

## ... and in heroin, cocaine and ecstasy

The number of heroin, cocaine and ecstasy seizures by Customs increased by 38 per cent during 1999-2000 but there was a slight decrease in the number of cannabis seizures.

Two of these were Customs largest seizures (cocaine and ecstasy) and second largest seizure of heroin. Close collaboration with partner agencies also contributed to several significant post-border seizures, including 88.9 kg of heroin in Sydney in February 2000.

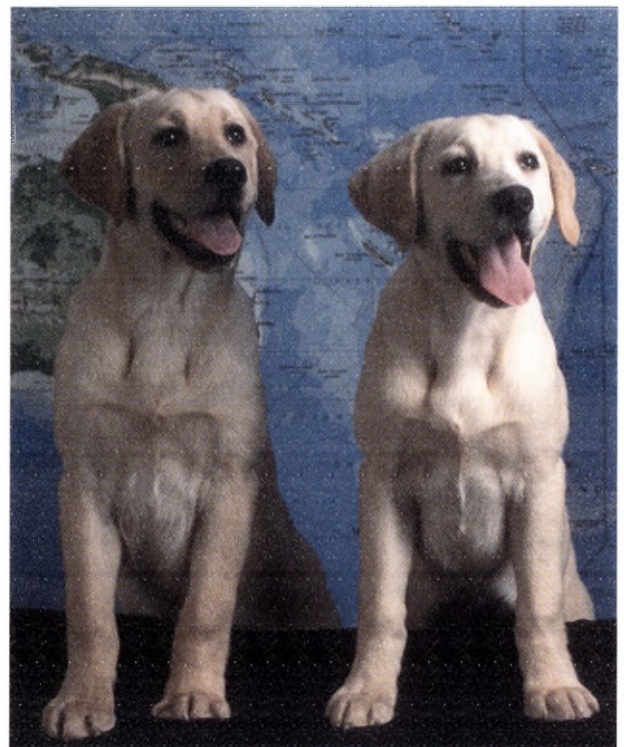
The big cocaine seizure was on 1 February, when a yacht was intercepted on arrival from New Zealand. Customs and Australian Federal Police had maintained surveillance on the *Ngairi Wha* before its arrival at Broken Bay on the NSW central coast. Fifteen bales containing a total of 502 kg of cocaine were found. The AFP subsequently arrested six people associated with the importation.

That seizure followed closely on the first detection in Australia of black cocaine on 20 January 2000. An air cargo consignment from Brazil to Sydney was found to contain bags of a black substance that resembled lumps of dirt with a pungent odour. Ionscan swabs of the substance pointed to cocaine that had been camouflaged with chemicals to avoid detection. This was

subsequently confirmed as the world's second largest seizure of black cocaine, at 115.5 kg.

Early in January, a container from The Netherlands arrived in Brisbane via Singapore which, on advice from the AFP, Customs officers examined. The 38 large metal hydraulic ram cylinders inside contained off-white tablets which proved to be 9.1 kg of cocaine, 9.0 kg of ecstasy powder and 67.4 kg of ecstasy tablets. This was the largest single ecstasy tablet and powder detection - more than twice the amount of the previous largest detection.

On 21 October 1999, a shipping container of timber arriving in Sydney from Indonesia was selected for examination and revealed a false bottom, concealing a total weight of 219 kg of heroin. The consignment was targeted for examination after significant



analytical work prompted Customs and AFP to focus on the transaction.

Frontline, a cooperative program between Customs and industry groups involved in international trade and transport to help identify illegal activity, contributed effectively to detection of illegal drugs.

Members provided 671 referrals to Customs, resulting in the detection of 146 instances of illegal activity. The program has a strike rate of one detection from every five referrals. Some of the more significant results include many seizures of heroin, cocaine and cannabis.

Customs Watch, which encourages the public to Watch Out for Australia and report any unusual or suspicious activities, recorded 1040 calls and 61 detections of illegal activity. One report led to the closure of an illegal laboratory and the detection of \$50,000 of amphetamines, \$37,000 of cannabis, 2000 steroid tablets, 340 steroid vials and \$34,000 cash.

Customs received funding through the Tough on Drugs Strategy to establish a Centre of Expertise to train specialist ship and aircraft search teams. After skills acquisition in best-practice ship search techniques from Britain and Canada, an Australian training package was developed. Its first course was conducted in November 1999. Research also began on the development of an aircraft search program.

Customs maintained its commitment to the ongoing identification of leading-edge technology that can be applied to the detection and identification of drugs and other prohibited goods.

A major exercise began to identify the most appropriate x-ray equipment to assist in the detection of narcotics in fully laden shipping containers.

The ionscan particle trace detector again proved itself to be one of the more successful technology-driven initiatives. The success of the technology has led to an increase in deployed units to 51 nationally, including a total upgrade to the latest model and the introduction of a highly successful training and certification program for Customs operators.

A major project to provide closed-circuit television surveillance to 27 major seaports around Australia continued during the year. A 24-hour monitoring centre is being established in Melbourne. The introduction of this system will enhance Customs capability to manage risks at seaports both during and after hours. Operational and Intelligence efforts will be improved and the introduction of the surveillance network will serve as a deterrent to those who would engage in illegal activity.

Customs has 42 operational detector dogs nationally, with teams in each capital city and Cairns. They are particularly useful for mass screening of articles, people, and large areas, and to indicate a need for further examination, such as unpacking of containers.

Two seizures of note were:

- A passive-alert dog responded to two female passengers who were headed for the 'nothing to declare' (green) channel at Sydney Airport. The passengers were subsequently found to possess a total of 2 kg of cocaine in their shoes and around their waists.

- A passive-alert dog operating at Perth Airport was responsible for the first seizure of crystalline methamphetamine 'ice' imported by an arriving passenger. The drug was in hand luggage and totalled almost 250 grams.

A new Bell 412 helicopter began operations in January 2000, enabling Customs to conduct day/night surveillance and response operations in the Torres Strait, either by helicopter alone, or in conjunction with Coastwatch fixed-wing aircraft and surface assets. New lit helipads were installed in strategic locations to increase flexibility.

The National Marine Unit disposed of six Minister-class vessels and acquired eight new Bay-class vessels. The upgrade recognised increasing demand for operations beyond the 12 nautical mile jurisdiction. The first of the new Bay-class vessels, the Australian Customs Vessel (ACV) Roebuck Bay, was commissioned in March 1999 and a further four vessels were delivered in 1999-2000.

The capabilities of the new vessels were demonstrated when the ACV Holdfast Bay was able to patrol waters off Sydney in extremely difficult weather conditions for an extended period during an operation that resulted in the detection and seizure of 502 kg of cocaine.