

F. Oceania

Drug trafficking through the Pacific islands en route to Australia and New Zealand is of increasing concern and poses a security and public health challenge to the countries of the region.

1. Major developments

755. Drug trafficking through the Pacific islands en route to Australia and New Zealand is of increasing concern. The low level of adherence to the three international drug control treaties coupled with the unique geography of the region renders the Pacific islands vulnerable to drug trafficking and drug-related organized crime. In addition to large seizures seen in the Pacific islands of drugs that were destined for Australia and to a lesser extent New Zealand, domestic seizures of smaller quantities and observations in the region appear to indicate growing levels of drug abuse in some Pacific island States.

756. There were increasing concerns about trafficking in drugs such as methamphetamine in the Pacific islands, as noted by the Regional Policy Consultations of the Pacific Islands Forum, which identified trafficking as an emerging issue to be covered by the Forum in 2019. The Regional Security Declaration (the “Boe Declaration”) endorsed by Forum Leaders at the Forty-Ninth Pacific

Island Forum held in Nauru from 3 to 6 September 2018 recognized an increasingly complex regional security environment driven by multifaceted security challenges. In the Forum communiqué, Forum Leaders welcomed the decision by the Government of Australia to work with regional security agencies to establish the Pacific Fusion Centre to strengthen information-sharing and maritime domain awareness to inform responses to threats such as drug trafficking and transnational crimes. The Pacific Fusion Centre was to build on existing security architecture, including the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre.

757. The Board reiterates its concern that many of the non-parties to the three international drug control conventions are located in Oceania.⁸¹ The Board remains engaged with the countries of the region to support their steps towards treaty adherence and implementation and welcomed the accession of Palau to the 1988 Convention. The Board urges those States that are not yet party to all three drug control conventions to take steps towards accession as a matter of priority. In addition, the Board calls on countries and international and regional organizations that provide support to the non-parties in the region to aid the efforts of the non-parties to accede to the treaties as a matter of priority.

2. Regional cooperation

758. The Transnational, Serious and Organized Crime Pacific Taskforce was launched by the law enforcement agencies of Australia, Fiji, New Zealand and Tonga in February 2019. The goals of the Taskforce are to (a) enhance the sharing of information between participants through the established Pacific Transnational Crime Network, the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre and transnational crime units; (b) investigate and disrupt transnational serious and organized crime entities operating from, through or impacting the participant countries; (c) target organized crime entities or syndicates utilizing small craft to move illicit drugs and facilitate other organized criminal activity; (d) demonstrate the commitment of participants to effective multinational cooperation and effectiveness in combating transnational organized crime; and (e) strengthen cooperation to conduct expanded investigations on transnational organized criminal groups.

⁸¹ Seven of the 10 States yet to accede to the 1961 Convention are in Oceania: Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Eight of the 13 States not party to the 1971 Convention are in Oceania: Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Four of the 7 non-parties to the 1988 Convention are in Oceania: Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu.

759. The twenty-first annual conference of the Oceania Customs Organization took place in May 2019 in Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, attended by 21 member customs administrations and representatives of international and regional organizations, including the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police. Topics discussed at the conference included trade facilitation, revenue mobilization, border security and digital capacity. The INCB secretariat participated in the conference to highlight challenges in addressing trafficking in synthetic drugs and related substances to and through the small island States of the region. In particular, the Board's secretariat provided information on the trafficking of fentanyl-related substances by means of international mail and express courier services, and demonstrated the use of the Board's IONICS system. In 2019, the Board signed a memorandum of understanding with the Oceania Customs Organization to facilitate cooperation in countering trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances, new psychoactive substances and precursor chemicals.

760. The 2019 PICP conference, on "Preventing drug harm within our communities", was held in American Samoa in August 2019, at which a draft PICP strategic plan was presented. At a meeting of the PICP Executive Leadership Team held in Sydney in early 2019, the Pacific Transnational Crime Network gave a presentation on crime trends across the Pacific, focusing on illicit drugs, human trafficking and gang movements.

761. At the meeting of the Pacific Island Law Officers' Network held in the Cook Islands in October 2018, the PICP Secretariat gave a presentation on current activities and the Pacific Methamphetamine Action Plan. According to the PICP Secretariat, the Network had completed an analysis of legislation on methamphetamine in the Pacific island region. A Pacific Transnational Crime Network Team Leaders' Meeting held in Fiji in September 2018 included a workshop to identify actions to support the Pacific Methamphetamine Action Plan.

