

The Hague: A post between Australia and Europol

The Hague post is responsible for liaising with 19 European countries bilaterally and 27 countries in the European Union through the AFP's third-party presence in Europol.

Soon after starting in The Hague, Senior Liaison Officer (SLO) Russel Smith and Liaison Officer (LO) Stephen Fry were to find out just how busy their post could be. They were tasked with coordinating the international aspects of four major organised crime investigations simultaneously. This involved negotiating with their Dutch and Belgian law enforcement partners to support significant narcotics investigations occurring in Australia.

During the same period The Hague office was involved in finalising an operational and strategic agreement between Australia and Europol, while helping to coordinate several

high-level executive visits. This proved to be an exciting period for the post, and the team was satisfied with the end results.

"I think the team would agree that 2007 to 2008 was a challenging and rewarding time for the entire post," he said.

"With the support of the teams in Australia working their end of the investigations, we had some significant successes across the board."

Reflecting on the early part of his posting, SLO Smith said the experiences have helped to bring The Hague into prominence in the AFP's international network.

"It has emerged with enhanced

relevance, and this has resulted in a significant increase in the number of strategic initiatives we are undertaking and the number of high-level visits we are facilitating," he said.

Operationally the post's investigations into synthetic drug trafficking and the exchange of intelligence information with other agencies takes up the majority of time.

And there is an obvious advantage in having an AFP post in the Netherlands, which is one of the world's most prolific producers of MDMA. Investigations into organised crime links between Australia and the Netherlands have produced several successes,





01: Peace Palace, UN International Court of Justice in the Hague. **02:** Historic buildings, The Hague. **03:** Map showing The Hague. **04:** LO Stephen Fry and SLO Russel Smith.

and having a post in The Hague has also helped to create operational efficiencies.

The post also helps to progress strategic matters through international tribunals and courts such as the International Criminal Court, and provides advice to the AFP Executive on issues ranging from Afghanistan to whaling. Having an AFP presence in Europol is also important.

"This will continue to emerge as an important intelligence resource for law enforcement globally," SLO Smith said.

"I cannot overstate the importance of using this organisation, not only to help

with cross-checking entities, but also for the contribution and use of intelligence material.

"Primarily, the interaction with Europol is handled by our imbedded Europol Liaison Officer Ray Imbriano."

Developing contacts in Europol and other law enforcement agencies in Europe is another important aspect of the work done by the AFP's post in The Hague.

"There are many foreign law enforcement agencies represented in The Hague all vying for the same limited resources, so establishing relationships of confidence and trust with your host agency

is critical in opening the door to the right person when you need them the most," he said.

SLO Smith said that none of the success they enjoy overseas would be possible without the support of the AFP International Network back in Canberra.

"The people who work in the International Network Coordination and Support Teams, Overseas Administration and Overseas Travel Teams do a fantastic job and are extremely committed to supporting the liaison officers, their families and local staff."



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