

Robinvale accused in meth lab trial

Jenny Denton

FORMER Robinvale labour hire contractor Zheng Cai Kuay, and Wei Yu Boo, of Bannerton, who worked for him, have been committed to stand trial in the Victorian County Court on charges relating to an alleged large-scale methylamphetamine trafficking syndicate.

Mr Kuay, 33, has been charged with possessing hydrobromic acid, a precursor chemical, and dealing negligently with the proceeds of crime as well as trafficking a large quantity of methylamphetamine.

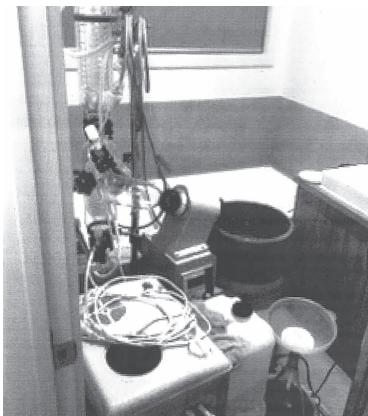
Mr Boo, 29, has been charged with possessing materials for trafficking in a drug of dependence.

Both men have pleaded not guilty to the charges.

At a committal hearing in the Melbourne Magistrate's Court this month police laid out evidence against 15 mainly Malaysian nationals alleged to be involved in the syndicate.

The court heard Mr Kuay and his associate Eng Beng Koh were already under police surveillance, as "persons of interest" in the investigation of the 2015 murder of former fruit picker Shu Jian Lim when homicide detectives working on the case made the "chance find" of a meth lab Kuay and Koh were linked to in Tarneit, in Melbourne's western suburbs.

The February 2020 find sparked a five-month operation by the clandestine laboratory squad into the alleged syndicate, which they claim



Photos of the crime scene including the meth lab were shown in court.

Mr Kuay was a key part of.

At a second clan lab bust, in May 2020, in Truganina, police arrested alleged drug cooks Hang Kwok and Yew Kean Koo trying to escape out a window.

At a third house, again in Tarneit, they found equipment and drug residues which according to prosecutor John Saunders was evidence it was being used by the syndicate for storage or production.

In addition to Mr Kuay's phone number being found on a 20-litre tin of solvent at the first Tarneit property, he and Wei Yu Boo were captured on CCTV loading cans of acetone into the boot of a car with alleged ringleader Eng Beng Koh at another address, police said.

However, they believe Mr Kuay was not directly involved in the production of drugs but had a financial

role in operations.

Police said the syndicate was using labour hire businesses Mr Kuay set up and chicken and egg farms at Lake Lookout Road, Beauchamp and Upton Hill, near Seymour, to launder drug money.

Asked about the farms by counsel for Eng Beng Koh, Adam Chernok, Detective Stuart Burnham said syndicate members had referred to being able to legitimise their money in a conversation captured on a listening device.

At raids on the rural property in Bannerton where Mr Kuay was living on June 5 and June 30 police found close to \$220,000 in cash – \$180,000 of it in his bedroom ceiling.

They also confiscated a Mercedes that was in Mr Kuay's possession.

Despite having a warrant for a firearm, they didn't find one.

At another property in Robinvale, registered in the name of a syndicate co-accused, police uncovered three tonnes of hydrobromic acid.

At Mr Boo's Bannerton address they found a rotary evaporator – equipment used in producing meth – located in sealed boxes under tarpaulins at the rear of the residence, which Mr Boo shared with several other fruit pickers.

According to police, in a conversation captured on a listening device, ringleaders Eng Beng Koh and Yining Tao had discussed hiding it there.

In another conversation Mr Kuay allegedly instructed Mr Boo to buy the tarpaulins.

Mr Boo's fingerprints were also found on a bucket at the Tarneit lab raided by police on February 20.

Mr Kuay, who was granted bail on a surety of \$150,000 in the Supreme Court of Victoria in June, remained in custody during the committal hearing while his visa status was confirmed.

His wife, Cyrene Liew, who the court heard had been left without means to support her three children following her husband's arrest, pleaded guilty to a charge of dealing in property suspected of being the proceeds of crime and received a 12-month good behaviour bond.

Mr Boo had been granted bail under strict conditions in the Supreme Court in December last year.



Caught out

OFFENDERS were disturbed while tampering with a power power at the intersection of Long Lake Road and the Murray Valley Highway in Lake Boga, just before midnight on Wednesday August 18.

Copper wiring copped

COPPER wire was stolen from a location off Berriwillock-Birchip Road in Birchip, between Friday July 23 and Friday August 20.

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BEWARE when you order something online that during the current lockdown, to ensure your items actually get delivered to you.

Victoria Police said that the popularity of online shopping and the convenience of having packages/parcels delivered right to your doorstep could be the perfect opportunity for thieves.

Here's their tips on preventing mail or parcel theft: have packages delivered when someone will be home; regularly check the front door; ask a friend, family member or neighbour to visit your home if you are unavailable; get it delivered to work if you boss gives you the okay; require a signature; install security cameras as a deterrent, or if possible, place a lock on your letterbox.

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