



Improving the passenger experience at airports

Chief Executive Officer Michael Carmody outlines moves underway to enhance passenger flows at international airports and the future of Customs operations in this environment.

Customs presence at airports derives from our community protection role. Whether on our own behalf or on behalf of other agencies, we are there to prevent or detect the illegal movement of people or harmful goods across our borders.

Our operations are dominated by two factors: the short intervention times we have at the border to prevent the illegal entry of people or harmful goods and the tension inherent in our border protection role. Border protection means there has to be some impact on travel. But if our approaches to border protection unreasonably compromise trade and travel, we lose the community's confidence and our ability to perform our role.

There can sometimes be unacceptably long wait times for individual passengers. These can occur because of a combination of events including off-schedule arrivals which put pressure on our staffing.

Processing of passengers leaving the country is affected by the unpredictability of passenger flows, including tour groups. We are moving to provide greater contingency for these "unscheduled" events, including trialing the use of part-time employees to help out during peak periods.

Significant Investment

Customs is one part of the total traveller experience when arriving or departing Australia. There are many interrelated players and interventions within this broader system. There is, for example, little gain for the passenger in speedier passage through the Entry Control Point if it simply leads to a longer wait in the baggage hall. This broader system has been the focus of the Passenger Facilitation Taskforce. Customs, as Chair of the Taskforce, is making a significant investment in bringing together both government and industry to achieve collective goals and outcomes that support effective and efficient passenger facilitation.



CEO Michael Carmody.

In the nine months to the end of March 2007, some 1000 passengers were refused entry to Australia. In the same period Customs detected more than 200 attempts by passengers to bring in various illicit drugs and precursors and seized more than 62 kilograms of these substances.

The Taskforce has been up and running since March 2006 and has made good and sound progress. That progress incorporates a more collaborative relationship between government agencies and industry.

The Taskforce has mapped out the current current flow of passengers through both inwards and outwards processes. A consultant has been engaged to develop a metric model for all of the steps in the processes, which will be measured at each of the eight international airports at peak and non-peak times. The aim of this work is to develop a set of 'whole of airport' measures that are agreed by all stakeholders and a sound performance model against which to measure and test ourselves.

Passenger Flows

We have also implemented a trial of 'express paths'; differential queuing arrangements for first, business and some frequent flyer passengers. The regulatory and scrutiny standards remain the same. The arrangement is expected to serve two outcomes. Firstly, airlines and airports want to differentiate products for premium paying customers. Secondly, the arrangement will provide an overall facilitation benefit for the total group of passengers. This is a measure sought by industry based on similar arrangements at a number of international airports. Airports have been invited to submit their proposals for the trial to the Taskforce.

Customs is working hard with Quarantine to resolve issues around queuing and screening at the back of the inwards hall. At Sydney Airport a trial has been run on 'in-line' x-ray screening in the basement. The Taskforce is looking at the outcomes of the trial. More work needs to be done and the Taskforce is looking to put more emphasis and effort into resolving these issues.

Work is also being undertaken to improve planning and information sharing. I am encouraged by the willingness and participation of the industry representatives to find ways to plan together and share as much data in as timely a way as possible to support smooth passenger flow through the terminal.

International Co-operation

Custom is not alone in grappling with these issues. On the international scene Customs is a member of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Travel Interest Group. This group consists of airports, airlines, ground handlers, government agencies and technology providers. Late last year the group published versions of its Ideal Passenger Flow. At its next meeting, the group will begin the development of a set of "ideal arrangements" for the security elements within an Ideal Passenger Flow. At the same time IATA is opening up a closer discussion with the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) about these matters with the intention of influencing international standards for aviation security.



Customs is also a member of the ICAO New Technologies Working Group, which focuses on the way technological solutions might be harnessed to facilitate the smooth flow of passengers in a secure environment. They were instrumental in the development of e-Passports. Australia is introducing an automated passenger processing solution utilising e-Passports.

Installation of SmartGate at Brisbane Airport was completed at the start of March.

Airports of the future

Customs has also joined a consortium being brought together by Brisbane Airport to support a four-year research program entitled 'Airports of the Future: Secure, Efficient and User-Friendly.' The research will be undertaken through an Australian Research Council Linkage Program comprising the Queensland University of Technology, the University of New South Wales, the University of Melbourne, the Western Australian Chemistry

Centre, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA, and the Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands.

More broadly in the Customs community there is an increasing international focus on managing the end-to-end supply chain rather than simply entry to a country's borders.

In translating this to the passenger environment, Australian and New Zealand Customs have taken the first steps to explore how joint management of Trans-Tasman travel might improve the outcomes for us, industry and travellers. The Passenger Facilitation Taskforce has put forward an agenda that offers the prospect of improving the travel experience for legitimate travellers. The challenge for us is to continue to work openly and constructively to turn that into a reality.

An edited extract of a speech to aviation industry leaders by Customs CEO Michael Carmody.