



COCAINE

KEY POINTS

- In 2007–08, the number of cocaine detections at the Australian border increased by 71 per cent.
- Over 80 per cent of the total weight of cocaine detected at the Australian border occurred in sea cargo shipments.
- The number of national cocaine seizures in 2007–08 is the highest on record.
- While cocaine arrests decreased in 2007–08, they remain at a high level.

MAIN FORMS

Cocaine is a stimulant drug produced from the leaves of the coca plant (*Erythroxylon coca*), which is native to South America. Cocaine increases the activity of the central nervous system and interferes with the uptake of dopamine—a chemical in the brain associated with pleasure (DEA, 2006).

Historically, cocaine was used as an anaesthetic in surgery but is now used illicitly for its euphoric and stimulating effects. In its most common form as a hydrochloride salt (*cocaine hydrochloride*), it appears as a white crystalline powder. It can be snorted, rubbed into the gums or injected once dissolved in water. ‘Crack’ is the name given to a freebase form of cocaine.¹ In this form, it appears as rock crystals that are heated and their vapours inhaled (DEA, 2006). Crack cocaine is not commonly encountered in Australia.

Long-term effects of cocaine use include insomnia, depression, anxiety, psychosis and cerebral atrophy. Regardless of the length or frequency of cocaine use, associated health risks include heart attack or stroke, which may lead to sudden death. When consumed in conjunction with alcohol, the associated health risks are compounded as the human liver manufactures a third substance called *cocaethylene*, which increases both the euphoric effect and risk of death (DrugInfo Clearinghouse, 2007; NIDA, 2007).

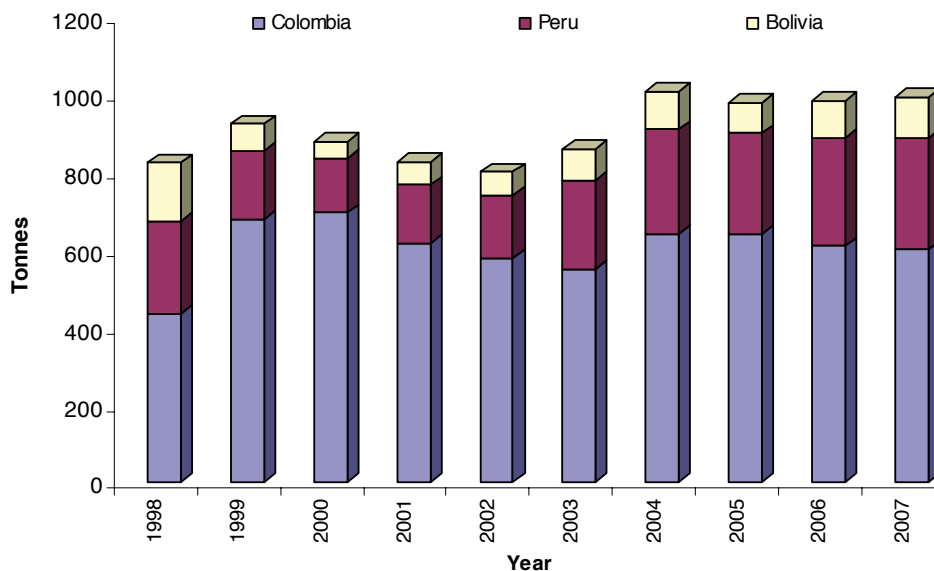
¹ The term ‘crack’ refers to the crackling sound the cocaine produces when heated.

INTERNATIONAL TRENDS

Since 2006 the total area under coca cultivation in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru has increased by 16 per cent to 181 600 hectares. Despite this, global coca cultivation is still lower than the record 221 300 hectares set in 2000. Potential cocaine production has only risen from 984 to 994 tonnes (see Figure 29). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Colombia accounts for approximately 60 per cent of global cocaine production (UNODC, 2008).

