



MEDIA RELEASE

OPERATION SWORDFISH: ACLEI investigation report released

ACLEI investigators uncover corrupt conduct by former Locally Engaged Employee who was employed to process Australian visa applications

Friday, 20 August 2021 (immediate release)

An investigation by the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity (ACLEI) found that a former Home Affairs employee used their position to influence the processing of visas for an unlawful financial benefit, under Operation Swordfish.

Operation Swordfish formed part of the Visa Integrity Task Force, established by ACLEI in 2017 to target corrupt conduct by staff members involved in the issue of visas in various Australian and overseas posts.

The investigation related to a Locally Engaged Employee who worked as a Visa Processing Officer of the then Department of Immigration and Border Protection (now the Department of Home Affairs) based at the Australian High Commission in New Delhi. Under Operation Swordfish, ACLEI investigators found that the officer:

- a) obtained visa applicant details from systems accessed in their employment;
- b) forwarded applicant details to personal email addresses on multiple instances, including names, application reference numbers, dates of birth and visa histories;
- c) approached applicants, and their sponsors, using a personal email addresses and an alias email address;
- d) offered assistance to applicants, and their sponsors, in processing their visas for a monetary amount;
- e) received substantial sums of money on at least two occasions from applicants' sponsors in connection with the processing of their visa applications, totalling AUD \$9,798; and
- f) approved multiple visas outside of policies and procedures.

Ms Jaala Hinchcliffe, the Integrity Commissioner and head of ACLEI, has today published her report on Operation Swordfish. Ms Hinchcliffe said, "The former employee engaged in corrupt conduct, namely abuse of office, which generally means someone has used their position to dishonestly benefit oneself or another, or to dishonestly cause detriment to another."

The seriousness of the corrupt conduct is compounded by the severe consequences resulting from the granting of two applications in particular:

- The granting of an application in circumstances where the applicant's age was being investigated. It was later determined they were a minor. As a result of the visa being granted, the applicant travelled to Australia.
- The sponsor of a visa application believed he paid the visa fee correctly, when in fact that money was retained by the corrupt staff member.

The Australian High Commission in New Delhi were alerted to the officer's mishandling of a number of visa cases through existing fraud control measures. Home Affairs notified ACLEI about two potential corruption issues, and ACLEI's investigation arose from this information.

The employee's employment was terminated in 2018 by the Australian High Commission under the terms and conditions of employment, following a complaint from a client.

Ms Hinchliffe said, "An important outcome of the Visa Integrity Task Force was the dissemination of corruption prevention products, which enable the corruption issues and vulnerabilities discovered through these investigations to be learnt from and mitigated in the future."

"Operation Swordfish highlights the importance of corruption prevention, including anti-corruption training, to raise awareness of the integrity and corruption risks associated with visa processing."

For further information, the Operation Swordfish report is available on the [ACLEI website](#).

About the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity (ACLEI)

ACLEI is committed to preventing and investigating corruption issues relating to Commonwealth law enforcement agencies. ACLEI supports the Integrity Commissioner to provide independent assurance to government about the integrity of prescribed law enforcement agencies and their staff members. The office of the [Integrity Commissioner](#) and ACLEI are established by the [Law Enforcement Integrity Commissioner Act 2006](#) (the LEIC Act). For more information, visit ACLEI's website: aclei.gov.au

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