



Research Note 4: Benchmarking Drug Seizures

Summary

Benchmarking of Australia's drug law enforcement effort suggests that over the period 1997-2000, Australia generally outperformed North America, Europe and the world as a whole. This comparison of drug seizure rates was based upon the number of kilograms seized per million persons of population. The Australian Federal Police has played a major role in the detection and seizure of these drugs. Caution is advised in interpreting the results as the environments within which law enforcement agencies operate vary widely.

Aim

Australia's drug law enforcement efforts comprise many aspects including the disruption of organised crime, deterrence of illicit drug importations and the seizure of drugs both at the border and within Australia. The current study considers the efficiency of Australia's law enforcement agencies in seizing illicit drugs by benchmarking Australia's performance against that of overseas law enforcement agencies in North America, Europe and the world.

This study is an extension of an earlier report benchmarking drug law enforcement by the Australian Federal Police (AFP). (See Research Note 1.) The initial report focused on the AFP in its Federal role relating to the importation and exportation of drugs with the former being of greater importance. The AFP's performance in the interdiction of heroin was compared against the collaborative efforts of law enforcement agencies in North America and Europe. While the AFP plays a significant role in the seizure of drugs in Australia it is important to recognise that it is often in cooperation with the Australian Customs Service and State and Territory Police Services. The scope of the current report was widened to reflect more fully the results of this cooperation.

Results are reported for heroin, cocaine and amphetamine-type substances (ATS), which are the major drugs of importation. It should be noted that for domestic comparisons MDMA is included within ATS but excluded from international comparisons. An overview of the situation in Australia is presented followed by international comparisons.

DOMESTIC COMPARISONS

Seizure data for Australia was obtained from the Australian Illicit Drug Report 2000-01 produced by the former Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence (now Australian Crime Commission).

Statistics are reported for the financial year 2000-01. It should be noted that some double counting of seizures may occur from joint operations of the AFP and State and Territory Police Services.

Table 1 shows the amount of heroin, cocaine and ATS seizures made by the AFP and State and Territory Police Services in 2000-01.

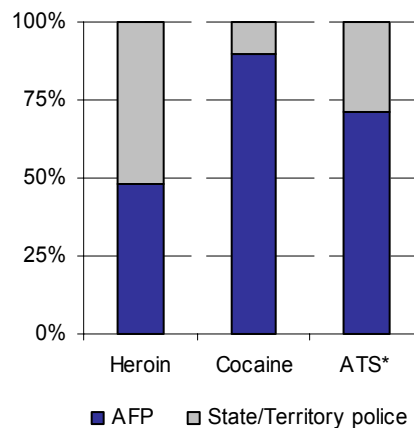
Table 1. Drug seizures (kilograms)

	Heroin	Cocaine	ATS*
AFP	232	451	572
State/Territory police	248	52	229
Total	481	503	802

*includes MDMA

The majority of drugs seized in 2000-01 were by the AFP; specifically the AFP was responsible for 48% of heroin, 90% of cocaine and 71% of ATS seizures by weight (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Proportions of drugs seized by AFP and State/Territory police



*ATS seizures include MDMA.

Australian Federal Police

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

Australian's performance in detecting and seizing heroin, cocaine and ATS is compared with the performance of law enforcement agencies in the European Union (EU), Northern America and the world.

Methodology

It would be preferable to measure drug seizures as a proportion of total imports but directly estimating the amount of an illicit substance imported has obvious difficulties. In the absence of direct measures, proxies or indirect measures can be used. As a broad generalisation, one could suggest that the total amount of illicit drugs consumed is roughly proportionate to the population of a country. On that basis, the current paper compared the amount of illicit substance seized per 1,000,000 persons of resident population:

$$\text{Seizure rate} = \frac{1,000,000 * (\text{Kilograms seized})}{(\text{Resident population})}$$

This formula provides a uniform basis of comparison among nations or groups of nations. The formula assumes that countries with larger resident populations are likely to have a greater number of drug users. This can only be true within certain limits. Obviously, it is more likely to hold true for countries of similar cultural backgrounds, e.g. Europe, North America and Australia.

