

Tell us what you think

By Steve Stoddart

Customs at Sydney Airport receives its fair share of complaints and a healthy level of compliments from travellers. Testing an innovative Complaints and Compliments system at the airport has increased the feedback and given us opportunities for even further improvement. Issues highlighted by passengers' comments have identified the need for Quality Improvement Team projects in which Customs officers can effect changes.

"Complaints!" It was not so long ago that this word made us cringe when a call from 'above' asked for a report.

The public service is making a concerted effort to provide people with quality service and Customs is up there with the best of them. Recent publication of Customs service charters has increased this expectation and we are prepared to receive and act on feedback.

In the first nine months of the trial, Customs at Sydney Airport received 273 complaint issues. When officers were asked to estimate the number of 'pats on the back' they usually replied with figures ranging from 10 to 50. It came as a surprise to many that compliment issues for the same period totalled 146.

Customs clears an average of 20,000 international arriving and departing passengers a day. In such a dynamic and stressful workplace it is easy for

Customs officers to become blinkered to the process which makes it difficult to step back and put us in the shoes of the traveller. It is important that clients are given easily accessible means to comment on our performance so that we take the time to consider the impact of our processes from another perspective. The Complaints and Compliments trial has provided those means with the popular Reply Paid Brochures available at the airport.

Efficiencies gained at the Customs entry and outward control points have resulted in part from client comments. The streaming of different categories of traveller, the dynamic signage in the concourses and above processing modules as well the combined Customs, Immigration, Quarantine and Wildlife document are perfect examples of how client feedback provides us with opportunities for continuous improvement.

National implementation of the Customs Complaints and Compliments system will be effected in 1999. This will include a number of enhanced feedback opportunities including a 'Freecall 1800' phone number and Internet page. The system will be available to national and international clients.

(See 'Complaints and Compliments', page 16).

Steve Stoddart (pictured below) is a member of the Complaints and Compliments Unit. He joined Customs in 1986 and served for 10 years at Sydney Airport.

