AUSTRALIAN
CRIMINAL
INTELLIGENCE
COMMISSION

ILLICIT DRUG DATA REPORT
2019–20

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CEO FOREWORD

The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission's annual *Illicit Drug Data Report,* now in its 18th edition, continues to provide an authoritative picture of illicit drugs in Australia. It informs policy and operational decisions across government, industry and the not-for-profit sector and focuses efforts to reduce the impact of illicit drugs on our communities. For this and subsequent reports we will also include additional information and summary tables highlighting trends in national drug markets over the past decade for methylamphetamine, MDMA, cannabis, cocaine and heroin.

Serious and organised criminals are at the centre of Australia's illicit drug market, motivated by greed, power and profit. We know serious and organised crime groups continue to generate significant profits from the sale of illicit substances, with the price paid for illicit drugs in Australia being among the highest in the world. The estimated street value of the weight of amphetamines, MDMA, cannabis, cocaine and heroin seized nationally in 2019–20 is around $9.7 billion, of which amphetamines accounts for nearly 90 per cent, underlining the size of the black economy that relates to illicit drug markets. Almost all of the drug markets monitored in this report showed signs of expanding in 2019–20. As such, the importation, manufacture, cultivation, distribution and use of illicit drugs in Australia remain a focal point of government, law enforcement, health and intelligence agencies.

Illicit drug use cannot be addressed by law enforcement alone—a multi-faceted approach is needed. This report combines illicit drug data from a variety of sources including law enforcement, forensic services, health and academia, which inform our understanding and assist in focusing our collective efforts to respond to the issue of illicit drugs. The risk and harm posed by illicit drugs to the Australian community is ever-growing, which underscores the need for law enforcement and health agencies to work collaboratively to combat both the supply and demand for illicit drugs in Australia. Despite the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on drug markets in the latter half of 2019–20, a number of new records were set this reporting period and include:

- 38.5 tonnes of illicit drugs seized nationally
- 5.2 tonnes of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) (excluding MDMA) detected at the Australian border
- 12.8 tonnes of ATS seized nationally
- 10.6 tonnes of cannabis seized nationally
- 121,274 national illicit drug seizures
- 39,204 national ATS seizures
- 62,454 national cannabis seizures

- 2,230 national heroin seizures
- 5,750 national cocaine seizures
- 166,321 national illicit drug arrests
- 49,638 national ATS arrests
- 5,393 national cocaine arrests.

Over the last decade, during which time the Australian population increased around 14 per cent:

- the number of national illicit drug seizures increased 74 per cent
- the weight of illicit drugs seized nationally increased 314 per cent
- the number of national illicit drug arrests increased 96 per cent.

These upward trends not only highlight the continued vigilance of law enforcement in reducing the supply of illicit drugs, but also the resilience of these markets. Illicit drugs continue to be a concern for law enforcement and the wider community, and the data in this report illustrate the ongoing need to reduce demand.

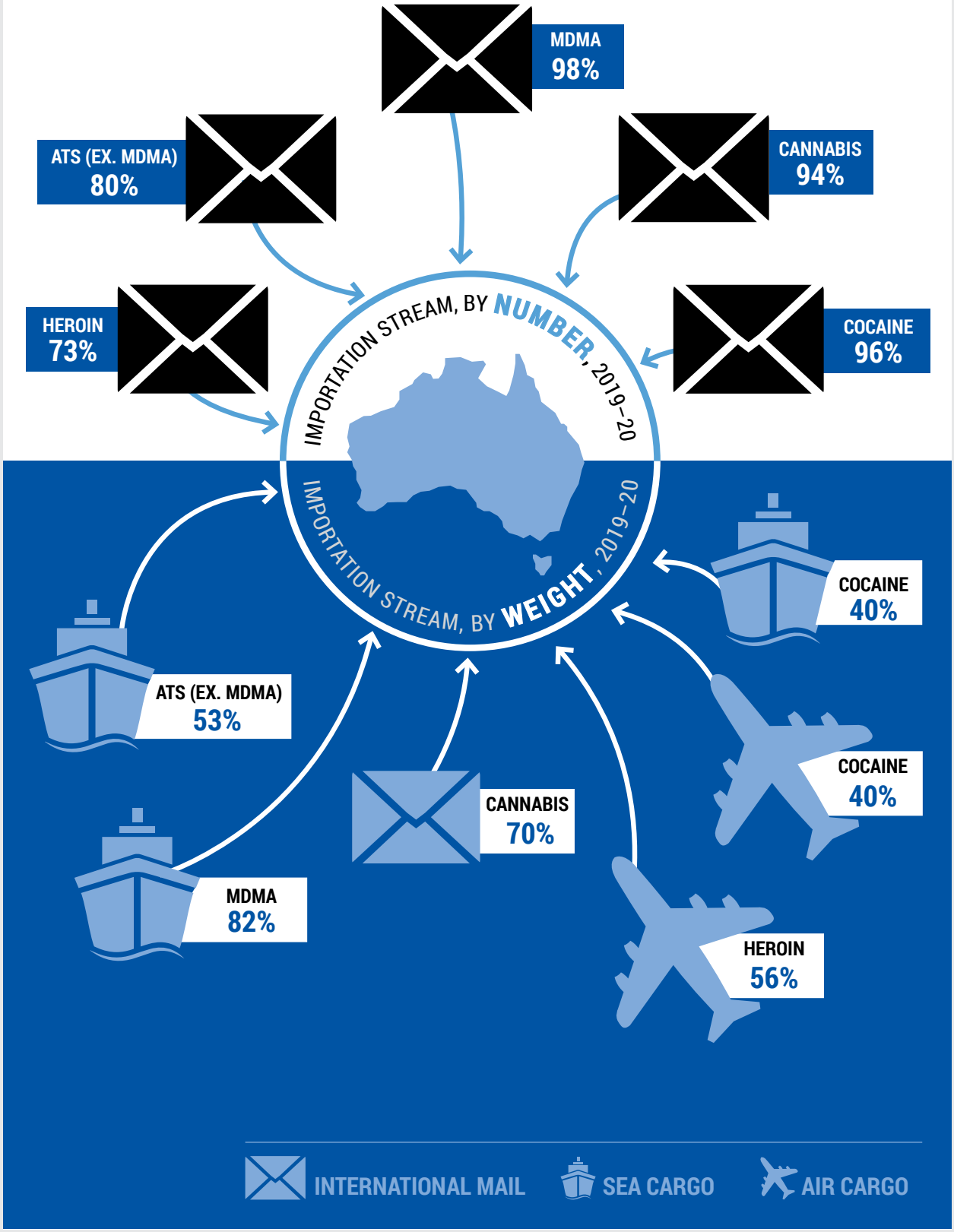
This reporting period the combined weight of cannabis, heroin and cocaine detected at the Australian border equated to less than one quarter of the weight of ATS (including MDMA) detected. Methylamphetamine, which accounts for the majority of ATS, remains the most consumed illicit drug of those monitored by the National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program based on available dose data. It is estimated that 11,147 kilograms of methylamphetamine was consumed in Australia during the reporting period, with 9,408 kilograms of amphetamines—the majority of which is methylamphetamine—seized nationally in 2019–20.

In addition to the highest risk drug markets, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission continues to monitor emerging markets. It is for this reason that the feature drug section of this report is focused on GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD. While the market for these drugs is small compared to more traditional illicit drugs, it appears to be expanding, with record recent seizures and clandestine laboratory detections and this is resulting in tangible harm to some users. The number of clandestine laboratories detected nationally increased for the first time since 2011–12.

