



# COCAINE

## KEY POINTS

- The number of cocaine detections at the Australian border decreased from 359 in 2008–09 to 291 in 2009–10.
- A single sea cargo detection accounted for 62 per cent of the total weight of cocaine detected at the Australian border in 2009–10.
- Analysis of cocaine samples seized at the Australian border indicates a potential shift in the geographical origin of cocaine entering Australia.
- Despite the record number of national cocaine seizures in 2009–10, the weight of seizures decreased by 33 per cent.
- The number of national cocaine arrests has almost doubled over the last decade, increasing from 652 in 2000–01 to 1 244 in 2009–10.

## MAIN FORMS

Cocaine is derived from the genus *Erythroxylum*, of which at least 17 species contain the alkaloid cocaine. The 2 main species cultivated for the production of cocaine are *Erythroxylum coca* (E. coca) and *Erythroxylum novogranatense*. E. coca has the highest cocaine content of the 2 species and is cultivated along the eastern slopes of Bolivia and Peru. *Erythroxylum novogranatense* is cultivated in Colombia and countries in Central America (Freya & Levy 2009).

The process of extraction and production of cocaine hydrochloride from coca leaves is a chemical process that typically occurs in 3 stages — the extraction of crude coca paste from the coca leaf, purification of the coca paste into cocaine base and conversion of the cocaine base into cocaine hydrochloride (Casale & Klein 1993). Production from cocaine paste to cocaine hydrochloride requires sulphuric acid, potassium permanganate, acetone (or other solvents) and hydrochloric acid (EMCDDA & Europol 2010).

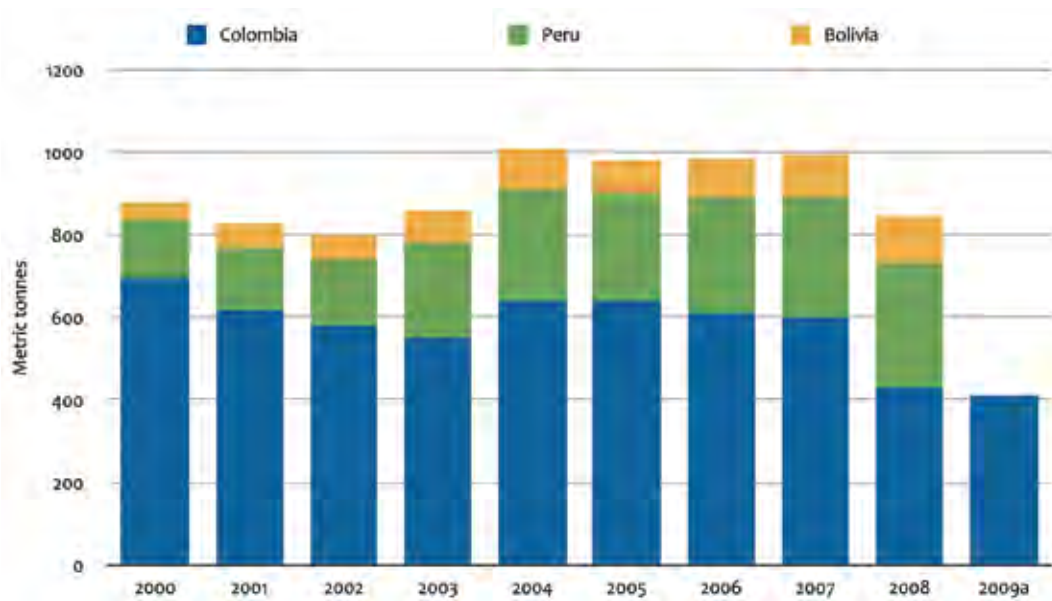
Cocaine is commonly found in 2 forms. The most common form found in Australia is the powdered hydrochloride salt form of cocaine, which can be snorted or dissolved in water and then injected. The second form, 'crack', is rarely encountered in Australia. Crack is the name used to describe the form of cocaine base which is produced by treating cocaine hydrochloride with a mild base (commonly sodium bicarbonate or ammonia solution). It is usually in the form of irregular solid semi-translucent particles. Cocaine base is readily volatilised (converted to vapour) with heating, hence this preparation is ideally suited for administration by inhaling the vapour (smoking). The term crack refers to the crackling sound the cocaine produces when heated (AIC 2009; EMCDDA 2010; NIDA 2010).

Cocaine is an addictive stimulant drug which increases the speed of central nervous system activity (NIDA 2010). Cocaine can make the user feel euphoric, confident, energetic, alert, talkative and excited. Adverse effects of use include tachycardia, hypertension, paranoia, anxiety and panic (AIC 2009). Cocaine has a strong reinforcing action, causing rapid psychological dependence. This dependence is reportedly more pronounced in those who smoke crack (EMCDDA 2010).

## INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

In 2009, the combined coca cultivation in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru decreased by 5 per cent, from 167 000 hectares to 158 000 hectares. The majority of this decline was due to a 16 per cent reduction in the area under cultivation in Colombia, which decreased from 81 000 hectares in 2008 to 68 000 hectares in 2009. This has resulted in a decrease in the potential production of cocaine in Colombia from 430 tonnes in 2008 to 410 tonnes in 2009 (See Figure 37) (UNODC 2010a, 2010b).

