

# The Olympic legacy

By Chris Schofield

From the time Sydney was awarded the right to host the Sydney 2000 Olympics and Paralympic Games, Customs cooperated closely with other government agencies at national and state level to streamline systems to service the requirements of the biggest single peacetime event in history.

The two Games, spanning 15 September to 29 October, marked the culmination of years of planning and preparation by Customs.

The development of strong links with other agencies was a critical aspect of Customs planning. Customs provided a number of secondments and liaison officers to key partner organisations such as the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence, the Olympic Intelligence Centre, the Federal Olympic Security Intelligence

Centre, the Sydney 2000 Games Task Force within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and to the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG).

National Director Border Division John Hawksworth, who was responsible for coordinating Customs involvement in the Olympics, said the effort and teamwork proved more than worthwhile.

"You only have to look at the range of activities in which Customs was involved and the number of people who moved to different work area," he said

Planning for the Games took place over a six-year period.

Mr Hawksworth said the outcome was even better than forecast, particularly at the key Olympic arrivals and departures location of Sydney Airport. An extra 200 Customs staff supplemented the normal complement of 600 officers. Off-airport check-in and baggage collection also took place at the Games Village to ease congestion at Sydney Airport.

"The plan was to get passengers through the airport in accordance with normal government standards, in other words, 95 per cent queuing at the primary line for less than 30 minutes. We managed the majority within 15 minutes, and even faster for outwards processing, giving Olympic visitors a good first and last impression."

The high volume arrivals and departures at Sydney Airport were focused on the days immediately preceding the Olympic opening



A customs officer at Sydney International Airport assists an Olympic family member with arrival documents.

ceremony and on the day immediately after the closing ceremony. On 13, 14 and 15 September, arriving passengers averaged over 15,000 daily while on 2 October a record number of 41,300 passengers, made up of 24,200 outwards and 17,100 inwards, were processed.

"We were capable of handling many more passengers than actually turned up," he said.

"The volumes of accompanied baggage again were not up to the predicted worst case scenarios. We were tested more on departure than we expected. We knew there would be a very heavy concentration of teams and other Olympic family members leaving on 2 October, but only realised late in the piece that this would coincide with a very heavy inwards load of Australians returning from trips overseas. I was extremely encouraged by the way our people handled the big inwards flow that coincided with the big outwards flow."

During the officially recognised Olympic period from 1 August to 1 November, more than 2.2 million inwards travellers were cleared nationally. This included over 46,000 Olympic and Paralympic Family Members.

Customs also cleared goods entered under special concessional provisions. This included Games competitors' equipment, team medical kits, giveaways and consumables and materials and products for Games venues.

"We had to pull out all stops when it became apparent that a high proportion of teams had not organised their medications properly," he said.

"I think we did not understand the diverse nature of the various teams.

It was not a case of contacting the one chief doctor for the team, advising him or her of what was required and expecting it all to occur properly. There is a whole range of doctors for various sub groups within teams and then individual athletes sometimes had their own trainers or personal physicians.

"In the event, though, after some very quick work on the part of Central Office staff, we were able to get a very rapid approval process in place for those people."

"Certainly there were incidents along the way. We had issues relating to security teams bringing their own equipment with them. We had incidents relating to performance enhancing drugs, the majority of which were potential major incidents. There was one big incident concerning a trainer who had brought in human growth hormone. That became a significant issue for our investigators and the court."

During the Games, Customs was committed to continuing with existing cargo service standards. To this end, Customs established a dedicated Olympic Cargo response Team in Sydney to manage Games related goods that allowed other resources to be deployed to servicing regular clients. More than 1200 lines of cargo were cleared in Sydney alone. Nationally, more than \$633 million worth of temporary Olympic imports were cleared. Japan proved to be one of the largest sources of temporary imports, comprising mainly broadcast equipment.

"On the issue of Olympic counterfeit goods, Customs predicted that infringing merchandise would peak during the six months before the Games," he said.

"The prediction proved correct with seizures flattening out once the Games arrived. More than 149,000 items were seized under the *Sydney 2000 Games (Indicia and Images) Protection Act*," Mr Hawksworth said.

In recognising that Olympic-related border activity was not confined to Sydney alone, Customs established a national network of regional contact officers who ensured all regions were aware of Customs Olympic preparations. These officers were instrumental in developing strategies for managing the Games' impact in their respective regions.

Mr Hawksworth believes it was the huge challenge that confronted all Customs staff that prompted them to reach and achieve such high levels of efficiency and service during the Games.

"If you say to someone 'this is the biggest thing to hit this town and you are part of it and it is going to be extremely difficult to do and we are relying on you to give it your best shot', then that really is a challenge and I think people generally respond to such a challenge," he said.

"Being in the full glare of world publicity puts you on your mettle not to let the side down, not to let Customs down, not to let the country down."

Mr Hawksworth believes Customs met the Games challenge through the dedication of its officers as well as detailed planning and preparation.