I commend the efforts of all who contributed to this report, from law enforcement, forensic services, academia and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission. If not for your vital contributions and continued support, it would not be possible to understand the complex and evolving Australian drug market.

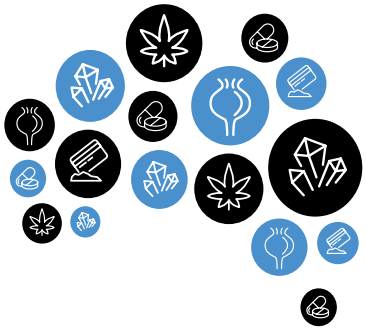
Michael Phelan APM
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission

IMPORTATION METHODS

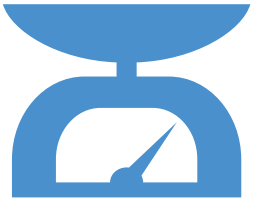


NATIONAL SEIZURES AND ARRESTS

RECORD
121,274
DRUG SEIZURES



RECORD
38.5
TONNES



DRUGS SEIZED

RECORD
166,321
DRUG ARRESTS

1 SEIZURE EVERY
4.5 MINS

1KG SEIZED EVERY
14 MINS

1 ARREST EVERY
3.5 MINS

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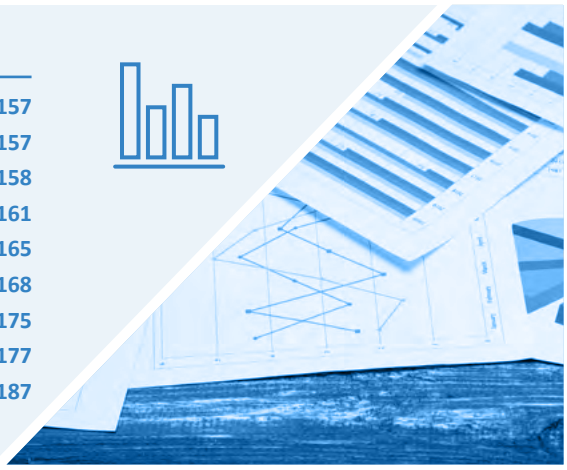


APPENDIX

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report contains data and analysis provided by federal, state and territory police, as well as forensic laboratories and the Department of Home Affairs.[1] These agencies provide significant contributions to each report and their expertise and experience, along with their continued support, have been invaluable to the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission.

Key contributors are listed below:

- Australian Border Force
- Australian Federal Police
- Australian Federal Police, ACT Policing
- Australian Federal Police, Forensic Drug Intelligence
- Australian Institute of Criminology, Drug Use Monitoring in Australia Program
- ChemCentre
- Department of Home Affairs
- Forensic Science Service Tasmania
- Forensic Science South Australia
- National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program
- New South Wales Police Force
- Northern Territory Police
- Queensland Health and Forensic Scientific Services
- Queensland Police Service
- South Australia Police
- Tasmania Police
- Victoria Police
- Western Australia Police Force.

1 Further information about the data, jurisdictional issues and explanatory notes is contained in the *Statistics* chapter.

INTRODUCTION

The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission's Illicit Drug Data Report (IDDR) is the only report of its type in Australia, providing governments, law enforcement agencies and interested stakeholders with a national picture of the illicit drug market. The IDDR presents data from a variety of sources and provides an important evidence-base to assess current and future illicit drug trends, offers a brief analysis of those trends and assists decision-makers in the development of strategies to combat the threat posed by illicit drugs.

The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission collects data annually from all state and territory police services, the Australian Federal Police, the Department of Home Affairs, state and territory forensic laboratories and research centres. Illicit drug data collected and presented in this report for the 2019–20 financial year include:

- arrest
- detection
- seizure
- purity
- profiling
- price.

The purpose of this report is to provide statistics and analysis to assist decision-makers in developing evidence-based illicit drug supply, demand and harm reduction strategies. The data also assist the Australian Government to meet national and international reporting obligations.

The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission uses the National Illicit Drug Reporting Format (NIDRF) system to standardise the arrest, seizure and purity data received from police services and contributing forensic organisations.

The current format and structure of the IDDR provides a more concise report, while still retaining key illicit drug market information and insights. Similar to previous reports, each chapter in the 2019–20 report provides an overview of changes since the previous reporting period and also includes some longer-term trends in key market indicators—including border detections, national seizures and arrests, price, purity, forensic analysis, wastewater analysis and drug user survey data—which inform and enhance our understanding of Australia's illicit drug markets and the ability to identify changes within them.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Variations exist in drug markets, both internationally and domestically, within and between states and territories, and over time. No single dataset provides a national picture of Australian illicit drug markets and it is only through the layering of multiple data—both current and historical—that we are able to enhance our understanding of illicit drug markets.

Cannabis and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) continue to be the main two illicit drug markets in Australia. This is illustrated by supply indicators such as national arrests, with cannabis and ATS accounting for three quarters of the total number of national arrests in 2019–20. Cannabis accounted for half of the total number of national seizures and around a quarter of the weight of illicit drugs seized nationally this reporting period. In 2019–20, ATS accounted for a third of both the number and weight of illicit drugs seized nationally.

The emergence of COVID-19 and the resulting restrictions, both domestically and internationally, may have impacted drug market trends for this reporting period. Based on supply and demand indicators for the main illicit drug markets in Australia in 2019–20:

- The ATS market remains large and shows some signs of potential expansion.
- The cannabis market remains large and is potentially expanding.
- The heroin market remains small but appears to be expanding.
- The cocaine market continued to expand.
- While the market for other drugs remains small compared to the above markets, there are signs that the market for hallucinogens continued to expand, with the market for GHB/GBL and 1-4 butanediol also expanding (see *Feature Drug* section).

In addition to domestic border detections and seizures, international operations and collaboration also impact Australian drug markets. A summary of some current international operations and initiatives is included in Appendix 1.

Over the last decade, the methylamphetamine, MDMA, cannabis and cocaine markets have expanded, while there have been mixed changes in the heroin market.

National drug market decade trend: comparison of 2010–11 and 2019–20[2]

	Methylamphetamine	MDMA	Cannabis	Cocaine	Heroin
Border detections					
Number	↑ 28% 1,075 → 1,377[a]	↑ 1,961% 112 → 2,308	↑ 501% 2,137 → 12,846	↑ 447% 486 → 2,660	↓ -24% 232 → 177
Weight	↑ 4,920% 105kg → 5,271kg[a]	↑ 16,038% 8kg → 1,291kg	↑ 839% 69kg → 648kg	↑ 9% 701kg → 763kg	↓ -72% 400kg → 110kg
National seizures					
Number	↑ 274% 9,133 → 34,133[b]	↑ 171% 1,840 → 4,981	↑ 25% 50,073 → 62,454	↑ 372% 1,217 → 5,750	↑ 31% 1,700 → 2,230
Weight	↑ 1,415% 621kg → 9,408kg[b]	↑ 4,845% 65kg → 3,214kg	↑ 96% 5,452kg → 10,662kg	↑ 138% 662kg → 1,573kg	↓ -44% 375kg → 210kg
National arrests					
Number	↑ 322% 10,633 → 44,847[b]	↑ 120% 2,161 → 4,746	↑ 30 % 58,760 → 76,669	↑ 543 % 839 → 5,393	↑ 38 % 2,551 → 3,514[c]
Median price[d]					
	↑ $75.00 → $90.00	↓ $33.25 → $22.50	↑ $25.00 → $27.50	↑ $50.00 → $80.00	↑ $50.00 → $85.00
Annual median purity range					
	↑ 9.3% to 32.0% → 13.4% to 82.9%	↑ 7.7% to 16.0% → 39.9% to 76.0%[e]	—	↑ 9.5% to 30.0% → 40.5% to 67.0%	↑ 14.0% to 48.0% → 39.7% to 77.0%
NDSHS[f]					
Use in lifetime	↓ 7% → 6%	↑ 10% → 13%	↑ 35% → 37%	↑ 7% → 11%	➲ 1% → 1%
Recent use	↓ 2% → 1%	➲ 3% → 3%	↑ 10% → 12%	↑ 2% → 4%	➲ <1% → <1%
DUMA[g]					
	↑ 18% → 51%	↑ <1% → 1%	↓ 45% → 44%	↑ 1% → 2%	↓ 11% → 7%

