

JAIL SENTENCE A HARSH WARNING TO FRAUDSTERS



"An 18-month jail term imposed on a Melbourne man should warn those seeking to avoid paying legitimate duty on imported goods that they will be caught and punished," the Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison, said.

The sentence was imposed on a 41-year-old Australian citizen from Sydenham, Victoria, in the Melbourne County Court. He was also subject to a non-parole period of ten months.

The man had pleaded guilty to ten counts of breaching section 134.2 (1) of the Criminal Code of the Commonwealth (obtaining a financial advantage by deception from the Commonwealth).

On 19 February 2003, the Customs Melbourne container x-ray facility detected 1200 cartons of undeclared spirits (shown at right) in two containers from Croatia labeled on the manifest as 'mixed foodstuffs'. Customs investigators executed search warrants the following day on several premises in metropolitan Melbourne.

An analysis of seized material, including documents and computers, established that another eight shipments of undeclared spirits and wine had been imported into Melbourne between September 2002 and February 2003. The total

Customs duty evaded on the nine shipments was \$706,417.

Senator Ellison said the \$190 million investment by the Australian Government in container x-ray facilities in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Fremantle was paying big dividends in protecting Australian taxpayers from large revenue losses through the evasion of duty.

In April 2003, the Customs Sydney x-ray facility uncovered the biggest quantity ever of smuggled tobacco when 11 tonnes of tobacco were discovered - if declared, this would have attracted duty of \$2.95 million.



ECSTASY TABLETS FOUND IN WINE SHIPMENT

The third major MDMA (ecstasy) seizure in Australia this year was yet another example of the tremendous work that Customs and the Australian Federal Police (AFP) are doing in combating the trade in illegal drugs, the Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison, said.

The AFP arrested three people in Sydney on 19 February 2003. The investigation commenced when Customs officers at Port Botany identified 33.9 kilograms of MDMA concealed in a wine shipment from Greece. The 135,600 tablets had an estimated potential street value of \$6.5 million.

Three men - a 50-year-old invalid pensioner from Reservoir, Victoria, a 39-year-old mechanic from Rockdale, NSW, and a 57-year-old builder from Hurstville, NSW - appeared in Sydney's Central Local Court, charged with drug trafficking offences.

This follows the seizure of 42.5kilograms of MDMA in Melbourne in January and February by Customs and the AFP in joint operations which resulted the arrest of three men.

"This adds up to over 76 kilograms of MDMA which has now been seized within the last two months and again sends a clear message to those who attempt to import illicit drugs that they will be caught," he said.

"Both Customs and the AFP are to be congratulated for their collaborative efforts in preventing significant illicit drug importations into Australia."