**FIGURE 37:** Potential production of cocaine, 2000 to 2009 (Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime)



a Potential cocaine production figures for Peru and Bolivia for 2009 were unavailable.

In Peru, coca cultivation increased by 7 per cent to 59 900 hectares, while cultivation in Bolivia remained relatively stable at 30 900 hectares. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimated that in 2009 the combined cultivation of coca bush in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru had the potential to yield between 842 to 1 111 tonnes of cocaine hydrochloride (UNODC 2010a).

A two-tiered market for cocaine has emerged in the United Kingdom (UK) at both the wholesale and street level. Heavily cut, cheaper cocaine is sold to some customers, while higher purity cocaine is sold to those willing to pay higher prices (SOCA 2010). In the United States of America (US) cocaine availability continues to decrease. Authorities attribute the decline to a combination of factors including increased law enforcement efforts in Mexico, decreased cocaine production in Colombia and high levels of cartel violence (NDIC 2010).

Law enforcement operations continue to reshape some smuggling routes and methods in US-bound transit zones. According to the US National Drug Intelligence Centre, traffickers are increasingly using self-propelled semi-submersibles to transport cocaine from South America to Mexico (NDIC 2010). In 2009, these vessels were used in 60 cocaine trafficking operations compared with only 23 for the years 2001–2007. These operations are estimated to have moved 332 tonnes of cocaine (BINLEA 2010).

West Africa remains a key transshipment point for cocaine transported to Europe with an estimated US\$1 billion worth of cocaine moving through the region in 2008 (UNODC 2009). Most of the cocaine moving from South America to West Africa remains in the control of South American—predominantly Colombian—organised crime groups. These groups continue to move large multi-tonne consignments of cocaine via sea routes or smaller multi-hundred kilogram consignments via the air stream. According to the UK Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA), payment in cocaine to West African organised

crime groups has led to an emerging trafficking network with these groups using traditional links between the UK, Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone (SOCA 2010).

The structure of supply chains facilitating the global movement of cocaine continues to evolve as traffickers adapt transportation routes and concealment methods in response to a number of factors, including law enforcement operations and changing market dynamics. Importations via sea cargo continue to be an effective method of moving medium to large-scale cocaine shipments to several national markets. Traffickers use a broad range of techniques, many innovative. In April 2010, media reporting revealed Spanish law enforcement detected 814 kilograms of cocaine concealed in false compartments of a lorry shipped from Argentina. The lorry had been remodelled—complete with race logos and advertisements—to appear as a support vehicle used in the Paris to Dakar rally held in Argentina (EITB 2010).

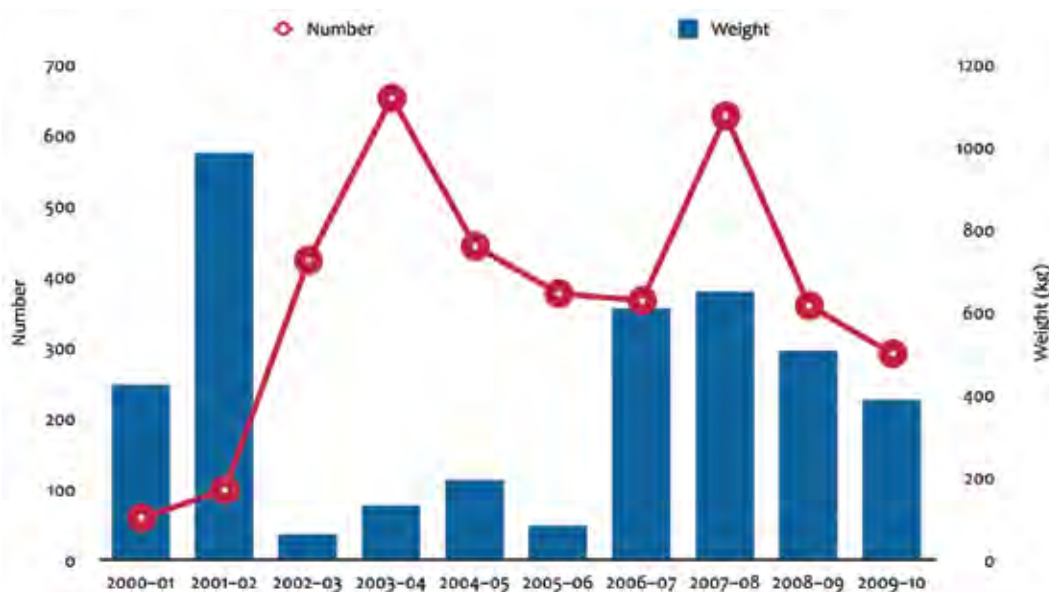
The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) has noted that the UNODC activities to target cocaine precursors (Project Cohesion) are lagging behind activities targeting heroin precursors. The INCB has further noted that there is insufficient understanding of the sources of chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of cocaine and the related diversion patterns and trafficking trends (INCB 2010).

## DOMESTIC TRENDS

### AUSTRALIAN BORDER SITUATION

In 2009–10, the number of cocaine detections at the Australian border continued to decrease, from 359 in 2008–09 to 291 in 2009–10. The weight of cocaine detections also decreased, from 506 kilograms in 2008–09 to 386.8 kilograms in 2009–10 (see Figure 38). In 2009–10, there was only 1 detection over 100 kilograms, which was in a sea cargo consignment from Mexico.

