

## New response needed to beat growing drug menace

The ever-growing volume of illegal drugs being seized by law enforcement and customs agencies around the globe has prompted the World Customs Organisation (WCO) to call for a "new response" from its 151 members.

Recent drug seizure statistics from Interpol, national law-enforcement agencies and from customs services around the world are collated and regularly presented in the WCO's Customs and Drugs Report, at WCO meetings and at joint WCO-Interpol press conferences.

Australia is represented at WCO meetings by the Australian Customs Service.

At a recent joint WCO-Interpol press conference held in Brussels, the WCO said that law enforcement agencies, such as customs and police, must continue to step up their fight against illegal drugs. The conference was told that law enforcement and customs agencies around the world seized 11 per cent more illegal drugs during 1999 than in 1998. A total of 4256 tonnes of illegal drugs was intercepted during 1999 compared with 3837 tonnes intercepted in 1998.

Seizures of illegal drugs by customs services alone increased by 21 per cent around the world during the same period. The total value of the illegal drugs that such customs intervention denied to international criminal syndicates during 1999 is estimated at \$60 billion. That is enough to buy a new \$20,000 car for every man, woman and child in Sydney or Melbourne.

Commenting on these latest figures, the WCO said that they

should send a clear message to political, economic and social authorities and hence to member States. "A new response must be given if there is still to be a hope of defeating this scourge," a spokesperson said.

Most seizures of illegal drugs involve opium, cannabis, heroin and cocaine. However seizures around the world of synthetic "psychotropic" drugs (including those commonly known as ecstasy and speed), and of the precursor chemicals which are used in the manufacture of a range of illegal drugs, increased even more dramatically during 1999. Interceptions of some varieties of 'psychotropic' drugs doubled during 1999 while others increased ten-fold.

Seizures of methamphetamine increased from 16 tonnes to 36 tonnes during the year while amphetamine seizures went up from 0.8 tonnes to 13 tonnes. Seizures of ecstasy increased from two tonnes to seven tonnes during the same period. World-wide, seizures of "precursor" chemicals (such as ephedrine and acetic anhydride) increased from 93 tonnes in 1998 to 179 tonnes in 1999.

By far the most commonly traded illegal drug remains cannabis. Seizures by law enforcement and customs agencies of cannabis, in its various forms, increased by more than 10 per cent during 1999 - from 3440 to 3800 tonnes during the year.

The next most commonly traded illegal drug around the world is cocaine. Total seizures of cocaine went up from 366 to 420 tonnes in 1999 - a 15 per cent increase. Total

seizures of heroin went up by 16 per cent - from 31 tonnes in 1998 to 36 tonnes in 1999.

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