



Agent alert issued following real estate fraud in ACT

This e-Bulletin is in response to a public announcement by [ACT Policing](#)

WA authorities have warned real estate and settlement agents to be on high alert following the reported real estate fraud in the ACT.

Commissioner for Consumer Protection Anne Driscoll believes the criminals responsible will be encouraged by their success to make further fraud attempts.

“Everyone in the property industry, particularly those involved in property management and sales, should have a heightened state of awareness about these fraud attempts. They need to be in a position to detect them soon after initial contact is made and certainly before any documents are sent,” Ms Driscoll said.

“Agents need to ensure that they have owner identification processes in place and that all of their staff are properly trained and instructed in what to do when a request to change contact details are made, especially if the owner is based overseas.

“In these cases, a confirmation of the change in contact details should be sent to the owner’s original street and email addresses, which will alert the real owner if something is wrong.”

Detective Senior Sergeant Dom Blackshaw of the Major Fraud Squad (WA Police) said there are similarities between the ACT fraud and previous cases in WA.

“There have been two successful and six unsuccessful real estate frauds reported in WA in recent years, all but one have involved properties owned by South Africans. We are assisting ACT authorities in their inquiries by sharing information gathered during our investigation into these past WA cases,” Det Snr Sgt Blackshaw said.

“Through our cooperation with the Australian Federal Police and overseas authorities, we have had some success with one man in Nigeria and three people in South Africa arrested over two of these frauds, but this doesn’t mean there won’t be others who are attempting to do the same.

...continued on page 2

[CPD Information](#)

[News & Forms](#)

[Contact Us](#)

...continued from page 1

“With the windfall for a successful real estate fraud being substantial, there will always be criminals attempting to steal an owner’s identity and sell their home without their knowledge. So it’s imperative that people working in the property industry are vigilant at all times to the warning signs so that these fraud attempts don’t reach a successful conclusion.”

Landgate has also established fraud prevention measures through the ‘Verification of Identity Practice’ which is designed to reduce the opportunity for successful land title fraud as a result of identity theft or other improper dealings. The Practice sets out to achieve this by requesting verification of the identity of a person transacting and their authority to deal with an interest in land. The Practice is available the Land Titles Registration Practice Manual on Landgate’s [website](#).

When dealing with an absentee owner, whether they are overseas, intrastate or interstate, the Department reminds agents to make further inquiries regarding identity and seek additional evidence whenever:

- There has been a request from an owner to change their address or other contact details. Confirm any changes by contacting the owner via their original email and postal addresses (especially changes prior to a sale). Additionally, contact the owner at their previous phone number to double check.
- The transaction originates from overseas (especially from countries known for scams, such as Nigeria and South Africa).
- There is a request for funds to be sent to a bank account different from that normally used by the client, or to offshore accounts.
- New email addresses being used are generic such as Hotmail, Yahoo or Gmail. Furthermore, never send an e-mail back to a purported owner by pushing the reply field (the e-mail will be sent back to a possible offender). Either hit the ‘*forward e-mail*’ field or the ‘*create new e-mail*’ field and re-type the address of the owner (recorded in the business records).
- Communication does not reflect the usual style used by the real owner or their English is uncharacteristically poor.

Agents are reminded that they put their licence at risk if they fail to follow the *Code of Conduct for Agents and Sales Representatives 2011* which incorporates identity verification measures to help prevent fraud.

END OF RELEASE