



Lunar seize almost seven tonnes of illicit tobacco worth over \$12 million

This is a joint media release between Victoria Police and the Australian Taxation Office

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In a joint operation with the Australia Taxation Office, detectives from Taskforce Lunar have seized over \$12 million worth of illicit tobacco as part of an investigation into the cultivation and distribution of illicit tobacco in eastern Victoria.

With assistance from the ATO, a Commonwealth search warrant was executed at a remote Arcadia property on Tuesday, 26 March.

A seven-acre illicit tobacco crop was located at the rear of the property, worth a total avoided excise value of almost \$9 million. The dried weight was over four and a half tonnes.

There were no people present at the address, and the crop was subsequently ploughed under the seizure provisions of the Excise Act.

On Tuesday, 7 May, a second Commonwealth search warrant was executed at a residential address in Undera.

Two large kilns were located at the rear of the property which investigators will allege were utilised to dry illicit tobacco.

Almost two tonnes of dried illicit tobacco, worth in excess of \$3.5 million, were seized from the address.

Again under the seizure provisions of the Excise Act, the illicit tobacco was disposed of.

Five firearms which were improperly stored at the property were also seized, and a 73-year-old man, not believed to be connected to this

investigation, was served with a notice of suspension and proposal to cancel a firearms licence.

On Monday, 17 June, as part of a joint investigation with Western Australia Police and with the assistance of VIPER Taskforce, three warrants were executed in Werribee (2) and Altona Meadows also linked to this investigation.

Approximately 50,000 illicit tobacco sticks, 30 kg of loose-leaf tobacco, vapes and a CCTV system were seized from the Werribee addresses – one residential address and one tobacco store.


A 36-year-old Werribee man, believed to own the Werribee store, was interviewed on Wednesday, 26 June in relation to possessing and producing illicit tobacco.

He is expected to be charged on summons.

Mobile phones were seized from the residential Altona Meadows address.

Police will allege the properties searched are linked to a significant leader of an organised crime syndicate involved in the illicit tobacco network.

The investigation remains ongoing.

Anyone with information about illicit tobacco is urged to contact Crime Stoppers on **1800 333 000** or report online at www.crimestoppersvic.com.au 

Victoria Police Quotes

Detective Acting Superintendent Mark Hatt, State Anti-Gangs Division, Crime Command said:

"We have made it absolutely clear that we will target anyone at any level across the state who is involved in the distribution and sale of illicit tobacco, and that involves regional Victoria.

"There seems to be a mistaken belief that you are safe from being targeted and out of constant law enforcement attention in country areas. This could not be further from the truth.

"These seizures – and their potential value in avoided excise – are significant, and their impact will no doubt be felt by the organised

crime groups operating in Victoria. They will also provide further avenues of enquiry for Victoria Police.

“When there is a risk to the community due to this heightened criminal activity, we will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to do absolutely everything we can to deter, disrupt and dismantle these syndicates.”

ATO Quotes

Assistant Commissioner Jade Hawkins said:

“The success of these significant operations has required the close collaboration of law enforcement agencies at all levels of government to detect, disrupt and dismantle organised crime syndicates who use profits from illicit tobacco to fund other more serious illegal activities.”

“Engaging in the illicit tobacco trade is a serious offence and is far from victimless. These crimes are calculated, deliberate, and take vital funding from essential community services such as healthcare and education.”

“Illicit tobacco retailers gain an unfair price advantage over honest businesses who do the right thing. Removing illegal tobacco from crop to the shop creates a level playing field for those small businesses.”

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