a. National border detection data reflect ATS (excluding MDMA).
b. National seizure and arrest data reflect amphetamines, which include amphetamine, methylamphetamine, dexamphetamine and amphetamines not elsewhere classified. At this time, it is not possible at a national level to provide a further breakdown of drugs within the amphetamine category. Based on available data, methylamphetamine accounts for the majority of amphetamines seizures and arrests.
c. Heroin arrests include arrests for heroin and other opioids.
d. National median prices for a street deal are equivalent to 0.1 gram of methylamphetamine, 1 MDMA tablet, 1 gram of hydroponic cannabis, a cap (0.2 grams) of cocaine or a taste/cap of heroin (0.1–0.3 grams). National median prices are calculated using price data reported by four or more jurisdictions, with the exception of cocaine which used price data reported by New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania in 2019–20.
e. Annual median purity reflects reported phenethylamine purity, the majority of which relates to MDMA.
f. National Drug Strategy Household Survey. Data is for 2010 and 2019 and reflects the proportion of the Australian population aged 14 years or older who reported having used the nominated drug.
g. Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program urinalysis data.

2 Key for tables in the Executive Summary:
↓ = Decrease ➲ = Relatively stable ↑ = Increase ■ = Highest on record □ = Highest in last decade

PROFILE OF ILLICIT DRUG DETECTIONS AT THE AUSTRALIAN BORDER

Number of illicit drug detections—comparison between 2018–19 and 2019–20

Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS)		Cannabis	Heroin	Cocaine
ATS (excluding MDMA)	MDMA			
↓ -32%	↓ -39%	↑ 15%	↓ -4%	↓ -1%
2,022 → 1,377	3,777 → 2,308	11,133 → 12,846	184 → 177	2,695 → 2,660

Cannabis continued to account for the greatest number of border detections in 2019–20, followed by cocaine, MDMA, ATS[3] and heroin.

- The number of ATS, MDMA, heroin and cocaine detections at the Australian border decreased in 2019–20.
- The number of cannabis detections at the Australian border increased this reporting period.

Weight of illicit drug detections—comparison between 2018–19 and 2019–20

Amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS)		Cannabis	Heroin	Cocaine
ATS (excluding MDMA)	MDMA			
↑ 2%	↓ -39%	↓ -64%	↓ -61%	↓ -27%
5,148kg → 5,271kg	2,124kg → 1,291kg	1,811kg → 648kg	283kg → 110kg	1,049kg → 763kg

ATS accounted for the greatest proportion of the weight of border detections in 2019–20, followed by MDMA, cocaine, cannabis and heroin.

- The weight of MDMA, cannabis, heroin and cocaine detected decreased this reporting period.
- The weight of ATS detected increased in 2019–20 and is the highest weight on record.

3 ATS border detection data excludes MDMA, which is reported separately.

Proportion of illicit drug detections, by importation stream in 2019–20

Drug type	Importation stream, by number		Importation stream, by weight	
ATS (excluding MDMA)	**International mail**	**80%**	**Sea cargo**	**53%**
	Air cargo	18%	Air cargo	39%
	Air passenger/crew	1%	International mail	7%
	Sea cargo	1%	Air passenger/crew	1%
MDMA	**International mail**	**98%**	**Sea cargo**	**82%**
	Air cargo	2%	International mail	11%
	Air passenger/crew	<1%	Air cargo	7%
	Sea cargo	<1%	Air passenger/crew	<1%
Cannabis	**International mail**	**94%**	**International mail**	**70%**
	Air cargo	6%	Air cargo	28%
	Air passenger/crew	<1%	Sea cargo	1%
	Sea cargo	<1%	Air passenger/crew	1%
Heroin	**International mail**	**73%**	**Air cargo**	**56%**
	Air cargo	24%	International mail	44%
	Air passenger/crew	3%	Air passenger/crew	<1%
Cocaine	**International mail**	**96%**	**Sea cargo**	**40%**
	Air cargo	3%	**Air cargo**	**40%**
	Air passenger/crew	<1%	International mail	18%
	Sea cargo	<1%	Air passenger/crew	2%

The international mail stream continued to account for the greatest proportion of the number of illicit drug detections at the Australian border, however the importation stream accounting for the greatest proportion of the weight detected varies by drug type.

PROFILE OF NATIONAL DRUG SEIZURES

Number of national illicit drug seizures—comparison between 2018–19 and 2019–20

National	ATS	Cannabis	Heroin	Cocaine	Other & unknown drugs
↑ 8 %	↑ 2 %	↑ 11 %	↑ 7 %	↑ 7 %	↑ 13 %
112,474 → 121,274	38,250 → 39,204	56,491 → 62,454	2,080 → 2,230	5,378 → 5,750	10,275 → 11,636

The number of national illicit drug seizures increased to a record level this reporting period.

- In 2019–20, cannabis continued to account for the greatest proportion of the number of national illicit drug seizures (51 per cent), followed by ATS (32 per cent), other and unknown drugs (10 per cent), cocaine (5 per cent) and heroin and other opioids (2 per cent).
- The number of ATS, cannabis, heroin, cocaine and other and unknown drugs seizures increased this reporting period, with ATS, cannabis, cocaine and heroin increasing to record levels.

The number of national illicit drug seizures increased 74 per cent over the last decade, from 69,595 seizures in 2010–11 to a record 121,274 seizures in 2019–20.

Weight of illicit drug seizures—comparison between 2018–19 and 2019–20

National	ATS	Cannabis	Heroin	Cocaine	Other & unknown drugs
↑ 45 %	↑ 47 %	↑ 38 %	↑ 7 %	↓ -4 %	↑ 59 %
26.6t → 38.5t	8,776kg → 12,864kg	7,740kg → 10,662kg	197kg → 210kg	1,638kg → 1,573kg	8,345kg → 13,276kg

The weight of illicit drugs seized nationally increased to a record level this reporting period.

- In 2019–20, other and unknown accounted for the greatest proportion of the weight of illicit drugs seized nationally (34 per cent), followed by ATS (33 per cent), cannabis (28 per cent), cocaine (4 per cent) and heroin and other opioids (1 per cent).
- The weight of ATS, cannabis, heroin and other and unknown drugs seized nationally increased this reporting period, with ATS and cannabis increasing to record levels.
- The weight of cocaine seized nationally decreased this reporting period.

The weight of illicit drugs seized nationally increased 314 per cent over the last decade, from 9.3 tonnes in 2010–11 to a record 38.5 tonnes in 2019–20.