The majority of Andean cocaine still flows to North America.² However, cocaine is increasingly distributed and used in Western Europe and West Africa. Increased seizures in West Africa indicate this region's growing role as a transit point for South American cocaine trafficked to West and Central Europe. Decreased demand in North America has been largely offset by increased demand in South America, Western Europe and Western and Southern Africa (UNODC, 2008a). After cannabis, cocaine is now the second most commonly used illicit drug in the European Union (EMCDDA, 2007). An estimated 200–300 tonnes of cocaine is smuggled into Europe annually, a growing proportion of which is trafficked through West Africa (INCB, 2008). In 2007, the African Union adopted a five-year plan of action on drug control and crime prevention in response to increased trafficking, stockpiling and consumption of cocaine and other drugs on the continent (UN Information Service, 2007).

FIGURE 29: POTENTIAL PRODUCTION OF COCAINE, 1998 TO 2007



Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), World Drug Report 2008

² The term Andean is used to describe the South American region, which includes such countries as Bolivia, Colombia and Peru.



Foreign law enforcement agencies continue to record significant seizures of cocaine. In June 2008, foreign law enforcement made 10 separate seizures of cocaine totalling approximately 16.8 tonnes. This included 7 tonnes in Panama, 2.7 tonnes in Colombia and 2 tonnes in Mexico. Additionally, 381 kilograms of cocaine suspended in liquid was seized in Croatia. During 2007, the combined governments of Bolivia, Colombia and Peru destroyed 6858 laboratories producing either coca base or cocaine hydrochloride. In addition, these governments seized approximately 141 tonnes of cocaine hydrochloride and 77.7 tonnes of cocaine base/paste (INCB, 2008).

DOMESTIC TRENDS

AUSTRALIAN BORDER SITUATION

Cocaine detections at the Australian border in 2007–08 increased slightly in weight and significantly in number compared with 2006–07 (see Figure 30). In total, 649.3 kilograms of cocaine was detected in 627 detections. This represents a six per cent increase in weight and a 71 per cent increase by number.

The weight of cocaine detections in 2007–08 remained largely consistent with 2006–07. This is due to continued large detections in sea cargo, including two detections over 100 kilograms.

FIGURE 30: NUMBER AND WEIGHT OF COCAINE DETECTIONS AT THE AUSTRALIAN BORDER, 1997–98 TO 2007–08 (SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION SERVICE)

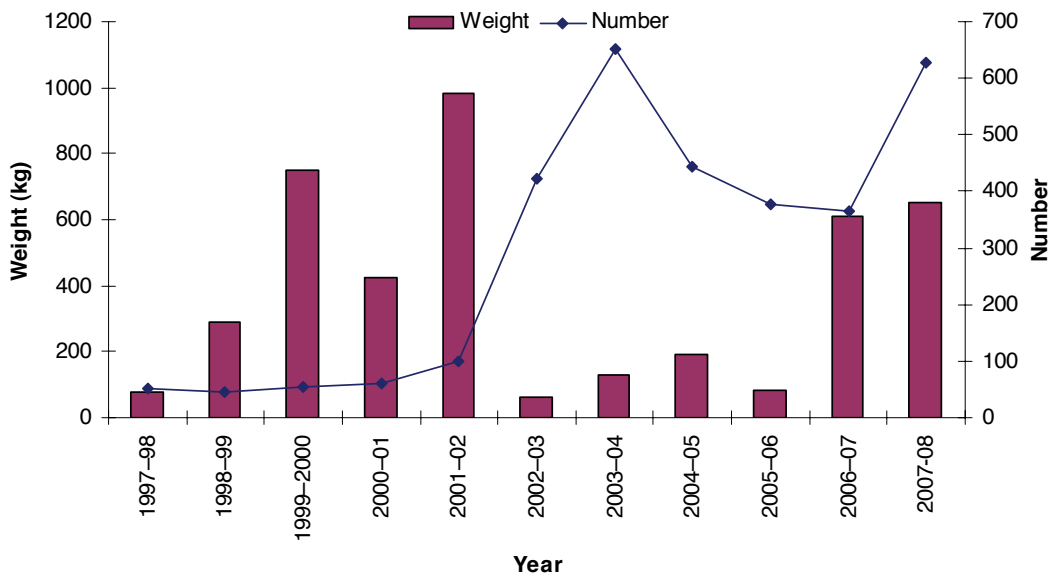


FIGURE 31: NUMBER OF COCAINE DETECTIONS AT THE AUSTRALIAN BORDER, AS A PROPORTION OF TOTAL DETECTIONS, BY METHOD OF IMPORTATION, 2007-08
(SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION SERVICE)

