

# Olympics

## WILL BE A MARATHON TASK

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*When Sydney won the right to hold the 2000 Olympic Games in 1993, the Australian Customs Service started preparing for what will be a key role in ensuring the success of the world's biggest sporting event. JOHN HAWKSWORTH outlines how Customs plans to manage – and benefit from - a vast and complex task.*

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The success of the Sydney Olympics will be measured by Australia's ability to efficiently and effectively manage the mind-boggling logistics. As the first point of contact for the expected tens of thousands of international athletes and visitors, the Games and the associated Paralympics present an unprecedented opportunity for Customs to contribute to Australia's overall success as host nation.

In the simplest of terms, it means a lot of hard work for everyone involved.

The Olympics is a unique event because of its size and its impact on the whole community. We are talking about maybe half a million people moving around the Sydney metropolitan area to the different venues on any one day. That means a lot of visitors from overseas. There will be a huge amount of equipment coming in to help put on these large events which also come past Customs. We will assist in the security of the Games and in protecting the intellectual property rights associated with the Olympic organisers. All this means a considerable amount of pre-planning and organisation so that everything will go smoothly.

Initially, Customs did not realise just how huge the task would be even though preliminary work had identified major factors that would affect us. We started

by listing issues that we would need to consider. The first version of this ran for about three pages, ranging from "How do you get so many people through the airport in time for the Games?" to "What do you do about the guide dogs for blind competitors during the Paralympics?" Since then we have had a lot of very good advice from customs and immigration authorities overseas who have gone through this before.

It was not until Customs senior managers spoke to South Korean counterparts about their experiences of the 1988 Seoul Olympics that the sheer size of the job ahead became apparent. We really got serious about planning after this meeting. The Koreans said

that whenever we started planning we would wish we had begun two years earlier. They impressed upon us that the job was bigger for Customs than anything that could be imagined. That message was taken to heart by our executive. The Koreans gave us a lot of good advice on the volume of cargo we could expect and the difficulties of dealing with it using normal procedures.

In 1995 I visited Barcelona, site of the 1992 Olympics, and Atlanta, which was then in its final stages of preparation for the 1996 Olympics. Customs and immigration authorities in Spain and the United States advised on the systems that appeared to work for them and those that did not. Barcelona turned out to be the

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# FOR CUSTOMS



*Photograph courtesy of Olympic Co-ordination Committee*

best model for Sydney because of similarities between the two cities. Like Sydney, Barcelona is a major port, a major business centre and a major tourism destination. Spanish organisers had used cruise ships as floating hotels for the duration of the Games to provide additional accommodation. Much of the information I brought back proved to be directly relevant to Customs planning for the Sydney Games.

The major issue facing Customs is the volume of international arrivals, particularly through Sydney Airport. We are talking of something like 50 000 members of the Olympic family, maybe 17 000 members of the Paralympic family and something like 40 000 to 50 000 guests of sponsors. Then, of course, there are just the ordinary VIPs from the 197 member countries. A visit by the United States President is

possible. On top of all that, routine Customs work at the airport will have to be carried out at the same time.

Fortunately, some visitors are likely to arrive over the month before the Games, including competitors coming well ahead to practise and acclimatise. Some will arrive in Sydney as domestic passengers, having entered through other ports. But, on the day after the closing ceremony there could be as many as 70 000 people trying to get out through Sydney Airport.

## A 'working smarter' ethos

Customs is basing preparations on a 'working smarter' ethos which permeates the planning. By using

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more sophisticated electronic processing methods, Customs is aiming to use solutions to the problems raised by the Olympics to gain a much longer term benefit.

Our strategy recognises that the Olympics takes place over a relatively short time. Including the Olympics and the Paralympics, plus the early arrivals, we are talking about only two to three months in one year. As big as that workload will be, it is roughly equivalent to the routine workload we expect by 2003. So we are building a passenger processing system that will handle the routine workload of the early years of the next millenium. If we can do that, the amount of extra tweaking that we will have to do for the Olympic period will be minimal.

Obviously we cannot simply pour additional staff into Sydney Airport to try to handle the job. To start with, we would test the rest of the airport infrastructure. It would not be rational to have so many Customs officers in the arrival hall that there would not be enough room for passengers. Instead, we are modernising our processing systems to maximise use of electronics and pre-information about who is arriving.

Air and sea cargo should be less of a problem. This is because the quantity expected is not overpowering in terms of the ordinary workload. As well, virtually all Customs air cargo systems are fully automated, and by 2000 we expect the same situation for sea cargo.

Apart from the Olympics focus, Customs has been making improvements in these areas in any case. In passenger processing, cargo management and intellectual property protection, Customs officers are already well advanced.

The Olympics has given us a target date by which many improvements must be in place - an incentive to get on with the job. It also provides a tremendous lever when we are discussing with government and other agencies what is essential to have in place.

## Making procedures 'Olympics-proof'

Good working relationships with other government agencies, at federal and state levels, is fundamental to Customs success. The prime partner is the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games.

A Sydney-based senior Customs officer, Greg Boyd, was appointed in 1996 to work with SOCOG. Customs works closely with the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, the Australian Federal Police and the New South Wales Police Service on security matters. On passenger processing, Customs is working with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service. On cargo, the major partners are AQIS and industry representatives working on behalf of the Olympic movement.

At present, in Customs, only Boyd and his assistant, Michele Reddy, are wholly engaged on the Olympics. The rationale is that we are trying to make Customs routine procedures Games-proof. To do that, we have decided not to set up a large Olympic unit with all the Olympic responsibilities.

We have tasked relevant areas of Customs with getting their systems up to a stage where they can handle the Olympic issues. For example, Customs people who deal routinely with intellectual property issues and labelling are working with SOCOG to make sure we protect those who are licensed to use Olympic markings.

A huge amount of work has gone into passenger processing for Sydney Airport in preparation for the arrival of dignitaries. Passenger processing staff in Canberra have been attending numerous liaison meetings to try to improve our border systems in terms of how we handle passengers.

Some sponsored guests will be coming into the country for two reasons - to have an Olympic experience and to have an Australian experience, particularly to enjoy the Great Barrier Reef. So we expect many will enter through Brisbane or Cairns and other places. The Government is keen that the tourism and marketing benefits of the Games are spread broadly across the country. And our security friends have warned us that if a fire-cracker goes off in Broome during the Games, it will be treated as an act of Olympic terrorism just as much as if it had gone off in Sydney's Darling Harbour.

To educate Olympic visitors to Australia about entry requirements, Customs is working with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and Quarantine to mount a worldwide information campaign using printed material, videos and the Internet. Customs is considering setting up an information centre at the Olympic site just before and during the Games to deal with customs-related concerns of athletes and officials.

*John Hawksworth, Regional Director, New South Wales, is coordinating the Customs effort for the Olympic Games. As well as chairing an internal working party of senior staff from Border Management, Commercial Services and Executive Support which is examining all the key issues, and being the main liaison point with other government agencies, he is responsible for Customs preparations for and operations during the Games.*