Comparison of the weight of methylamphetamine, MDMA, heroin and cocaine seized nationally in 2019–20 and estimated consumption

Drug	Estimated consumption[a] (kilograms per annum)	2019–20 national seizures (gross kilograms)	Percentage of total estimated consumption seized (%)
Methylamphetamine	11,147	9,408[b]	84
MDMA	2,630	3,214	122
Heroin	1,021	210	21
Cocaine	5,675	1,573	28

a. Consumption estimates are based on data derived from Year 4 of the National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program.
b. At this time it is not possible at a national level to provide a further breakdown of drugs within the amphetamines category, as such national seizure figures reflect the weight of amphetamines seized. Amphetamines include amphetamine, methylamphetamine, dexamphetamine and amphetamine not elsewhere classified. Based on available data, methylamphetamine accounts for the majority of amphetamines seized.

Wastewater analysis provides a measure of licit and illicit drug consumption within a given population. The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission has used wastewater data collected between August 2019 and August 2020 as part of the National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program (NWDMP) to estimate the annual weight of methylamphetamine, MDMA, heroin and cocaine consumed nationally. Based on the reported gross weights seized nationally by Australian law enforcement in 2019–20 and consumption estimates from the NWDMP:

- The weight of amphetamines seized equated to 84 per cent of the total estimated weight of methylamphetamine needed to meet national demand.
- The weight of MDMA seized equated to 122 per cent of the total estimated weight of MDMA needed to meet national demand.
- The weight of heroin seized equated to 21 per cent of the total estimated weight of heroin needed to meet national demand.
- The weight of cocaine seized equated to 28 per cent of the total estimated weight of cocaine needed to meet national demand.

PROFILE OF ILLICIT DRUG ARRESTS

National illicit drug arrests—comparison between 2018–19 and 2019–20

National	ATS	Cannabis	Heroin & other opioids	Cocaine	Other & unknown drugs
↑ 8 %	↑ 7 %	↑ 8 %	↑ 12 %	↑ 8 %	↑ 13 %
153,377 → 166,321	46,437 → 49,638	71,151 → 76,669	3,129 → 3,514	5,016 → 5,393	27,644 → 31,107

The number of national illicit drug arrests increased to a record level this reporting period.

- In 2019–20, cannabis continued to account for the greatest proportion of national illicit drug arrests (46 per cent), followed by ATS (30 per cent), other and unknown drugs (19 per cent), cocaine (3 per cent) and heroin and other opioids (2 per cent).
- The number of national arrests increased for all drugs this reporting period. There were a record number of national ATS, cocaine and other and unknown drugs arrests in 2019–20, with the number of national heroin and other opioids arrests this reporting period the highest reported in the last decade.

The number of national illicit drug arrests increased 96 per cent over the last decade, from 84,738 in 2010–11 to a record 166,321 in 2019–20.

Arrest data in the IDDR incorporate recorded law enforcement action against a person for suspected unlawful involvement in illicit drugs. It includes action by way of arrest and charge, summons, diversions, infringement and caution. The action taken by law enforcement is influenced by a number of factors, including but not limited to which state or territory the incident occurs in, the drug type and quantity and related legislation/regulation. In 2019–20, summons accounted for the greatest proportion of national drug arrests (45 per cent), followed by arrest and charge (36 per cent) and caution/diversion/infringement (20 per cent). These proportions vary between drug type, with arrest and charge accounting for the greatest proportion of national heroin and other opioids arrests (58 per cent) and summons accounting for the greatest proportion of national ATS and steroid arrests (both 49 per cent). While caution/diversion/infringements accounted for 33 per cent of national cannabis arrests this reporting period, the highest proportion reported for any drug, summons accounted for the greatest proportion of national cannabis arrests in 2019–20 (42 per cent).

Males continued to account for the majority of national illicit drug arrests (75 per cent) in 2019–20. While there was some variation in the proportion of arrests involving males across drug types, males consistently accounted for the greatest proportion of arrests across all drug types this reporting period, ranging from 72 per cent of national other and unknown drug arrests to 85 per cent of national cocaine and steroid arrests.

In 2019–20, consumer arrests continued to account for the greatest proportion of national illicit drug arrests (88 per cent). While consumer arrests accounted for the greatest proportion of arrests across all drug types this reporting period, the proportion attributed to them varies, ranging from 75 per cent of national cocaine arrests to 91 per cent of national cannabis arrests.

PROFILE OF NATIONAL CLANDESTINE LABORATORIES AND PRECURSORS

National clandestine laboratory detections—comparison between 2018–19 and 2019–20

No. of detections	Size and production capacity		Location	
↑ 1%	↓ Addict-based	47% → 44%	↑ Residential	69% → 74%
308 → 312	↓ Other small	33% → 28%	↓ Commercial/industrial	10% → 8%
	↑ Medium	18% → 24%	→ Rural	5% → 5%
	↑ Industrial	2% → 4%	→ Other	5% → 5%
			↓ Vehicle	9% → 4%
			↑ Public place	3% → 4%

The number of clandestine laboratories detected nationally increased for the first time in 2019–20 after seven consecutive reporting periods of decreases.

- The majority of laboratories detected in Australia continue to be addict-based and situated in residential locations.
- The majority of laboratories detected this reporting period were producing methylamphetamine, with the hypophosphorous method of production the predominant process identified.

Number of ATS precursor border detections—comparison between 2018–19 and 2019–20

ATS Precursors	
ATS (excluding MDMA)	MDMA
↑ 143%	↑ 100%
325 → 790	2 → 4

Both the number of ATS and MDMA precursor detections at the Australian border increased in 2019–20.

Weight of ATS precursor detections—comparison between 2018–19 and 2019–20

ATS Precursors	
ATS (excluding MDMA)	MDMA
↓ -20%	↑ 951%
2,621kg → 2,099kg	390g → 4.1kg

The weight of ATS precursors detected at the Australian border decreased in 2019–20, while the weight of MDMA precursors detected increased.

2019–20 FEATURE—GHB, GBL AND 1,4-BD

KEY POINTS

- The combined market for gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB), gamma butyrolactone (GBL) and 1,4-butanediol (1,4-BD) is small, but appears to be expanding.
- There were record numbers of GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD seizures and record weights of GHB and related compounds (including GHB and other related substances grouped in a single category) seized in 2019–20.
- A record 23 clandestine laboratories producing GHB/GBL were detected nationally in 2019–20.
- According to user reporting, demand for GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD remains relatively stable.

INTRODUCTION

GHB is a depressant and is found naturally in the body in small quantities and may also be synthetically produced. GBL and 1,4-BD, which are solvents with industrial applications, are closely related chemicals that once ingested are converted into GHB. GHB commonly appears as a colourless, odourless, bitter or salty liquid and less commonly as crystal powder. On the illicit market it is usually sold in small bottles or vials and is typically administered orally and swallowed (AAC 2021a; ADF 2021; DrugWise 2021).

In Australia many substances are regulated in relation to their sale, supply and distribution under various Commonwealth and state and territory legislation. Under the *Commonwealth Criminal Code Regulations 2019* (Cth), GHB and GBL are classified as both controlled drugs (illegal to possess) and border-controlled drugs (illegal to import into Australia).

GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD are often used illicitly to achieve a euphoric and disinhibiting effect when used in low doses, or for their sedative effects at higher doses. GHB and GBL are also used by body builders to promote the production of growth hormones (AAC 2021b; DrugWise 2021; WHO 2012).