3. National legislation, policy and action

762. In August 2019, Palau acceded to the 1988 Convention, a development which was welcomed by the Board. In an executive order issued in April 2019, the President of Palau referred, inter alia, to the growing incidence of drug trafficking. The executive order stated that the policy of the Government was to strengthen border security, and it set out measures to secure ports of entry and prevent the entry of foreign nationals intending to commit any form of transnational crime.

763. In Tonga in June 2019, representatives of Government, churches and young people participated in a two-day meeting to discuss and review the draft first national illicit drugs policy. The five-year policy aims at building a safe, healthy and resilient Tonga through effective prevention and enhanced enforcement and by progressively reducing harm, and was approved by the Tongan Cabinet in October 2019. The policy had six strategic areas of focus: supply reduction and alternative development; demand and harm reduction; improved coordination and control; international and regional cooperation; improving data collection, analysis and information-sharing; and compliance with human rights. Also in 2019, the Tonga Police announced that a drug task force had been initiated.

764. In Samoa, participants doing training on the Universal Treatment Curriculum for Substance Use Disorders completed a training course on basic counselling skills for addiction professionals as a step towards their certification as alcohol and drug addiction counselors. The training was facilitated through the Colombo Plan in partnership with the Government of Samoa, with funding from the United States State Department Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.

765. The Misuse of Drugs (Medicinal Cannabis) Amendment Act 2018 came into effect in New Zealand in December 2018. As a result, people with terminal illnesses have an exemption and statutory defence for possessing and using cannabis, and CBD is no longer a controlled drug at the national level. Within a year of coming into effect, the Minister of Health must recommend regulations establishing standards for medicinal cannabis products, and those regulations will be a key element of the medical cannabis programme to be established. In 2019, the drug legislation of New Zealand was amended, inter alia, to reaffirm the existing discretion in prosecuting for possession and use, with the specification that when considering whether a prosecution is required in the public interest, in addition to any other relevant matters, consideration should be given to whether a health-centred or therapeutic approach would be more beneficial to the public interest, and to make it possible to issue temporary drug orders for emerging and potentially harmful substances of abuse.

766. In September 2019, the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory, a self-governing territory within the Australian federal system of government, adopted legislation which, once in force, will create exceptions to existing criminal offences for persons over the age of 18 for the following: possession of up to 50 grams of cannabis for non-medical purposes; and cultivation of

up to two cannabis plants (with a maximum of four plants per household). The Board remains engaged in dialogue with the Government of Australia with a view to ensuring the full implementation by Australia of its international legal obligations under the international drug control legal framework. The Government of New Zealand announced that on the occasion of the general election in 2020 a referendum would be held on the legalization and regulation of cannabis. The Board remains engaged in dialogue with the Government of New Zealand, including through its mission to the country held in September 2019. The Board recalls that the 1961 Convention as amended, to which Australia and New Zealand are parties, requires States parties to limit the use of narcotic drugs exclusively to medical and scientific purposes.

767. Noting plans in the region to permit the cultivation of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes, the Board reminds Governments of the need to respect the requirements of the 1961 Convention as amended and that controls must be in place to ensure that material is not diverted to the illicit market. The Board also notes that, according to the terms of the 1961 Convention as amended, the overproduction of cannabis for medical and scientific purposes should be avoided and currently, as reported to the Board, this supply is being met through existing licit sources.

768. In New Zealand, in December 2018, a report was released containing the findings of a government enquiry into mental health and addiction, with recommendations covering, inter alia, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, regulation, and responses to possession of drugs for personal use. In response, the Government announced a number of related initiatives in connection with its 2019 budget, focusing on mental health and addiction support. The initiatives announced included the expansion of access to primary mental health and addiction support, enhancement of specialist drug services, a new acute drug harm response discretionary fund, establishment of a drug early warning system, and addiction training focusing on communities experiencing harm from synthetic drugs.

769. In September 2019, the final report of the review of the Narcotic Drugs Act 1967 was submitted to the Parliament of Australia. The report contains 26 recommendations to improve the regulatory framework for the cultivation, production and manufacture of medicinal cannabis in Australia. The recommendations were accepted by the Government and would be implemented through a two-stage process commencing as of the end of 2019.

