



Part 1: Is that a steroid in my supplement?

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Organised criminals and heavy steroid users are importing raw powders to manufacture the drugs in their own backyard. Our two part program shows that while police trumpet their successes through rising arrest figures, users and dealers say it's never been easier to get steroids in Australia. Reporter Alex Mann and triple j's James Purtill investigate this murky world of steroid supply and find a fascinating web of fake identities, encrypted messaging apps and dodgy backyard chemistry.

Alice Brennan: Hi there, I'm Alice Brennan, this week on Background Briefing a two-part coproduction with Triple J's Hack. It's about risk, calculated risk and uncalculated risk. What risks would you take to achieve that ideal body? These days it seems like there's more and more pressure on us to have the perfect body, and there are more and more ways of getting there; shakes, stims, protein powders, pre-workouts, post-workouts, fat burners.

And then there's this:

[Audio: Backyard lab video]

Backyard steroids, moonshine anabolics, homebrews of the non-beer variety.

Alex Mann, what are we listening to?

Alex Mann: This is the sound of a Chinese steroid lab giving instructions on how to make your own steroids at home in your own kitchen. This kind of thing is totally available online right on the open web and they send you these videos when you decide to order steroids from them over the internet.

Alice Brennan: And it's a very informative, she is picking up things off the table and pointing them out. There's a pipette and a bottle and a vital and a...

Alex Mann: So many of these legally questionable practices and transactions are available readily online, and that's what got reporter James Purtill and I interested in this whole topic in the first place.

James Purtill: How many pages were there?

Alex Mann: This is showing results 1 to 10 in the Australian Steroid Source Talk forum of 341. It's like those old HTML code forums where everybody would go on and talk about their MySpace pages, except in this case, James, everyone is talking about steroids.

James Purtill: Yes, it's walking this fine line between being in plain sight, I mean, this isn't on the dark web, it's just a page you can get to. People are kind of anonymous because they've got these usernames and you just get a WhatsApp or Wickr number or something like that and communicate. It's like looking into the black market but you're just standing in the street.

Alex Mann: So there's a list of guys who are approved steroid sources, and there's a list of web addresses, and then just a whole lot of banter between steroid users about just how good those steroids are, how reliable the sources are and how clean the gear is as well, where it's come from.

James Purtill: If there's one thing steroid users like more than getting ripped and massive, it's talking about it on the forum. Brotherhood of Pain.com.

Alex Mann: What's the tagline?

James Purtill: 'Don't F*** with the Brotherhood'. Can I say it?

Alex Mann: I think people get the idea.

Alice Brennan: This week on Background Briefing the first in a two-part investigation into the lengths Australians go to, the risks we take to achieve that ideal body. Part one, the illegal trade of steroids and how the guys making steroids in Australia try to stay one step ahead of the law. And just a warning, there are some F-bombs in this story.

Alex Mann: How many of these would you do in a session?

Matt Pearce: That particular exercise, you're looking at three sets 18, 16, 14, so that'd be a regular superset with some...

Alex Mann: In his garage on the outskirts of Newcastle, 34-year-old Matt Pearce is pumping some serious iron.

Alex Mann: 45 kg, 50 kg, each arm. That's almost as much as I weigh.

Matt Pearce: Yeah, we can chuck some of them up, that's pretty easy.

Alex Mann: The garage is full of big weights and well-loved gym gear, and stacked between them are piles and piles of cardboard boxes. An old scooter is gathering cobwebs outside the roller door.

Matt Pearce: I like going to the gym for an hour, it's just like literally relaxation for me. I'm not a bodybuilder by any means, I don't train for a look, I train for practicality, and then how I look or the size of what I am is just a by-product of what I'm training for.

Alex Mann: Matt's not tall, but his chest, arms and legs are massive. In his younger days, Matt was a promising rugby league rookie with dreams of turning pro.

Matt Pearce: When you're younger 17, 18, 19, you sort of make silly decisions I suppose, you don't train as hard as do now, your diet's not on point, you always think there's next year. So in hindsight I wish I'd done things better when I was younger but it's all a learning experience, and if I didn't go through that I wouldn't be where I am now. No regrets, but it would have been nice to have played one game.

