras mounted on or near a marked police van at designated public places; alerts reviewed by officers on screens in a nearby van before any action.

What changed

Before: police identified wanted or vulnerable people through existing policing and intelligence methods; WA Police had used non-live facial recognition for more than a decade, per AAP. After: during the trial, officers received real-time alerts from cameras at public places and events, and checked each alert before acting. Whether the capability continues depends on the internal evaluation. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6]

What it cost

Not reported

What it saved

Not reported. By WA Police's account, the trial led to 122 arrests and the identification of 146 registered sex offenders and 10 people whose welfare needed checking. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6]

Governance and control

WA Police published a privacy impact assessment and an equality impact assessment, required superintendent-level authorisation for each deployment and says every alert is checked by officers. The WA information commissioner said it was not invited to any formal consultation and gave no input into the trial's design, and is monitoring and requesting information. The Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia said it was offered a meeting two days before launch.

S2 · Accountable owner · Claimed
The privacy impact assessment names the Technology Portfolio in the Innovation Division as business owner, with a responsible officer and an executive sponsor. [3]

A1 · Safe use · Claimed
WA Police says deployments follow standard operating procedures and that extra scrutiny applies near hospitals, schools and places of worship. [1]

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
Every alert is checked by officers before any action, and an alert is not by itself grounds to arrest, by WA Police's account. [1]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Claimed
Police say incorrect alerts are reviewed after each deployment and the trial will be evaluated internally; no independent evaluation is reported. [1]

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
NEC is named as vendor; how its algorithm was tested for WA's population is not reported, and police did not answer the ABC's question on First Nations faces. [3] [5]

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Outside scrutiny (a regulator, court, auditor or similar body acted)
The WA information commissioner said it was not consulted on the design, set out privacy risks under the PRIS Act and said it is monitoring and requesting information from WA Police. [4]

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– Scale and alert accuracy, by WA Police's account: 1,380,882 faces scanned with 9 incorrect alerts out of 292.

– Arrests, by WA Police's account: 122 over the five months.

– Published privacy and equality impact assessments and deployment rules.

DID NOT

– Consultation: the WA information commissioner said it was not invited to participate in any formal consultation, and the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia called an email two days before launch "the extent of the consultation", per the ABC.

– Transparency during the trial: after the first week, WA Police declined to release more data for several weeks, per the ABC.

– WA Police did not respond to the ABC's question on whether the system had been tested or trained on First Nations faces.

UNPROVEN

– Whether arrests would have happened anyway through ordinary policing.

– Whether the system performs equally across ethnic groups, including First Nations people, in WA conditions.

– The outcome of the internal evaluation and any decision on future use.

Timeline

Nov 2025 Privacy impact assessment prepared for an overt live facial recognition trial, naming NEC as vendor [3]

Jun 2026 Trial begins on 22 June with cameras on or near a marked police van in public places [1]

Jul 2026 WA information commissioner says it was not invited to any formal consultation on the trial [4]

Aug 2026 ABC reports criticism from privacy experts and the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia [5]

Oct 2026 Operational activity ends on 31 October after 100 deployments; internal evaluation to follow [1]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: D, Task support. Proof: Claimed only. Level of change: Task support.

Task support (Level 1, band D). Officers received alerts to check during a time-limited trial; structures and processes outside the deployments did not change, and the trial ended pending evaluation.

Graded D. Live facial recognition gave officers alerts to act on during time-limited deployments, by the force's account; it did not change how policing is organised and the trial has ended pending an internal evaluation. Results are police figures with no independent check.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The force published its impact assessments and deployment rules, and reports low incorrect-alert rates. The gaps sit at the join with outside bodies: the state information commissioner says it was not invited to any formal consultation, and the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia says it was contacted two days before launch. For any public body deploying biometric AI, the evaluation design and the regulator's role are best settled before the first deployment, with the evaluation's measures published in advance.

1. Consult the regulator and affected communities before deployment.
2. Publish how success and bias will be measured before the trial starts.
3. Release trial data on a fixed schedule so scrutiny does not depend on requests.

Evidence

Score 1 of 4. Self-reported: the results are WA Police's own figures; the information commissioner's statement and ABC reporting are independent but do not test the results.

Evaluation method. Self-reported operational figures from WA Police; an equality impact assessment and privacy impact assessment were published; no independent evaluation. The force says an internal evaluation will follow.

Sources disagree. The ABC names NEC's NeoFace M40 product; the privacy impact assessment refers to NEC's NeoFace Watch. AAP reported a planned trial of three to six months with one camera system and a van; the trial ran for about five months.

Status. Trial ended on 31 October 2026; WA Police says an internal evaluation will examine

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/wa-police-live-facial-recognition-trial

[1] Western Australia Police Force (WA.gov.au): Live Facial Recognition Technology
https://wa.gov.au/organisation/western-australia-police-force/live-facial-recognition-technology

[2] Western Australia Police Force (WA.gov.au): Overt Live Facial Recognition trial update
https://www.wa.gov.au/government/announcements/overt-live-facial-recognition-trial-update

[3] Western Australia Police Force: Privacy Impact Assessment, Overt Live Facial Recognition
https://www.wa.gov.au/media/161114/download

[4] Office of the Information Commissioner WA: media release on the WA Police trial (9 July 2026)
https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2026-07/oic_media_release_wapol_olfr_pilot_09072026.pdf

[5] ABC News: Privacy concerns raised over Australian-first live AI police face scanning trial
https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-08-11/ai-police-face-screening-trial-sparks-privacy-concern/107009644

[6] AAP: Eye spy: police to deploy Australian-first surveillance
https://aapnews.aap.com.au/news/eye-spy-police-to-deploy-australian-first-surveillance

Western Australia Police Force website: https://www.police.wa.gov.au

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