

## Media Release

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### The \$900 million dollar mystery that fooled our nation

*Australia's Greatest Conman?* premieres  
Tuesday, 24 February on SBS and SBS On Demand

\*\*Interviews available\*\*

\*\*Images [here](#)\*\*

\*\*Trailer [here](#)\*\*

One man. One mystery. Our nation's most baffling crime. *Australia's Greatest Conman?* premieres **Tuesday 24 February at 8.30pm on SBS and [SBS On Demand](#).**

In the 1980s, John Friedrich led an elite sea and land rescue squad out of Victoria, winning an Order of Australia, top-secret government contracts and hundreds of millions of dollars in loans. But no one knew that John Friedrich was not who he made out to be, and his undoing revealed one of the most audacious scams in Australian history – an estimated \$900 million in today's value.

In *Australia's Greatest Conman?*, Walkley Award-winning journalist and presenter **Marc Fennell** sets out to uncover the truth behind the man who deceived a nation. With exclusive interviews with **Kerry O'Brien**, **Hugh Riminton** and **Richard Fidler**, as well as Friedrich's closest colleagues and fiercest rivals, Fennell reveals a story stranger than fiction in this gripping true-crime thriller that will keep audiences guessing until the very end.

**Presenter and Producer Marc Fennell said:** "The most fascinating criminals are the ones whose motives remain a mystery. John Friedrich pulled off a fraud on a scale Australia had never seen, yet he gained relatively little for himself.

So, what sat at the heart of his crime? Why build such an extraordinary web of lies and money? That's the part that still intrigues me to this day."

#### The Rise of John Friedrich

In 1977, a man who called himself **John Friedrich** joined the National Safety Council Victoria Division (NSCA). Within a few years, he transformed the sleepy organisation into the most advanced civilian search and rescue operation Australia has ever seen. John pioneered unthinkable new techniques – para-rescuers leaping out of planes with search dogs,

pigeons guiding search operations, fire-fighting helicopters – and won the NSCA international acclaim.

No one knew a single detail about John Friedrich beyond the day he walked into the NSCA. But the rescue organisation's success rocketed him to popularity, gaining the favour of bankers and politicians like Bob Hawke. As the NSCA's size and influence exploded exponentially, sceptics began to ask: Where was all the money coming from?

## **The Fall**

John Friedrich's financing proved as elusive as the man himself. Competitors calculated that the NSCA was in deficit of at least \$33 million a year, yet banks continued to loan John hundreds of millions of dollars. While John deflected the probing enquiries of Australia's top journalists, rumours of foreign intelligence and military involvement multiplied.

Then, in 1989, when the NSCA chairman asked John to explain accounting anomalies – he vanished. As police scoured the country for John, questions gripped our nation. How had a man without a past charmed Australia's top politicians, banks, and even the military? Where had all the money gone? Was he a master criminal, a Robin Hood hero, or a spy?

Just who, exactly, was John Friedrich?

*Australia's Greatest Conman?* is an in-house production for SBS, and will be subtitled into five languages, streaming on SBS On Demand in Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and Vietnamese.

SBS German will launch an accompanying podcast, *Der Fall John Friedrich* (The Case of John Friedrich) on Monday 2 March, offering additional insight into the man behind Australia's greatest con.

***Australia's Greatest Conman?* premieres Tuesday 24 February at 8.30pm on SBS and [SBS On Demand](#), with the second and final episode airing Wednesday, 25 February at 8.30pm on SBS and [SBS On Demand](#).**

Images for media use are available on the [SBS Screening Room](#).

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