



AFP
AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE

Patrolling a global beat

"It's the biggest single seizure of ecstasy in the world"
- ABC's *Lateline* Program, August 8, 2008

Fifteen million ecstasy pills weighing 4.4 tonnes had been concealed inside tomato tins and hidden in a shipping container. For more than a year the AFP, Australian Customs, Victoria Police, the Australian Crime Commission and international law enforcement agencies had worked to bring the drug trafficking investigation to its successful conclusion.

Known as 'Operation Inca,' the investigation led to the arrest of significant organised crime figures in Australia, and shut down a major international drug smuggling syndicate. Arrests were made in Belgium and the Netherlands, and as a result of the investigation police identified money laundering operations worth more than \$9 million.

The record haul led to Australia becoming the world leader in seizures of MDMA (ecstasy), accounting for more than a quarter of all global seizures of the drug in 2008.

Stopping criminal syndicates from smuggling drugs into Australia is one of the AFP's key areas of operation. For 30 years it has worked with its Australian and international law enforcement partners on many successful investigations, including the arrest of 20 people in 1985 as part of Operation Lavender. During the investigation police confiscated boats, cars and cash – and found almost a tonne of cannabis resin at a Sydney rubbish dump.

The illicit drug trade has become an international multi-billion dollar business that has grown exponentially since the AFP began in 1979. Drug use in Australia has also changed. In the early 1980s, most drug seizures were of cannabis and heroin derivatives. More recently, users have shifted to amphetamine-type stimulants such as ICE, and ecstasy.

The AFP's success can in part be measured by the vast quantities of drugs that do not make their way onto Australian streets. Australia's biggest cannabis haul was in 1997, with 10 tonnes seized during a single operation. The next year, a series of targeted AFP investigations and the seizure of 390kg of heroin helped to create a "heroin drought" across Australia.

Dealers were cutting the heroin to try to meet demand, greatly reducing its purity on the streets. Where addicts were previously able to get a hit of around 60% purity, the scarcity of the drug meant that fell to around 20%. This had an immediate effect. In a two year period the number of

overdose deaths fell from more than 1000 a year to less than 400. More than a decade later, that situation is being maintained.

The AFP is in a unique position to combat drug smuggling operations as it straddles both national and international aspects of law enforcement in Australia. But targeting drug syndicates is just part of its strategy.

To combat all forms of transnational crime the AFP is taking the fight offshore, targeting criminal syndicates at their points of vulnerability in source or transit countries.

In May 2000 the AFP established a People Smuggling Strike Team. Over time this has evolved into a whole-of-government collaboration to provide a centrally directed, highly mobile investigative capability against global people smuggling syndicates. To combat people smuggling activities in Australia and overseas, the AFP has generated a law enforcement program founded on the pillars of prosecution, disruption of crime and working with other nations to improve their policing capacity.

But people smuggling is not the only way criminals move human cargo. While 'people smuggling' and 'people trafficking' are often confused as being the same thing, they are different. People smugglers are paid by their passengers to take them into a country illegally for the purpose of seeking asylum. On the other hand, people traffickers arrange for victims to enter a country where they can then be exploited.

Around the world men, women and children are trafficked into many different industries including agriculture, construction, domestic work, hospitality, sex work, and factory labour. People who are trafficked into such situations often suffer from physical or psychological abuse. All forms of trafficking are illegal in Australia, and the AFP Transnational Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Team has been established to investigate human trafficking in all its forms.

The AFP also works closely with its counterparts in other countries through joint-training initiatives and capacity development programs. These activities form part of the AFP's Law Enforcement Cooperation Program (LECP) and are a key part of the AFP's strategy to help strengthen law enforcement capabilities across the region.

The program fosters cooperation between policing agencies and plays a vital role in assisting foreign law enforcement agencies to deal with transnational crime. When it began in 1997, the LECP focused on cooperative law enforcement initiatives within the Asia-Pacific region. It continued to grow and now looks into transnational crime issues across the globe, supporting AFP efforts offshore through bilateral and multilateral projects.

There are now almost 100 AFP officers stationed at 31 international posts around the world. This is a significant increase on the three overseas offices the AFP began with in 1979.

Of course, the AFP's international liaison officers now face a vastly different environment to their predecessors. Globalisation has provided greater opportunities for criminals to conceal illicit activities, allowing them to bury the illegal movement of money, people, goods and services within increased levels of legitimate trade and travel. Communication tools such as the internet also enable criminal networks to flourish and operate in a way police could not have envisioned 30 years ago. Terrorism, drug smuggling, money laundering, human trafficking, and child-sex tourism are just some of the crimes investigated by the AFP's international network.

The men and women of the AFP who work in overseas posts develop close ties to the communities in which they live and care deeply about the work they are doing. Relationships are often forged under the most trying of circumstances, such as in the aftermath of a terrorist attack, or during clean-up operations after the Boxing Day tsunami.

The past 30 years have seen the AFP develop into an effective transnational law enforcement agency in a large part because of the relationships that have been developed both here and abroad. Over time, these relationships have deepened to reflect a shared commitment by police to combating crime in Australia and across the globe. Such relationships have already yielded significant successes, and will be the cornerstone for continued AFP success over the next 30 years.