HARMS

Use of GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD can result in drug dependence, overdose and death (see Case Study 1). The risk of overdose is increased as a consequence of the small dosage units and also as a consequence of use in combination with other drugs such as alcohol. Commercially available domestic or industrial products containing these substances are not meant for human consumption and invariably contain other potentially toxic substances, including heavy metals and other solvents such as acetone or toluene. Other harms include its use to facilitate sexual assaults.

According to Global Drug Survey[4] data in 2019, 2.7 per cent of respondents reported using GHB/GBL in the past 12 months. Of the 13 illicit drugs ranked in terms of the proportion of people having to seek emergency medical treatment following use, GHB/GBL was ranked third (3.5 per cent) after heroin (12.7 per cent) and methylamphetamine (4.1 per cent). Of those reporting GHB use in the last 12 months, one in five reported losing consciousness, with 60 per cent of those reporting unconsciousness saying that they did so on more than one occasion in the past 12 months (GDS 2021).

The number of GHB related drug-induced deaths is small, accounting for less than 1 per cent of all recorded unintentional drug-induced deaths in Australia in 2017 and 2018[5]. The risk of death increases when GHB and GBL are combined with other depressant drugs such as alcohol, opioids or benzodiazepines, which can lead to severe respiratory depression. Use of GHB with psychostimulant drugs such as methylamphetamine, MDMA or cocaine can cause severe heart strain, with additional substances detected in 90 per cent of recorded GHB-related deaths in Australia from 2001 to 2019 (AAC 2021; ADF 2020; Drake at al. 2020; DrugWise 2021; Penington Institute 2019; Penington Institute 2020; WHO 2012).

CASE STUDY 1: GHB-related deaths and overdoses across Australia

The number of GHB-related deaths has steadily increased in Australia over the past two decades with 8 deaths reported between 2000 and 2004, 19 from 2005 to 2009, 21 from 2010 to 2014 and 26 from 2015 to 2019. Increases in GHB-related deaths and overdoses have prompted authorities to issue warnings in relation to GHB and GBL use. For example:

- in October 2019, the Canberra Hospital reported a resurgence of GHB-related overdoses
- in December 2019, the Western Australia Police Force issued a public warning about GHB after it was linked to three fatal overdoses in Perth and several others requiring medical attention
- in October 2020, South Australia Health issued an urgent warning about increased GHB overdose risks when multiple patients presented with serious effects after consuming GHB (ABC 2019; Canberra Times 2019; Drake at al. 2020; Government of South Australia 2020).

4 The Global Drug Survey is a self-report survey. Sampling was conducted between 7 November 2019 and 30 December 2019 and included 110,000 respondents from more than 25 countries.

5 Numbers refer to the succinimides and oxazolidinediones group, including drugs that have anti-convulsant or sedating-hypnotic effects. GHB typically forms the majority of the succinimides and oxazolidinediones group.

SUPPLY INDICATORS

INTERNATIONAL PICTURE

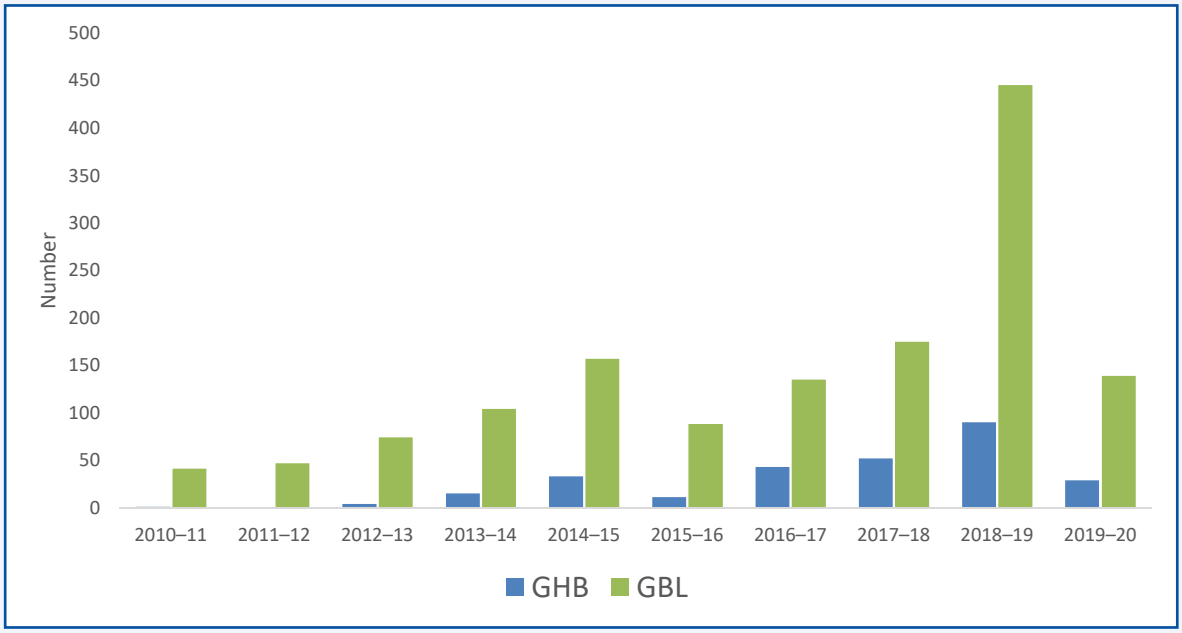
Available data suggest that fewer, but larger, seizures of GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD have been detected globally, with the majority seized in Europe. The World Customs Organization reported a 40 per cent decrease in the number of GBL seizures between 2018 and 2019. In contrast, the weight seized increased 149 per cent. GBL accounted for the greatest proportion of the weight of psychotropic substances seized in 2019, accounting for 15 per cent. Of the psychotropic substances seized in 2019, GBL accounted for the largest proportion of air seizures by weight (85.2 per cent) and 23.1 per cent of mail seizures (WCO 2020).

In 2018, seizures of GBL were reported mainly in Europe, with amounts ranging from 1 litre in Italy to 27,500 litres in Lithuania. The United States (US) was the only country outside of Europe to report GBL seizures; while Hungary and Spain were the only countries to report seizures of 1,4-BD in 2018. Countries in South East Asia and Oceania reported seizures and increasing use of GHB and GBL in 2019 (INCB 2019; UNODC 2020).

BORDER DETECTIONS

The number of GHB and GBL border detections increased over the last decade, with a record number of detections of both drugs reported in 2018–19. While fluctuating over the last decade, the number of GHB detections increased significantly, from 1 in 2010–11 to 29 in 2019–20, with the number of GBL detections increasing 239 per cent, from 41 in 2010–11 to 139 in 2019–20 (see figure below).

Number of GHB and GBL detections at the Australian border, 2010–11 to 2019–20 (Source: Department of Home Affairs)



In the last decade international mail consistently accounted for the greatest proportion of the number of GHB and GBL border detections, ranging from 56 per cent in 2019–20 to 86 per cent in 2013–14. Air cargo was the second most commonly detected importation method, ranging from 13 per cent of detections in 2017–18 to 44 per cent in 2019–20. Air passenger, followed by sea cargo were the least commonly detected importation methods. Although data relating to the quantity detected is not available, Case Study 2 provides an example of a significant detection at the Australian border.