770. Efforts continued in Australia to address the illicit supply of methamphetamine. For example, in February 2019, a specialist multi-agency team was established in the State of South Australia, led by the South Australia Police and comprising members of agencies such as the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Border Force and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission. The Western Australia Police Force started use of its “meth enforcement vans”, which were equipped with forensic testing facilities, drug detection devices and specialist communications equipment, and were used to counter trafficking of methamphetamine on state highways.

771. In Australia, following a public consultation on prescription opioids in 2018, an Opioid Regulatory Advisory Group was established to provide independent, expert advice. As a result of the Group’s advice, for example, smaller pack sizes would be introduced for immediate-release prescription opioid products, specific warnings for health professionals and consumers would be required for all prescription opioids, and consumers were being encouraged to return unwanted opioids for destruction.

4. Cultivation, production, manufacture and trafficking

772. Large quantities of drugs, mainly cocaine and methamphetamine, continue to be seized in the island States of the region. For example, a record seizure of 500 kg of cocaine was made on a yacht in Honiara, Solomon Islands, in September 2018, as a result of a joint investigation with Australian authorities. A seizure of 6.7 kg of methamphetamine, 625.29 grams of cannabis and 107.29 grams of cannabis oil was made in Tonga in April 2019, detected in a shipment sent from the United States. Also in April 2019, approximately 3 kg of methamphetamine were seized in a drug operation in Tonga. A number of seizures of smaller quantities of methamphetamine were also reported in Tonga in the past year, indicating the possibility of abuse of methamphetamine in the country. Cooperation between law enforcement authorities in Fiji and New Zealand resulted in seizures of methamphetamine that was alleged to have been trafficked from the United States to New Zealand, as well as the seizure of 39 kg of cocaine in Fiji.

773. A varying trend is observed in the quantity of methamphetamine seized in Oceania: following an upward trend in seizure quantities over the period 2009–2014 and a subsequent decline over the period 2014–2016, there was an increase again in 2017. Australia and New Zealand accounted for 93 per cent and 7 per cent,

respectively, of the quantity of methamphetamine seized in the region in the period 2013–2017. A ninefold increase in the quantity of “ecstasy” seized in the period 2013–2017 was reported in Oceania, which accounted for one fifth of the quantity of “ecstasy” seized worldwide in that period.

774. The amount of amphetamine-type stimulants (excluding MDMA), predominantly methamphetamine, detected at the Australian border (2.95 tons) increased by 61 per cent from 2016/17 to 2017/18, and the amount of MDMA detected at the border increased by 59.6 per cent over that period, to 1.42 tons in 2017/18. Over the same period, total seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants (including MDMA) in Australia increased by 48 per cent to 11.2 tons.

775. A change in the pattern of methamphetamine trafficking into Australia has been seen in recent years. In 2015, China and Hong Kong, China, were the two main embarkation points for methamphetamine trafficked to Australia. By 2017, the United States had become the most important embarkation point, followed by Thailand and Malaysia. In 2017/18, the United States continued to be the primary embarkation point for amphetamine-type stimulants (excluding MDMA) detected at the Australian border. In January 2019, cooperation between the authorities of Australia and the United States led to the seizure in the United States of a record quantity of more than 1.7 tons of methamphetamine destined for Australia. In June 2019, in Australia, a record onshore seizure of almost 1.6 tons of methamphetamine, concealed in a consignment originating in Thailand, was announced.

776. In 2017, Canada and to a lesser extent the United States were reported for the first time as being main countries of departure for methamphetamine found in New Zealand, followed by Hong Kong, China; China; and Mexico. In New Zealand, over 2018 and 2019, police in Wellington targeted organized criminal groups involved in the distribution of methamphetamine.

777. The number of clandestine laboratories detected in Australia continued to decrease, with 432 detected clandestine laboratories in 2017/18, compared with 463 the previous year, and with methamphetamine being the main drug manufactured. The clandestine laboratories detected continued to be primarily user-based (i.e., manufacture for own use) and located in residential areas, but the proportion of such laboratories has decreased by a third since 2011/12, while the proportion of other small-scale laboratories has doubled, and the proportion that are medium-sized laboratories has more than doubled. While almost half of the detected laboratories (46.2 per

cent) were illicitly producing amphetamines, predominantly from the precursors ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, a record 22 clandestine laboratories manufacturing GHB/GBL were detected (compared with 11 the previous year), and 20 laboratories were illicitly manufacturing MDMA, the largest number in the past decade and more than double the number in the previous year (8 laboratories manufacturing MDMA detected). A fluctuating trend was seen in the detection of clandestine laboratories in New Zealand, rising from 45 detections in 2015 to 745 in 2016 but then falling to 79 detections in 2017.