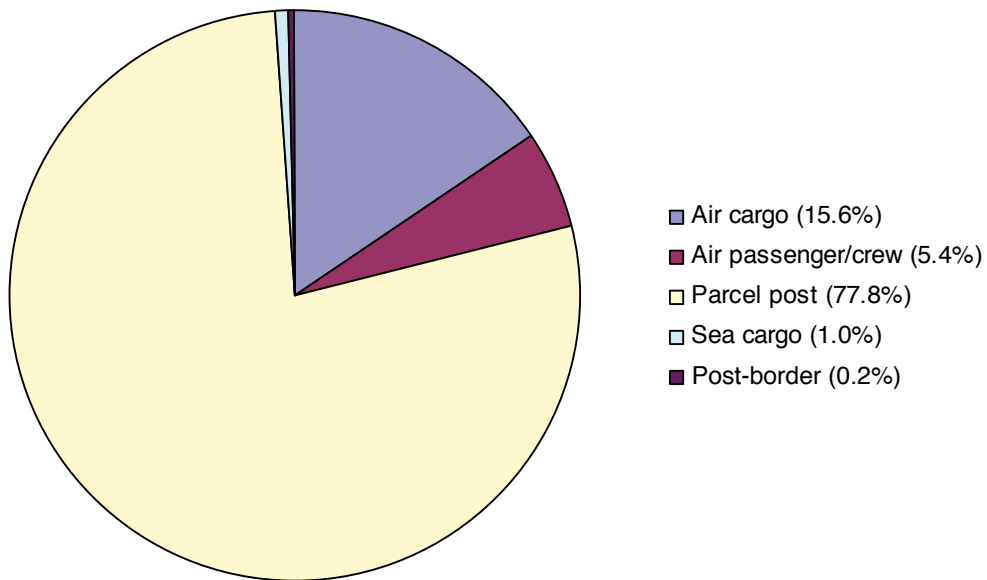
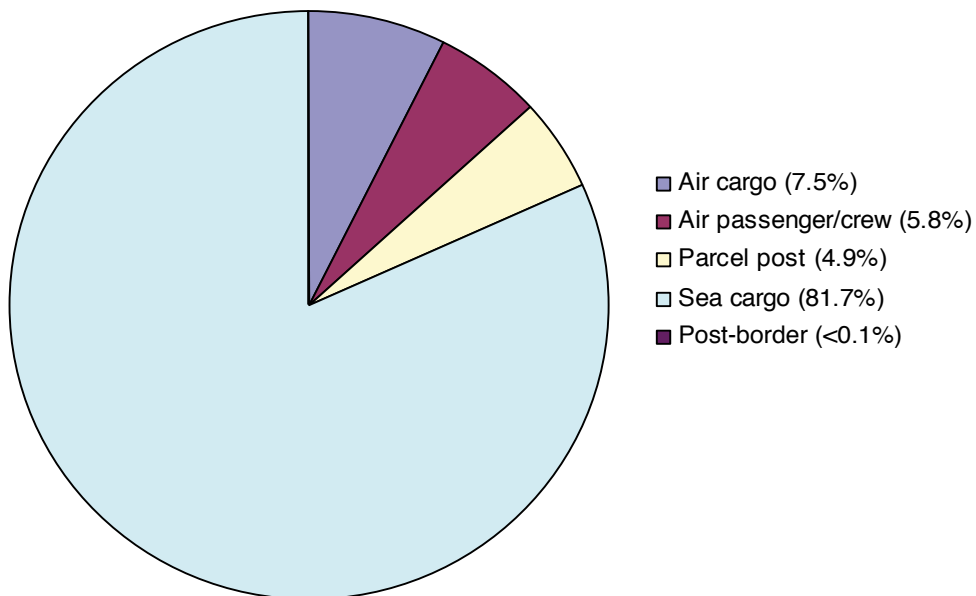



