

Customs excels in 2001-02

By Stephanie Sammut*

Record drug seizures, the implementation of phase one of Customs project to re-engineer its cargo management processes, construction of container and pallet examination facilities and strengthened civil maritime surveillance were significant highlights in 2001-02, according to the *Customs Annual Report*, tabled in the Senate in October.

"The report again highlights the excellent job that Customs is doing in facilitating trade and the movement of people and in protecting Australia's borders," Customs CEO Lionel Woodward said.

A record quantity of drugs was seized by Customs over 2001-02 – an increase of four tonnes on the previous year – with several record seizures.

"Almost three tonnes of cannabis resin was seized in Melbourne in August 2001 – the biggest seizure of the drug ever made in Victoria," Mr Woodward said. "Australia's biggest seizure of cocaine of 938kg was detected in July 2001 in Dulverton Bay, Western Australia."

Enhancements to Customs border-protection capabilities in the 12 months included the commencement of construction of container and pallet examination facilities in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Fremantle. The Melbourne facility is now operational.

Customs also assisted with the introduction of increased quarantine-intervention measures during the year following outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in Britain and other parts of

Europe. Initiatives included x-ray examination of almost all passenger baggage, international mail and high-volume/low-value air cargo not selected for other forms of examination or assessment.

"Customs made significant progress on the cargo management re-engineering project, implementing phase one on 1 July 2002 with key changes for importers and exporters being introduced," Mr Woodward said.

"This project, along with border protection, will continue to be a key priority over the coming year."

The report also highlights the work done by Customs to deliver the Federal Government's commitment to increasing maritime civil surveillance and response activity, strengthened through new arrangements with the Australian Defence Force under Operation Relex.

Under this arrangement, Customs provides support to Defence on the activity of suspected illegal entrant vessels within a defined area.

"Customs maintains the lead role in all other activity within this area, and for all surveillance and response activities in all other maritime approaches to Australia," Mr Woodward said.

Customs Operation Eddington was devised to complement Operation Relex.

"This operation provides intensified coverage from Ashmore Islands to the north-west of the Northern Territory and east to the Torres Strait," he said.

The Customs National Marine Unit also recruited additional marine crew to enable an increase in the number of days Customs patrol vessels are at sea

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to 2400 a year. In the year, the vessels achieved 1356 sea days, which exceeded the year's target of 1200 sea days.

"The effectiveness of Customs arrangement for coastal surveillance is evident as no suspect illegal entrant vessels reached the Australian mainland before detection in 2001-02," he said.

More than 17 million people were processed through international airports and seaports during the year.

Import entries decreased by 1 per cent with 2.823 million entries lodged and export entries increased by 2 per cent with 1.456 million entries lodged.

The annual report includes profiles

of Customs staff (see article page 34), reflecting the diversity of Customs as an organisation.

"It is through the hard work, commitment and professionalism of all Customs staff that we are able to deliver our outcome and outputs to government and the Australian community, along with meeting the new demands and challenges of increased quarantine intervention and counter-terrorism activities," Mr Woodward said.

The *Customs Annual Report* is available online at www.customs.gov.au. Performance highlights from the report are also available online.



Locations of Customs offices in Australia and Cargo Management Industry target dates - just two of the 45 figures contained within the 200 pages of the 2001-2002 Customs Annual Report.