

# Man arrested for multi-million dollar migration fraud

Joint media release

17-11-2021 -

A joint agency investigation has today led to the arrest of a 57-year-old man from the NSW Central Coast for allegedly being the primary facilitator of a multi-million migration fraud.

The man was arrested by Australian Federal Police members at his Terrigal residence this morning, and is expected to appear before Gosford Local Court today (17 November 2021).

A whole-of-government investigation – led by the AFP and comprising the Australian Border Force (ABF), AUSTRAC, the Australian Taxation Office and Department of Home Affairs – found evidence of an alleged scheme intended to defraud legitimate visa programs. It was triggered by an ABF investigation into allegations of significant visa and migration fraud, dating to August 2019.

The man allegedly facilitated more than 130 fraudulent visa applications – focusing on the food service and regional farm worker industries – over four years, resulting in more than \$2 million being gained from this activity.

A total of nine search warrants were executed by AFP and ABF officers in relation to this investigation on 21 July 2021, at premises in Wamberal, Terrigal and Copacabana on the NSW Central Coast, in the Sydney suburbs of Revesby (two locations) and Rockdale (two locations), and at East Maitland, NSW, and Bundaberg West, Queensland. Additional search warrants were executed today on the man's Terrigal residence today, and at a Tuggerah premises.

The 57-year-old man was charged with providing false documents and false or misleading information etc. relating to non-citizens, contrary to Section 234 of the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth), and restriction on charging fees for immigration assistance contrary to Section 281 of the *Migration Act 1958* (Cth).

He faces a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment if convicted of either offence. Investigations are continuing into other potential criminal offences and further arrests have not been ruled out.

AFP a/Commander Investigations, Eastern Command, Craig Bellis said the charges laid in this matter involved a serious breach of public trust.

“The alleged offences in this matter involved the exploitation of Federal Government programs designed to assist Australian businesses, and it is incumbent on the AFP to investigate and prosecute instances of large-scale fraud against Australian taxpayers,” he said.

“Anyone with any information about this or other migration fraud offences is encouraged to contact the AFP on 131 237, or 131 AFP.”

ABF Assistant Commissioner East and Port Operations, Erin Dale, said the ABF takes a zero-tolerance approach to anyone trying to profit through the exploitation of vulnerable foreign workers.

“This investigation demonstrates the unwavering resolve of the ABF and AFP in preventing the exploitation of foreign workers in Australia. ‘Cash for visa’ schemes as they are often known, target vulnerable visa holders who may not be aware of Australian laws and workplace entitlements”, she said.

“Together, the ABF and AFP will continue to pursue facilitators of visa and migration fraud, while protecting foreign workers who play a vital role within the Australian community”.

AUSTRAC National Manager Michael Tink said AUSTRAC led in-depth financial analysis and traced funds that identified more than \$2 million in income likely derived from fraud-related offences.

“This demonstrates financial reporting from industry combined with AUSTRAC’s specialist financial analysis plays an instrumental role in detecting and stopping criminals seeking to defraud government programs.”

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