



Case study

Operation Elektra

Operation Elektra investigated the conduct of 3 Serco officers who provided telephone services and official information to detainees in immigration detention centres.

Operation Elektra was a joint investigation by the former Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity (ACLEI), the former Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP), now the Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs), and the Australian Federal Police (AFP).

From 2009 to December 2024, DIBP contracted Serco to provide immigration detention facilities and detainee services in Australia, including its external territories. Serco employed more than 2,000 staff to provide a range of services including security, detainee welfare and detainee engagement.

Grooming and abuse of office

This case involved 1 Serco officer using their position to provide mobile phone services to detainees, and a second Serco officer misusing their official role to access and disclose official information to benefit another person, each constituting an [abuse of office](#).

In a corruption context, grooming refers to the deliberate targeting and manipulation of public officials, by people within or outside an agency, to gain an illegitimate or illegal advantage.

Grooming involves 3 stages of corrupting influence by perpetrators:

- targeting public officials

- building personal relationships with the public official
- exploiting the public official's position for corrupt purposes.

In this case, it appears the Serco officers involved may have been exposed to targeted grooming by a detainee, which may have contributed to their conduct.

Further information on grooming in a corruption context is available in the [Integrity Outlook 20022/23](#).

Referral

In May 2017, a detainee provided information to DIBP suggesting a Serco officer located at the Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) was selling mobile phones to detainees.

DIBP made a formal notification about the matter to ACLEI, under the then *Law Enforcement Integrity Commissioner Act 2006* (Cth) (LEIC Act) (no longer in force). The term 'formal notification' is now known as a [mandatory referral](#) under the *National Anti-Corruption Commission Act 2022* (Cth).

What happened

In May 2017, ACLEI investigators attended the Christmas Island IDC to interview witnesses and persons of interest. A lengthy investigation into 3 Serco Detainee Service Officers (DSO) followed.

Officer 1

- The issue was whether Officer 1 had provided mobile phone services to detainees for profit. A policy was in place at the time, which listed mobile phones and subscriber identity module (SIM) cards as controlled items not permitted in IDCs.
- The investigation confirmed that 2 detainees, Detainee A and Detainee B, were using SIM cards subscribed in Officer 1's name. However, it was not established that Officer 1 received payment.

- Rather, Officer 1 provided the SIM card to Detainee B in December 2016 and routinely paid for the prepaid service on Detainee B's behalf. Officer 1 was confirmed to be in an intimate relationship with Detainee B.
- In January 2017, Officer 1 provided a SIM card to a third detainee, Detainee C. Officer 1 was also in an intimate relationship with Detainee C, who had been detained at both Christmas Island IDC and Yongah Hill IDC. However, the SIM card intended for Detainee C was ultimately found to be in Detainee A's possession. Officer 1 maintained she did not intend for the SIM card to be provided to Detainee A.

Officer 2

- Officer 2 was also found to have a personal relationship with Detainee B while Detainee B was detained at Yongah Hill IDC. Officer 2 obtained Detainee B's mobile number from another detainee, initiated contact and exchanged hundreds of text messages with Detainee B.
- At the request of Detainee B, Officer 2 accessed the Detention Service Provider (DSP) Portal, which contained records of immigration detainees. Officer 2 sent several text messages to Detainee B which contained information they obtained from the DSP Portal about the transfer and transport of numerous detainees and the residential address of a former detainee who had been released into the community.

Officer 3

- Officer 3 also developed an association with Detainee B (although there is no suggestion that it was intimate) and communicated with Detainee B regularly.
- Detainee B often offered Officer 3 cups of tea and dinner while at work. Detainee B asked Officer 3 for their home address, which was provided, and Officer 3 later received a birthday gift (a bracelet & perfume) in the mail from Detainee B.
- Officer 3 admitted to providing Detainee B with a limited amount of vague and generic information relating to detainee transfers. Officer 3 told ACLEI investigators that her manager gave inconsistent guidance as to whether she

was permitted to disclose transfer information to detainees. There was no evidence to the contrary.

Outcome

The Commissioner found that both Officers 1 and 2 engaged in corrupt conduct, namely abuse of office.

The Commissioner was not satisfied Officer 3 engaged in corrupt conduct.

Officer 1

In September 2017, Officer 1 was charged by the AFP with 2 counts of abuse of public office. Officer 1 pled guilty to both charges and was convicted and fined a total of \$2000.

Officer 2

In 2020, the then Integrity Commissioner referred 2 briefs of evidence to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (CDPP) in relation to Officer 2 and Officer 3.

Officer 2 pled guilty to 2 counts of being an entrusted person and making a record of or disclosing Immigration and Border Protection information. Officer 2 was discharged without conviction upon entering a recognisance to be of good behaviour and comply with a supervision order for 10 months (including accepting community corrections and psychological counselling, as required).

Officer 3

The CDPP did not recommend charges against Officer 3.

Corruption prevention commentary

The investigation revealed that Serco DSOs formed close knit groups with each other and with certain detainees and detainee groups, which resulted in a poor internal reporting culture. A poor internal reporting culture is a corruption vulnerability.

The investigation highlighted the vulnerability of Serco DSOs to grooming by detainees, which involved detainees ingratiating themselves with DSOs, who felt sympathy for the detainees or developed intimate feelings for them, resulting in two of the officers engaging in corrupt conduct.

Operation Elektra demonstrates the risks and vulnerabilities for public officials involved in the immigration detention network and the risk of being subjected to the grooming process, which can begin from the moment an officer takes up employment.

The Commission encourages Commonwealth agencies to include targeted corruption prevention content in both induction and ongoing training courses for staff. This content should address:

- grooming
- other corruption risks identified by this investigation
- reporting mechanisms available to staff.

Further information

See the full investigation report at [Operation Elektra](#).

For further corruption prevention information, see [corruption prevention and education](#).

To report a corruption issue, see [report corrupt conduct](#).