

Case 1 – \$10 million cannabis operation dismantled

A law enforcement investigation into a suspected illegal drug operation led to the restraint of a number of properties, and the seizure of 1,550 cannabis plants and a substantial amount of money and other assets. In total, the items and money seized were estimated to be worth AUD10 million.

The investigation began after AUSTRAC disseminated information to a law enforcement agency which identified a series of local and overseas funds transfers worth AUD3.2 million over a two-year period. The activities consisted mainly of large cash deposits made by ten suspects connected to 13 common addresses in Victoria.

These same suspects also sent numerous high-value international funds transfer instructions (IFTIs) to common beneficiaries in New Zealand. The large amounts of money involved in the transfers were inconsistent with the stated occupation of the suspects, who claimed to be working in the retail industry, studying, or unemployed.

The investigation revealed the suspects had purchased properties in Australia and used them to grow and cultivate cannabis plants. The funds generated by this activity were used to purchase additional properties in Australia and New Zealand.

The suspects were charged with cultivating, trafficking and possessing commercial quantities of drugs, conspiracy to cultivate, traffic and possess a large quantity of drugs, and knowingly dealing with the proceeds of crime and theft.

Offence	Drug trafficking
Customer	Individual
Industry	Banking (ADIs) Real estate
Report type	IFTI
Channel	Agent/third party Electronic Physical
Jurisdiction	International – New Zealand
Designated service	Account and deposit-taking services
Indicators	Common addresses provided for funds transfers conducted by different people Customer undertaking transactions that appear to be inconsistent with their profile and/or transaction history: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • large cash deposits • large international funds transfers Purchase of high-value assets (real estate)

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