

Air cargo

the toughest examinations ever

By Kelly Edwards

Customs air cargo examination rate has increased from around 40 per cent to 70 per cent in response to an Australian Government commitment in 2001 to place greater emphasis on the examination of air cargo. The measures are aimed at the prevention of prohibited items crossing the Australian border and hindering, among other things, the availability of firearms on the black-market.

"These new arrangements significantly increase the proportion of air cargo subject to either x-ray or physical examination from July 2002," the Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison, said when announcing the new arrangements.

"Customs world-leading risk assessment techniques still play an important role in keeping harmful goods out of the country, but now that 70 per cent of air cargo is being examined, Customs is able to broaden its targeting significantly. Known weapons-supply countries get particular emphasis in this targeting."

In setting Customs corporate priorities in July 2002, Customs CEO Lionel Woodward said: "We must increase our capacity to detect prohibited goods (including illicit drugs and illegal firearms) and provide faster and more efficient cargo examinations through the use of technology such as container and pallet x-ray machines."

Customs redeployed staff from other functions and used existing x-ray equipment to achieve the increase in air cargo inspections. To avoid duplication in examinations and to minimise delays to cargo clearance, Customs consulted the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service.

Express cargo operators and other operators were consulted on a regional basis to achieve higher rates of inspection with the least disruption to business. Workable and time-sensitive solutions are being implemented.

Customs will look at the application of new technologies and sophisticated information processing for continual improvement in inspection processes in the future.



Customs officer Tony Lundy examines air cargo at the Express Mail Handling Unit at the Qantas Freight Terminal on the tarmac at Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport.