

ADF helicopter unit grounded amid 'cocaine ring' allegations

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ADF members caught up in 'cocaine ring'

An Australian Defence Force Chinook helicopter unit has been grounded, with up to 10 staff accused of running a cocaine ring.

9NEWS has confirmed the personnel from the Townsville base - including officers, aircrew, maintenance workers and a civilian employee - were busted in a targeted operation that started with a tip-off.

It is believed the drug tests confirmed the alleged offenders had traces of cocaine, ecstasy and amphetamines in their systems while they were on duty.

Military police were there for the raid at the regiment's headquarters.

A second crew, already on exercise in Queensland with American marines and Kiwi soldiers, was also grounded until each of them could be interviewed and supply samples to drug testers.

Under the Army's discipline system, commanders have asked those who tested positive to explain why they shouldn't be immediately kicked out of the Defence Force.



Some members of the regiment served in Afghanistan. File image: Department of Defence/AAP

The personnel will likely face a court martial but so far no criminal charges have been referred to police.

Former soldiers told 9NEWS there was no excuse if drugs were being used while on the flight line but believe some may have turned to substance abuse to alleviate PTSD.

The regiment played a key role in Afghanistan for nearly a decade, shifting thousands of kilos of stores and aid.

The group also spearheaded getting troops into remote locations and lifting them out of trouble at any time of day and in often unpredictable weather.

Chinook helicopters can carry up to 60 soldiers into combat zones.

Townsville RSL president Bill Whitburn was shattered by the allegations.

"I'm devastated to hear that," he said.

"To put other members' lives at risk is unacceptable."

The office of Defence Minister Marise Payne has been contacted for comment.

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