

# Currency Squad is right on the money

THE Currency Squad is one of the oldest specialist investigation units in the Australian Federal Police. Its origins can be traced back to the major threats to the nation's currency during the 1960s.

When decimal currency was introduced to Australia, several well-organised criminal groups took advantage of the public's unfamiliarity with the new banknotes and produced and distributed large quantities of high-quality counterfeit banknotes.

Significant difficulties were experienced in co-ordinating counterfeiting investigations as the various criminal groups frequently operated from interstate. This hindered investigations by the various State Police Services.

The Commonwealth Government decided that it was essential to protect the integrity of the nation's currency. The then Attorney General, Nigel Bowen QC, ordered the creation of a permanent specialist unit within the Commonwealth Police to investigate counterfeiting offences.

The Currency Branch of the Commonwealth Police immediately assumed a major role in counterfeiting investigations, assisting and co-ordinating investigations by State Police which led to the apprehension of the various groups involved in the initial decimal currency counterfeiting.

Even though the Currency Branch was formed to provide a permanent unit to investigate counterfeiting, it was not until 1985 that a specific Act of Parliament finally grouped together all the specific counterfeit offences under one piece of legislation.

Prior to 1985, counterfeit offences were found in various Commonwealth and State Acts including the Reserve Bank Act 1956, Currency Act 1965, and State Crimes Acts for offences such as Obtain Property by Deception and Utter Forged Document.

From 1967-85, the investigation of

currency counterfeiting offences was jointly conducted by the Currency Branch and various State Police Forces. The function of the Currency Branch was to provide investigators with the technical assistance required for successful investigations and to develop a comprehensive record of counterfeit banknotes and counterfeiters as well as their methods of production throughout Australia.

## Australian Federal Police Currency Squad

In 1979 the Currency Branch became known as the Australian Federal Police Currency Squad, following the amalgamation of the Commonwealth Police and the Australian Capital Territory Police.

In 1985 the Crimes (Currency) Act 1981 came into force. This one Act grouped together all the specific offences relating to counterfeiting, and the equipment used to counterfeit. The Act also gave the power to Police and Customs Officers to seize, without warrant, counterfeit currency, counterfeit proscribed securities and the equipment used to make those counterfeit items, whether the equipment had been used or intended for use in counterfeiting. The Act is based largely on the Articles agreed to at the 1929 Geneva Convention on the Suppression of Counterfeit Currency. (That Convention led to the formation of the international police organisation known today as Interpol.)

The Currency Squad is based at AFP Southern Region Headquarters in Melbourne and is part of the Fraud and General Crime Division. The Squad is also the



*Close scrutiny is often the only way to determine whether the note is real or counterfeit. Detective Constable Brian Thompson examines a suspect \$50 note.*

Interpol national central bureau for the suppression of counterfeit currency in Australia, and as part of that function it maintains comprehensive records of all genuine world currencies for the 158 member countries of Interpol, records of genuine banknotes and coins no longer accepted as legal tender and records of counterfeit banknotes of those countries, as well as maintaining records of all known counterfeits within Australia and a computer data base of offenders and suspects.

Since 1987, the Currency Squad has seen a marked increase of counterfeit currency in Australia. This trend, while similar to overseas countries, has also coincided with the current economic climate in Australia and the proliferation and affordability of modern technology, which has made Australian and overseas currencies much easier to reproduce.