



Lunar seize 11 firearms, cash and a further 3 tonnes of illicit tobacco worth over \$6m

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 (ATO), detectives from Taskforce Lunar have seized a further 3 tonnes of illicit tobacco, over \$170,000 cash and eleven firearms as part of their investigation into the cultivation and distribution of illicit tobacco in Victoria.

With assistance from the ATO and Western Region Crime Squad, Goldfields Crime Investigation Unit and uniform members from Horsham, Stawell and Highway Patrol, five Commonwealth search warrants were executed at large rural properties in the state's west – three in Landsborough and two in Barkly.

No illicit tobacco was located at the western Victorian warrants, though each property had evidence of recent harvest of the plant.

At a Johnsons Gully Road address in Barkly, 20,000 illicit cigarettes and a small quantity of cash were located.

A 40-year-old man at the property was interviewed but released pending further enquiries.

With assistance from the VIPER Taskforce, Brimbank Crime Reduction Team and Brimbank Crime Investigation Unit, a further five Commonwealth search warrants were executed at residential addresses in northwest metropolitan suburbs – Sydenham (2), Delahey (2) and Melton South.

At a Rose Court property in Sydenham, police seized 200 kg of illicit tobacco, five firearms which were improperly stored, shotgun rounds

which were improperly stored, documentation relating to the manufacture of illicit tobacco and keys which are believed to be for illicit tobacco farms.

A 30-year-old man at the address was interviewed by police and is expected to be charged on summons.

At a Nelson Court address in Melton South, 1.5 kg of cannabis, approximately \$60,000 cash, 10 shotgun rounds and 1000 kg of illicit tobacco were located.

A 47-year-old man residing at the property was charged with possessing illicit tobacco to defraud the revenue, possess a trafficable quantity drug of dependence, possess proceeds of crime and firearms offences.

He was bailed to appear at Sunshine Magistrates' Court on 2 October.

At Wordsworth Place in Delahey, police located 600 kg of illicit tobacco, approximately \$90,000 cash and six firearms which were improperly stored.

A 35-year-old man at the address will be charged on summons with possessing illicit tobacco to defraud the revenue, possess proceeds of crime and firearms offences. He will appear at court at a later date.

At a Spellman Avenue property in Sydenham, police located 900 kg of illicit tobacco and a small quantity of cash.

A 39-year-old man residing at the address will be charged with possessing illicit tobacco to defraud the revenue and possess proceeds of crime.

At Lalwinya Street, Delahey, police located approximately 600 kg of illicit tobacco.

Overall, the total weight of tobacco seized is over 3.3 tonnes and represents approximately \$6 million in lost excise.

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 said previously that Victoria Police is focused on targeting syndicate leaders, directors, facilitators and organisers responsible for this criminal offending.

“That remains a key priority for us, and we are doing absolutely everything we can to target them, to bring this criminality to an end and to make involvement in illicit tobacco as unattractive a proposition as possible for organised crime groups.

“However, we also need the community’s help. Purchasing illicit tobacco is not a victimless crime – in doing so, you are unwittingly funding organised crime.

“That money can be used to commit other crimes, such as an arson attack on a business, or to obtain an illicit firearm for a shooting. It is that simple.

“If you are aware of illicit activity linked to a tobacco store, please come forward with that information so police can act.”

ATO quotes

Assistant Commissioner Jade Hawkins said:

‘We are committed to targeting growers and sellers of illicit tobacco and ensuring they face the consequences of their actions.’

‘The outcomes of these raids are another positive step forward in the ongoing work to detect, disrupt and dismantle organised crime syndicates who use profits from illicit tobacco to fund other more serious illegal activities.’

‘The illicit tobacco trade not only takes away vital funding from essential community services, but it also disadvantages honest small businesses who do the right thing.’

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