FIGURE 32: WEIGHT OF COCAINE DETECTIONS AT THE AUSTRALIAN BORDER, AS A PROPORTION OF TOTAL WEIGHT, BY METHOD OF IMPORTATION, 2007-08
(SOURCE: AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION SERVICE)





Importations of cocaine by parcel post and air cargo using the ‘scatter methodology’ continue to be regularly detected (see Figures 31 and 32). The scatter methodology involves the consignment of a large number of low-volume items.

SIGNIFICANT BORDER DETECTIONS

Significant border detections of cocaine in 2007–08 included:

- 250 kilograms of cocaine detected in a sea cargo consignment from China to Sydney, concealed in Chinese tea, on 4 March 2008
- 124 kilograms of cocaine detected in a sea cargo consignment from Canada to Melbourne on 5 June 2008
- 27 kilograms of cocaine powder detected in sea cargo from Canada to Sydney on 5 May 2008
- 7.8 kilograms of cocaine powder detected in unaccompanied baggage, in Sydney on 10 January 2008
- 5.7 kilograms of cocaine detected on an aircraft, from the United States of America (US) to Sydney on 2 December 2007.

IMPORTATION METHODS

In 2007–08, 530.8 kilograms of cocaine was detected in sea cargo. A total of 48.7 kilograms was detected in air cargo, 37.7 kilograms ‘on’ or ‘in’ air passengers and 31.9 kilograms in postal articles. There were 30 detections over one kilogram—11 in air cargo, 10 with air passengers, 6 in sea cargo and 3 in postal articles.

The trafficking and subsequent transshipment of cocaine from Canada continues to pose a high threat to the Australian border. Similarly, the growth in cocaine trafficking through China and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China continues to have an impact. West African criminal syndicates continue to import cocaine—via the postal, air cargo and passenger streams—and accounted for a greater number of detected importations.

EMBARKATION POINTS

In 2007–08, embarkation points of significant attempted cocaine importations—an aggregate detected weight of cocaine of at least three kilograms—were in weight order: China, Canada, Guyana, Brazil, the US, Argentina, Lebanon, Colombia, Peru, Vietnam and South Africa.

DOMESTIC MARKET INDICATORS

According to the *2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS)*, the proportion of the population who used cocaine in the previous 12 months (recent use) increased significantly from 1 per cent in 2004 to 1.6 per cent in 2007. This represents an increase of approximately 111 700 people. Recent use is at its highest level since 1993. However, when compared with other drugs such as cannabis (9.1 per cent) and MDMA (3.5 per cent), use of cocaine remains relatively low. The proportion of the population that has 'ever used' cocaine also increased significantly, from 4.7 per cent in 2004 to 5.9 per cent in 2007. This figure has gradually increased since 1993 and is also currently at its highest level (AIHW, 2008).

Forty per cent of regular ecstasy users and 22 per cent of regular injecting drug users reported cocaine use in the previous six months (Black et al., 2008; Black et al., 2008a). In 2007, research on drug use among police detainees, incorporating surveys and urinalysis, found that cocaine was the least likely drug to be detected.³ Only one per cent of all detainees tested positive to cocaine use, compared with two per cent the previous year (Adams et al., 2008).

Several studies of the Australian cocaine market have identified two distinct user groups. The first group is typically employed, well-educated and socially integrated. This group consumes cocaine occasionally, most commonly via the intranasal method and in combination with other drugs such as ecstasy and alcohol. This group does not consist of many high-wealth individuals, a demographic which is traditionally associated with cocaine use. The second group is typically of lower socio-economic status and usually injects cocaine. Cocaine is used more frequently among this group, and often in conjunction with other drugs such as heroin and benzodiazepines. This group is thought to be the primary consumer of cocaine in Australia (Kaye, 2007; Shearer et al., 2005).