**FIGURE 38:** Number and weight of cocaine detections at the Australian border, 2000–01 to 2009–10 (Source: Australian Customs and Border Protection Service)



## SIGNIFICANT BORDER DETECTIONS

Significant border detections of cocaine in 2009–10 included:

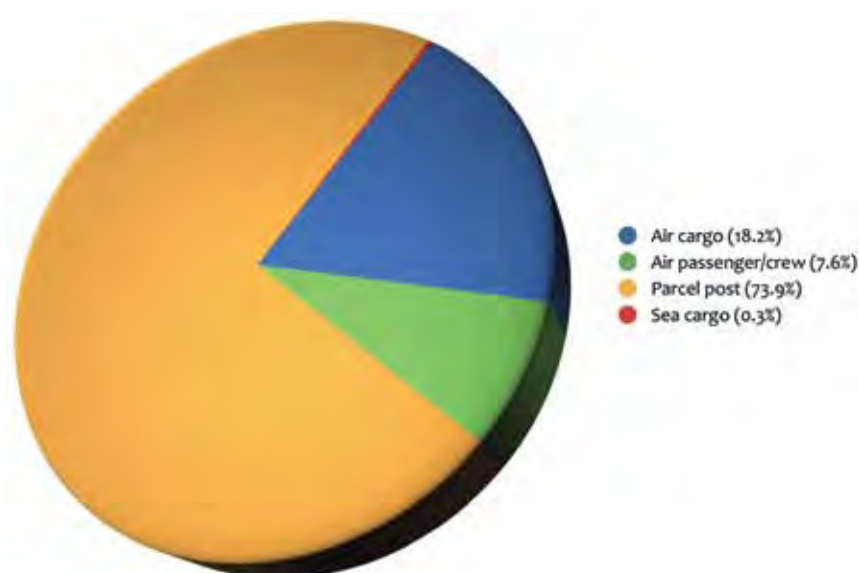
- 240 kilograms of cocaine detected on 14 June 2010 in a sea cargo consignment from Mexico to Melbourne
- 10 kilograms of cocaine detected on 29 June 2010 in the base and lid of an air passenger’s luggage travelling from Canada to Melbourne
- 9.4 kilograms of cocaine detected on 24 November 2009 in a parcel post consignment from Panama to Sydney
- 8 kilograms of cocaine detected on 15 February 2010 in an air cargo consignment from Nigeria to Sydney.

The 4 detections listed above have a combined weight of 267.4 kilograms, which accounts for 69 per cent of the total weight of cocaine detected at the Australian border in 2009–10.

## IMPORTATION METHODS

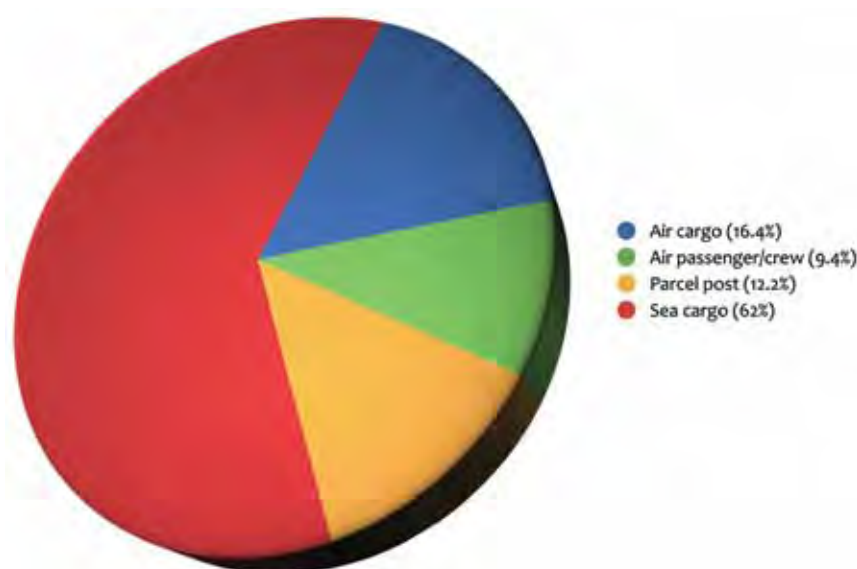
Since 2000–01, the postal stream has continued to account for over 70 per cent of the number of cocaine detections at the Australian border. In 2009–10, parcel post accounted for 73.9 per cent of detections by number. Methods of cocaine concealment identified during this reporting period included in fishing line spools, tiles and ceramics, clothing, swallowed internally, sewn into bags, carpets and impregnated into rubber products (see Figure 39).

**FIGURE 39:** Number of cocaine detections at the Australian border, as a proportion of total detections, by method of importation, 2009–10 (Source: Australian Customs and Border Protection Service)



By weight, a single sea cargo detection of 240 kilograms in 2009–10 accounted for 62 per cent of the total weight of cocaine detections at the Australian border (see Figure 40).