Alex Mann: Just a few years ago, Matt made a decision that would set his life on a new and dangerous path.

Matt Pearce: As with anything, you abuse anything, you abuse sugar, you abuse Panadol, you abuse alcohol, there's going to be decline in health, you're going to cause yourself problems.

Alex Mann: Matt's training buddies, along with his brother, have always liked to push themselves. Almost all of them have used steroids.

Matt Pearce: I see a steroid as something that you can use to better yourself in some circumstances, and if you abuse it, you can definitely hurt yourself.

Alex Mann: And sourcing steroids on the black market is a risk, even for the most experienced users.

Matt Pearce: For me it all started with my brother, he was using homemade steroids. My brother's two years younger than I am. He still trains with me now. I suppose when we're lifting we are, like anyone else like you're in the gym and he does 200 kilos so you want to do 200 kilos, but not overly competitive.

Alex Mann: One day as they were training in the garage, Matt's brother complained of a weird pain. He'd injected homemade steroids into his leg, and now it hurt.

Matt Pearce: I was with him here, he was training and he had a red line running down his leg and he said it was really hot, it was like corked, he couldn't put weight on it, had the day off work. And I'm like, that's not good like, having the red line there. I've got a good mate that's a physio I rang him and he's like, nah, that doesn't look good, send him a picture.

Alex Mann: Matt's physio mate told the brothers they should go straight to hospital.

Matt Pearce: So we went up to the hospital, just emergency, just to see what it was.

Alex Mann: You went there together?

Matt Pearce: Yeah, we went up there together.

Alex Mann: Doctors put Matt's brother on a drip of intravenous antibiotics for almost two weeks. And his bodybuilder's physique began wasting away.

Matt Pearce: It was a pretty bad staph infection, they didn't know which way it was going to go.

Alex Mann: Just how bad did it get?

Matt Pearce: At one stage they were talking about maybe if they couldn't stop the staph there's always a risk of losing your leg.

Alex Mann: That's pretty scary

Matt Pearce: Yeah, it was at the time, it was at the time. When you first see the line you don't think much of it and even when you go into hospital they say it's an infection you don't think much of it, it's not till you see how swollen his leg got and how long he was in there for that you realise how bad it was.

Alex Mann: Matt and his brother are part of a bigger story. It's a story about how steroids get into this country, and it's filled with fake identities, encrypted messaging apps, dodgy backyard chemistry, and a group of people convinced they're staying one step ahead of the law.

My reporting partner on this story, James Purtill and I, have been investigating the criminal networks supplying Australia's backyard steroid manufacturing industry for two months now. We've tracked down Chinese labs smuggling raw steroids into Australia, and we've spoken directly with one of the most high-profile distributors here. What we've found is an illegal industry that's operating in plain sight. And police are struggling to keep up.

Matt Pearce: There's plenty of people Australia-wide, there's no major city that doesn't have someone manufacturing their own steroids. In any suburb anywhere in New South Wales, Sydney, Newcastle, it doesn't matter, you go to your local biggest gym, you could be in there for 10 minutes and you can have steroids in your hand.

Alex Mann: On the side of the road, a small black unmarked police car is waiting. For me. It's midday, and outside it's hot. Inside, the air conditioning's on.

Alright, Peter, how're you going?

Peter McErlain: Good. I'm cool now.

Alex Mann: My driver, is Peter McErlain.

Peter McErlain: Detective Superintendent Peter McErlain. I'm the Commander of the Drug and Firearms Squad, State Crime Command, NSW Police.

Alex Mann: And we're going for a drive. Where are we headed?

Peter McErlain: We're heading to some suburbs around the south west of Sydney; Harris Park, Merrylands, Granville...

Alex Mann: Peter McErlain spent years policing this area as the head of the Middle Eastern Organised Crime Squad.

Peter McErlain: I was there for about four years, four and a half years...

Alex Mann: Through the car windows the houses look just like any other slice of Australian suburbia. But outside of Sydney's CBD, these suburbs have the highest number of steroid arrests in NSW. We know this because we've been given access to the past decade of detailed police data on steroid arrests. It's the only area of the country where data with this amount of detail is available.

The analysis we've done explicitly shows for the first time where the state's steroid hotspots are, and adds weight to the anecdotes we've heard about growing demand around here.

