



Luxury spender jailed through Operation Protego

A 44-year-old woman has been sentenced to 2 years and 8 months imprisonment.

Published 29 November 2024

A 44-year-old woman has today been sentenced to 2 years and 8 months imprisonment for dealing with the proceeds of indictable crime, contrary to section 400.4(2) of the Criminal Code (Cth). They will be released on a Recognisance Release Order after serving 10 months, upon entering recognisance of \$2,000 and to be of good behaviour for 2 years.

Thitikorn Thanawong registered for an Australian business number (ABN) for an aromatic massage oil manufacturing business. After providing an associate with her myGov login details, Ms Thanawong's ABN was registered for GST. Between November 2021 and March 2022, nine business activity statements (BAS) were lodged to claim GST credits.

Ms Thanawong received \$296,212 in GST refunds by lodging claims that contained false information. This money was then used to pay for designer branded items from Louis Vuitton, Saint Laurent and Gucci, ski holiday expenses, and direct transfers to associates including her previous partner.

In June 2022, an ATO audit showed no business-related transactions in Ms Thanawong's bank accounts, and she was unable to produce any records to substantiate the claims in the activity statements. The ATO concluded that Ms Thanawong's business did not exist, and she was not entitled to any GST credits.

Deputy Commissioner John Ford is reminding the community to be aware of GST fraud schemes, especially those advertised through social media.

'If something seems too good to be true, then it most likely is. If you see someone advertising a quick way to get a loan from the ATO, this is fraud,' Mr Ford said.

'GST fraud takes away funds that could have been used to support essential community services such as healthcare, infrastructure and education.'

'Engaging in this behaviour will not be tolerated, and we will ensure that those who choose to are held to account,' Mr Ford said.

This is another sentencing resulting from the ATO's extensive efforts under Operation Protego. This operation was initiated in response to widespread GST fraud. It includes compliance and debt recovery actions, as well as criminal investigations, leading to jail sentences for serious offenders.

This matter was prosecuted by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (Cth) (CDPP) following a referral from the ATO.

As part of Operation Protego, the ATO has taken action against more than 57,000 alleged offenders, and those involved in this fraud have already been handed in the order of \$300 million in penalties and interest.

As of 31 October 2024:

- 104 people have been arrested
- 72 people have been convicted with a range of sentencing outcomes, including jail terms of up to 7 years and 6 months and with orders made to restrain real property
- the ATO has finalised 60 investigations and referred 51 briefs of evidence to Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions.

The ATO also supports Operation Protego investigations which are led by local law enforcement agencies rather than the SFCT.

You can anonymously report suspected tax evasion or crime to us by making a **tip-off** online or call **1800 060 062**.

Visit ato.gov.au/GSTrefundfraud for more information about Operation Protego.

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