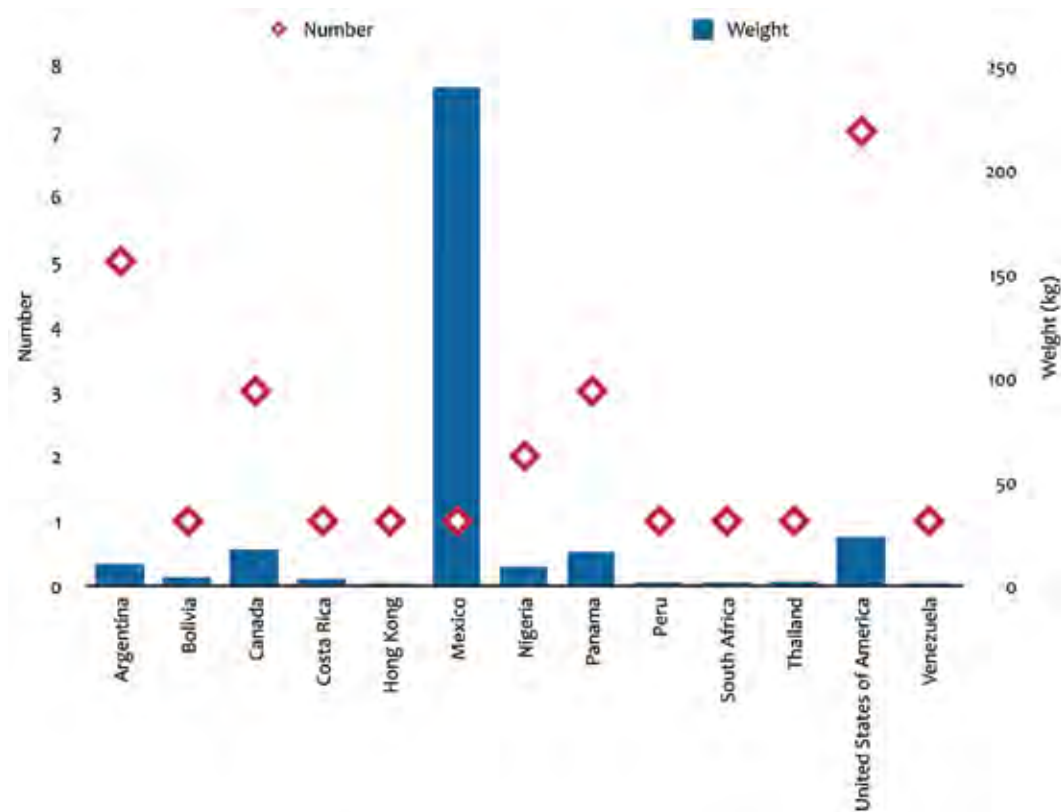
**FIGURE 40:** Weight of cocaine detections at the Australian border, as a proportion of total detections, by method of importation, 2009–10 (Source: Australian Customs and Border Protection Service)



## EMBARKATION POINTS

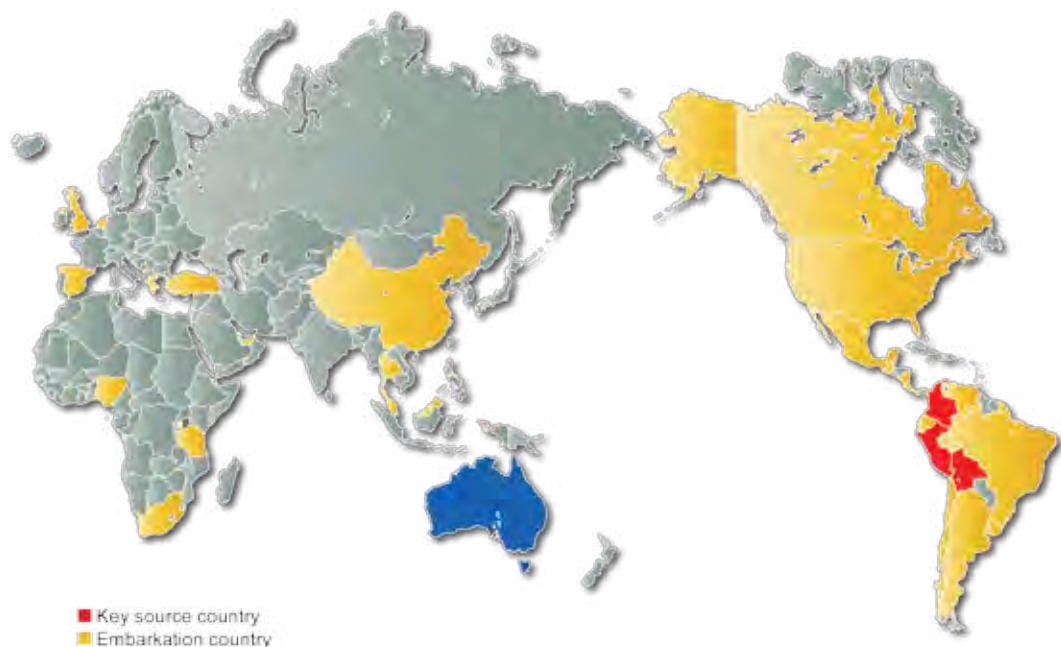
During 2009–10, the most commonly detected embarkation points for cocaine were from North America, followed by Central and South America. Mexico was the prominent country of embarkation by weight for individual importations of cocaine over 1 kilogram and accounted for 62 per cent of the total weight of attempted importations. However, by number, Mexico only accounted for 1 per cent. Other prominent embarkation points for detected individual importations of cocaine over 1 kilogram (in aggregate weight order) included the US, Canada, Panama, Argentina and Nigeria (see Figure 41).