PRICE

In 2007–08, the price of a gram of cocaine in Australia ranged between \$200 and \$500. The price of a gram remained stable in most jurisdictions, with the exception of South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, which recorded increases. In South Australia, the price for a gram increased from a range of \$200–\$400 to \$300–\$500. In the Australian Capital Territory, the price increased from a range of \$300–\$400 to \$400–\$500 per gram.

PURITY

Figure 33 illustrates the fluctuations in cocaine purity in Australia on an annual basis since 1999–2000. The purity of cocaine has fluctuated considerably within all states and territories during this period. The median purity ranged from 3 per cent to 68.8 per cent.

³ Drugs tested for included benzodiazepines, cannabis, cocaine, heroin, methylamphetamine, MDMA and other opioids such as buprenorphine.

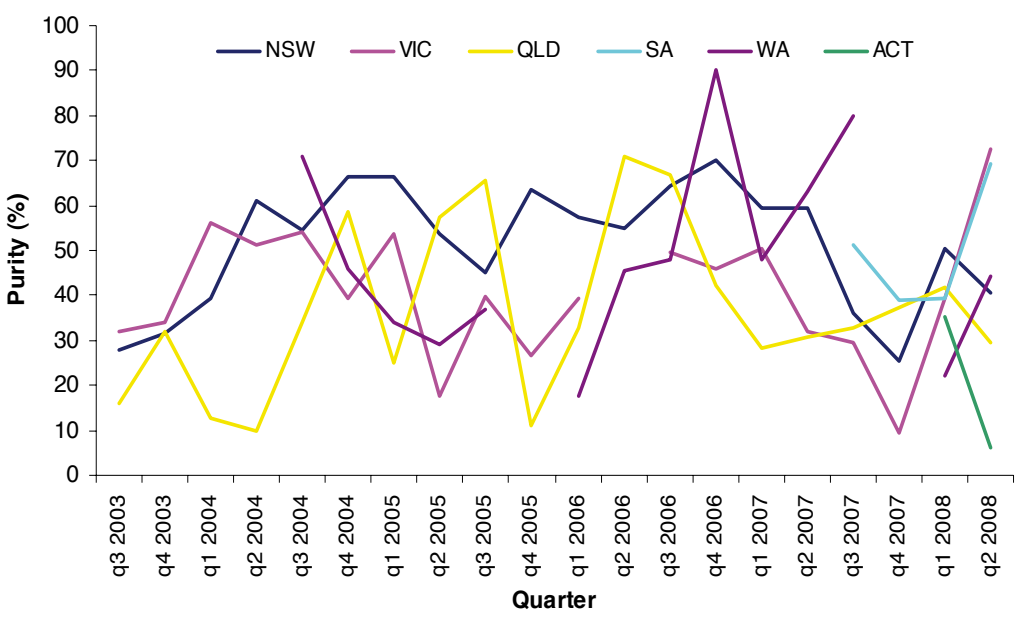


Figure 34 illustrates the median purity of cocaine on a quarterly basis. In 2007–08, the median purity of cocaine ranged from 6.2 per cent in the Australian Capital Territory to 80 per cent in Western Australia.

FIGURE 33: ANNUAL MEDIAN PURITY OF COCAINE SAMPLES, 1999–2000 TO 2007–08



FIGURE 34: QUARTERLY MEDIAN PURITY OF COCAINE SAMPLES, 2003–04 TO 2007–08



AVAILABILITY

According to the 2007 NDSHS, the proportion of the population that was offered or had the opportunity to use cocaine increased from 3.1 per cent in 2004 to 3.9 per cent in 2007. This rate is considerably lower than for cannabis (17.1 per cent), but higher than heroin (0.9 per cent) (AIHW, 2008).

In a 2007 national study of regular ecstasy users, 54 per cent of respondents reported cocaine as either 'easy' or 'very easy' to obtain, while 43 per cent reported it as 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to obtain. Although national reporting on the availability of cocaine is mixed, cocaine is reportedly easier to obtain in certain jurisdictions, notably New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria (Black et al., 2008).