Peter McErlain: We're finding steroids probably on investigations where we're not looking at steroids.

Alex Mann: McErlain says steroids are a popular choice for the criminal gangs that operate in this area.

Peter McErlain: There is a large drug demand in these areas out here in Sydney, and along with that demand comes violence. So, if you're part of that violence, image is very, very important. If you want to be a standover man you've got to look like a standover man.

Alex Mann: Are they easier for people to get than before?

Peter McErlain: Ease? I think demand is the problem. A lot of the gymnasiums out in these areas are hubs for the sale of steroids, and a lot of that is about body image. So steroids aren't just an organised crime tool.

Alex Mann: Once upon a time, steroids were just for the hard-core gym junkies, criminals and professional bodybuilders. These days they seem to be everywhere. Beyond NSW, national crime statistics released last year show a record for steroid arrests, and the second highest number of steroid seizures.

If you talk to people in the scene they say that you could walk into a gym anywhere in the country and have some in your hand in 10 minutes. Is that a result of a failure at the border?

Peter McErlain: Yeah, look, it is a concern, whether they're coming through the border or they are being manufactured or they're being purchased over the net or the dark net, which is increasing, that is a concern for us, and again the demand for such illicit drugs is a concern for us as well.

Alex Mann: Now amid that huge demand there is growing evidence of a new trend; the rise of the backyard steroid lab. Users call them home-brews. The process is simple, and the price mark-ups are astronomical.

Peter McErlain's team is desperate to keep up.

Peter McErlain: The police force adapts and so does organised crime, they adapt, and if we don't adapt with them, well, we get left behind.

Alex Mann: In 2015, backyard steroid labs were an emerging issue for police. But in the last few years they've busted a number of big commercial operations.

The raw steroid powder used in these backyard labs is made overseas, and body building forums are full of users boasting about how much easier the powders are to import than injectable steroids in small vials.

Just ask Matt Pearce, who we heard from earlier.

Matt Pearce: Chances of you getting raw powder stopped at the Australian border is basically zero. There's no smell to steroids, the dogs can't pick it up, none of the scanners over here have the technology to flag it a different colour like they do with cocaine.

Alex Mann: The backyard brewers then mix that raw powder with other over-the-counter ingredients to make injectable steroids.

Matt Pearce: Most of the people you buy the product from, the raw product over there, they'll send you the video of how to make it, then you can make your own concoctions.

Alex Mann: For the brewers who carry the importation risks, the rewards are huge profits, sometimes up to 4,000%. Using raw powder imported from overseas, a \$125 vial of steroids can be made for just \$3.

So there's serious money to be made?

Matt Pearce: Serious money to be made.

Alex Mann: Every day, customs seize more than 16 packages of steroids and growth hormones at the border. They declined an interview but warned in an email that 'these substances can be highly noxious and are often manufactured and distributed by persons with no chemistry or medical skills'.

Matt Pearce and his brother knew all about those risks.

Matt Pearce: You don't know over here if it's made in a bucket, in a bathtub, you don't know how they're distilling it, like, is the bacteria getting killed? You don't know.

Alex Mann: What you do know is that it made your brother really sick.

Matt Pearce: Yeah, it made him pretty crook, gave him a pretty bad infection.

Alex Mann: After the leg incident, instead of giving up the 'roids, the two brothers decided to look for a new source. Matt vowed never to deal with the backyard brewers again and instead he began importing steroids himself.

Surely, in the back of your mind, you must've been thinking, 'What I'm doing here could land me in some pretty serious trouble.'

Matt Pearce: That's where I suppose a bit of stupidity came in.

I don't know if you've got WhatsApp there?

Alex Mann: I do, yep.

I'm sitting at the kitchen table in Matt's house. He pulls out his phone and begins flicking through old texts.

Matt Pearce: So the number that you need, is +86...

Alex Mann: At this point it's probably best we don't broadcast that number. It belongs to someone from an industrial steroid lab in China.

Matt Pearce: So this is an example of a price list these guys will send out...

Alex Mann: Wow!

It's like a window is opening before me and on the other side is a giant black market for steroids. On the list that Matt shows me, every steroid you can imagine is available to order. As a test, I tried texting the lab and they sent me a price list too.