**FIGURE 41:** Country of embarkation for individual cocaine importations of more than 1 kilogram detected at the Australian border, 2009–10 (Source Australian Customs and Border Protection Service)



There has been an expansion in the number of embarkation countries for cocaine importations into Australia over the past decade. Despite a reduction in the number of countries of embarkation from 46 in 2008–09 to 30 in 2009–10, this is still higher than the 22 countries recorded in 1999–2000. Figure 42 illustrates the key source countries and embarkation points of cocaine detected at the Australian border in 2009–10.

**FIGURE 42:** Key source countries and embarkation points of cocaine detected at the Australian border, 2009–10



## DRUG PROFILING

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) Australian Illicit Drug Data Centre (AIDDC) is a forensic drug profiling program used to identify regions of origin and manufacturing trends for samples submitted from seizures made at the Australian border. The program also allows for comparisons within and between seizures to identify distinct batches of drugs or potentially demonstrate links between groups involved in illicit drug manufacture or trafficking. However, only certain drug types are examined and not every seizure of drugs at the Australian border is analysed or profiled.<sup>1</sup>

The figures in Table 11 and Table 12 represent cocaine profiling results identifying the geographic origin of the coca-leaf used in the production of the drug. While cocaine profiled as ‘Colombian’ continues to form the largest proportion of analysed seizures by weight, results for the first half of 2010 indicate an increase in the proportion of cocaine being sourced from Peru. It should be noted that ‘unclassified’ figures include samples that are currently undergoing profiling, as well as samples for which a geographic origin could not be determined through existing profiling techniques.

**TABLE 11:** Geographical origin of coca leaf used to produce cocaine as a proportion of the total bulk weight of analysed AFP seizures, 2007–June 2010

Year	Colombian %	Peruvian %	Bolivian %	Unclassified %
Jan–Jun 2010	63.9	34.4	0.7	0.9
2009	91.3	6.8	<0.1	1.9
2008	95.1	4.7	–	0.2
2007	86.3	10.6	0.4	2.7

Source: Australian Federal Police 2010, Australian Illicit Drug Data Centre.

The data in Table 12 is based on the same analytical samples used as the basis for Table 11, but is organised in terms of seizures rather than actual bulk weight. The presence of ‘mixed’ seizures highlights the existence of shipments where more than 1 type of cocaine was present (for example, cocaine with ‘Colombian’ and ‘Peruvian’ origin within a single shipment). By number, the proportion of analysed cocaine from Colombia has decreased between 2008 and 2009, while the proportion of Peruvian cocaine has increased. The results from analysis conducted in the first 6 months of 2010 indicate this trend has continued.

**TABLE 12:** Geographical origin of coca leaf used to produce cocaine as a proportion of analysed AFP seizures, 2007–June 2010

Year	Colombian %	Peruvian %	Bolivian %	Mixed %	Unclassified %
Jan–Jun 2010	36.2	36.2	4.2	6.4	17.0
2009	44.9	32.7	2.0	10.2	10.2
2008	67.3	28.6	–	–	4.1
2007	61.7	23.3	1.7	9.9	3.4

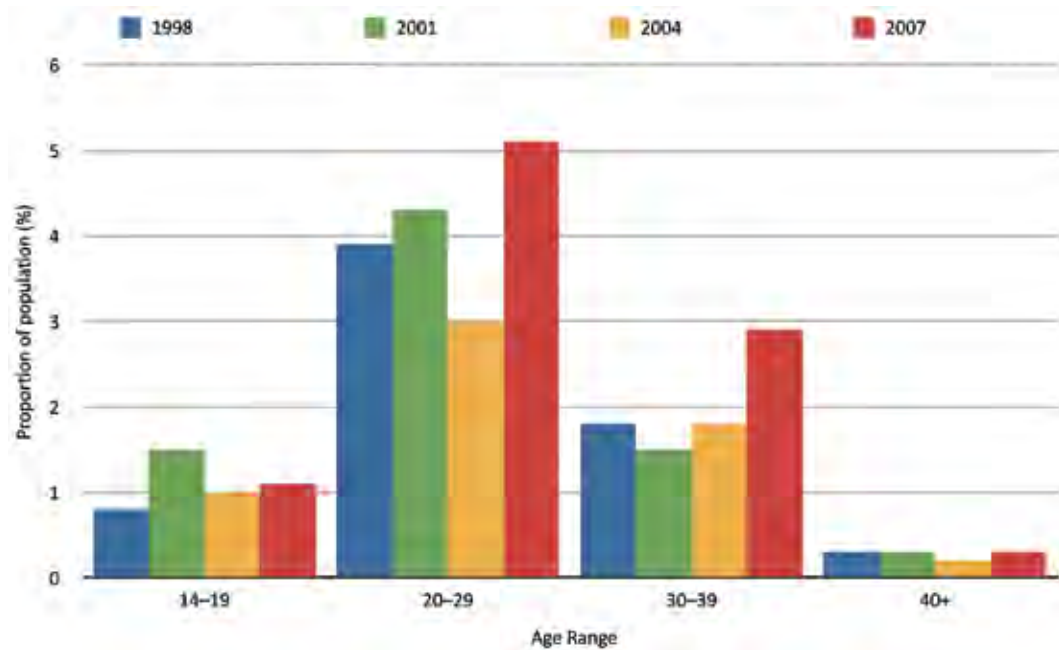
Source: Australian Federal Police 2010, Australian Illicit Drug Data Centre.