SEIZURES AND ARRESTS

Both the weight and number of national cocaine seizures increased in 2007–08 (see Figure 35). Compared with 2006–07, the seizure of 665 kilograms of cocaine in 2007–08 represents a marginal increase (see Table 14). Victoria reported the highest increase in weight, while the largest decrease occurred in Queensland.

The number of cocaine seizures increased by seven per cent in 2007–08 and is the highest on record. New South Wales accounted for approximately 80 per cent of cocaine seizures in number and weight. Although the Australian Capital Territory reported the highest percentage increases in number and weight, the actual increase in figures were small and comparatively low.

FIGURE 35: NATIONAL COCAINE SEIZURES, BY WEIGHT AND NUMBER, 1998–99 TO 2007–08

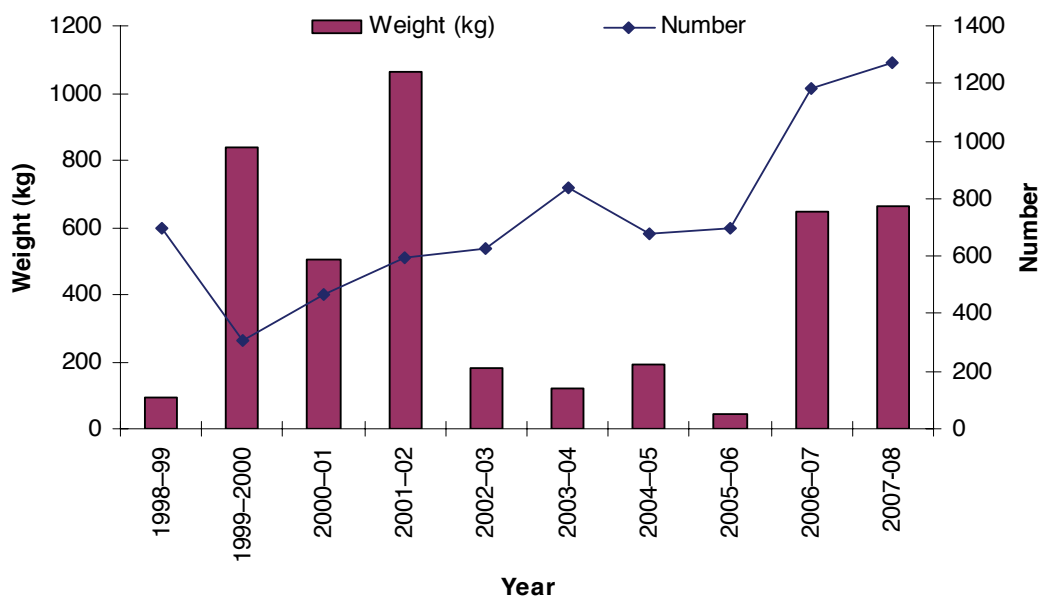


TABLE 14: NUMBER, WEIGHT AND PERCENTAGE CHANGE OF NATIONAL COCAINE SEIZURES, 2006–07 AND 2007–08

State/territory ^a	Number			Weight (grams)		
	2006–07	2007–08	% change	2006–07	2007–08	% change
NSW	920r	1 013	10.1	481 060r	525 444	9.2
Vic	48r	73	52.1	4 196r	127 432	2937.0
Qld	153r	91	-40.5	161 081r	10 235	-93.6
SA	10	6	-40.0	80	642	702.5
WA	39r	65	66.7	187r	859	359.4
Tas	2	0	-100.0	7	0	-100.0
NT	3	0	-100.0	26	0	-100.0
ACT	9r	23	155.6	1	66	6500
Total	1 184r	1 271	7.3	646 638r	664 678	2.8

a. Includes seizures by state/territory police and AFP for which a valid seizure weight was recorded.

