

## Introduction

Trends in the supply of and demand for illicit drugs can be determined by examining data on patterns of use, prices and purity. In this Report, as in previous years, the ABCI has used unit record data provided by the State, Territory and Commonwealth police services, aggregating and analysing the material to develop a national picture.

A number of factors do, however, limit the ABCI's ability to produce a comprehensive, reliable assessment based on the data supplied:

- lack of uniformity in both recording and storing data on illicit drug arrests and seizures across all States and Territories;
- problems with quality control;
- differences in counting methodologies applied in the jurisdictions;
- differences in definitions of drug consumer and provider offences across jurisdictions;
- differences in the way drugs and offences may be coded; and
- inadequate drug identification.

The ABCI is working to redress this situation through the National Illicit Drug Statistics Framework, which has been developed in a joint project with the National Crime Statistics Unit of the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the National Illicit Drug Reporting Format Project. Implementation of the Framework will eventually result in standardised and comprehensive national illicit drug statistics and will improve police arrest and seizure data, allowing for a more accurate and comprehensive analysis of the illicit drug situation in Australia.

## Interpreting the statistics

Despite the limitations of the current data set, the *Australian Illicit Drug Report 2000–01* provides the best collection of arrest and seizure statistics available in Australia. Care should be taken, however, when comparing and interpreting the statistics. What follows should be taken into consideration.

## Recording and storage methods

At present, law enforcement agencies record their illicit drug arrests and seizures in different ways and this presents difficulties when aggregating and comparing data. There are disparities in the level of detail recorded for each offence, in the methods used to quantify the seizures, in the way offence and seizure data are extracted, and in the way counting rules are applied.

## Quality control

Missing, incomplete and non-specific information relating to drug seizures makes it impossible to calculate precisely the quantity of each drug type seized. It is thus difficult to analyse trends on a comparative basis across a number of years.

In 1998–99, for the first time in several years, South Australia Police provided seizure data extracted manually from major operational databases. However, the Service was unable to provide this information for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. South Australia Police did provide aggregated seizure data for 2000–01. This data has been placed in table 8.11. Standard processing rules used in the production of data for the *Australian Illicit Drug Report* have not been used to compile this data and caution should be exercised with regard to comparability.

## Counting methodology

The ABCI has used the following counting methodology to develop a count of offenders by drug type:

- Where a person has been charged with multiple consumer or provider offences for a particular type of drug, that person is counted as only one consumer or provider of that drug.
- Where consumer *and* provider charges for a particular drug type have been laid against a person, the person is counted only as a provider of that drug.
- A person who has been charged in relation to multiple drug-types is counted as a consumer or provider for each drug type.
- A person is counted on each separate occasion that he or she is charged.

Not all jurisdictions apply this counting methodology and records relating to additional charges for the same drug must be removed from some data sets. A more rigorous application of the methodology to the 2000–01 data may have resulted in a reduction in the number of offences recorded for both New South Wales and Victoria.

### Consumers and providers

Offenders are classified as consumers or providers to differentiate between people apprehended for trading in, as opposed to using, illicit drugs. Those charged with supply-type offences—for example, importation, trafficking, selling, cultivation and manufacture—are classed as providers. Those charged with user-type offences—for example, possessing or administering drugs for their own use—are classed as consumers.

In some cases the jurisdiction responsible for the data allocates consumer and provider codes. In other cases the ABCI applies the codes, using information about the type of offence committed. Further, there are some differences in the methodologies the jurisdictions use for applying consumer and provider codes.

### Drug identification and coding

Not all suspected drug seizures are scientifically analysed to establish the precise nature of the drug. In some cases, only seizures of a predetermined weight or seizures that are the subject of a ‘not guilty’ plea are scientifically analysed. All other seizures remain recorded as they were by the investigating officer without further qualification. The officer usually carries out a narcotics (‘narco’) test.

There are also differences between jurisdictions in the classifications used to code drug types, which may result in inconsistencies in the treatment of some drugs.