Data

Comparisons are based on calendar years and were made over a six-year period from 1995 to 2000 inclusive. Population figures were derived from the US Census Bureau.

All drug seizures were provided by the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs Global Illicit Drug Trends 2002 except for Australia where AFP seizure records differ significantly from that reported by the UN. In this case AFP seizure statistics, derived from the AFP's PROMIS database, were substituted. ATS seizures exclude MDMA as these are not reported in North America.

Table 2. Heroin, cocaine and ATS seizure rates 1995-2000

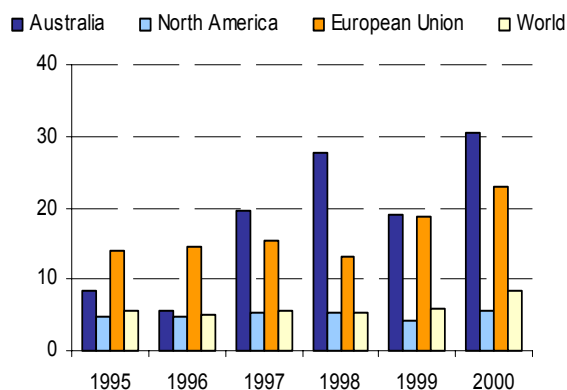
	Australia	North America	European Union	World
Heroin				
1995	8.5	4.9	14.0	5.5
1996	5.6	4.8	14.7	4.9
1997	19.7	5.4	15.3	5.7
1998	27.8	5.2	13.1	5.4
1999	19.0	4.2	18.7	6.0
2000	30.4	5.5	23.0	8.4
Cocaine				
1995	19.2	386.4	77.0	51.8
1996	5.8	440.0	54.6	57.1
1997	4.4	343.3	85.2	56.7
1998	16.4	383.3	113.8	64.5
1999	3.7	431.8	83.0	59.9
2000	75.0	318.8	113.4	55.1
ATS				
1995	34.1	3.4	4.3	1.1
1996	18.5	4.9	9.3	1.6
1997	10.9	4.7	13.9	2.0
1998	9.7	5.9	12.6	2.1
1999	14.6	8.6	10.2	5.4
2000	22.3	7.9	17.5	6.2

Results

Table 2 has heroin, cocaine and ATS seizure rates for Australia, North America, the European Union and the world for the years from 1995 to 2000.

- Australia's heroin seizure rate increased from 8.5 in 1995 to 30.4 in 2000. In 2000, Australia's seizure rate exceeded that of North America, the European Union and the world. Figure 2 shows the heroin seizure rates.
- In 1995, 1996, 1999 and 2000 Australia's ATS seizure rate exceeded that of North America, the European Union and the world. Despite this, the seizure rate actually declined from 34.1 in 1995 to 22.3 in 2000. The global seizure rate increased from 1.1 in 1995 to 6.2 in 2000.
- In 1995, the AFP cocaine seizure rate was well below the global average and that for the European Union and North America. Australia's seizures have tended to be volatile and showed a large increase in 2000. In that year the Australian seizure rate was 75.0, the global seizure rate was 55.1 and that of the European Union 113.4.

Figure 2. Heroin seizure rates Australia, North America, European Union and the world



Conclusion

Drug law enforcement is an obvious choice for international comparison as results can be easily quantified in terms of either kilograms or number of units seized, and is widely reported. Despite this ready comparability, caution is advised in interpreting the results as the environments within which law enforcement agencies operate vary widely. It must also be remembered that the results herein reflect one measure of Australia's performance in the area of drug law enforcement. When assessing the overall effectiveness of drug law enforcement other aspects, such as disruption of organised crime and deterrence effect, should be considered.

Nevertheless, benchmarking of Australia's drug law enforcement effort suggests that over the period 1997-2000, Australia consistently outperformed North America, Europe and the world as a whole in terms of the quantity of heroin and ATS seized per million resident population. The AFP has played a major role in the detection and seizure of these drugs. The reasons for the comparative lack of success with respect to cocaine are less clear and may relate to the relative popularity of that drug in Australia.