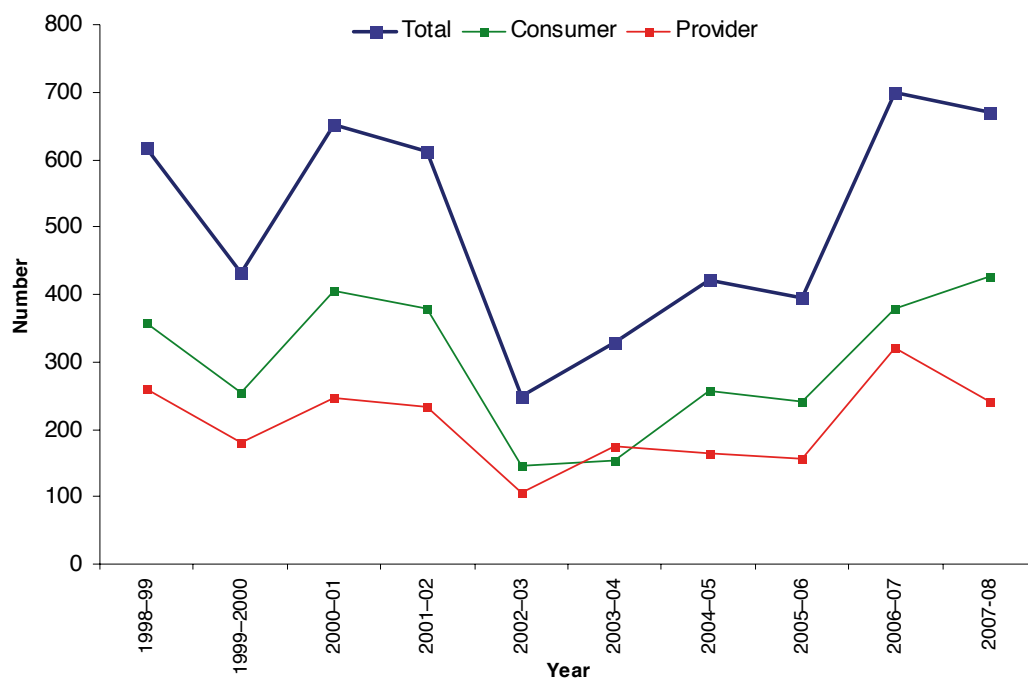
Although the number of national cocaine arrests decreased by four per cent in 2007–08, it is the second highest reported in the last decade (see Table 15). Figure 36 illustrates the national number of cocaine arrests since 1998–99. Cocaine arrests have fluctuated considerably during this period, ranging from 250 in 2002–03 to 699 in 2006–07. Cocaine arrests remain significantly lower than that of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), cannabis and heroin. The majority of arrests continue to occur in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. ‘Consumer’ arrests continue to comprise the greatest proportion of total arrests for cocaine. The exception was 2003–04, when ‘provider’ arrests accounted for 54 per cent of cocaine arrests.

TABLE 15: NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE CHANGE OF NATIONAL COCAINE ARRESTS, 2006-07 AND 2007-08

State/territory	2006-07	2007-08	% change
NSW	367r	385	4.9
Vic	127	119	-6.3
Qld	143r	107	-25.2
SA	11	11	0.0
WA	42	43	2.4
Tas	1	0	-100.0
NT	1	0	-100.0
ACT	7	4	-42.9
Total	699r	669	-4.3

a. Includes arrests by state/territory police and AFP for which a valid seizure weight was recorded.

FIGURE 36: NUMBER OF NATIONAL COCAINE ARRESTS, 1998-99 TO 2007-08





NATIONAL IMPACT

In 2007–08, the number and weight of cocaine border detections are among the highest on record. Sea cargo accounted for 80 per cent of the total weight of detections, with a single detection accounting for nearly 40 per cent of the total weight. The greatest number of detections continue to be made through the postal and air cargo streams.

Cocaine trafficked from Canada, as well as through China and the Hong Kong SAR of China, continue to pose a threat to the Australian border. Based on detection data, West African criminal syndicates are responsible for the greatest number of cocaine importations.

The weight and number of national cocaine seizures increased marginally in 2007–08. The 1271 seizures is the highest in the last decade. The number of cocaine arrests decreased in 2007–08, but remains high.

Cocaine use among the general population has increased since 2004 and is currently the highest on record. Increases in cocaine border detections and seizures within Australia indicate a potential expansion of the domestic cocaine market.

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