

Quick change for travellers

By Louise Patroni

A new computer system for the Tourist Refund Scheme allows travellers to receive their money back faster and has improved the integrity of the data Customs collects.

TRS3 began operations in November and is now using card-swipe technology, rather than manual input of claimant details, significantly reducing waiting lines and the risk of error.

The Tourist Refund Scheme, introduced by the Federal Government on 1 July 2000 with the goods and services tax (GST), allows overseas visitors and Australian residents to claim back the GST and wine equalisation tax (WET) on goods purchased in Australia when they are taken overseas.

The old TRS process relied on travellers correctly recording their credit card, bank account or address details on forms which were then manually processed.

The new system verifies each traveller's bona fides through Customs electronic passenger processing system (PACE). It then uses card-swipe technology to capture and verify traveller credit card details or, using additional software, verifies bank account and/or address details to initiate a bank deposit or cheque refund.

The refund process has been further streamlined - travellers' information now being delivered electronically to Customs through Customs third-party payment service provider. The card-swipe and automatic-transfer technologies combined mean even faster processing of TRS claims.

Automated payment ensures that refunds to credit cards and bank accounts can now be paid within five working days and cheque refunds within 15 working days. Previously, Customs aimed to have refunds paid within 30 days. Cash refunds are no longer available.

The new system also has the advantage of greatly reducing the potential for fraud against the Commonwealth. TRS3 incorporates substantial new audit and reporting mechanisms that will assist

Customs identify potential fraudulent activities.

In its first year of operation, the TRS refunded close to \$30 million worth of GST and WET with close to a quarter of a million claims. This figure rose by 27 per cent in 2001-2002 to more than \$40 million in refunds from over 300,000 claims. This represents retail

sales in excess of \$79 million from more than 21,000 Australian retailers since July 2000.

The Australian TRS differs from other refund schemes around the world. Other countries only allow travellers to purchase goods from a limited number of stores and charge administration fees on the refund. The Australian scheme allows Australian citizens, as well as overseas visitors, to purchase goods from any retailer within Australia with no administrative fees.

Travellers can claim a refund if they:

- buy a minimum of \$300 worth of goods from one retailer
- buy the goods no more than 30 days before departing Australia
- obtain a single tax invoice for the goods
- have the goods available for inspection by Customs on request
- present the tax invoice, goods, passport and boarding pass at the TRS booth when departing Australia.

Refunds are available until 30 minutes prior to the scheduled departure time of the flight.



Presenting passport, boarding pass, goods and tax invoice to a Customs officer at a TRS booth.