



Date Thursday, 9 June 2022

Two Investigation Reports released by the Integrity Commissioner: Operations Fortescue and Drysdale

Four former Australian Border Force officers prosecuted for defrauding the Commonwealth while performing duties for the Tourist Refund Scheme

Integrity Commissioner and head of the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity (ACLEI), Ms Jaala Hinchcliffe, has today published reports on two connected investigations – Operations Fortescue and Drysdale.

The investigations considered corruption allegations and risks in relation to the administration of the Tourist Refund Scheme (TRS), an Australian Government initiative where departing overseas travellers may claim a tax refund for goods purchased in Australia.

Operation Fortescue confirmed that four former Australian Border Force (ABF) officers had separately defrauded the Commonwealth by lodging and processing fraudulent TRS claims in the course of their duties.

The joint investigation with the Department of Home Affairs uncovered evidence that the officers directed refunds amounting to a combined total of \$139,480.56 to their own bank accounts or accounts held by family members.

Subject to criminal prosecutions for their conduct, each of the officers pled guilty and were convicted of obtaining a financial advantage by deception under the *Criminal Code* (Cth). The Integrity Commissioner found that all four officers had engaged in corrupt conduct as these activities involved an abuse of their office as a staff member of a law enforcement agency.

Ms Hinchcliffe said, "The evidence obtained demonstrates that each of the former officers performed their duties to dishonestly benefit themselves and cause detriment to the Commonwealth."

The corruption issues identified in Operation Fortescue resulted in ACLEI initiating Operation Drysdale.

Operation Drysdale involved a more thorough examination of the TRS system to investigate whether other ABF officers had engaged in corrupt conduct. It also sought to identify any corruption risks to prevent potential corrupt conduct.

The investigation identified one additional instance of suspicious TRS processing activity which was referred to the Department of Home Affairs for further investigation.

Operation Drysdale identified some areas for improvement but did not identify systemic corruption in the TRS process.

The Investigation Reports on Operations Fortescue and Drysdale are 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](#). For more information, visit ACLEI's website: aclei.gov.au