

# IDEC: Setting the drug war regional strategy



*The Ninth Annual International Drug Enforcement Conference being opened in Cartagena by President Gaviria of Colombia.*

## 'Many people are surprised to hear Australia has a drug problem'

Region and brings together the various major drug enforcement agencies from the countries of North and South America and the Caribbean, as well as observers from many European countries and international organisations.

Australia and Japan were the only countries to attend from the Asia Pacific Region.

"Attendance at this type of conference is extremely valuable for the AFP," Superintendent Schramm said. "It provides the opportunity to better understand developments in the Region and gives us the opportunity to meet the many law enforcement officials on whom the AFP relies for co-operation and assistance.

"It also gives us the chance to show that Australia is interested

in the Region," Superintendent Schramm said.

"Many people are surprised to hear that Australia has a drug problem but are happy to co-operate when they realise we have permanent police representation in the region."

The decision to hold this year's conference in Cartagena, the city where in 1989 US President Bush met a number of his South American counterparts to plan a regional political strategy against the problems of cocaine trafficking and abuse, was taken at last year's conference in Mexico City at a time when the 'cocaine war' involving the so-called Colombian 'cartels' was at its height.

Some doubts were held at the time that such a large meeting could be held in safety, but the Colombian authorities mounted a massive security operation and the conference went without incident.

The problems of international cocaine trafficking and the development of techniques to assist the identification of money laundering and asset seizure were among a wide range of matters discussed at the Ninth Annual International Drug Enforcement Conference (IDEC) in Colombia recently.

The conference was attended by more than 100 delegates from 36 countries. Australia was represented by **Detective Superintendent David Schramm**, of the Buenos Aires Liaison Office, which has responsibility for AFP law enforcement liaison within the South American sub-continent.

The venue for the conference was the historical Colombian city of Cartagena, once famous as a haven for pirates who roamed the Caribbean in search of treasure, but in recent times better known as a busy port from which major consignments of cocaine are shipped to the markets of the United States and Europe.

The conference, held annually, is the largest of its kind in the

"Some of the many American and European holidaymakers who flock to the Caribbean coast at this time of the year to escape the northern hemisphere winter would not have expected their holiday to include a navy frigate anchored offshore, circling helicopters over their hotel or police security checks on all roads and people entering the city," Superintendent Schramm said. "But it certainly made the delegates feel more at ease."

The conference also coincided with the centenary celebration of the formation of the Colombia National Police who were hosts.

The PNC performs a broad range of police work throughout the country, but probably is best known internationally for its front-line role against guerrilla groups and the so-called 'drug cartels'.

An Australian could almost feel at home in the presence of PNC members as their uniform includes a slouch hat, complete with one side turned up 'digger' style.

The armed forces also have a major role, as does the Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad (national security service), which is responsible for the Colombian ICPO-Interpol National Central Bureau. The latter have been actively involved in the much publicised extradition of Colombian cocaine traffickers to the United States.

While people read about record



*A haul of 10.2 tonnes of cocaine, seized this year in Colombia. Two Colombian National Police were killed during investigations leading to the seizure.*

cocaine seizures in various parts of the world, Colombian seizures caused these to pale by comparison. In the two years 1989-90, a total of 80 tonnes, or 800 000kg, of cocaine, as well as a further 13 tonnes of cocaine base, were seized by the PNC.

"This year looks like following the trend with already close to 30 tonnes being seized in the first four months," Superintendent Schramm said. "Earlier this year one seizure netted 10.2 tonnes, which after extensive investigation was located buried on a farm belonging to a 'cartel' member. In addition, over 600 laboratories, with huge quantities of chemicals, have been located and destroyed over the past two years."

Colombia once was a major producer of cannabis, but after extensive law enforcement efforts during the early 1970s, the seizure rate dropped dramatically, with less than 1 000 tonnes being seized in 1990, compared with more than 5000 in 1984.

The price of this success had not come cheaply.

"While police members throughout the world know that danger is a part of the job, in Colombia the word 'danger' takes on new meaning," he said. "In the past ten years, over 2200 PNC members have been killed in the line of duty — 600 of them in the past two years, along with some 2500 injured."

In the investigation, which resulted in the seizure this year of 10.2 tonnes, two PNC members were captured, tortured and killed by cocaine traffickers.

"In this incident the culprits were caught in neighbouring Venezuela and handed over to the Colombian authorities for prosecution — an example of the improved level of co-operation over recent years," he said.

"The Colombian National Police is a very professional organisation, in which its members go about their job in the face of constant danger. When you see the task they have and the manner in which they approach it, you cannot help but respect them. They really are at the front line." •



*A heap of seized drugs being burned with the help of incendiary devices.*