CASE STUDY 2: Border detection of a large commercial quantity of GBL

In February 2018, a joint Australian Federal Police (AFP) and Australian Border Force (ABF) operation resulted in one of Australia's largest seizures of GBL. ABF officers identified a high-risk shipping container arriving into Sydney. The consignment contained 120 drums, each with a capacity of 200 litres. During a physical examination, ABF officers identified 10 drums that had a number of anomalies. Presumptive testing of the liquid, labelled as car pre-painting wash, returned a positive result for GBL. Two thousand litres of GBL was seized, with an estimated street value of $10 million. A 30-year-old man was charged with one count of importing of a commercial quantity of a border-controlled substance under subsection 307.1(1) of the *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cth; AFP 2018).

While embarkation points for GHB and GBL detections (by number) changed over the last decade, the most frequently identified countries include China (including Hong Kong), the Netherlands, Germany, the United Kingdom and the US. Other prominent countries include Lithuania, Poland, Singapore, Belgium, the Republic of Korea, Switzerland and Thailand. Since 2015–16, China (including Hong Kong) and the Netherlands have been identified as the top two embarkation points by number.

SEIZURES

In recognition of recent apparent increases in this market and the inability of the National Illicit Drug Reporting Format (NIDRF) system to provide granularity on related national seizures, bespoke data and information was sought from the AFP and jurisdictions in 2019–20 to gain a more detailed understanding of the nature and extent of the GHB, GBL and 1-4 BD market in Australia, and how this may have changed and evolved over the last decade.

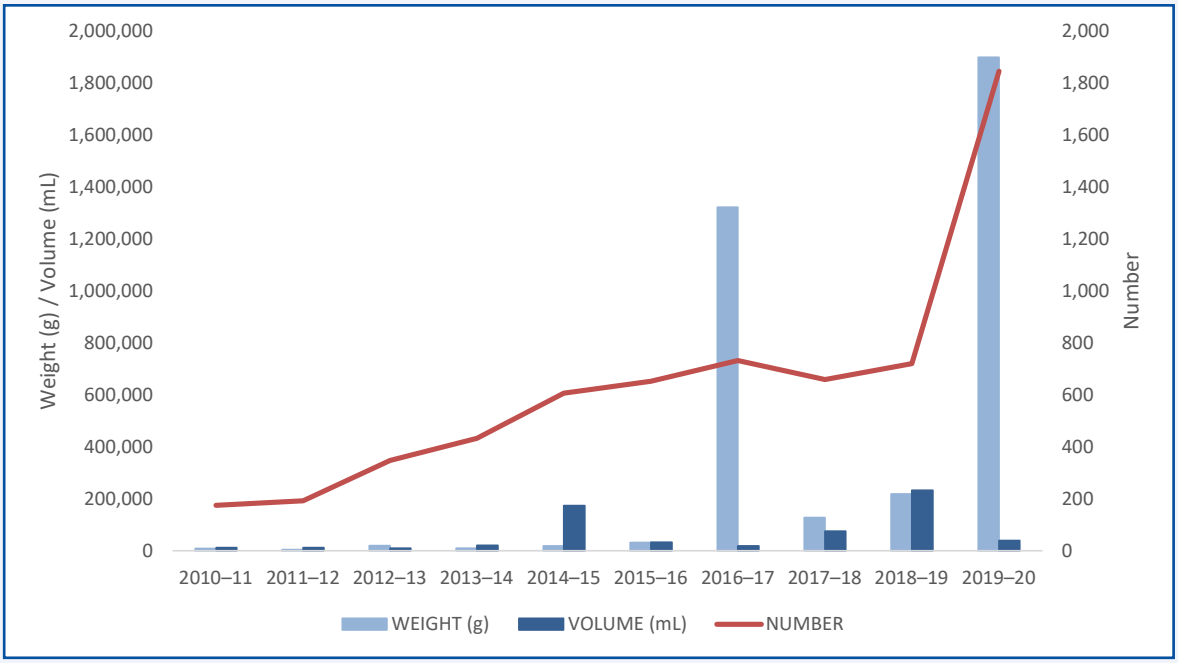
While seizure data are not available for all jurisdictions, overall trends point to an increase in the number, weight and volume of GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD seizures between 2010–11 and 2019–20. Seizures fluctuated over the period, in some instances as a direct result of targeted law enforcement action. In some jurisdictions, GHB and related substances are grouped as a single category and reported as 'GHB and related compounds'. Where GHB could be separated from other related compounds, the weight seized was less than that of GBL. This in part may be a consequence of controls placed on GHB through international drug conventions.

Despite substantial increases in the number of seizures in 2019–20, seizures of GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD are small when compared to other drugs. For example, despite large increases in both the number and weight of GHB and related compounds seizures, GHB and related compounds were only the ninth most commonly seized drug in New South Wales in 2019–20.

While fluctuating, the number, weight and volume of reported GHB and related compounds seizures increased over the last decade (see figure below):

- The number of GHB and related compound seizures increased 954 per cent, from 175 in 2010–11 to a record 1,845 in 2019–20 (of which a record 444 seizures were identified as GHB[6]). In 2018–19 there was 720 seizures.
- The weight of GHB and related compounds seized increased significantly, from 8.50 kilograms in 2010–11 to a record 1,897.62 kilograms in 2019–20 (of which 33.86 kilograms was identified as GHB). In 2018–19, 217.84 kilograms was seized.
- The volume of GHB and related compounds seized increased 233 per cent, from 11.78 litres in 2010–11 to 39.24 litres in 2019–20 (which was identified as GHB). In 2018–19, 232.21 litres was seized.

Reported national GHB and related compound seizures, by number, weight and volume, 2010–11 to 2019–20[a]



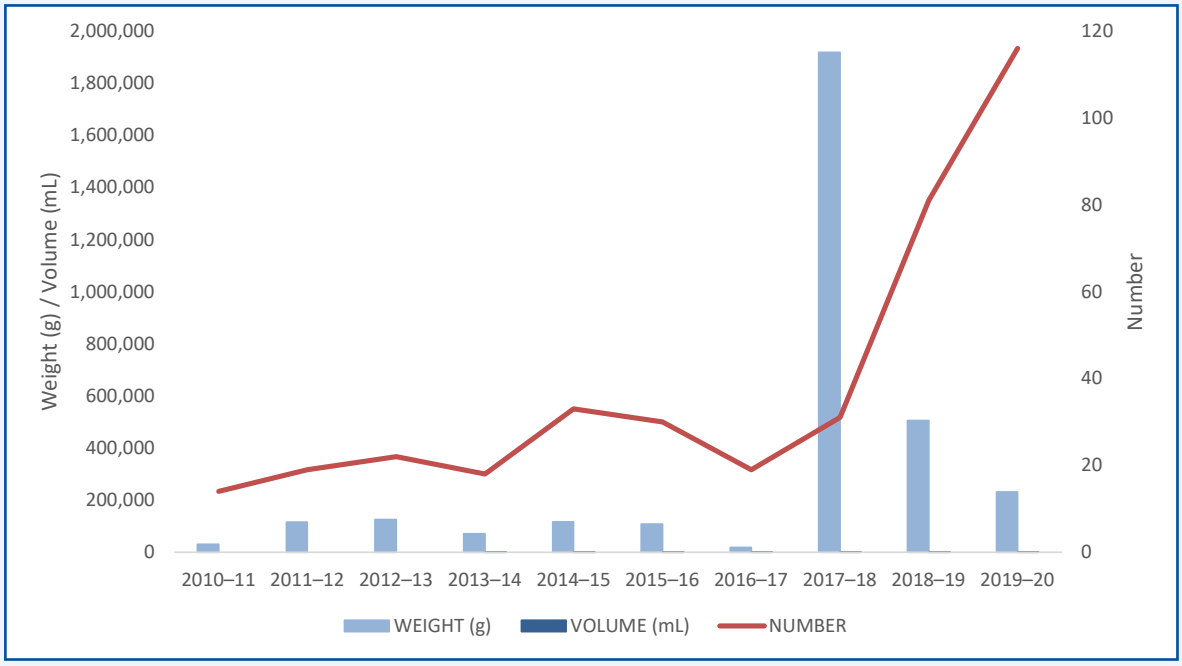
a. Grouping includes substances classed as 'fantasy'.

