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SUBMISSIONS



ACC Submission to PJC AOSD Inquiry



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Subject

ACC response to comment that the quality of the Illicit Drug Data Report (IDDR) has declined in recent years.

Background

The Queensland Alcohol and Drug research and Education Centre (QADREC) claimed in its submission to the PJC that the “quality of the ACC’s principal public domain intelligence product, the Illicit Drug Data Report (IDDR), has declined in recent years”. It stated that “this has in part been due to major internal organisational restructuring and the loss of experienced intelligence officers”.

QADREC also outlined wider issues it thought affected the IDDR. These included:

- Inadequate data collection on drug seizures and clan lab detections by some state and Federal agencies
- Unknown degree of overlap in federal seizure data
- Poor and inconsistent record keeping at a state level
- Lengthy delays in drug seizure and clandestine laboratory analysis and limited information on clan lab capacity in this data
- Failure to separate data on phenethylamines (ecstasy) from methamphetamine
- Limited use of open source intelligence on the demand side of the market and on consumer behaviour in retail transactions
- Delays in building research partnerships for strategic intelligence
- Inadequate information sharing among agencies and with the research community.

Current Position

The ACC inherited the report from the ABCI. The Australian Illicit Drug Report (AIDR) was a substantially larger volume than the IDDR, containing more generalised information about illicit drug markets as well as illicit drug data. While the ACC accepts that the current version of the report may give rise to expressions of concern such as that raised by QADREC, it strongly rejects the ill-informed assertions that this is a consequence of restructuring or a loss of skilled intelligence officers.

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The change in nomenclature to IDDR reflects the ACC's view that while there remains a niche for a report aggregating law enforcement data on illicit drug seizures, its primary responsibility is to provide a flow of strategic and tactical intelligence to partner agencies in a way not previously undertaken by any of the ACC's predecessor agencies. The ACC decided in 2003-04 to focus its resources on providing intelligence to partner agencies in support of operational interdictions and awareness of strategic policy issues that would have much greater impact, albeit potentially downstream. The ACC has done this successfully, with improved flows (both quantitative and qualitative) of intelligence to partner agencies.

Nonetheless, it has maintained production of the report, currently known as IDDR, with a more concentrated focus on data and a reduced level of general comment. Feedback for the 2003-04 and 2004-05 editions of the IDDR indicates that it is now very well accepted by its audience and key stakeholders, and has delivered high quality analysis. A respected researcher in the social policy arena recently acknowledged to the ACC that the IDDR, in its current form, not only provides the most authoritative source of data but now provides the most clearly expressed and concise summary of the current and projected environments for each drug type.

Issues about the integrity of data collection have been present since the inception of the AIDR. The ACC relies almost entirely on data from other agencies: the IDDR clearly acknowledges the limitations of the data and offers several caveats on interpretation of the data. The ACC has invested resources and funding in the development of a standardised reporting format that allows the ACC to mitigate inconsistencies in data provided and to allow comparability across data sets that would otherwise be largely incompatible.

The assertion that there is inadequate information sharing among agencies and between research bodies is flawed. The IDDR exists only because of a commitment to information sharing on this issue; the resource commitment and degree of collaboration required on the part of contributing agencies and the ACC for the production of the IDDR is significant. Moreover, the data is shared with research bodies: the ACC provides the collated and synthesised data to NDARC without charge and it does so ahead of publication (on an embargoed basis) to allow NDARC to progress its own research work.

The ACC does accept that there is scope for more collaborative work with research bodies and has work in hand to improve partnerships in this area.

