



## Melbourne man sentenced for attempting to defraud the ATO of nearly \$458,000

A Melbourne man has been sentenced following a joint AFP and ATO SFCT investigation.

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A Wheelers Hill man has been sentenced today (Thursday 21 December, 2023) to 3 years and 6 months imprisonment for defrauding the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) of nearly \$35,000 and attempting to defraud the ATO of a further \$458,000.

Blake Crough, 35, pleaded guilty to two counts of attempting to obtain financial advantage by deception and one count of obtaining financial advantage by deception in the Melbourne Magistrates Court in May 2023.

The joint AFP and Australian Taxation Office (ATO) Serious Financial Crime Taskforce (SFCT) investigation began in June, 2020, after the ATO linked Mr Crough to a number of suspicious claims, including 40 fraudulent applications for JobKeeper.

The value of fraudulent claims totaled \$492,957.

The AFP arrested Mr Crough at his residence in Wheelers Hill earlier this year (23 February, 2023). Mr Crough was subsequently charged.

AFP Detective Superintendent Bernard Geason said the sentence was a warning to criminals who seek to exploit and steal from the Commonwealth and by extension, Australian taxpayers.

'The ATO-led Serious Financial Crime Taskforce is a joint partnership that allows us to leverage our combined forces and skills to identify and stamp out criminal behaviour,' Det-Supt Geason said.

'The JobKeeper payments were designed to assist people during a pandemic and in turn, protect our community.'

'With so many Australians doing it tough, it is more important than ever that we seek out those who heap the burden of crime on the public.'

ATO Deputy Commissioner and SFCT Chief John Ford said protecting the integrity of the tax and superannuation system is a priority, and part of that is ensuring the integrity of stimulus measures such as JobKeeper payments.

'This outcome demonstrates that where people deliberately set out to exploit the system, we will work with our partner agencies through the SFCT to take action. Compliance is firmly on our radar.'

This matter was prosecuted by the CDPP.

Mr Crough was sentenced to 3 years and 6 months with a non-parole period of 2 years and 3 months.

The SFCT is an ATO-led joint-agency taskforce. It brings together the knowledge, resources and experience of relevant law enforcement and regulatory agencies to identify and address the most serious and complex forms of financial crime.

The AFP-led CACT was formed in 2011 as part of a multi-agency crackdown on criminal assets, bringing together the resources and expertise of the AFP, ATO, Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, AUSTRAC, and Australian Border Force.

Together, these agencies trace, restrain and ultimately confiscate criminal assets.

For more information on the SFCT, including the identikit outlining key financial crime personas, visit [ato.gov.au/SFCT](https://ato.gov.au/SFCT).

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