

OC-SCAN POLICY BRIEF



Involvement of an Irish mobile OCG in the illegal trade in rhino horn

Based on intelligence and evidence gathered from various sources, investigations have been carried out against a mobile Organised Crime Group (OCG) involving persons of Irish and ethnically Irish origin. These investigations have identified this group as specialising in the theft and illegal trade of rhino horn. It is suspected also that members of this group have invested significant proceeds of crime in Ireland (mainly in real estate and other assets). In targeting countries across the European Union (EU), this mobile OCG has been involved in tarmac fraud, the distribution of counterfeit products (generators and power tools), organised robbery, money laundering and drugs trafficking. Outside the EU, this OCG has been active in North and South America, South Africa, China and Australia. The key findings related to this Irish mobile OCG are:

- This OCG is now engaged in the targeted theft and trade in rhino horn, in addition to the opportunity-based crimes such as tarmac and power tool fraud linked to its travel movements across Europe. These activities also facilitate and camouflage their involvement in the illegal rhino horn trade.
- Members of this OCG are becoming more sophisticated in money laundering, international shipping and travel, as well as in the use of communications technology and false documents. The use of intimidation, threats and violence is a notable feature of this OCG.
- To 'source' and acquire rhino horns, this group has targeted antique dealers, auction houses, art galleries, museums, private collectors and zoos, whereby its members have also resorted to theft and (aggravated) burglary. To sell specimens, it has exploited auction houses in the UK, France, USA and China.
- General awareness of the threat associated with the opportunity-based activities of this group tends to be low in most target countries, as the perceivable impact of single crimes is marginal in comparison to the accumulated impact resulting from the volume of offences and the number of victims throughout the EU.

Drawing on these findings, the main recommendations of Ireland and Europol are:

- Dedicated investigations in each country initiated to determine the scale/nature of the threat associated with this mobile OCG at national level, followed by the exchange of intelligence that reflect the group's multi-crime dimension.
- Continuation of current services by Europol and Ireland that can include a 24/7 capacity where required for live support and immediate checks at an operational level, as well as analytical reports and cross-match requests.
- Distribution of national alert messages that: a) provide the general public, in addition to law enforcement, with indicators related to their opportunity-based crimes (e.g. for tarmac fraud and counterfeit products); and, b) warn potential targets with rhino horn on display or in-storage of possible 'visits' from persons likely to defraud or attack them to obtain specimens (museums, zoos, antique dealers, etc.).



Rhino horns intercepted in January 2010 at Shannon airport in Ireland

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