6 The total number and weight of identified GHB seizures may be higher, but due to grouping of GHB with other related compounds in some jurisdictions actual numbers cannot be determined.

Where it was possible to differentiate GBL from related compounds, the number and volume of GBL seizures increased over the last decade, while the weight of GBL seized fluctuated (see figure below):

- The number of GBL seizures increased 729 per cent, from 14 in 2010–11 to a record 116 in 2019–20. In 2018–19 there was 81 seizures.
- The weight of GBL seized increased 669 per cent, from 30.13 kilograms in 2010–11 to 231.65 kilograms in 2019–20. In 2018–19, 505.75 kilograms was seized, a decrease from the record 1,917.20 kilograms seized in 2017–18.
- The volume of GBL seized increased over the last decade, from no seizures in 2010–11 to 1.32 litres in 2019–20. In 2018–19, 1.23 litres of GBL was seized.

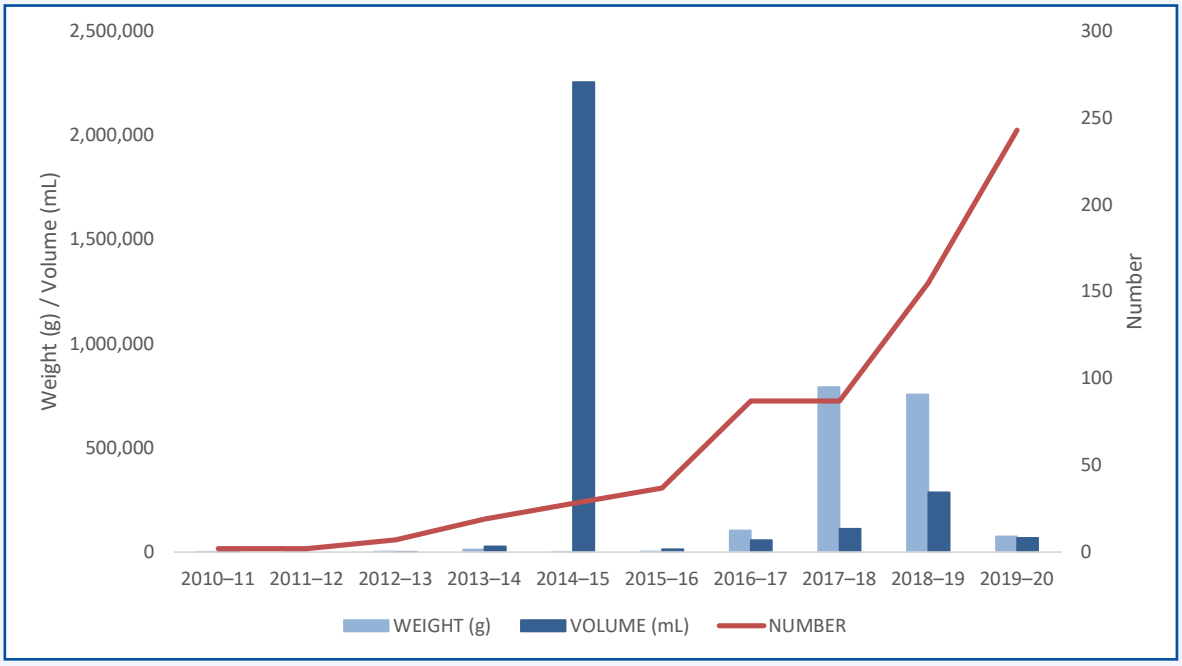
Reported national GBL seizures, by number, weight and volume, 2010–11 to 2019–20



While the number of 1,4-BD seizures increased over the last decade, the weight and volume seized fluctuated (see figure below):

- The number of 1,4-BD seizures increased significantly, from 2 in 2010–11 to a record 243 in 2019–20. In 2018–19 there was 155 seizures.
- The weight of 1,4-BD seized increased significantly, from 0.01 kilograms in 2010–11 to 76.23 kilograms in 2019–20. In 2018–19, 756.70 kilograms was seized.
- The volume of 1,4-BD seized increased 237 per cent, from 20.00 litres in 2010–11 to 67.30 litres in 2019–20. In 2018–19, 286.06 litres was seized, with a record 2,254.65 litres seized in 2014–15.

Reported national 1,4-BD seizures, by number, weight and volume, 2010–11 to 2019–20



GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD seizures were reported in almost all states and territories with the exception of Tasmania. Seizures ranged from small quantities, likely for personal use, to large commercial quantities. In many cases, offenders charged with supply of GHB, GBL or 1,4-BD were in possession of other illicit drugs (see case studies below).

CASE STUDY 3: Possession of 1,4-BD

On 24 August 2019, an offender was apprehended by members of the Northern Territory Police's Drugs and Organised Crime Squad when disembarking from a flight from Adelaide and was subject to a search in accordance with section 120C of the *Police Administration Act 1979* (NT).

During the search detectives located 41.9 grams of methylamphetamine and a 100 millilitre vial of 1,4-BD concealed in clothing around the offender's groin area.

On 7 February 2020, the offender was sentenced in the Darwin Supreme Court in relation to the following charges:

- supply Schedule 1 dangerous drug–commercial quantity
- possess a prohibited substance (Schedule 10 substance).

He was sentenced to serve four years imprisonment with a non-parole period of 17 months.

CASE STUDY 4: Supply of GHB

The Western Australia Police Force currently have a prosecution before the Perth District Court after a male adult was charged with possessing and/or attempting to possess GHB, both with intent to sell or supply.

In June 2020, the male adult was arrested at a postal locker in Perth. A quantity of 652.5 grams of GHB had been delivered to the postal lockers. A series of *Misuse of Drug Act 1981* (WA) search warrants were executed in relation to the matter and a further 112.7 grams of GHB was seized. The total amount of GHB seized was 765.2 grams.

If convicted, the male adult may be subject to other legislation, such as possible asset seizure.

PRICE

Based on available price reporting for the last decade, and assuming there are no significant changes in the environment, the median prices for GHB and/or GBL at the both street and commercial quantity levels are expected to remain relatively stable, or decrease slightly over the next two years.

