

## **AFP helps return stolen 1800s-coin worth \$525,000 to Poland**



**This is a joint media release between the AFP and the Embassy of the Republic of Poland**

**The AFP has helped return a stolen 1813 Holey Dollar, most recently sold at auction for \$525,000, to the Government of the Republic of Poland.**

**It is thought to be the first time Australian law enforcement has arranged the return of a cultural object to the European nation.**

The coin, which was stolen from a museum collection in Toruń, Poland, between 2011 and 2018, had been tracked globally by Polish authorities after it was reported missing. They identified it as being exported into Germany sometime between 2011 and 2018, where it was offered for sale in two auctions.

From there, the coin made its way to Melbourne, Australia, where it was sold at auction to an Australian collector in Perth for \$525,000.

On 26 August, 2024, the AFP, in cooperation with the Australian Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (the Department), seized the coin in Perth after the owner was identified through its most recent seller, an Australian company specialising in rare coins.

The coin was subsequently surrendered to the AFP willingly. It is not expected any Australian-based individuals will face criminal charges, as all local transactions were made in good faith. All parties were unaware at the time the coin had been stolen.

The formal request for return of the coin to Poland was made to the Department in June, 2023, under the Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986 which, among other matters, provides a framework for the return of cultural property that has been illegally exported from a foreign country and imported into Australia.

The request noted the coin was a protected object of the Republic of Poland, with the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage providing strong evidence to show the coin had been stolen, as well as cultural property laws which have protected the object and prohibited its export from Poland.

The coin is significant to the nation, and the Regional Museum of Toruń for historical, cultural, and monetary reasons.

AFP Commander Renee Colley said the handover was a landmark for relations between Australian law enforcement and the Polish government.

"This is the first object for which the Australian Government has received a restitution request from the Government of the Republic of Poland," Commander Colley said.

"The AFP is delighted to have played a role in returning this important artifact to the Polish Government.

"The AFP's INTERPOL National Central Bureau, the designated contact point for all Australian law enforcement agencies for investigative matters and coordinated assistance, works with national and international law enforcement agencies to detect sources of illicit trafficking of cultural material, which can lead to fantastic results such as this one today."

The coin was formally returned to representatives of the Polish government by the Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for the Arts, on behalf of the Australian Government at a ceremony at the Embassy of the Republic of Poland on 14 February, 2025.

Marcin Kawałowski, Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Republic of Poland also praised the AFP's efforts in having the object returned to his country.

"As a diplomat, I obviously recognise the importance of official agreements and political declarations, but it gives me great satisfaction when I can witness the practical dimension of successful bilateral cooperation," he said.

"Today, we would like to appreciate the efforts of the Australian Federal Police in retrieving the lost Holey Dollar, which – in the spirit of trust and mutual understanding - has resulted in the organisation of this particular ceremony."

The coin was struck from a Spanish Silver Dollar minted at the Mexico Mint in 1777 during the reign of King Charles III of Spain. The object is also of significance to Australia as Holey Dollars were created to address a shortage of coins in the colony of New South Wales.

**Author:** Australian Federal Police

**Editor's note:** [Images of the seized coin](#) are available via Hightail.