

# Prosecutors make Scotland difficult place for criminals



Prosecutors have reiterated their determination to make Scotland a hostile environment for anyone hoping to make money from criminal activity; by hitting the criminals where it hurts most – in the pocket.

The Civil Recovery Unit Annual Report is published today, and the Crown Office have revealed that more than £12 million worth of cash and assets has been recovered in the past year, making a total of around £80m secured since the legislation was first passed in 2003.

The specialist prosecutors of the Crown's Serious and Organised Crime Division secured confiscation orders worth over £8 million against convicted drug dealers, benefit fraudsters, and a variety of others including more than £4.3 million alone from those involved in the "black fish" cases. In addition, the Civil Recovery Unit recovered over £4 million during the same period.

A large proportion of the money has now been put to the Scottish Consolidated Fund to be reinvested in Scottish communities via the CashBack for Communities programme.

Announcing this year's POCA figures, the Solicitor General Lesley Thomson QC said:- "This year we have taken more than £8 million from convicted criminals and a further £4 million thanks to the work of our Civil Recovery Unit. This takes the total recovered for the past 10 years to more than £80 million.

"By full use of the proceeds of crime legislation, law enforcement can strike at the very heart of criminality in

Scotland to ensure that criminal networks big and small are disrupted and dismantled.

“My message is clear – if you try to make a profit from crime, the Crown will use this legislation to the maximum to take that profit from you and ensure it is put to a much better use in communities across Scotland through the Scottish Government’s CashBack Scheme.”

Prosecutors were keen to point out that that these powers are being used against anyone making a profit from criminal acts, and not just those involved in drug trafficking.

Examples included over £4m recovered from vessel skippers following large scale undeclared landings of fish in the north of Scotland, Numerous drug dealers arrested as part of former Strathclyde Police Operation Trust, including West Lothian man Craig Hunter who has been ordered to pay £65,000 in addition to his 3 year and 9 month prison sentence, along with various benefit cheats.

Former Edinburgh heroin dealer Ronald Aldred who was sentenced to four years imprisonment had a nominal confiscation order made against him for £680 after investigators established that he had spent his ill-gotten gains. However, the order allows courts to recover any future assets, whether they are obtained by crime or legitimately.

Lindsey Miller, Head of the Serious and Organised Crime Division (SOCD) and the COPFS POCA Champion, said:- “Over the past ten years, the Proceeds of Crime Act has been proven time and again to be an extremely powerful and flexible tool in the hands of prosecutors.

“We have taken more than £80 million from criminals, which otherwise could have been reinvested in their criminal enterprises. “However, we have not become complacent in our success. Crime evolves and we must evolve with it. In the last year alone, we have seen successful confiscation orders

against people who have participated in all types of crime, including drug dealing, selling counterfeit goods, embezzlement, human trafficking and benefit fraud. "We will continue to use our experience and expertise to maximise disruption to criminal enterprises"

The highest amount recovered was £5.6m from Abbot Group Ltd; an Aberdeen based drilling company which had admitted benefitting from corrupt payments made in connection with a contract entered into by one of its overseas subsidiaries and an overseas oil and gas company.

Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill explained that this money will go to benefit young people and communities. He said:- "Prosecutors and police are cracking down on organised crime and criminals have nowhere to hide. More than £12 million has been confiscated from criminals last year, hitting them where it hurts – their wallets.

"Our communities are benefiting from the hard work of prosecutors and police putting ill-gotten gains to good use through our CashBack for Communities Programme, which invests crooks' cash in facilities and activities for our young people and their communities across the length and breadth of the country.

"Since CashBack for Communities began in 2007, over £50 million recovered from the proceeds of crime has been invested or committed throughout Scotland, directly benefitting over 600,000 young people and generating over 11,000 volunteers who are now putting something back into their communities."