778. Significant amounts of the methamphetamine precursors ephedrine and pseudoephedrine were seized in Australia and New Zealand in the period 2013–2017, while only small amounts of the amphetamine precursors 1-phenyl-2-propanone (P-2-P) and phenylacetic acid were seized in the region. The amount of precursors for the manufacture of amphetamine-type stimulants (excluding MDMA) detected at the Australian border more than doubled from the past year, reaching a record level of 4.9 tons in 2017/18. Over the same period, the amount of precursors of MDMA detected at the border decreased significantly, from 10 kg to 5 grams in 2017/18, consisting of a single seizure.

779. The quantity of heroin and morphine seized in the region continued to decrease in 2017, falling to the lowest level since 2009. More than 90 per cent of the total amount of heroin and morphine seized in Oceania was seized in Australia. The amount of heroin detected at the Australian border decreased by 5.7 per cent from the previous year, to 190.1 kg in 2017/18. Most of the heroin seized in Australia originated in South-East Asia, but an increase was observed in the proportion of seized heroin originating in South-West Asia.

780. Owing to a spike in seizures in Australia, the total quantity of cocaine seized in Oceania increased by 94 per cent from 2016 to 2017, and accounted for 0.3 per cent of the quantity of cocaine seized globally in 2017. Of the cocaine seized in Oceania over the period 2013–2017, 98 per cent was seized in Australia; during that period, seizures of cocaine in Australia quadrupled, from 1 ton to 4.1 tons. Seizures of cocaine at the Australian border were relatively stable over the past year, declining by 16.5 per cent, from a record 1.1 tons in 2016/17 to 0.9 tons in 2017/18; seizures of cocaine in the country decreased by 57.4 per cent, to 1.97 tons, nevertheless still the second highest seizure total on record. While Colombia remained the primary source of cocaine analysed, the proportion of cocaine originating in Peru increased, returning to a level similar to that of 2015. Over the period 2013–2017, the quantity of cocaine seized in New Zealand also

increased, from 0.2 kg to 108 kg. In August 2018, a record seizure of approximately 190 kg of cocaine, destined for Australia, was made at the New Zealand border following a joint investigation with Australian authorities.

781. Increases in cannabis seizures were reported in 2017 in Oceania, although those seizures accounted for less than 1 per cent of total worldwide seizures of cannabis herb and cannabis resin. A 10-year record amount (580.2 kg) of cannabis was detected at the Australian border in 2017/18 (compared with 102.5 kg in 2016/17), the greatest proportion of which was cannabis oil. The amount of cannabis seized within Australia increased for the third consecutive year, to 8.656 tons in 2017/18, from 7.55 tons in 2016/17.

782. The analysis of wastewater monitoring data in Australia indicated that the total seizures (by weight) of amphetamines, MDMA, heroin and cocaine in 2017/8 were the equivalent of 51.4 per cent, 175.0 per cent, 30.5 per cent and 47.9 per cent of the estimated consumption of those respective substances in the country for that period.

783. According to UNODC, countries in Oceania reported minimal seizures of fentanyl and its analogues. The number of detections of new psychoactive substances at the Australian border decreased by 29.0 per cent from 2016/17 to 2017/18 (687 detections). By weight, amphetamine-type substances accounted for 46.5 per cent of the new psychoactive substances analysed, followed by cathinone-type substances (38.1 per cent) and tryptamine-type substances (9.3 per cent).

5. Prevention and treatment

784. According to UNODC, the prevalence of past-year drug use among adults in Oceania (statistics for Australia and New Zealand only) is 11.0 per cent for cannabis, 3.28 per cent for opioids (including opiates and pharmaceutical opioids), 0.16 per cent for opiates, 2.2 per cent for cocaine, 1.34 per cent for amphetamines and pharmaceutical stimulants, and 2.17 per cent for “ecstasy”. In the Federated States of Micronesia, the prevalence of past-year abuse of cannabis is 17.2 per cent, and past-year abuse of amphetamines and pharmaceutical stimulants is 1.58 per cent. No comprehensive data on the level of drug abuse exist for the remainder of the region. The Board encourages the regional and international organizations that provide assistance to the Pacific island States to extend their support to the collection of data on the extent of the drug problem in order to facilitate the adoption of targeted and evidence-based drug policies.