### Data sources

Three sources of drug statistics are used: offence and seizure data; drug purity data; and data on drug prices.

### Offence and seizure data

Offence and seizure data were supplied by:

- New South Wales Police Service
- Victoria Police
- Queensland Police Service
- Western Australia Police Service
- South Australia Police
- Tasmania Police
- Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services
- Australian Federal Police
- Australian Customs Service

In 2000–01, Table 8.11 Seizures, displays State police and Australian Federal Police seizures separately.

### Drug purity data

State and Territory forensic laboratories and the Australian Forensic Drug Laboratory in Sydney supplied data on drug purity levels. Figures for Victoria, Queensland, the Northern Territory, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, represent the purity level of drugs seized by police during the relevant quarter. Figures for South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, and those supplied by the Australian Forensic Drug Laboratory, represent the purity level of drugs received at the laboratory during the relevant quarter. The time between the date of seizure by police and the date of receipt at the laboratory can vary from a few days to several months.

### Data on drug prices

Data on prices for illicit drugs—as shown in Tables 8.17 to 8.21—were collected quarterly from each of the police services and are based on information supplied by covert police units and police informants. Other price data were taken from studies of drug-using populations in specific localities and these may differ slightly from police prices; any differences are discussed in the relevant chapters.

## Explanatory notes

The following definitions apply to terms used in this report.

### Arrest

'Arrest' incorporates all recorded law enforcement action against a person for suspected unlawful involvement in drugs. It incorporates enforcement action by way of arrest, summons, cannabis expiation notice in South Australia, simple cannabis offence notice in the Australian Capital Territory, drug infringement notice in the Northern Territory, and 'notice to appear' in Queensland. Some charges subsequently may have been dropped or the defendant may have been found not guilty.

### Seizure

'Seizure' refers to the confiscation by a law enforcement agency of a quantity of an illicit drug or a regulated drug being used or possessed unlawfully, whether or not an arrest is made in conjunction with that confiscation.

The amount of drug seized may be recorded by weight, volume, and linear measurement or as a unit count (eg. number of tablets, plants or bags). The method of estimating the amount of drug seized varies from State to State and also varies within the jurisdictions. For example, seizures of amphetamine in tablet form may be weighed or counted, and similarly, seizures of cannabis plants may be weighed, counted or measured.

The seizures presented in Table 8.11 only include those seizures for which a drug weight was recorded. The table undercounts both the number of seizures and the amount of drug seized for all drug types. Amphetamine and cannabis data are most likely to be affected by the variety of measurement methods used and these figures should be treated with caution when making comparisons between States or over time. This table includes seizures by the Australian Federal Police and State Police.

### Heroin and other opioids

'Heroin and other opioids' includes opiate analgesics such as heroin, morphine, opium, codeine and opioid analgesics such as methadone and pethidine.

### Cocaine

'Cocaine' includes cocaine, coca leaf, coca paste and crack.

### Amphetamine-type stimulants

'Amphetamine-type stimulants' includes amphetamine; methylamphetamine; crystalline methylamphetamine; and phenethylamines.

### Phenethylamines

'Phenethylamines' includes 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA—commonly known as 'ecstasy'); 3,4-methylenedioxyethylamphetamine (MDEA); 3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDA); dimethoxyamphetamine (DMA); and paramethoxyamphetamine (PMA).

### Cannabis

'Cannabis' includes cannabis plant, leaf, resin, oil, seed and all other forms.

### Hallucinogen

'Hallucinogen' includes tryptamines such as lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and psilocybin (mushroom).

### Steroid

'Steroid' includes anabolic androgenic steroids such as testosterone, nandrolone and stanozolol.

### Other drugs

'Other drugs' includes phencyclidine (PCP, or angel dust), diazepam, lignocaine, benzocaine, dothiepin, flunitrazepam, other prescription drugs, and any drug not included in the other categories.

## Symbols and abbreviations

See page 5 for symbols and abbreviations used in the following tables.