

Customs in the media

Drugs, dangerous weapons, wildlife and credit card 'skimmers' are among recent seizures by Customs around Australia. Following are some of the most significant cases.

LARGE QUANTITIES OF DRUGS

In Melbourne, more than 24kg of MDMA (ecstasy) tablets from Belgium, with a street value of approximately \$4.7 million, were seized in Melbourne and three men arrested as a result of information received by the Customs Hotline number (1800 06 1800). Simultaneous search warrants were executed at four residential premises across Melbourne. Five other men were arrested over the importation of more than one tonne of MDMA (ecstasy) tablets.

The seizure, which had an approximate street value of more than \$250 million, was Australia's largest and one of the world's biggest single detections of the street-ready drug. In Sydney, four men were arrested and approximately 400kg of ephedrine, a pharmaceutical drug often used to make methamphetamine, commonly known as speed, were seized from a shipping container. Search warrants were executed at a warehouse and two other premises. Four people were charged.

In Brisbane, about 120,000 tablets containing the prohibited drug pseudoephedrine were seized from an air cargo shipment from Thailand. The consignment was declared as ceramic vases. A search warrant was executed at a property south of Brisbane. Three men were arrested.

In Cairns, Customs officers foiled an attempt to smuggle more than 25kg of cannabis in bags of sugar in an air cargo shipment from Papua New Guinea. A 22-year-old Australian was arrested.

An Adelaide operation involved the seizure of more than 115kg of heroin and the arrest of five men. It was a result of a 12-month investigation involving cooperation with law-enforcement authorities in Belgium, the Netherlands, China and Hong Kong. The drug was in two shipping containers, listed to be carrying plastic chairs, from China.

The containers were moved from Adelaide to Sydney before the seizure operation was completed. One of the men was arrested in Hong Kong.



DANGEROUS WEAPONS

Customs officers in Sydney intercepted an AK-47 assault rifle at the border and other weaponry during raids on business and residential addresses. It was in a registered post parcel from North Carolina, labelled "auto machine parts". The further weaponry included a single-barrel shotgun, three rifles and magazines.

In another operation, Customs raided five premises and seized 449 knives and daggers, 267 replica firearms and pistol lighters, 171 electric shock devices including stun guns, 88 bags of slingshot ballbearings, 86 slingshots, 75 sword sticks and 10 blowdarts. The investigation began after interception of two cartons containing 50 blowpipes and 12 pistol crossbows from Shanghai.

Another shipping container of illegal weapons including 10 stun guns, 52 push knives, 6 sling shots with arm braces, 10 knuckledusters, 12 items with concealed blades, 100 extendable batons, 8 soft air pistols, 12 flick knives, 60 butterfly knives, 20 star knives and 30 trench knives was discovered.

Customs investigators executed warrants on three retail outlets, a residential property, and a car, and a further 155 weapons were found.

In Perth, more than 500 terrifying illegal weapons were discovered by Customs in three separate seizures over a one-month period. The cache included 172 trench knives, 71 push knives, 161 knives with concealed blades, 13 daggers, 20 ornamental scabbards and more than 100 other weapons.

In Brisbane, Customs officers seized a consignment of 40 flick knives and 10 butterfly knives destined for the Sunshine Coast in a package declared as hunting equipment and fishing tackle. In another case, an Australian man was fined more than \$7,000 for attempting to import 50 dangerous finger claws declared as garments from Thailand. Intended for sale in stalls at Queensland country shows, they are capable of inflicting serious injury.

In Adelaide, a woman detected by Customs attempting to import 107 stun guns disguised as mobile phones through the Adelaide International Mail Centre was fined \$4,500. Customs investigators executed warrants on two properties in Adelaide, seizing an additional stun gun disguised as a mobile telephone. A gift shop in was among those properties searched.

In Melbourne, Customs officers prevented almost 2000 potentially dangerous BB guns (soft air firearms) from reaching the Canberra community. They were among a container of goods described as toys sent from China. Customs targeted possible importers following a seizure of similar weapons at a Canberra market.



WILDLIFE

A Sydney man, convicted of attempting to smuggle 23 Australian native birds eggs out of Australia, was jailed for two years with a non-parole period of 14 months. Customs officers discovered the eggs hidden in his underwear.

In Melbourne, two live South American emerald green tree boas destined for Adelaide were seized by Customs officers who examined a parcel from Sweden.

Customs officers at Melbourne International Airport discovered 51 live tropical fish concealed beneath the skirt of a female Australian passenger. A search warrant was executed on a house at Rosanna where another five fish were seized. It was

the second seizure of live fish at Melbourne Airport in a couple of months.

In Perth, an attempt to smuggle 24 turtles and a lizard out of Australia resulted in a Japanese man being fined more than \$24,000. Thirteen of the turtles died in the attempt. The man left the country within hours of the discovery but returned some time later and was arrested.

In Brisbane, an Australian man who attempted to smuggle 52 exotic bird eggs was sentenced to three years in jail. The eggs were concealed in a purpose-made body vest.

ILLEGAL CIGARETTES

A 28-year-old Sydney man was fined almost \$60,000 after pleading guilty to the attempted smuggling of approximately six million cigarettes and 390kg of manufactured tobacco. Customs investigators executed warrants on three properties. Customs estimated the value of the potential duty and GST the man had attempted to evade was more than \$1.5 million. In another case, Customs foiled an attempt to smuggle 6.5 tonnes of undeclared tobacco into Australia. It was one of the biggest seizures made by Customs and avoided evasion of Commonwealth duty and taxes amounting to approximately \$1.9 million. Search warrants were executed on several addresses in connection with the investigation.

In Melbourne, an Australian man was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in jail for attempting to evade duty and taxation payments of \$1.5 million. The sentencing followed an attempt in 2001 to smuggle more than seven million undeclared cigarettes. He was to serve 10 months before being released on a 20-month good behaviour bond.

Close to 10 million falsely labelled cigarettes with a street value of approximately \$2.2 million were seized as a result of information leading to the targeting of a container from China.

FRAUD

Officers at Sydney Airport prevented an alleged attempt to import material designed to "skim" the credit cards of unsuspecting consumers.

They searched the bags of three Chinese nationals from on a flight from Thailand, allegedly finding a credit card skimming device, a number of high-quality blank credit cards and software. Three passengers were later remanded.