



Australian Government

Australian Customs Service

customs media release

Couple face drug charges after bird flu scare - Tuesday, 10th October 2006

Joint media release - Australian Customs and the Australian Federal Police

A couple from Greystanes in Sydney's west has been charged with importing heroin by allegedly concealing the drugs internally.

The man and woman, both 36-year-old Australian nationals, arrived on a flight from Vietnam at Sydney International Airport on Wednesday morning, 27 September 2006.

The man, who has been in intensive care in a Sydney hospital for almost two weeks, was charged on Friday during a bedside court hearing.

He is recovering after undergoing surgery to remove 80 pellets containing 457 grams of a white powder which allegedly tested positive for heroin.

He was remanded in custody to appear before Kogarah Local Court today.

The man was unconscious and unwell when the flight was boarded by Customs and Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) officers on the tarmac.

He was taken from the plane for medical assessment under suspicion of Avian Influenza (bird flu), of which he was later cleared.

He was transferred to hospital and later placed into Australian Federal Police (AFP) custody on suspicion of carrying drugs internally.

His fiancée was also detained by the AFP on suspicion of concealing drugs internally.

She later passed 93 pellets containing 912 grams of a powder alleged to be heroin. Some of the pellets were removed with medical assistance.

The woman appeared in Sydney Central Local Court on Thursday, 5 October 2006, and was remanded in custody. She will face the same court on Wednesday, 25 October 2006.

AFP Acting National Manager Border and International Network Bruce Hill said this case demonstrated the dangerous consequences of attempting to smuggle illicit drugs internally.

"It is thought one or more of the pellets burst inside him, resulting in a massive overdose," Federal Agent Hill said.

"Internally concealing drugs is a very dangerous and potentially deadly practice. Immediate medical attention and surgery to remove the pellets were the only things that prevented this man from losing his life," Federal Agent Hill said.

Customs NSW Regional Director Gail Batman said that drug couriers used a range of techniques in their attempt to import drugs.

"This should serve as a warning to people concealing drugs internally - there are very dangerous consequences that could result in death," Ms Batman said.

Both have been charged with one count each of importing a marketable quantity of a border controlled drug under Section 307.2 of the Criminal Code Act 1995.

The maximum penalty for this offence is a fine of \$550,000 and/or 25 years imprisonment.