



Wayne Hardy

Jan 26, 2017 12:21 GMT

## **‘Most Wanted’ tobacco fugitive brought back to face justice**

One of the UK’s most wanted tax fugitives, who helped mastermind an international illicit tobacco smuggling operation, has been jailed after being extradited from South Africa by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to face justice.

Wayne Hardy, originally from Nottinghamshire, played a key role in the £1.9 million plot to manufacture illicit tobacco on a commercial scale. He was handed a three-year jail sentence in his absence after fleeing to Cape Town

in 2010.

The 56-year-old, who features on HMRC's Most Wanted list, was arrested in the South African city in November 2016 and placed on remand in the Pollsmoor Prison. He was extradited back to the UK via Heathrow Airport yesterday, accompanied by HMRC officers, before being taken to Ipswich Crown Court where his sentence was extended by three months.

Hardy is the fifth and final member of the gang to go to prison – four others were jailed in April 2011 for their part in the scam.

Simon York, Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

"Hardy thought he could avoid jail by fleeing to South Africa, leaving his accomplices to serve their time while he soaked up the sunshine. He was wrong, and has now swapped the South African beaches for a British prison cell.

"Running away from tax crime isn't an option. As this case shows, we will constantly pursue fugitives who, like Hardy, think they can avoid paying for their crime. Our message is clear – nobody is beyond our reach."

The gang were in the process of setting up an illegal counterfeit tobacco factory, which would have netted them many millions of pounds in unpaid duty, when they were raided.

The plot was smashed when more than 100 HMRC officers, supported by our law enforcement partners raided premises in Suffolk, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Essex in July 2008.

At a farm in Leicestershire, officers discovered more than 16 tonnes of raw leaf tobacco which would have been manufactured into hand-rolling tobacco. The duty evaded on this amount of tobacco alone is estimated at £1.9 million.

The scam was linked to Bulgaria and, in a joint operation, officers from the Bulgarian National Counter Organised Crime Agency simultaneously searched premises in Bulgaria.

HMRC officers in the UK and abroad, with good international cooperation from South African law enforcement agencies and Interpol, worked to bring Hardy back to the UK.

## Notes for editors

1. Wayne Hardy, DOB 13/01/1963, formerly of West Bridgford [correct], Nottinghamshire, was found guilty of conspiring to cheat the public revenue and sentenced to three years in prison in his absence, at Norwich Crown Court on 12 October 2011. Today, after being extradited from South Africa, he was taken to Ipswich Crown Court where he was ordered to serve his sentence plus three months.
2. Disrupting criminal trade is at the heart of HMRC's strategy to clamp down on the illicit tobacco market, which costs the UK around £2.4 billion a year.
3. Anyone with information about the transport, storage or sale of suspected illicit tobacco should call on our 24 hour Hotline on 0800 59 5000.
4. The HMRC 'Most Wanted' list features tax criminals who have absconded from justice. The Most Wanted list is published here: [www.flickr.com/photos/hmrcgovuk/sets/72157631087785530/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/hmrcgovuk/sets/72157631087785530/)
5. Follow HMRC Press Office on Twitter @HMRCpressoffice HMRC's Flickr channel: [www.flickr.com/hmrcgovuk](http://www.flickr.com/hmrcgovuk)

---

## Issued by HM Revenue & Customs Press Office

*HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) is the UK's tax authority.*

*HMRC is responsible for making sure that the money is available to fund the UK's public services and for helping families and individuals with targeted financial support.*

## Contacts



### **HMRC Press Office**

Press Contact

[news.desk@hmrc.gov.uk](mailto:news.desk@hmrc.gov.uk)

03000 585018

### **HMRC Press Office Out Of Hours Contact**

Press Contact

07860 359544