Matt first entered this world in early 2015, after his brother recovered from the leg infection.

Matt Pearce: It's actually pretty simple, I was talking to a bodybuilder in the States...

Alex Mann: On a forum. Bodybuilders and steroid users are super active on the forums.

Matt Pearce: He ended up putting me on to a chemist in China...

Alex Mann: He got the WhatsApp number and a website address from his forum contact.

Matt Pearce: He suggested two different websites, I went to a website, made the purchase, sent the money over, six days later it was in my mailbox.

Alex Mann: Literally all you had to do was send an email and some money and six days later you've got steroids.

Matt Pearce: That's exactly how easy it was.

Alex Mann: Matt's first order was small, just a few vials for his brother and his roommate. He was lucky and they cleared customs no worries.

Matt Pearce: That's where it started for me. My brother and my roommate, they were running it.

Alex Mann: When the liquid testosterone arrived, it was up to Matt to complete the final stage of the manufacturing process in his kitchen.

Matt Pearce: They can't sell what they call a finished product so they leave the last filtration system out of it, so you're supposed to filter it again for your last time.

Alex Mann: Matt says he wasn't using them himself, and that he's actually used steroids once in his life. His motivation for importing was to get access to steroids that wouldn't make his brother sick.

Matt Pearce: Because I didn't want anyone using anything was going to hurt 'em.

Alex Mann: When word of Matt's importing spread to his friends he decided to increase the size of his order. Before he knew it he was supplying more than 20 people. From what Matt told us, the street value of his importing could have been close to \$30,000. But he says he was just selling it at cost price.

Matt Pearce: I didn't think that I was supplying...like I didn't think I was like a bkie or a kingpin or a drug organisation, I didn't see myself as that, I just saw myself as someone that was helping them out at that stage.

Alex Mann: What Matt didn't know was that he'd tapped into the same trade network that supplies steroids to backyard laboratories across Australia and the world. The Chinese lab that sold him unfinished liquid steroids also sells raw powders.

Matt Pearce: To me I was just a little bit naive I suppose but I just thought that I'm helping these guys out, it's easy, I'm talking to these guys, I'm learning more stuff, like I'm seeing results, what works, what doesn't work, so for me it was like a whole learning experience about how I suppose customs worked in Australia. If I was doing it for a profit or to see how far we could push with the whole thing, I could have had hundreds.

Alex Mann: Outside Matt's house my reporting partner James Purtill and I try to make sense of what we've just heard. We've been working on this story together for months.

I can't believe how readily available this stuff is. That's what I get from that.

James Purtill: Yeah, and how willing he is to talk about it.

Alex Mann: He doesn't care. He's like totally got all this stuff out and just telling us how to get steroids. It sounds really, really easy.

James Purtill: I can't believe I've never been offered steroids. It's like it's just beneath the surface of the street, of this town, or the rest of the country.

Alex Mann: And the way he talks about it, it's something that is so accessible so that the moment you start getting vaguely interested in this stuff, you know, you'll enter into this world. It sounds like it's right there.

James Purtill: Yeah, I always thought that steroids were something that you kind of graduated to when you went into elite sport or something like that, like that there would be some huge gulf between people who're taking and who aren't, but you just sort of slide into it.

Alex Mann: Back home? Or lunch?

James Purtill: Yeah, let's grab some lunch.

PA voice-over: Ticket number S11, please proceed to counter one.

Alex Mann: No, this is not a food court. Right now, I'm waiting my turn at the Registry of the Adelaide District Court. I'm here to examine the files of one of the biggest steroid import and manufacture cases to ever come before the courts in Australia.

Thank you very much for that.

Man: That's a lot more reading?

Alex Mann: Yep, that's a lot more reading, thanks.

In front of me is a stack of folders a foot high. You'd never find the detail in this case file on the forums, or anywhere else. And even though this guy got caught, his case shows how easy it is for steroid manufacturers to scale up, and how they avoid detection.

John Triulcio grew up in the north-eastern suburbs of Adelaide. Sifting through the court documents, it's clear he led a turbulent life. By the time of his arrest, his four children had been removed from his care, and the relationship with his wife was dysfunctional. He'd been using ice, and police were receiving reports of domestic violence.

