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WHY AUSTRALIA NEEDS TO CHANGE ITS VIEW OF ORGANIZED CRIME

Organized crime costs Australia approximately [\\$15 billion per year](#). The federal government's [campaign](#) against the ice menace highlights organized crime's danger to wider society.

International law enforcement agencies such as Interpol have recently highlighted organized crime's changing nature. So what is "organized crime" and how has it changed? Are authorities too focused on the usual suspects and missing the new and emerging criminal markets?

International perspectives on defining organized crime

Law enforcement agencies have often been more focused on activities or enterprises of organized criminals rather than the markets that exist within the organized crime world.

International policing organisation [Interpol](#) frames its discussion of organized crime in terms of criminal activity:

Organized networks are typically involved in many different types of criminal activity spanning several countries. These activities

may include trafficking in humans, illicit goods, weapons and drugs, armed robbery, counterfeiting and money laundering.

The [UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#) suggests that organized crime groups have a number of elements. These include:

- a group of three or more persons that was not randomly formed
- existing for a period of time
- acting in concert with the aim of committing at least one crime punishable by at least four years' incarceration.

The motive behind any group is to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit.

Australia's National Organized Crime Response [Plan](#) does not define the concept of organized crime. However, it identifies six main threats:

- ice use
- growing use of technology to facilitate crime
- criminal targeting of the financial sector
- professional money laundering
- illicit trade and use of firearms
- the prominence of entrepreneurial individuals in illicit markets.

A number of pieces of legislation help frame how Australia defines organized crime. These include the [Australian Crime Commission Act](#) and the [Queensland Crime and Corruption Act](#).

The New South Wales Crime Commission [defines](#) organized crime as including serious crime committed in a systemic, organized or sustained way that would likely have a significant impact on the community and involve substantial proceeds.

Is Australia looking at the right players?

Since 2013, Queensland has been [targeting](#) crime committed by outlaw motorcycle gang members, or bikes. Earlier this month, South Australia [proposed similar laws to](#) Queensland's. State Attorney General John Rau argued that these laws target organized crime.

However, a snapshot of bikes' organized crime activity in Queensland may suggest that too many resources are being devoted to what could be best described as low-level players.

Money laundering has rightly been considered as being at the centre of organized crime, yet not one charge of money laundering

was made against a bike gang member in six years in Queensland. Most of the crime that bike gang members committed simply does not fit the nature of organized crime offences.

This focus on the easy targets has seen other highly profitable organized crime groups flourish. An [ABC 7.30 report](#) recently uncovered "boiler rooms" - sophisticated fraud operations that are running virtually untouched in Queensland. One insider claimed they were earning hundreds of millions of dollars.

Their discovery prompted the [head of the fraud squad](#), Brian Hay, to call the Gold Coast a crime "mecca". These criminals weren't riding Harley Davidsons. They were working the phones.