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The Sydney Morning Herald

20th drug gang suspect held

- **AUGUST 11 2008**
- **Nick McKenzie**

AN ALLEGED member of the organised crime gang behind the world's biggest ecstasy seizure was arrested at Melbourne Airport last night.

[Australian Federal Police](#) swooped on Anil Suri, 53, of Maidstone, about 7pm after his overseas flight landed.

He was arrested in relation to a plan to import a large shipment of drug precursor chemicals, separate from the ecstasy importation that sparked police raids last week. It will be alleged the chemicals were to have been used to make drugs such as amphetamines and methamphetamines.

Suri is the 20th person connected to a crime network, whose members include figures linked to the Calabrian mafia, which the AFP has alleged may be responsible for importing up to 60% of Australia's illicit drugs.

Police believe that Suri, an Australian national of Indian heritage, organised the planned importation of precursors with Severino Scarponi, a South Australian of Italian heritage who was arrested and charged on Friday.

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Five people, including Suri, are expected to appear in Melbourne Magistrates Court today charged with serious drug-related offences.

The 14-month AFP-led operation, codenamed Inca, into the ring culminated on Friday with [raids](#) on homes around Australia.

Among those arrested were alleged syndicate mastermind Pasquale Barbaro, suspected drug baron and founder of the Black Uhlans Outlaw motorcycle gang John Higgs, and Rob Karam, of Kew, an alleged drug importer suspected of using corrupt Melbourne dock and freight workers to make the imports.

Friday's raids related to the world's largest single shipment of ecstasy ever seized by police - 4.4 tonnes or 15 million tablets, with a street value of \$440 million - discovered hidden in tins of tomatoes shipped from Italy to Australia in June last year.

After discovering the massive haul of drugs, the AFP last year made a tactical decision not to reveal the raid. After secretly substituting inert pills for the tablets and resealing each tin, it mounted an elaborate surveillance and phone-tapping operation.

This led the Federal Police to discover the crime network's Carlton safehouse, which they bugged with listening devices, gathering evidence crucial to the arrests.

The Daily Advertiser

DRUG RING SMASHED

11 Aug 2008, 1:24 a.m.

FOUR Griffith properties were yesterday raided by Australian Federal Police (AFP) and Customs officers as part of a covert operation that has netted the world's largest haul of ecstasy tablets, valued at \$440 million. As a result of the raids, 13 people – including Pasquale Sergi, 45, of Griffith and Pasquale Barbaro, 46, of Tharbogang – appeared in the Melbourne Magistrates' Court facing charges including drug trafficking, drug importation and money laundering. AFP Commissioner Mick Keelty said the seizure of the world's largest ecstasy haul has caused a major disruption to organised crime in Australia and overseas. The AFP said it arrested 20 people across Australia in pre-dawn raids yesterday. During a joint 12-month investigation by the AFP and Customs, 3000 tomato tins were found to contain 15 million ecstasy tablets when they were shipped from Italy to Melbourne in June last year, police said. Police also allege they seized 150 kilograms of cocaine from the same syndicate in July this year. The investigation also identified a money laundering operation worth more than \$9 million. At a press conference in Melbourne yesterday, four customs officers guarded the massive haul of drugs contained in plastic bags and containers sitting on a large table. Mr Keelty said the investigation also involved cooperation with European police where search warrants were executed in Belgium and the Netherlands with investigations continuing in Italy. "This is part of a global international syndicate," Mr Keelty said. "This is a major disruption to transnational organised crime, both for this country and abroad." The investigation was the largest ever undertaken by the AFP, Mr Keelty said. "This is the epitome of what organised crime investigations are about and this is for the AFP in our 30-year history, this is the largest operation we have ever undertaken." Customs CEO Michael Carmody described the drug importation as sophisticated and well organised. He said the investigation started after officials received small snippets of intelligence more than 12 months ago. Others appearing in court were Melbourne men Alan Saric, 34, of Werribee, Francesco Madafferri, 47, of Greenvale, Antonio Sergi, 34, of Sydenham, Mohamed Nasfan Abdul Nazeer, 24, of West Footscray, Tanesh Bernard Dias, 35, of West Footscray, Rob Karam, 41, of Kew, John Higgs, 63, of Taylors Lakes, Gratian Bran, 51, of Cheltenham and Salvatore Agresta, 40, of East Keilor, Sharon Ropa, 37, of Carlton and Severino Scarponi, 39, from South Australia. Seven other people have also been charged. Police executed 45 search warrants in Victoria, NSW, Tasmania and South Australia. Prosecutor Brent Young asked the court for extra time to prepare the case. He said police had intercepted 187,000 telephone calls and had 3600 hours of listening devices to trawl through. Mr Young said a brief of evidence would not be available for six months. Ten of the accused made no application for bail and were remanded to appear in the same court for a special mention hearing on March 26 next year. Madafferri was granted bail on conditions including reporting to police daily. He will also appear in

the same court on March 26 next year. Dias and Nazeer, who are not charged with drug offences, were remanded to appear in the same court on February 9 for committal mention.