

PACE overtakes PASS

Customs will soon replace one of its oldest and, for many years, most effective information systems in favour of a new, faster and more efficient system for clearing passengers.

To be known as PACE, it will maintain Customs' place as a world leader in effective border management.

In July 1998, PACE (Passenger Analysis, Clearance and Evaluation) system will take over from PASS (the Passenger Automatic Selection System) at Australia's international airports.

During its lifetime PASS has been continually enhanced to accommodate emerging technological advances. Initiatives such as Advance Passenger Clearance and Electronic Travel Authorities have necessitated that PASS be upgraded. A recent example was the introduction of document readers linked to PASS to satisfy the increasing demand for faster passenger facilitation.

PASS II is presently used by Customs at all international airports in Australia to process passengers. For the past 14 years this version of PASS has enabled Customs officers to make fast and accurate checks on all travellers arriving from or departing for overseas.

However, in 1995, a joint review by Customs and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) identified several reasons why PASS needed to be replaced. At the heart of the review team's recommendations was the fact that PASS was an ageing IT application. As such it was unlikely to be able to provide the necessary computer support in the future to facilitate the movement of passengers.

Customs and EDS Australia Pty Limited, a leader in the global information services industry, have signed a \$5.4 million contract to develop and install PACE. The new system will streamline the processing of travellers arriving in Australia by reducing waiting times while improving Australia's border security. In December 1997 EDS was awarded the contract for the provision of all computing services to Customs. (See 'Customs outsources all its information technology' page18.)

PACE will play an important part in Customs preparations for the large number of visitors to the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney.

Customs figures for 1995-96 show that 13.5 million international passengers arrived or left Australia, compared with 14.5m in 1996-97. This shows a growth of 7.5 per cent. By mid-2000, with the approach of the Sydney Olympic Games, the number is expected to rise even further.

As well as improving clearance functions, PACE will offer Customs improved levels of passenger analysis, leading to higher levels of compliance at the border. It will also provide improved management information.

PACE will be developed to provide access to the system 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It will enable processing of passengers away from the major international airports, which will assist processing of charter flights and cruise ships.

It will also be developed in conjunction with DIMA, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Federal Police and other agencies. It will have sophisticated risk management and analysis tools and will be linked to DIMA's system used to administer Australian visas and to the systems used to administer Australian and New Zealand passports.

Among the many attractions of PACE will be the simplicity of its operation and its provision of a flexible environment that will be capable of coping with the ever-changing environment of air and sea passenger transport.

The PACE project has been split into two phases. Phase One is concerned mainly with replacing the current features and attributes of PASS. This will involve the provision of new computer terminals for Customs officers. PACE will also be presented in the familiar Microsoft Windows colour format that exists on all Customs local area networks. Screens will be designed to ensure simple and clear use, and minimal keystrokes will be required to process a passenger.

Automated facilities, such as links to other systems and improved capture of data, will relieve Customs officers of more mundane activities. Officers will also have access to an in-built 'help' facility. If, for instance, an officer cannot remember how to process a resident from, say, Norfolk Island, PACE offers a drop-down menu selection to help in finding the required code.

Phase Two of the project will focus on the development of Information Management and Reporting. Current stand-alone applications such as PAXMAN, STOP and auto-CPCL will be integrated into PACE allowing far greater flexibility.

The gradual replacement of existing applications will take place throughout the year and PASS will be finally decommissioned before the end of this year.

Note: The title PACE, was suggested by Adelaide-based Customs officer, Ian Gray. He was presented with a plaque in appreciation of his appropriate suggestion.