There's a few lines here that I'm going to read out from the psychologist's report:

'He and his wife remained together despite what was a clearly dysfunctional relationship. They started going to the gym as a way to work out their stresses. And Mr Triulcio found this was of benefit in terms of his mental health as it improved his depressive symptoms and enhanced his self-esteem. He said the couple made friends through the gym and some of those people regularly used steroids. In that way, Mr Triulcio said, one thing led to another.'

On the 2nd of January 2014, John Triulcio joined the 'Brotherhood of Pain' bodybuilding forum. In one of his first posts, he wrote: 'Hi guys, I'm glad that I found this new forum. I'm 35, 89 kilograms. Been training on and off for the last 15 years. First cycle on testosterone ethanoate. Happy New Year.'

He soon became an active member of the group, posting advice about which steroids to use, how much, and who to contact to get them. By May that year, Triulcio had risen to become a senior forum member. And by June he was selling steroids online.

Megan Voller: John Triulcio was running a full-time, well-organised and well concealed illicit business. The profits that were available and were the focus of his business were staggering.

Alex Mann: Commonwealth Lawyer Megan Voller has spent two years working the case against John Triulcio. She says, at this point Triulcio was just getting started.

Megan Voller: Well, to import the products he was required to undertake a number of steps and that started with the source. So here he communicated with a number of Asian based suppliers and he communicated with them on a daily basis.

Alex Mann: Using an encrypted messaging app, John Triulcio ordered 4.2 kilograms of raw steroid powder from labs in China and Hong Kong to be delivered to the home and business addresses of associates around Adelaide. The Chinese labs provided recipes and instructions on how to turn those raw powders into his own brand of injectable steroids, which he did in his own kitchen. He called his label 'OzPharma' and began marketing it through the bodybuilding forums. User reviews were overwhelmingly positive. 'Best gear I've used in a while', one user said. 'OzPharma, nectar of the gods', said another.

But in November 2014, less than a year after he joined the forum, his business hit a snag, a snag that in theory should have put an end to it all.

Megan Voller: So he was arrested by SAPOL, South Australian police, in November 2014, and then a month later in December 2014 there was warrant activity by customs who are now the Australian Border Force and he entered into a bail arrangement, including home detention, with the Commonwealth.

Alex Mann: But instead of slowing down, John Triulcio increased the size of his business dramatically and ordered at least 10 times more steroids.

Megan Voller: He moved quickly and he changed his modus operandi and kept going. This was a very lucrative business for him, and that first undertaking was one that he had no regard to at all.

Alex Mann: While on bail and home detention John Triulcio opened 13 post office boxes under fake names, sent \$350,000 to Chinese steroid laboratories, and arranged for 60 kilograms of raw steroids to be sent to Australia by boat. Steroids started arriving in the PO boxes hidden in babushka dolls, LED lights, cables, shampoo bottles, and food and drink sachets.

He changed his steroid brand from OzPharma to Alpha Anabolics, and his business continued to grow.

Megan Voller: We can see that he was advertising himself as being the largest importer of steroids into Australia, and this he achieved by arranging for the website of one of his Asian suppliers to market him as their official Australian agent of steroids and human growth hormone and to direct contact to him via an email which was created for that purpose. In the process of really focusing on his marketing of his product, he liaised with designers to order labels and other branded merchandise for his business, and he also sourced and obtained the merchandise that he needed to market it, including vials and labels and other things. And then of course he communicated with his customers to accept orders and to provide them advice about the stock he had on hand and the dosage amounts that they should be taking once they received it.

Alex Mann: So John Triulcio, this guy was in a class of his own.

Megan Voller: He was, yes.

Alex Mann: Looking back over Triulcio's old forum posts you get a sense of how easy it was for him to go from casual user to big-time dealer in less than a year. But Triulcio had become reckless. In August 2015, when police were called to his house over a domestic violence dispute, they were ready to take him down for the steroids. In an industrial skip bin in the front yard, they found a handwritten list of steroid names, scales, Alpha Anabolics labels, vials, and packaging. When the case against him ended in December last year, he was sentenced to six and a half years prison.

But what happens to the supply of steroids when a guy as big as Triulcio goes under? His suppliers in China have continued selling raw steroid powders since his arrest, and when I contacted them they provided price lists and confirmed they'll still send to Australia.

