

The Hon Brendan O'Connor
Minister for Home Affairs
Launch of the Commonwealth
Organised Crime Strategic Framework
Parliament House, Canberra

25 November

1. First, may I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we meet on – and pay my respects to their elders, both past and present.

I would also like to acknowledge the heads of Commonwealth law enforcement agencies with us today.

[Introduction]

The Framework launched today articulates a Commonwealth Government, multi-agency, intelligence-led approach to organised crime.

This approach will draw on the full range of information, functions and powers of Commonwealth Government agencies to effectively prevent, disrupt, investigate and prosecute organised criminal activity.

The Framework provides scope for Government to respond immediately to critical threats.

It also identifies the key requirements which are at the core of an effective and robust law enforcement response over the longer-term.

In addition to the three key elements described by the Attorney-General, the Framework outlines five capabilities that our agencies will need to respond rapidly and decisively to emerging threats.

Intelligence, information sharing and interoperability

An effective response to organised crime begins with accurate, timely and detailed intelligence.

It is appropriate then, that the Framework's first capability is to improve interoperability and support effective sharing of information and the sharing of intelligence.

We have numerous law enforcement agencies at the Commonwealth level with a responsibility for combating organised crime.

In fact, the framework lists 25 Commonwealth agencies which, at some level, have an interest in organised crime—and there are undoubtedly more that will become engaged

Differences among these agencies—how they operate, what powers they can use, how information is collected and stored—can result in a fragmented approach.

The framework will enable us to review and address the barriers which hinder inter-agency collaboration to improve both the quality and quantity of information that we can use to detect and disrupt criminal activity.

We will develop agreed quality standards for intelligence, as well as guidelines and protocols so that agencies can confidently share highly sensitive intelligence.

We will overcome any legislative impediments.

Our capacity to collect, analyse and share intelligence will become more critical as organised crime introduces increasingly sophisticated methods to conceal their activities and hide illicit proceeds.

Targeting the Criminal Economy

We will also be enhancing agencies capability to “Target the Criminal Economy”, creating an environment which is hostile to organised crime by targeting the key motivating factor for organised criminals – namely profit.

Namely, the ability to trace, restrain and confiscate the benefits criminals derive from offences is a vital part of an effective criminal justice system.

Legislation currently before Parliament will improve our ability to ‘follow the money trail’, and remove opportunities to launder illicit profits.

New freezing orders will ensure that liquid criminal assets cannot be moved or hidden from authorities before court proceedings are finalised.

New unexplained wealth provisions will target wealth that has been unlawfully acquired.

For example, one individual identified by the Australian Crime Commission and targeted under an operation investigating the importation of high strength cannabis seeds, and the production of cannabis and meth-amphetamine, was found to have acquired assets worth \$3 million over six years.

That’s just one of many examples.

And yet, his income for that period was \$300,000 – leaving \$2.7 million unaccounted for.

Investigation, Prosecution and Offender management

Legislation will also underpin the third capability – “Investigation, Prosecution and Offender management”.

We must ensure that we have the right balance in terms of providing police with appropriate powers to carry out their task effectively.

This includes being able to work seamlessly across borders with counterparts in the States and Territories.

The Serious and Organised Crime legislation in Parliament will allow police to infiltrate organised crime networks by implementing model laws for controlled operations, assumed identities and witness identity protection.

It will also strengthen the Australian Crime Commission's powers to deal with uncooperative witnesses.

Preventative Partnerships with Industry and the Community

The fourth capability – “Preventative Partnerships with Industry and the Community” – will tackle the vulnerabilities that organised crime exploits.

These vulnerabilities allow networks to operate across both legitimate and illegitimate markets to maximise and subsequently, hide illicit profits.

Using fake or stolen identities, Nigerian scams, financial market fraud, and stealing bank account details through ‘phishing’ or computer viruses are just a few examples of how organised crime exploits community and industry for financial gain.

Organised crime has also infiltrated specific sectors of the legitimate economy to facilitate their activities – including the aviation, maritime and telecommunications sectors.

By working with industry and the community, we will raise awareness of these vulnerabilities, share intelligence, and develop and promote appropriate preventative responses.

International, Domestic and Commonwealth Partnerships

Finally we will build partnerships with state, territory and international partners.

Organised crime exploits borders to avoid detection and prosecution.

While the framework articulates the Commonwealth response to organised crime, Attorneys-General and Police Ministers from all Australian jurisdictions have also agreed to a comprehensive national response to organised crime.

We will also continue to work with our international partners to promote a coordinated and collaborative approach to organised crime, including the sharing of intelligence and police-to-police assistance to investigate individuals of interest.

The Framework, coupled with the national response to organised crime, will ensure that Australia takes the fight up to organised crime – tackling it through cooperation and coordination.