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Norwegian Diver Jailed Over Cocaine Smuggling in Australia

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— *Categories: Crime*

A Norwegian commercial diver has been sentenced to nearly 10 years in prison for attempting to smuggle 80 kilograms of cocaine into Australia.

Jon Birger Karlsen, 53, and his co-accused, Johan-Martinius Halvorsen, 35, pleaded guilty in January 2023 to attempting to possess a commercial quantity of a border-controlled drug.

The pair were part of an international crime syndicate. Authorities said Karlsen was flown to Brisbane, where nearly AU\$60,000 worth of scuba diving equipment and diver propulsion vehicles (DPVs) were purchased for him. The men were tasked with retrieving cocaine from the Cypriot-registered bulk carrier MV Stalo, docked at the Port of Newcastle in New South Wales.

Karlsen and Halvorsen were reportedly observed by a local ferry crew during a test run. Unbeknownst to them, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) had already been tipped off and removed the drugs from the ship. The AFP officers were waiting when the men attempted to recover the now-missing cocaine.

During sentencing, Karlsen's defence lawyer argued that he was unaware of his involvement in criminal activity. Presiding Judge Roy Ellis said while the men may not have known the exact quantity of drugs, it was evident they intended to retrieve illegal substances.

Judge Ellis stated that a 12-year sentence was appropriate for Karlsen but reduced it by 15 per cent due to his cooperation with authorities. Karlsen must serve a minimum of four years and 11 months before becoming eligible for parole.

Halvorsen received a 12-year prison sentence with a minimum term of five years and nine months.

The case underscores the continued efforts of Australian authorities to prevent large-scale drug importation and dismantle international crime networks operating in the country.