<sup>1</sup> In examining AIDDC figures, note that they do not reflect the total weight of a particular drug seized in each year, but only those samples submitted for analysis. There is typically a lag of several months between the seizure and receipt of profiling results. Additionally, the absence of similar data for street-level seizures in Australia makes it difficult to extrapolate the impact of any observed trends on drugs reaching consumers.

## DOMESTIC MARKET INDICATORS

According to the 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS), 1.6 per cent of the Australian population had used cocaine in the 12 months preceding the interview (recent use), the highest level reported since 1993. The 20–29 year old age group has consistently reported the highest rate of recent use, increasing from 3.9 per cent in 1998 to 5.1 per cent in 2007 (see Figure 43) (AIHW 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008).

**FIGURE 43:** Recent cocaine use as a proportion of the Australian population, 1998–2007 (Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008)



In a 2009 national study of regular injecting drug users, 21 per cent of respondents reported cocaine use in the 6 months preceding interview (recent use), the majority of which reported injection as the method of administration. Recent use of cocaine remained most common among participants in New South Wales. Cocaine powder continues to be the most commonly reported form of the drug used, with minimal reported use of crack cocaine (Stafford & Burns 2010).

In a 2009 national study of regular ecstasy users, 39 per cent of respondents reported cocaine use in the 6 months preceding interview (recent use), an increase from 36 per cent in 2008. Early findings from the 2010 national study indicate this trend is continuing, with 48 per cent of regular ecstasy users reporting recent cocaine use, the highest proportion since the survey began in 2003 (Sindicich et al 2009, Sindicich & Burns 2010, NDARC 2010).

## PRICE

Nationally the price of a gram of cocaine ranged between \$250 and \$500 in 2009–10. The price per gram remained relatively stable in most jurisdictions, with the exception of Victoria, which reported the greatest increase. After decreasing in price to between \$150 and \$200 a gram in 2008–09, the price in Victoria returned to \$300 per gram in 2009–10. In 2008–09, the price per ounce<sup>2</sup> of cocaine in Victoria spiked at \$11 000, decreasing to \$8 200 in 2009–10. The price range for an ounce of cocaine expanded in Western Australia, from between \$8 000 and \$12 000 in 2008–09 to between \$6 500 and \$20 000 in 2009–10. South Australia reported an increase in the price per kilogram for cocaine, from between \$150 000 and \$180 000 in 2008–09 to between \$240 000 and \$260 000 in 2009–10.

## PURITY

Figure 44 illustrates fluctuations in the annual median purity of cocaine in Australia since 2000–01. During the past decade, the median purity of analysed cocaine samples nationally has ranged from 3 per cent to 68.8 per cent. In 2009–10, New South Wales and Queensland were the only jurisdictions to record an increase in the median purity of cocaine. In Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, the median purity decreased by almost 50 per cent.