And even though Megan Voller, the lawyer who prosecuted Triulcio, said that he was in a class of his own, when I look at the forums he used to frequent, I can see at least eight other local brewers just like him, trading freely.

Would it surprise you to know that we've found other Australian producers who have set themselves up as local suppliers for Chinese steroid manufacturers that are currently selling in Australia?

Megan Voller: No, that doesn't surprise me as such, but we will, with the ABF and other agencies, work through those businesses and work out the source and reconstruct those businesses as the evidence becomes available to us.

Alex Mann: I can't help thinking that if Triulcio had been slightly more careful, like these guys, he'd probably still be in business

I decide to leave a public message on the forum and see what happens. 'I'm a journalist,' I write, 'I want to talk to someone about what happened to OzPharma. Please get in touch if you want to chat anonymously.'

At the bottom, I leave my contact details and forget about it.

Matt Pearce: There was a knock at the door at half past five in the morning. I was actually just finished breakfast, I was sitting on my breakfast bench, just finished breakfast, about to get in the gym for an early morning session. I went to the door and I'm like, who is it? It's like 5:30 in the morning...

Alex Mann: Matt Pearce is at the other end of the criminal spectrum to John Triulcio. But the police were coming for him too.

Matt Pearce: They yelled out, 'It's customs!' I looked out the door and they had one of those things that knock down the door ready to knock down the door.

Alex Mann: What were you thinking at that point, when you look out the door and you see that?

Matt Pearce: I just thought 'oh shit' basically, and then obviously your mind casts back and then I realised what they were doing there.

Alex Mann: When the court summons for importing and supplying steroids arrived, Matt was floored. A few years earlier, steroids had been reclassified as a schedule one drug, putting them in the same class as cocaine, heroin and ecstasy. He had no idea how much he'd been risking.

Matt Pearce: So in the back of my mind I think I'm not doing anything wrong, worst thing that's going to happen is I'm going to get a slap on the wrist and say 'you've been a bad boy'.

Alex Mann: Instead, Matt was looking at serious jail time. The maximum penalty for supplying or possessing steroids had gone from two to 20 years.

Matt Pearce: My barrister said the same thing, he said you're still 50/50 go to jail, told me to bring money with me to the court and have a bag ready with like a toothbrush and that kinda stuff in there 'cause I could be spending that night in jail.

I was shitting myself, like I honestly...to think there's a chance that I'm going to spend the next 6 months, 12 months, 18 months from that time inside a jail cell, every freedom that you're used to is taken away from ya, over something that cost me \$35,000, cost me all this stress, like there's nothing that I've even gotten from it and I'm looking at a real possibility of spending time in jail. It was scary.

Alex Mann: Matt received a good behaviour bond, and a two-year suspended sentence.

Matt Pearce: The relief was just...I can't even explain the relief, to be able to go home that night and sleep in my own bed. It was crazy. It made my whole outlook on life change, in all honesty.

Alex Mann: In what way?

Matt Pearce: It made me realise that at any time anything can be taken away from you.

Alex Mann: Federal and state police across Australia have been keen to promote the record arrest figures in their crackdown on steroids, and to publicise the arrests of guys like Matt Pearce and John Triulcio who are at either end of the criminal spectrum. While those two got caught, most people don't.

Steroid users, importers and manufacturers are learning from their mistakes, and the methods they use to hide from police are becoming harder to track. Those were the people I was reaching out to when I posted that message to the forum. And that's why, when my phone beeped the next day, I rushed to read the message.

Chris [message]: Seen you around on forums. If you want to have conversations like you posted on the visitor page, I suggest verifying your identity. Send me a selfie of yourself with an ID and my forum name and today's date.

Alex Mann: I'm at work in the middle of a meeting and I send a photo of myself dangling my ABC lanyard to this guy. He's messaging me on Wickr and his screen name is the same as one of the most influential and active steroid distributors on the bodybuilding forums. I've chosen not to use that name to protect his real life identity. Let's call him Chris instead. He writes back instantly.

Chris [message]: My man. So, asking like you did, respectful. You're wanting what sort of information? I'll need to touch base with a few guys. I'm the public figure so gotta check with em what can and can't be said. I'm one of the main sources, if not the most influential. But I'm no bkie, no 'gym bro', you'd walk straight past me. You wanna buy some steroids? Ha ha.

