

5 November 2024

AFP Acting Commissioner Ian McCartney: Senate Estimates Opening Statement

Good afternoon, I am AFP Deputy Commissioner Ian McCartney.

I am performing the duties of Commissioner while Commissioner Kershaw holds offshore bilateral meetings integral to our operational planning, including the next Federal election.

This is our fifth appearance at Senate Estimates this year, and we appreciate the opportunity to update you on how we protect Australians and Australia's interests.

Today, I'll provide you with information on two investigations:

- Operation ALESIA, which centres on the alleged disclosure of confidential information by a former partner of PwC Australia; and,
- Operation ARDVARNA, which is an AFP investigation into prohibited symbols.

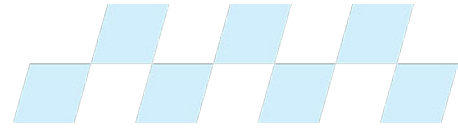
State and territory police have already used new Commonwealth laws to disrupt or charge individuals publicly displaying prohibited symbols, however, Victoria Police has reported several matters to the AFP.

The AFP established Operation ARDVARNA, under the Counter Terrorism and Special Investigations Command, to principally investigate reports of crime against 14 individuals for allegedly displaying prohibited terrorist organisation symbols at a Melbourne protest in September.

About 1100 hours has been spent investigating this matter, including reviewing 90 hours of CCTV evidence and Police Body Worn Camera footage and progressing the analysis of information collected during a recent week of action.

As of today, I can confirm:

- Fourteen individuals are under investigation for display of a prohibited terrorist organisation symbol in a public place;
- Three search warrants have been executed against three individuals, while a further three people have been spoken to by investigators; and
- A number of mobile telephones have been seized as well as an item of clothing depicting a prohibited terrorist organisation symbol.



If relevant thresholds are met, the AFP will provide briefs of evidence to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions to determine if charges will be laid.

I have provided a comprehensive update today on this issue but to protect the operation, I will be limited in providing further information.

I can reveal we are also investigating whether some discourse relating to deceased terrorists, or events in the Middle East, has reached the threshold of urging violence against groups or advocating terrorism.

I want to reassure the community that the AFP has not diverted resources from terrorism investigations.

This year, 10 counter terrorism operations have led to 15 individuals being charged. Eleven of those individuals were aged 17 years or younger, and many of those young people were radicalised online.

In relation to Operation ALESIA, the AFP has made significant advancements, despite this being a complex investigation, made more complicated by the historic nature of the alleged offending, the existence of derivative use immunity connected to other investigations, and legal privilege.

In August, the AFP executed two search warrants at residences in Sandringham and Sorrento, Victoria.

Additionally, the AFP began yesterday executing further search warrants on PwC Australia.

I am proud of what the AFP is achieving.

Thank you and I am happy to take questions.