**FIGURE 44:** Annual median purity of cocaine samples, 2000–01 to 2009–10

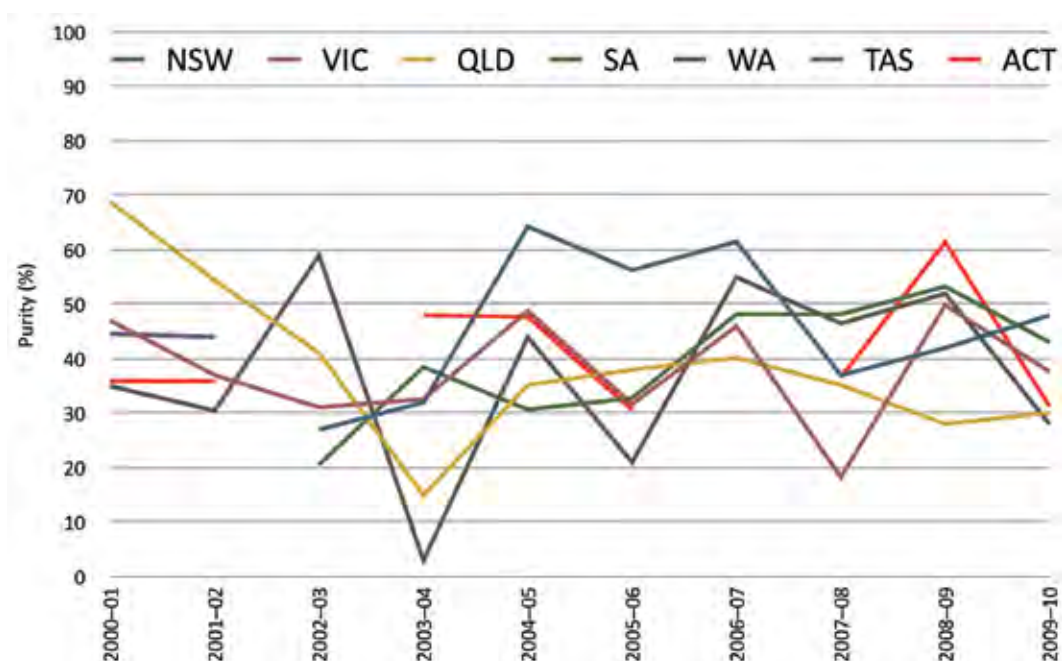
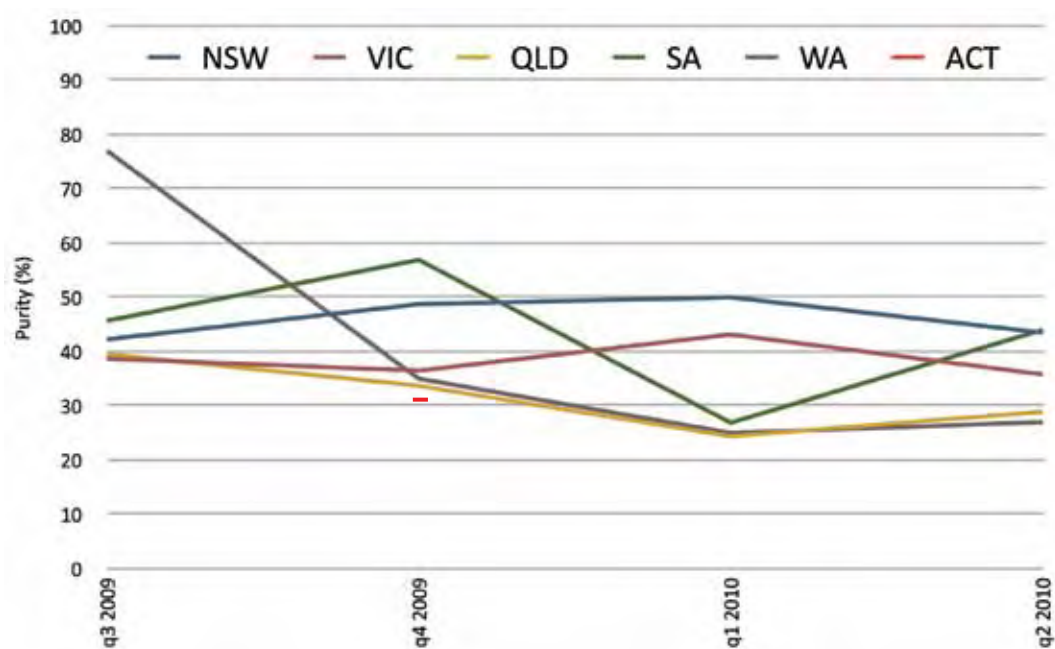


Figure 45 illustrates the median purity of analysed cocaine samples on a quarterly basis for 2009–10. During the reporting period, the median purity of cocaine ranged from 25 per cent to 77 per cent, with Western Australia reporting both the highest and lowest median purity in 2009–10.

<sup>2</sup> An ounce equates to approximately 28 grams.

**FIGURE 45:** Quarterly median purity of cocaine samples, 2009–10

## AVAILABILITY

In a 2009 national study of regular injecting drug users, 81 per cent of respondents reported cocaine as being easy or very easy to obtain. However, early findings from the 2010 study indicate a decrease in cocaine availability with 63 per cent reporting the drug as easy or very easy to obtain (NDARC 2010; Stafford & Burns 2010).

Conversely, reporting on the availability of cocaine in a national study of regular ecstasy users has remained relatively stable, with 58 per cent of respondents describing cocaine as easy or very easy to obtain in 2009, compared with 60 per cent in 2010 (NDARC 2010; Sindich & Burns 2010).

## SEIZURES AND ARRESTS

In 2009–10, the number of national cocaine seizures increased, while the weight of seizures decreased. The number of seizures increased from 1 217 in 2008–09 to 1 517 in 2009–10 and is now the highest on record. The weight of national cocaine seizures has continued to decline since 2007–08. In this reporting period, the weight of seizures decreased by 33.3 per cent, from 591.9 kilograms in 2008–09 to 394.8 kilograms in 2009–10 (see Figure 46).

**FIGURE 46:** National cocaine seizures, by weight and number, 2000–01 to 2009–10


In 2009–10, New South Wales reported an increase in the number of cocaine seizures and continues to account for the greatest proportion of national seizures. Victoria and the Northern Territory were the only jurisdictions to record decreases in the number of cocaine seizures. Western Australia recorded the greatest percentage increase of 116.9 per cent, increasing from 59 seizures in 2008–09 to 128 seizures in 2009–10.

Since 2005–06, New South Wales has accounted for the greatest proportion of the weight of national cocaine seizures. However, during 2009–10, the weight of cocaine seized in New South Wales decreased by 56.3 per cent. While Tasmania and Queensland recorded the greatest percentage increases in 2009–10, Victoria accounted for the greatest proportion of the weight of national cocaine seizures during this reporting period (see Table 13).

