



Media release

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\$1.8 million chop-chop op goes up in smoke

A Victorian man, 51-year-old Mr Abdallah Abdallah, was today sentenced at the Melbourne County Court to 2 and half years jail and received a \$2,000 fine to be released on a 4 year good behaviour bond for possession and movement of more than one tonne of illegal tobacco with a total excise value of \$1,831,881.

The operation was first discovered in February 2017 when the NSW Police Force Traffic and Highway Patrol Command, identified a suspicious van driving on the Newell Highway near Narrandera, NSW. It was later discovered that Mr Abdallah arranged for an unsuspecting man to drive ten one tonne hale bales of dried tobacco leaf from his farm in Queensland to Melbourne.

After the ATO received the referral from the New South Wales Police, ATO officers uncovered Mr Abdallah was in possession of more than 5.5 acres of illicit tobacco at two separate properties Givelda, near Bundaberg, in Queensland. ATO officers subsequently seized the illicit tobacco plants, plus equipment used for processing the illicit crop.

Mr Abdallah was sentenced today on the account of intentionally being in possession of illicit tobacco without being a licensed producer, dealer or manufacturer. Mr Abdallah was also charged with intentionally moving tobacco without permission.

ATO Assistant Commissioner Ian Read said that today's outcome demonstrates the ATO's commitment to detect, disrupt and dismantle organised crime syndicates involved in the illicit tobacco trade.

"The illegal tobacco trade is lucrative and is primarily supplied by organised criminal syndicates. The ATO estimates that \$600 million in foregone excise duty went to criminals instead of the community in 2015–16.

"Engaging in the illicit tobacco trade is not victimless. It significantly deprives the community of taxes that are required to fund essential community services such as roads, school and hospitals," Mr Read said.

Since July 2016, the ATO has undertaken 39 seizures totalling approximately 240 tonnes of illicit tobacco with estimated tobacco duty forgone of \$204 million.

The ATO is part of the multi-agency Illicit Tobacco Taskforce which coordinates whole-of-government powers to investigate, prosecute and dismantle organised crime groups

predominately responsible for the illicit tobacco trade, whether the tobacco is grown in Australia domestically or illegally imported.

If a member of the community has any knowledge or concerns about someone doing the wrong thing they can report it online at ato.gov.au/illegal-tobacco or by calling 1800 060 062.