785. The National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Programme of Australia, with coverage of 54 per cent of the country's population, shows that methamphetamine consumption continues to exceed consumption of all other illicit drug types and pharmaceuticals, and the population-weighted average consumption of methamphetamine increased from 2016 to 2018. Estimated MDMA consumption was low compared with other substances that were tested for, and the population-weighted average consumption decreased from 2016 to 2018. Oxycodone and fentanyl had elevated consumption levels at several test sites, and fentanyl consumption was increasing in several areas. Estimated heroin consumption decreased at the test sites from 2017 to 2018, while the estimated consumption of cocaine increased. Authorities report that both supply and demand indicators suggest an expanding cocaine market in the country. Among people who inject drugs, increasing use of methamphetamine has been reported, now surpassing heroin as the drug most frequently injected.

786. According to the 2017 Australian Secondary Students Alcohol and Drug Survey, 2 per cent of respondents, aged 12–17, reported having ever used methamphetamine, and 1 per cent reported past-month use of the substance. Lifetime prevalence of cannabis use increased from 16 per cent in 2014 to 17 per cent in 2017; and past-month use had increased from 7 per cent to 8 per cent. For “ecstasy”, reported lifetime use increased from 3 per cent in 2014 to 5 per cent in 2017, and reported past-month use increased over the same period, from 1 per cent to 2 per cent. For heroin abuse, both lifetime and past-month prevalence were reported to be 1 per cent. Cocaine abuse remained stable, with lifetime prevalence of 2.0 per cent and past-month use at 1.0 per cent. Past-month use of hallucinogens (specified in the survey as LSD or “magic mushrooms”) remained stable at 1.0 per cent, while lifetime use increased, from 3 per cent in 2014 to 4 per cent in 2017. The lifetime prevalence of synthetic cannabis decreased, from 2.3 per cent to 2.0 per cent.

787. The number of amphetamines-related treatment episodes in Australia increased by about 84 per cent between 2013/14 and 2017/18. Cocaine-related episodes increased by 160 per cent, while the number of heroin-related treatment episodes decreased by about

8 per cent, and morphine cases decreased by 40 per cent. Over the past decade, treatment episodes for amphetamines increased by over 300 per cent, and the number of heroin treatment episodes decreased by 22 per cent. In 2017/18, the most common principal drugs of concern leading clients to seek treatment were amphetamines, cannabis and heroin.

788. The proportion of police detainees in Australia testing positive for methamphetamine decreased from 51.3 per cent in 2016/17 to 45.6 per cent in 2017/18, which is still significantly higher than in 2008/09 (15.8 per cent). Cannabis remained a commonly used drug among detainees, but its prevalence steadily declined from 57 per cent in 2008/09 to 46 per cent in 2017/18. The proportion of detainees testing positive for MDMA also decreased, from 2 per cent in 2016/17 to 0.8 per cent in 2017/18. A decrease was also seen in the proportion of detainees testing positive for heroin, from 7.3 per cent in 2016/17 to 6.4 per cent in 2017/18. For cocaine, the proportion of detainees testing positive increased from 1.8 per cent in 2016/17 to 2.1 per cent in 2017/18.

789. The New Zealand Health Survey for 2017/18 found that among adults, the past-year prevalence of abuse of cannabis and amphetamines was 11.9 per cent and 0.8 per cent, respectively. Because of changes in the survey methodology, comparison with previous surveys was not possible.

790. The first findings of the New Zealand national wastewater testing programme, which covers about 80 per cent of the population and which tests for the presence of methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, MDMA and fentanyl, were released in April 2019. Preliminary results for the period from November 2018 to January 2019 show that methamphetamine is the most commonly detected illicit drug nationwide, with an estimated average total national consumption of 16 kg per week. According to UNODC, wastewater analysis indicated a 350 per cent increase in the quantity of MDMA consumed in 2017 in New Zealand, surpassing in December 2017 the level of consumption of methamphetamine. In the light of those findings and the increasing quantities of MDMA seized over the period 2015–2017, demand for MDMA and “ecstasy”-type substances appears to have been increasing rapidly in the country.