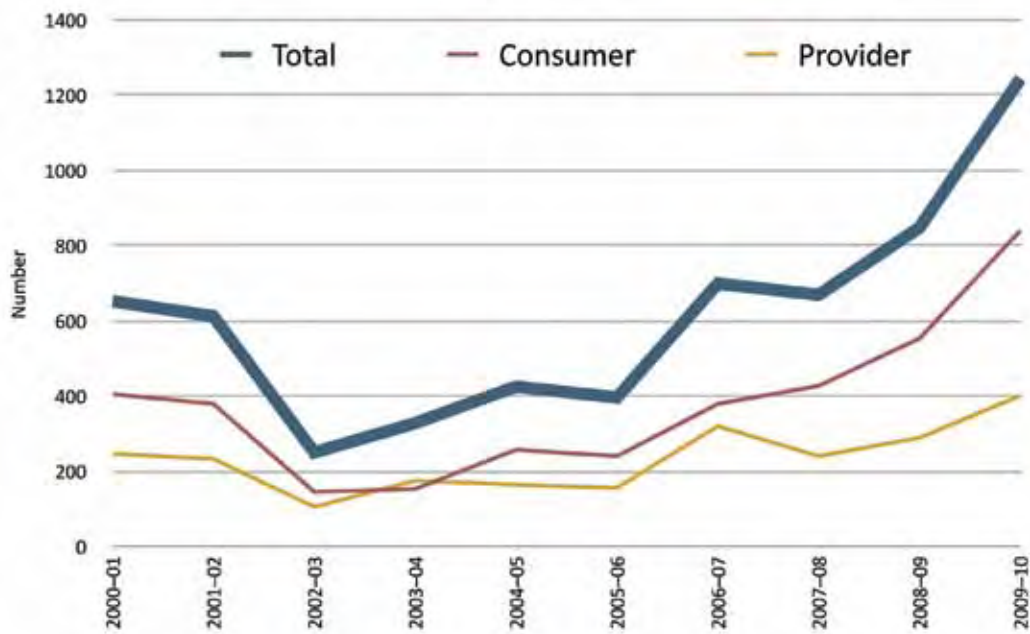
**TABLE 13:** Number, weight and percentage change of national cocaine seizures, 2008–09 and 2009–10

State/territory <sup>a</sup>	Number			Weight (grams)		
	2008–09	2009–10	% change	2008–09	2009–10	% change
New South Wales	845	1 069	26.5	341 883	149 395	-56.3
Victoria	116	113	-2.6	243 268	233 644	-4.0
Queensland	161	167	3.7	3 020	6 430	112.9
South Australia	10	16	60.0	391	755	93.1
Western Australia	59	128	116.9	2 992	3 760	25.7
Tasmania	2	4	100.0	7	796	11 271.4
Northern Territory	6	1	-83.3	235	13	-94.5
Australian Capital Territory	18	19	5.6	197	19	-90.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 217</b>	<b>1 517</b>	<b>24.7</b>	<b>591 993</b>	<b>394 812</b>	<b>-33.3</b>

a Includes seizures by state/territory police and AFP for which a valid seizure weight was recorded.

Figure 47 illustrates the number of national cocaine arrests since 2000–01. The number of cocaine arrests is currently the highest on record. In the past decade arrests have almost doubled, increasing from 652 in 2000–01 to 1 244 in 2009–10. Since 2006–07, the disparity between consumer and provider arrests has been increasing. In 2009–10, consumers accounted for 68 per cent of national cocaine arrests.

**FIGURE 47:** Number of national cocaine arrests, 2000–01 to 2009–10



In 2009–10, the number of national cocaine arrests increased by 46.7 per cent. The Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory were the only 2 jurisdictions to record a decrease in cocaine arrests. While Tasmania recorded the largest percentage increase, the number of arrests remains low. The number of cocaine arrests in New South Wales increased by 53.6 per cent, from 474 in 2008–09 to 728 in 2009–10. This is the highest number of arrests for a single jurisdiction during the last decade (see Table 14).

**TABLE 14:** Number and percentage change of national cocaine arrests, 2008–09 and 2009–10

State/territory <sup>a</sup>	Arrests		% change
	2008–09	2009–10	
New South Wales	474	728	53.6
Victoria	148	196	32.4
Queensland	154	204	32.5
South Australia	13	24	84.6
Western Australia	40	80	100.0
Tasmania	1	3	200.0
Northern Territory	4	1	-75.0
Australian Capital Territory	14	8	-42.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>848</b>	<b>1244</b>	<b>46.7</b>

a The arrest data for each state and territory includes Australian Federal Police data.

## NATIONAL IMPACT

While profiling data indicates the continued prominence of Colombia as a source country for cocaine seized at the Australian border, results from the first 6 months of 2010 indicate a trend towards an increasing proportion of cocaine sourced from Peru. Colombia remains the largest global producer of cocaine, however, it has seen a dramatic decline in the area under cultivation over the past decade, from 163 300 hectares in 2000 to 68 000 hectares in 2009. In contrast, Peru has seen a steady increase in the area under cultivation and now accounts for 38 per cent of global cultivation.

The number of cocaine border detections decreased from 359 in 2008–09 to 291 in 2009–10, with nearly three-quarters detected in the postal stream. The total weight of detections decreased from 506 kilograms in 2008–09 to 386.6 kilograms in 2009–10. In this reporting period a single sea cargo detection, which embarked from Mexico, accounted for 62 per cent of the total weight of cocaine detected at the Australian border.

Nationally, the number of cocaine seizures and arrests increased in 2009–10, while the weight of seizures decreased. New South Wales remains a prominent state for cocaine seizures, however, Victoria accounted for the greatest proportion of the weight of national cocaine seizures in this reporting period. National cocaine arrests increased in 2009–10 and have almost doubled since 2000–01. In 2009–10, New South Wales reported 728 arrests, the highest number of cocaine arrests ever recorded for a single jurisdiction.

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