

# Searching beneath the surface to detect crime

It has been said that *Intelligence is quickness in seeing things as they are*. For the staff of the State Intelligence Group (SIG) this is a daily reality.

SIG staff are constantly developing intelligence by analysing the hundreds of pieces of confidential and other information received daily about crime markets, their geographical locations and the illicit commodities involved. This intelligence enables police to identify serious criminal activity impacting on the Queensland community, and to effectively target the criminals responsible.

In a recent operation, an SIG intelligence officer detected an international cocaine importation network through the routine analysis of cash transactions between Queensland and Thailand.

Working closely with the Australian Customs Service, Australia Post and regional police, it was quickly established that the suspects were electronically sending reasonably small but frequent amounts of cash to Thailand. In return, concealed amounts of cocaine were being sent to post office boxes across the Sunshine Coast.

With the names of the suspected cocaine recipients all being false, the combined efforts of several specialist units were required to identify members of the network.

In a collaborative approach with members of the Fraud and Corporate Crime Group's Covert and Surveillance Investigation Unit, financial analysts and investigative staff, a picture emerged of a sophisticated drug network where members used multiple telephone SIM cards and internet cafes to covertly contact each other using coded messages.

SIG's intelligence and analysis revealed 93 suspicious money transactions totalling \$84,480 linked to one person, and a further 24 transactions totalling \$21,760 linked to other members of the network. Intelligence officers identified patterns of activity of the network, and this information added to the profiles being developed of the key suspects.

At the height of the investigation, packages were received on the Sunshine Coast containing some 40 scented tea candles and incense. The candles were examined and found to contain a

white powder wrapped in plastic and foil, concealed in the bottom of each candle. Field test examination of the powder showed a positive result for cocaine.

The operation evolved to a partnership with the Australian Federal Police and the Royal Thai Police, resulting in a full scale international sting operation being undertaken. With the assistance of Thai police, surveillance teams and specialist drug investigators, the cocaine exporter was tracked down and arrested in Bangkok.

Safely in custody, it was not long before the other members of the cocaine importation network were identified and arrested. In all, five people were caught and charged with 24 serious drug offences.

Far from being over, the work of the SIG continued. The operational intelligence generated in investigations like this plays a vital role in helping to identify and track down other seemingly unrelated criminal networks, their associated commodities and geographical identifiers. Information about the suspects' operational methods were shared with specialist drug investigators, regional police and

other Australian Police Services using nationally linked intelligence computer systems. The SIG's Strategic Intelligence Unit also used the details of this operation to compare with other emerging trends in criminal activity.

Had the need arisen, this operation could have called on the other specialised resources of the SIG. The Group has a broad range of capabilities with staff specialising in the areas of behavioural science, telecommunications analysis, human source (or informant) recruitment and handling, Major Incident Room and counter-terrorism intelligence responses, organised crime, major fraud, prostitution, illicit drugs, and paedophilia and child safety.

In a world of constantly changing hi-tech criminal activity, the SIG helps support and develop the investigative capabilities of the Queensland Police Service.

*By Detective Superintendent Steve Gollschewski, State Intelligence Group*



An international cocaine importation network was broken by State Intelligence Group officers, who detected concealed amounts of the drug being sent to post office boxes across the Sunshine Coast.