



Above: A selection of weapons seized by Customs in Melbourne.



Above: Drugs concealed inside flower pots.

CUSTOMS IN THE MEDIA

Weapons, wildlife and drug seizures have all featured in the media in recent months. Matt Morrissey provides an overview of some of the stories that have grabbed the attention of the nation.

Drugs

- In August, a 45 year old man was extradited from Costa Rica by the Australian Government for his alleged role in importing 89 kilograms of cocaine into Australia in 2001. At the time of the seizure, the cocaine was worth approximately \$22.5 million.
- Customs officers in Sydney x-rayed a consignment of 946 boxes of flower pots from Mexico and discovered white powder concealed inside 21 of the flower pots. Presumptive testing of the powder indicated the presence of cocaine. Six men were later charged in relation to the importation of 35 kilograms of cocaine with a potential street value of up to \$35 million dollars.
- Also in Sydney, a 46 year old man was arrested and charged with importing 113 kilograms of MDMA (ecstasy) powder in a shipment of solar hot water systems sent from Israel.
- In South Australia, a 29 year old man was arrested for his alleged involvement in the importation of more than 40 litres of the date rape drug Gamma Butyrolactone (GBL), also known as 'fantasy'.
- In Perth, a 26 year old woman was charged with importing almost one kilogram of crystal methamphetamine (ice) after being stopped and searched by Customs officers. Three packets of the drug were allegedly found in the woman's underwear and could have represented more than 9000 individual street deals.
- At Australia Post's Melbourne Gateway Facility, Customs officers discovered approximately two kilograms of MDMA concealed within the bases of nine ceramic model houses in two parcels from the Netherlands.
- Two men were charged and 25 litres of chemicals seized after a makeshift crystal methamphetamine (ice) laboratory set up in a hotel room in Sydney's inner west was dismantled in May. The men were allegedly attempting to manufacture a quantity of crystal methamphetamine and intended to distribute the finished product. The chemicals could have produced up to 12 kilograms of ice with an estimated value of \$2.4 million.



Above: Snakes concealed in garden gnomes.



Above: Some of the many steroid tablets seized by Customs.



Precursors and Steroids

- In July, Customs confirmed that it had so far seized 1335 separate shipments of Performance and Image Enhancing Drugs (PIEDs) and charged 29 people across Australia since it first mounted Operation KASHA in 2006. The seizures included more than 90,000 tablets, 60,000 capsules, 4,000 vials and 650 ampules of PIEDs. There was also one of the biggest ever seizures by Customs of PIEDs with an individual shipment of more than 40kg of steroid powder detected in Sydney in March.
- A Brisbane couple was charged by Customs Investigators with 16 counts of importing the prohibited steroid clomifene citrate and six charges of importing Human Growth Hormone (HGH). In total, 40.5 grams of clomifene citrate was seized. The couple pleaded guilty and was fined more than \$14,000.
- Customs intercepted a number of parcels addressed to two brothers in Bondi in Sydney which housed glass vials containing liquid and a large number of tablets. Samples of the illegal importations were analysed and found to contain anabolic and androgenic substances. The brothers were fined a total of \$34,090 for illegally importing steroids into Australia.
- In Adelaide, a man was arrested and charged after Customs Investigators executed search warrants following the detection of a parcel declared as 'Health and Beauty Products' was found to contain 598 tablets that allegedly tested positive to ephedrine.

Illicit Cigarettes and Tobacco

- Customs officers in Sydney arrested and charged three men with smuggling offences after discovering more than four million undeclared cigarettes in a container from China. The cigarettes were detected when Customs officers at the Port Botany Container Examination Facility x-rayed a sea cargo container which was declared as being packed with tissue paper. The container was found to have 20 cartons of tissue paper behind which were 402 cartons of cigarettes.
- Also in Sydney, Customs arrested and charged two men with smuggling offences and trying to avoid paying more than \$2 million in duty after discovering nine million undeclared cigarettes in a sea cargo container from the Philippines. The container, which was declared as holding 2400 cartons of salted pretzels, was actually packed with 85 cardboard boxes full of cigarettes.

Child Pornography

- Child pornography offences have once again been a major focus of Customs Investigators with a conviction and two unrelated arrests being made within a two-week period.
- A conviction was handed down in August to a 22 year old Australian man who was fined \$9000 after being found guilty in Perth Magistrates Court for smuggling child pornography.
- Earlier in August, a 46 year old man was



Above: Dangerous weapons seized in Adelaide and Melbourne.

questioned by Customs officers when he arrived at Perth International Airport. During a search of the passenger's baggage, Customs officers located a laptop computer. Officers questioned the man regarding the contents of the computer, which was allegedly found to contain images depicting child pornography. The matter was referred to Customs Investigators who arrested the man and charged him with importing prohibited goods in contravention of *Regulation 4A of the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956 and Section 233BAB of the Customs Act 1901*.

- The second arrest occurred in Sydney, when Customs Investigators arrested and charged.

Dangerous Weapons

- In Melbourne, Customs officers uncovered a major weapons smuggling operation, seizing more than 900 potentially lethal weapons in one of Customs biggest weapons seizures this year. A targeted search of a container at the Melbourne Container Examination Facility revealed 408 prohibited items including 96 daggers, 96 trench knives and 216 batons with concealed blades. Subsequent search and seizure warrants were executed on residential and commercial premises in Victoria where Customs Investigators seized another 530 prohibited items.

- In Adelaide, Customs seized a large quantity of dangerous weapons that could have found their way into the South Australian community. The seizure, which contained 258 throwing axes, 137 daggers, 113 throwing knives, 70 trench knives, 55 push knives, 33 concealable blades, 96 replica handguns, 76 replica flintlock pistols and 22 replica flintlock rifles, was found in a container declared as being filled with 'arts and crafts'.

Wildlife

- Customs and Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service officers foiled two attempts to smuggle snakes and lizards into Australia through the mail.
- In the first attempt, two snakes and three lizards were concealed in the hollow areas of three ceramic garden gnomes. In the second attempt, five snakes and five lizards were hidden in pottery figures and ornaments. Both packages had been sent from the UK and had been declared as gifts.
- In the Northern Territory, Customs Investigators charged a 44 year old Groote Eylandt (Alyangula) woman who allegedly tried to export the skull of a protected dugong. The dugong is a protected species under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).