

Seduced by the Internet – a real scam

In late July 2007, South Australian resident Des Gregor travelled to Africa to meet a woman he had met on the Internet. Lured for love, Mr Gregor became an unwitting target in a dangerous scam that could have had tragic consequences.

Mr Gregor was held hostage by three men for a \$100,000 ransom in Mali, West Africa and fortunately when his family raised the alarm for his welfare with Department of Foreign Affairs, the AFP, South Australian Police (SAPOL) and Canadian authorities began liaising with the Mali National Police to negotiate bringing him home safely.

For almost a fortnight the AFP's Adelaide office ran *Operation Streambank* supporting SAPOL negotiations with the victims family. Aviation staff from Adelaide airport were also involved as well as AFP negotiators from ACT Policing.

The AFP's Senior Liaison Officer based in South Africa was immediately dispatched to Mali and worked closely with the Canadian Embassy and local authorities to secure Mr Gregor's release. Mali Police provided more than 25 police officers for the investigation.

Assistant Commissioner and National Manager for

"He survived as a result of the AFP responding to this incident and working cooperatively at a multilateral level" Assistant Commissioner Tim Morris



International Tim Morris, explained the AFP wants this extreme example of Internet scam to serve as a warning to all Australians and to protect themselves from these types of criminals.

"Criminals are going online and using the Internet to target anyone they can regardless of age or background and people need to be aware that they could be putting their own lives at risk," Assistant Commissioner Morris said.

"This was a lucky person. While it was a distressing ordeal for him at the time, he survived as a result of the AFP responding to this incident

and working cooperatively at a multilateral level." he said.

Operation Streambank is a prime example of multiagency cooperation between local state police assistance to a whole of Commonwealth Government approach and further extending to the Mali and Canadian authorities via the AFP's International Network.

The Director of the Australian High Tech Crime Centre, Kevin Zuccatto, appeared on a national radio show to reinforce the message that scammers will continue to prey on people and trick them into sending money or gifts and worse, lure them to another country.

"People like Des are seduced by the Internet where websites and conversations appear very realistic. You need to use the same common sense that you apply in the real world, on the Internet," Federal Agent Zuccatto said.

The AFP is a member of the Australasian Consumer Fraud Taskforce which was formed by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) in 2005.

Along with government regulatory agencies and relevant departments, the taskforce promotes awareness in the community about scams.



Top: Federal Agent Gary Wynch with Mali Police Commissioner Yacouba Diallo.

Middle: Mr Gregor and Federal Agent Wynch with the Mali Police Secure Team in Africa

In March 2007, the AFP supported the taskforce's annual coordinated information campaign for consumers and ran the 'Scam Awareness Month' on the organisation's website.

ACCC's website SCAMwatch is also the campaign portal for the taskforce and anyone who suspects that they may have been the victim of an Internet scam should contact SCAMwatch on 1300 302 502 or visit: www.scamwatch.gov.au