Alex Mann: Chris reveals he was also distributing steroids for John Triulcio.

Chris [message]: John, he was a freak. Dead set. How he managed what he did, crazy.

Alex Mann: And he says when Triulcio went down, others just popped up to take his place.

Chris [message]: Maybe I suggest have a look at a forum, Brotherhood of Pain, Purple Panda, Brewing Station.

Alex Mann: He shows me an Australian steroid brewer who is right now doing exactly what Triulcio was doing, making steroids in Australia on behalf of a Chinese laboratory and even using their brand. They have a website, and the postal concealment methods they use are so good, there's even a disclaimer: 'We are not responsible if you throw away your products because you cannot find them in our stealth. If you cannot find your products please email us and we will tell you where to find them.' Payments are taken in bitcoin and if your package does happen to get seized, they'll even reship it to you for free. It's all there in plain sight, and right now they're getting away with it.

Chris [message]: Penalties, lol. Example, get caught with 400g of meth, you're fucked. Get caught with 450g of testosterone, not even commercial, lol.

Alex Mann: Chris says he's currently dealing about 250 to 500 vials of homemade steroids a week, even though he's facing minor charges relating to steroids right now.

Chris [message]: In the process, can't discuss. I'm all good. Slap over the wrist! LIKE I KEEP STOCK AT MY HOUSE.

Alex Mann: As we're texting back and forth, it's seems like both of us are investigating each other. He writes that he's checked out my LinkedIn.

And then this:

Chris [message]: I already know where you live...muahahahahaha. It's not a threat. I'm the resource man.

Alex Mann: The supply chains fuelling Australia's steroid habit operate just out of sight. But if you take the time to look, it really doesn't take much to find them. And whatever story the arrest and seizure figures tell, for guys like Chris and the people brewing steroids for him, it's clear business is going great.

We requested an interview with Australian Border Force to explain how the powders are getting into the country and what they're doing to stop it, but they declined.

In a brief statement, a spokesperson wrote that 'with the aim of protecting the community, the ABF works closely with state and federal law enforcement partners to detect, disrupt and investigate the importation and distribution of these drugs.'

Matt Pearce says if that's the case, it's not being felt on the ground.

But do you get a sense that for the guys that are making this stuff it's tightening up and getting harder?

Matt Pearce: Not at all, I think it's probably easier because the internet, because of all your suppliers in China.

Alex Mann: So even as police are tightening the net, for the people who are actually using it, it's never been easier?

Matt Pearce: It's never been easier to get, no, never been easier to get.

Alex Mann: So James, Matt came good in the end.

James Purtill: Yes, looks like he really learned something.

Alex Mann: Yes, he did, but there is something that we haven't actually spoken about in this story yet...

James Purtill: The boxes...

Alex Mann: There were so many boxes at Matt's house, they were in his bedroom, in the lounge room, they were in the spare room, in the garage and they reached right up to the ceiling. These days he is not dealing steroids, but he is supplements business is taking off.

James Purtill: Even he admits they are a legal grey area. And the thing is, if you're taking steroids, you generally know you're taking a risk. But if you're taking supplements, you might not realise you don't always know what's in them or what effect they could be having on your body.

Man: So I've had the case where I've taken L-carnitine to an excess. The maximum dosage for most people is usually 10g, I was taking 20 to 30 when I was prepping for a show. And I was taking so much, my sweat started to smell like fish.

Man: Young kids, teenagers, in many cases unknowingly using these supplements that contained the prohibitive substances and suffering organ damage. I saw liver transplants, kidney, liver failure, some really scary stuff.

Man: Jesus Christ, there's literally seven things I've never heard of in my life in this product.

Alex Mann: That's next time on Background Briefing. Our sound producer is Leila Shunnar, sound engineering this week from Andrei Shabunov and David Lawford, production by Brendan King and our series producer Jess O'Callaghan, fact check by Connie Agius, and our executive producer is Alice Brennan.

This has been a co-production between Triple J's Hack program and Background Briefing, so a special thanks to my reporting partner James Purtill. I'm Alex Mann.

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