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# CZ Abalone Compliance Workshop Unlicensed & illegal take

Chris Angwin

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# Major Investigation Unit (SIG/ITCU)



The Primary Role of the Investigation Unit is to detecting, investigating and dismantling large scale organized trafficking/processing of illegally taken marine species

## **Staff**

Manage of Unit  
Supervising Investigator  
6 Senior Investigators  
Principle Intel Officer  
Risk Analyst  
Snr Tactical Intel Analyst  
Senior Intel Officer  
and Intel Officer  
13 staff in total

# Major operations over the last 5 years target



Ajax/Apollo  
Apache  
Quantum  
Talon  
Optimum  
Bionic  
Spiral  
Gem  
Viper  
Abolish  
Squire  
Carbine

# Operation Quantum



- Targeting an organised syndicate of divers who are trafficking commercial quantities of abalone
- Abalone, rock Lobster and other shellfish.
- Divers all residing in the western suburbs of Melbourne and all have extensive fisheries history.
- Depart about 0430 and travel to dive sites in close proximity of Warrnambool,
- Take daily catch limit of abalone, rock lobster and turbo shells each 5 or 6 days a week.
- Organised local sales and sales on the street.
- Execution Phase with 65 officers involved, 12 Search warrants, 14 arrests, 12 vehicles seized
- 12 houses restrained, > \$200,000 cash seized



# Operation Talon

- Six Month investigation into a abalone trafficking syndicate operating through a Noble Park North restaurant
- Buy illegal abalone for approximate half the price of legal product and on selling in 1kg packages for \$70.00/kg
- Operation Talon was terminated on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, 2015
- Two search warrants on residence and inspection of restaurant, arresting three people
- Approximately 50kg of illegal abalone was located at the addresses along with phones, computer hard drives and equipment used to prepare the abalone for sale A 2013 Lexus SUV valued at over \$70,000-00 was also seized on the day



# Operation Apache



In early 2016, information was received from a registered human source that 2 men were illegally harvesting commercial quantities of abalone to sell for cash on the black market.

One had been a significant person of interest in two previous Fisheries operations.

- Operation MERLIN (2005)
- Operation ACID (2010)

Surveillance commenced in April 2016 and two methods to illegally harvest abalone were identified.

- Land based diving
- Boat based diving



# Operation Apache



At the beginning of the operation the dive was seen diving once on hookah but that was removed from the boat and he dived on scuba thereafter.

Diver was observed on a number of occasions entering the water wearing two wetsuits whilst the other acted as a lookout. The diver, who is slightly built, would exit the water bulging around both the stomach and chest regions. It was believed he was shucking the abalone underwater and hiding it between the two wetsuits.

The diver was a dive master working for a dive shop out of Geelong. He would generally run one to two courses a week teaching new students to obtain their dive qualifications.

The look out would always put up the dive flag on the boat, and it was my belief that if they were ever checked they would use the excuse of scanning new areas to take their students to.



# Operation Apache



Surveillance continued and they continued to actively dive the Bight in Queenscliff.

We never physically observed one abalone come out of the water, and post diving surveillance did not show any cash transactions for the exchange of abalone.

Surveillance conducted at the home address post diving activity always showed two to three scuba tanks being off loaded although GRAY only ever used one.

It was believed that the extra scuba tanks had been modified in order for the abalone to be concealed inside the cavity of the tanks.



# Operation Apache



On the 21<sup>st</sup> December 2016 a search warrant was executed at the accused home address.

Items seized included Toyota Hilux [NJP760], vessel [AY790], scales, telephones, documents and a large amount of scuba diving equipment belonging to both

Two scuba tanks were located and seized that revealed they had been professionally engineered with false screw caps on the base providing a cavity space to hold approximately 20 to 30 kg's of abalone.

# Operation Apache



# Operation Apache



On the 11<sup>th</sup> July 2017, the diver pleaded guilty to Trafficking a commercial quantity of abalone.

He was convicted and sentenced to 3 months imprisonment and further sentenced when released from prison to a 12 month Community Corrections Order with conditions to undergo drug and alcohol testing.

A 5 year S. 130 Prohibition Order was ordered.

All dive equipment valued at approximately \$9,000.00 was forfeited.

The diver initially appealed the sentence but later abandoned his appeal and is currently servicing his 3 month sentence.

# Operation Apache



On the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2017, the lookout pleaded guilty to Trafficking a commercial quantity of abalone.

He was convicted and sentenced to 3 months imprisonment and further sentenced when released from prison to a 12 month Community Corrections Order with conditions to undergo drug and alcohol testing.

A 5 year S. 130 Prohibition Order was ordered.

All dive equipment, his Hilux and Boat valued at approximately \$40,000.00 was forfeited.

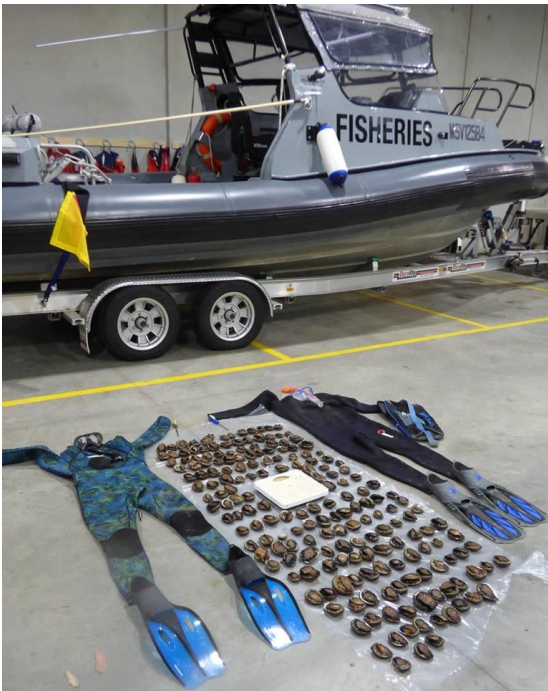
He has appealed his sentence.



# Central Fisheries Officer Tactical Apprehensions



31 January 2017 Canadian Bay  
190 Abs, 188 Undersized



Feb 2017 Phillip Island  
26 Abs, 19 Undersize, convicted, \$4,000



# Central Fisheries Officer Tactical Apprehensions



10<sup>th</sup> of May 2017  
176 Abs Cape Schanck,  
124 Undersize. 681 Likes, 110 Shares



26<sup>th</sup> Sep 2016 No. 16 Rye  
169 Abs Shares, 107 Comments  
55 undersized 453 Likes, 56 Comments





# Central Fisheries Officer Tactical Apprehensions

22 January 2016 Portarlington 94 Abs  
79 Undersized, 13 FISH call



January 2016 Kitty ITZ Phillip Island  
114 Abs, significant undersize.





# Central Fisheries Officer Tactical Apprehensions



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# QUESTIONS?

