

# This morning's stories on tax haven abuse are actually ...

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The Mail, [Guardian](#) and BBC (at least, and in descending order of breathiness) have stories based on what is very obviously a media briefing from HMRC this morning. [The nub is this:](#)

*A joint investigation by the UK, the US and Australia to identify those using offshore tax havens to hide wealth has uncovered more than 100 people.*

*Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) said some of these were already under investigation for tax evasion.*

So let's cut through the verbiage and absurd suggestions of spy rings and 200 lorry loads of information to which the [Mail refer](#) and which obviously tickle some press officers fancy in HMRC and highlight the important things about this.

The first is there is nothing new here. This refers to a 2009 leak, which has been long known about.

Secondly, what's staggering after four years is that all that has been achieved so far is that 100 names have been identified. What that makes very clear is how few resources HMRC must have dedicated to this issue, and how cuts must therefore have impacted on their ability to beat tax evasion.

Thirdly, what the stories also make clear is that no action has been taken against these people yet. Indeed, what's obvious is that they don't even seem to know they are under investigation. Why not has to be the fair question? Is that also down to a lack of resources or willing, or is it, again, that the resources aren't available to assemble the case?

Fourth, and perhaps most important, why has this been issued as a story now? Could it just be that this is a cynical move by HMRC acting on the Chancellor's demand to create good news stories about what the government is doing about tax evasion in the run up to the G8? And if so, is HMRC operational activity being compromised by the political process as a result? I ask for the good reason that because there is nothing

of news in this story - bar tales of delay and inaction - the only logical reason for issuing it is to make suggestion that the government is getting tough on tax evaders when the real story is exactly the opposite of that - because in reality in four years it looks as though almost nothing at all has happened here.

In that case this is a story that deserves to backfire.

Of course I want tax evasion beaten and action against tax havens. What the government is saying with this release is that its commitment to that process is so shallow that it will not commit the resources to deliver both aims. And that's what's shocking about today's stories.