



## Concrete consequences for GST crooks

Three individuals sentenced in June join the ranks of over 100 individuals sentenced to date under Operation Protego.

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The Australian Taxation Office's (ATO) relentless pursuit against GST fraud sees 3 more individuals sentenced in June 2025 under Operation Protego.

These latest sentencings bring the total of Operation Protego offenders convicted in **May** and June to 6, joining the ranks of over 100 individuals sentenced to date.

ATO Deputy Commissioner and Serious Financial Crime Taskforce (SFCT) Chief John Ford said the recent convictions show that the ATO is bringing criminals who commit GST fraud to justice.

'Our compliance and debt recovery actions demonstrate that we are addressing fraud. Where we see deliberate attempts to cheat the system, there will be severe consequences.'

'These crooks face long-term consequences. Not only do they need to repay the money, but they now have a criminal record set in stone, which may affect their ability to secure employment, obtain finance or insurance and travel overseas.'

'GST fraud steals funds that could have been used to support community services such as healthcare, infrastructure and education, instead of funding offenders' personal luxuries,' Mr Ford said.

The following sentencings show the ATO is working with cross-agency partners through the SFCT, including law enforcement agencies, to

bring criminal consequences, not just financial consequences, for GST fraudsters:

- Ms Darnelle Te Kiri was sentenced to 17 months imprisonment in the Melbourne County Court contrary to section 134.2(1) of the Criminal Code (Cth) for fraudulently obtaining \$202,936 through false business activity statements (BAS). Ms Te Kiri registered an ABN in 2021 for hospitality and bar work services and lodged 8 false BAS over 7 months, claiming to have spent over \$2 million in purchases despite reporting little to no income. An ATO audit found no evidence of a legitimate business. The funds were spent on rent, groceries, pubs and gaming, ATM withdrawals, and transfers to third parties and international money services. She was released immediately on \$1,000 recognisance, to be of good behaviour for 2 years and ordered to repay the full \$202,936.
- Mr Daniel Copeland was sentenced to 3 years imprisonment to be released after serving 12 months in the Newcastle District Court contrary to section 134.2(1) of the Criminal Code (Cth) for fraudulently obtaining over \$1.1 million in GST refunds from the ATO. Mr Copeland registered an Australian business number (ABN) for a plastering services business and submitted 23 false BAS in 2021. An ATO audit was unable to identify any evidence of the Offender's purported enterprise and that he was not entitled to claim the GST refunds. The funds were used for gambling, personal living expenses, accommodation, purchases at a car dealership and cash withdrawals. He was released on \$100 recognisance, to be of good behaviour for 5 years and ordered to repay the full \$1.1 million.
- Mr Tewhاناupani Nukunuku was sentenced to 2 years and 3 months imprisonment to be released after serving 9 months on recognisance release order requiring him to give security in the sum of \$1000 on condition he be of good behaviour for 2 years. Mr Nukunuku pleaded guilty in the Melbourne County Court for one offence of obtaining a financial advantage of \$168,000 by deception from the Commonwealth and one offence of attempting to obtain a further \$100,000 in GST refunds. He claimed to operate a concreting business and lodged 8 false BAS over a 6-month period. An ATO audit found he was not in business and did not hold the necessary registration or license to perform the claimed work. The funds were partly spent on some luxury items including retail expenses and a car. He was also ordered to repay the full \$168,000.

These sentencing outcomes are a direct result of the ATO's sustained and strategic efforts to prevent, detect, investigate and prosecute serious financial crime.


Mr Ford said these results are not just numbers; they represent our strong and ongoing commitment to protecting the integrity of Australia's tax and super systems.

These matters were prosecuted by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (Cth) (CDPP) following a referral from the ATO.

You can confidentially report suspected tax crime or fraud to us by **making a tip-off online or calling 1800 060 062.**

For more information about Operation Protego including recent sentencings, visit [ato.gov.au/protego](https://ato.gov.au/protego).

## Notes to journalists

- As part of Operation Protego, the ATO has applied treatment against more than 57,000 alleged offenders. Those involved in this fraud have already been handed in the order of \$300 million in penalties and interest.
- As at 31 May 2025, 112 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 62 investigations and referred 52 briefs of evidence to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions.
- A high-resolution headshot of [Deputy Commissioner and Serious Financial Crime Taskforce Chief John Ford](#)  is available from the ATO media centre.
- ATO stock footage and images is available for download and use in news bulletins from the ATO media centre.

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