

Herald Sun

Controversial ‘Mr Big’ police tactic helps cops find body of Melbourne mother Karen Rae

Wayne Flower, Herald Sun
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UNDERCOVER detectives used a controversial policing tactic to trick a suspect into leading them to the body of a murdered woman.

Posing as criminals, police are believed to have lured the man into revealing the location of Karen Rae’s body.

Following a subsequent police interview with him, officers uncovered Ms Rae’s body in bushland beside the Frankston Freeway.

Tony John Smith, 49, of Langwarrin, has been charged with Ms Rae’s murder.

The 48-year-old mother left a son, 10, behind when she left her Frankston North home in Abib Court on April 15, 2015, and never returned.

The controversial “Mr Big” policing method, which is also known as the “Canadian technique”, is a covert investigative procedure that has been used by undercover police to elicit confessions from suspects in cold cases.

It usually involves officers creating a fictitious criminal organisation, which they then seduce a suspect into joining.



SES and police search an area of bush alongside the Frankston Freeway. Picture: Jason Sammon

At the end of the investigation, the target is introduced to a “Mr Big” heading the organisation — also an

undercover police officer — and the target is induced to confess his crimes in exchange for becoming a member of the organisation.

The technique was used by police in Queensland to trap Brett Cowen, the killer of Daniel Morcombe.

The *Herald Sun* does not suggest police committed crimes during their undercover operation.

On Friday, Mr Smith appeared at the Melbourne Magistrates' Court for a brief administrative hearing, during which prosecutors asked for a longer period than normal in order for them to prepare their case.

Mr Smith was remanded to reappear in court for a committal mention hearing on May 4.

Criminal lawyer George Balot said his client maintained that he was innocent of the killing of Ms Rae.

“We are yet to receive a police brief of evidence. Once it is received, we will carefully and thoroughly consider any potential admissibility (of evidence) issues,” he said.

Mr Balot said Mr Big investigations were fraught with danger, because they could produce false confessions.

“The more violent the organisation appears to be and the more threatening and hectoring Mr Big is at the final interview, the greater the chance of inducing a false confession,” he said.

“The technique also raises other concerns involving unreliability, unfair prejudice to the accused, breach or avoidance of constraints on police interrogation, and general impropriety. It is frequently regarded by critics as a form of entrapment,” he said.