

Australian Crime Commission

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ILLICIT DRUG DATA REPORT 2002–03 KEY FINDINGS

Introduction

- This is the first edition of the Illicit Drug Data Report (IDDR).
- In the last financial year, more than nine tonnes of illicit drugs were seized by Australian law enforcement in over 46,830 seizures.

Amphetamines

- The number of border detections of amphetamine-type stimulants increased from 203 to 220 during 2002–03, while the total weight detected at the border decreased from 428.3 kilograms in 2001–02 to 244.7 in 2002–03.
- Detections included a record 223 kilogram seizure of crystalline methylamphetamine ('ice') in Sydney which was concealed in a sea container from China.¹
- The total weight of law enforcement agency seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants increased in 2002–03. Specifically, seizures of crystalline methylamphetamine increased in this period, with significant seizures including 90 kilograms and 105 kilograms.
- Seizures of clandestine laboratories continued to increase. This trend reflects the increase in seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants and the increasing domestic availability of these drugs.
- Seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants in 2002–03 included a significant seizure of 22 kilograms of ephedrine powder, which was concealed in a sea cargo container in Darwin. This is consistent with the Australian Illicit Drug Report 2001–02 prediction that an increase in the sourcing of precursors outside Australia would occur in response to a tightening of domestic regulatory controls.
- Purity analyses indicate a relatively low-level purity for amphetamine seizures, but an increase in purity of methylamphetamine seizures since 2002.
- Arrests for amphetamine-type stimulants have increased slightly since 2001–02. This is consistent with anecdotal reports from users that amphetamine-type stimulants are readily available in metropolitan and some regional centres.

Phenethylamines

- During 2002–03, the Australian Customs Service detected a record 552 kilograms of phenethylamines at the border in 314 attempted importations, including three of the four largest detections of MDMA at the border to date: 170.9 kilograms in Sydney in April 2003, 157 kilograms in Sydney in March 2003 and 135.5 kilograms in Brisbane in February 2003.
- The weight and number of MDMA border detections has been increasing since the mid-1990s with significant increases in the weight of detections since 1999–2000. This is consistent with the increasing use of MDMA in Australia and the current ease of obtaining the drug.
- Analyses of seizures suggest that purity of MDMA phenethylamines has fluctuated over previous years, but appears to have stabilised over the 2002–03 period.

Cannabis

- Cannabis is the most widely used illicit drug across all socio-economic groups in Australia. Arrest data appears to have stabilised.
- During 2002–03, the Australian Customs Service detected 699 attempted imports and exports of cannabis, with a total weight of 22 kilograms. This represented a significant decrease on the total weight of cannabis detected in 2001–02 (2944 kilograms).
- During 2002–03, Australian law enforcement seized 6145.22 kilograms of cannabis, a slight decrease from the 9800.66 kilograms seized in 2001–02.

Heroin

- The purity of heroin seizures increased slightly from the levels identified in 2001–02, and the number of consumer and provider arrests increased from 3259 in 2001–02 to 3824 in 2002–03. Findings from the 2003 Illicit Drug Reporting System suggest that the drug is 'easy' to 'very easy' to obtain in most states and territories except Tasmania and the Northern Territory, where only small numbers were able to comment on heroin availability.
- In 2002–03 there was an increase in the number of border detections of heroin but a decrease in weight seized. This

suggests that heroin importations in 2002–03 is moving from larger well-organised importations to smaller and increasingly 'opportunistic' importation methods, such as body packing, cargo and through Australia Post.

- Seizures in 2002–03 include one of Victoria's largest ever heroin seizures. A joint operation between the Australian Federal Police, Customs, Victoria Police and Tasmania Police resulted in the seizure of 125 kilograms of heroin and the disruption of an international drug syndicate.

Cocaine

- Although the number of cocaine seizures increased from 593 in 2001–02 to 624 in 2002–03, the weight of seizures decreased significantly and were comparable to years previous to 1999–2000. Similarly, Customs made a record number of cocaine detections, but with a low seizure weight.
- Cocaine purity analysis results varied widely and by jurisdiction for 2002–03, but there has been a relative downward trend in the purity of cocaine seized since 1997–98.
- There was a significant decrease in the number of cocaine arrests compared with 2001–02. *Australian Illicit Drug Report 2001–02* identified that little is known about the cocaine market in higher socio-economic areas, and that these users rarely come to the attention of law enforcement.

Other Drugs

- During 2002–03, the Australian Customs Service made 1269 seizures of performance-and-image-enhancing drugs. This represented a decrease of 22.6 per cent on 2001–02 seizures. This is the first decrease in seizures of performance-and image-enhancing drugs since reporting began in 1994–95.
- The total weight and number of domestic seizures of steroids has increased since 2001–02.
- The number of seizures of hallucinogens has remained stable from 2001–02, however, the total weight of hallucinogens seized has decreased in 2002–03.

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