

INFORMATION REQUEST	
National Cannabis Recovery Operation	
Deadline: 1700hrs 20 January 2021	Date of Response: 20 January 2021

Purpose

1. This information request provides you with further information on the Police decision to end the National Cannabis Recovery Operation, part of the former National Organised Crime Operation (NOCO). The NOCO has been superseded by a more significant and sophisticated Police and cross-government strategic approach to organised crime as outlined below. The change enables a focus on the new strategic approach and allows flexibility to balance and prioritise the targeting of harm in communities resulting from the manufacture, production and supply of illicit drugs.

The NOCO was a national operation focussed on disrupting organised crime, and included cannabis eradication

2. The NOCO was a multi-phase operation that included an organised crime disruption phase and a cannabis eradication phase. Both phases were coordinated at a national level and occurred on an annual basis. The organised crime disruption phase ran between February-May. The cannabis eradication flying phase ran between December-March.
3. The national cannabis eradication phase has existed in various forms since the 1980s. The cost of this operation in 2018/2019 was \$850k – with most of this dedicated to contracting helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft.

Extensive cross government policy development has introduced a more strategic cross government approach and the NOCO is no longer needed

4. In the past, Police's approach to organised crime relied less on a comprehensive cross government strategy, relying more solely on Policing and enforcement.
5. Police's work is now part of a comprehensive cross government approach driven the Trans-National Organised Crime Strategy and the Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities work programme. These will be further discussed below.
6. In the light of our new approach, as part of standard tasking processes, Police reviewed the NOCO prior at the end of 2020. Through this review and consultation with District Commanders, it was highlighted that:
 - Many of the NOCO activities had become part of ongoing business-as-usual for Districts as part of our broader organised crime focus. As a consequence, it is no longer necessary to provide national, annual coordination of these routine activities.

- National setting of tactics and priorities for organised crime will now be achieved through the new organised crime control strategy (described further in section below) in line with government's cross agency strategies.
 - More flexibility is required for cannabis recovery operations given the significant regional variation required.
7. As a consequence, and in consultation with District Commanders, in September 2020 Police made the decision to cease the NOCO. This decision had two key elements:
- **The organised crime focussed phases of the NOCO would be absorbed into business-as-usual activities throughout the year at a District level.** This reinforced the need for a year-round focus on these activities and would allow Districts to adjust how these activities are resourced and prioritised at a district level.
 - **The nationally managed, annual cannabis eradication phase of the NOCO would cease.** Funding would remain available for providing tactical support to Districts to conduct cannabis eradication operations within their respective regions (rather than this being coordinated as a single operation at a national level). This funding has not yet been sought by Districts but remains available for them to access as required.
8. Police continue to have a range of tactical options available to target the production, manufacture and distribution of illicit drugs. These tactics include intelligence gathering through a variety of methods including aerial searches, using informant information, general policing and public tip offs.
9. Districts make these operational decisions based on the requirements specific to each area, guided by the national strategies and working with the National Organised Crime Group. This includes targeting manufacturers and distributors of methamphetamine, synthetics and cannabis as these drugs are all known drivers of crime and revenue streams for organised crime groups.

Tackling organised crime is one of the most significant operational priorities for Police

10. Tackling gangs and disrupting organised crime is a significant priority for Police and there is a comprehensive, cross-government work programme underway to respond to the full spectrum of organised crime and address its harms. It combines diverse enforcement action with tailored social intervention, and targets local, national and transnational criminal activity as well as the social determinants that lead to the establishment of, and recruitment to, gangs.
11. This work programme includes the Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities workstream, the Transnational Organised Crime Strategy, and Police's internal Organised Crime Control Strategy.

Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities

12. The Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities work programme employs an innovative approach to combatting organised crime by combining social and economic intervention with targeted enforcement action. The work programme responds to the full spectrum of organised crime, including addressing its harms and drivers. It recognises that an approach based on evidence that addresses the social, economic and environmental factors that can drive organised crime and gang membership is a critical component of a successful and sustained response to organised crime. Responses are co-designed with iwi and local groups to address locally identified harms associated with organised crime and the responses are led by communities.

Transnational Organised Crime Strategy

13. Launched in September 2020, the Government's transnational organised crime strategy brings together government agencies to tackle organised crime by setting out a framework for greater coordination and prioritisation of government responses to transnational organised crime across a wide range of crime types. It focuses on the sophisticated global network of organised criminal groups which target New Zealand, driving the supply of drugs and other illicit commodities.
14. The Strategy seeks to strengthen capability, improve understanding and raise awareness across relevant government agencies and other partners (including the private sector and local communities) in order to unify, prevent, detect and dismantle crime.

Police's Organised Crime Control Strategy

15. Police is in the process of finalising its internal more operationally focused strategy (the Organised Crime Control Strategy). This ties together and provides a provides a framework for delivering the Police-specific elements of the Transnational Organised Crime Strategy, the Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities work programme, and our broader prevention and enforcement activities.
16. The Organised Crime Control Strategy supports the integration of enforcement activity, with the necessary partnerships at a District level to allow seamless integration of targeted enforcement activities with social engagement by partners from the public, private, and NGO sectors. This is combined with a focus on transnational criminal enterprises to tackle both the supply and demand aspects of activities such as methamphetamine supply and distribution. The strategy helps ensure the two workstreams, with their diverse international, national and local partnerships remain coordinated to provide maximum benefit for Aotearoa.
17. We will provide you with further advice on the Organised Crime Control Strategy in February 2021.
18. Given the significant public interest in this matter, we intend to proactively release this briefing on 29 January 2021.

19. Talking points are included as Appendix 1.

Reviewed by	Gillian Fergusson, Director, Policy	s.9(2)(a) OIA
Approved by	Mike Johnson, Assistant Commissioner, Serious and Organised Crime	

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Section 9(2)(g) Official Information Act 1982



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