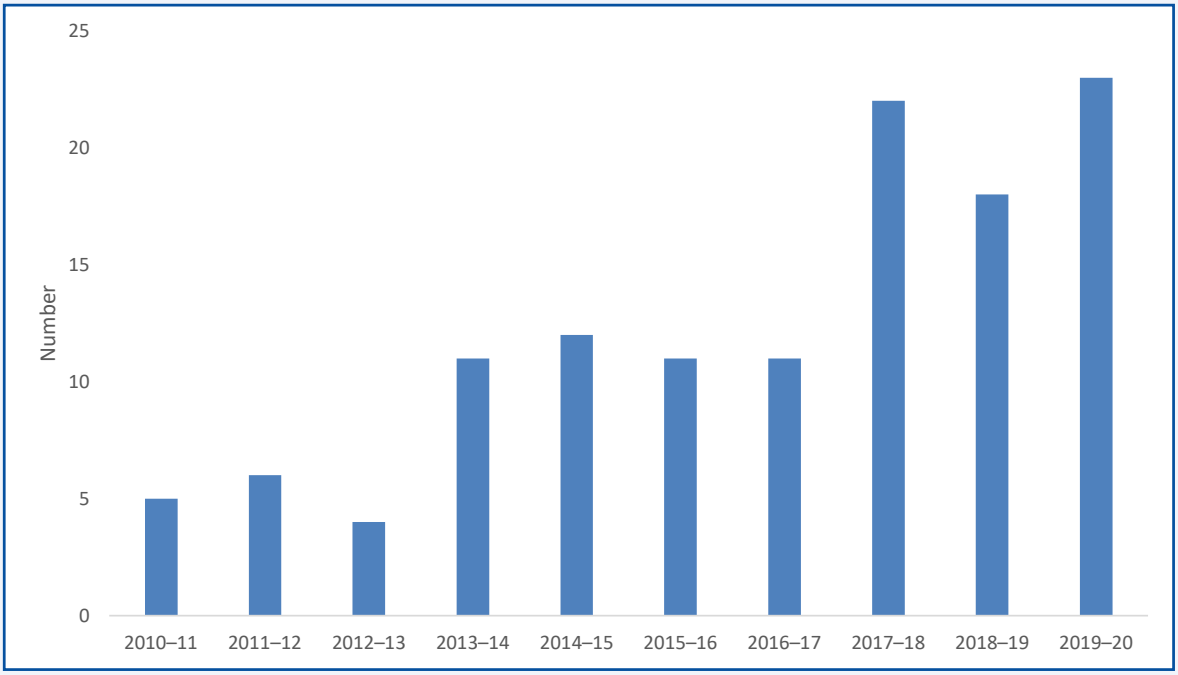
The national price range for 1 to 1.5 millilitres of GHB and/or GBL remained relatively stable over the last decade, ranging between $3 and $8 in 2010–11 to between $2 and $10 in 2019–20. In 2018–19 this price ranged from $2 to $15. The median price for 1 to 1.5 millilitres of GHB and/or GBL decreased over the last decade, from $7.50 in 2010–11 (reported in New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia) to $6.25 nationally in 2019–20. The national median price was $7 in 2018–19.

The price for 1 litre of GHB and/or GBL fluctuated over the last decade, ranging from $2,600 in 2010–11 to between $900 and $5,000 in 2019–20. The reported price range was between $1,500 and $3,000 in 2018–19. Median prices for 1 litre of GHB and/or GBL increased over the same period, from $2,600 in 2010–11 (reported in New South Wales) to $2,750 nationally in 2019–20. In 2018–19 the national median price for 1 litre of GHB and/or GBL was $2,625.

CLANDESTINE LABORATORIES

The number of clandestine laboratories producing GHB and/or GBL increased 360 per cent over the last decade, from 5 laboratories in 2010–11 to a record 23 laboratories in 2019–20 (see figure and case study below). The majority of GHB and/or GBL laboratories were detected in Victoria (31 per cent), followed by South Australia and Queensland (24 per cent each), New South Wales (19 per cent) and Western Australia (<1 per cent). No GHB and/or GBL laboratories have been detected in Tasmania, the Northern Territory or the Australian Capital Territory in the last decade.

Number of national GHB/GBL clandestine laboratory detections, 2010–11 to 2019–20



CASE STUDY 5: Arrest for GBL possession leads to the discovery of a clandestine laboratory

On 15 May 2020, detectives attached to Sydney City Police Area Command were patrolling the central business district when they stopped a hire car in Darlinghurst. Following a conversation with the 37-year-old driver, officers searched him and located cash and drugs believed to be methylamphetamine. During a subsequent search of the car, detectives seized approximately 27 kilograms of GBL, $20,000 cash, and various electronic devices and documents linked to the supply of prohibited drugs. The man was arrested and conveyed to a police station where he was charged with supply a large commercial quantity of prohibited drugs, supply a prohibited drug and two counts of dealing with the proceeds of crime.

As a result of subsequent inquiries, detectives executed a search warrant at a Regents Park factory on 18 May 2020, where they seized 724 kilograms of GBL. A further 56 kilograms of GBL was seized during a search warrant at a unit in Hunters Hill on 19 May 2020, with officers also dismantling a clandestine laboratory set up within the home.

AVAILABILITY

The reported availability of GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD fluctuated over the last decade. A national study of people who regularly use ecstasy and other stimulants found that the proportion of respondents reporting GHB as ‘easy’ or ‘very easy’ to obtain fluctuated, ranging from 45 per cent of respondents in 2014 to 83 per cent of respondents in 2016. No data were available for 2018, 2019 or 2020 (NDARC 2021a).

According to data from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD availability in all cryptomarkets monitored between January 2014 and August 2020 fluctuated, with a maximum of 350 cumulative listings (including interpolated data) recorded in June 2017. Based on the total number of listings, the combined GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD market is small compared to other drug markets. For example, in June 2017 there were 2,115 heroin listings, 4,184 methylamphetamine listings, 7,361 cocaine listings, 12,472 MDMA listings and 23,549 cannabis listings (NDARC 2021b).

DOMESTIC MARKET INDICATORS

Reported use of GHB and GBL remained relatively stable over the last decade, with recent data indicating that the number of users remains small compared to other drugs.

The National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) collects self-report information on alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use among the general population and also surveys people's attitudes and perceptions in relation to these. Conducted approximately every three years, the related report presents estimates derived from survey responses weighted to the appropriate Australian population. Data from NDSHS shows that consumption of GHB has remained relatively stable, with 0.1 per cent of the Australian population aged 14 years or older reporting recent GHB use[7] between 2004 and 2019 (with the exception of 2013, where less than 0.1 per cent reported recent use). The proportion of the population reporting GHB use at least once in their lifetime remained relatively stable, increasing from less than 1 per cent in 2004 to 1 per cent in 2019. The mean age of initiation for GHB use is mid-20s (AIHW 2020).

The Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) collects self-report information on drug use and related harms annually from individuals in Australian capital cities who regularly inject drugs. In 2020, 10 per cent of respondents reported recent use[8] of GHB, GBL and/or 1,4-BD, with a small number reporting recent injection (Peacock et al. 2021).

The Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) collects self-report information on drug use and related harms annually from individuals in Australian capital cities who regularly use ecstasy and other stimulants. According to EDRS data:

- The proportion of respondents reporting recent GHB/GBL use remained relatively stable over the last decade, decreasing from 7 per cent in 2011 to 6 per cent in 2020. In 2019 this proportion was 5 per cent.
- The reported median number of days of GHB/GBL use remained relatively stable between 2010 and 2020 at 2, the exception being 2016 and 2019 when the median number of days of use was 3 (Sindicich & Burns 2012; Peacock et al. 2020).

7 In the NDSHS, recent use refers to reported use in the 12 months preceding the survey.
8 In both the IDRS and EDRS studies, recent use refers to reported use in the six months preceding interview.

LAW ENFORCEMENT INITIATIVES

In response to the increasing threat posed by GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD to the Australian community, Australian law enforcement employs measures consistent with other initiatives used to investigate the importation, supply and manufacture of other illicit substances. These include collaboration between Commonwealth, state and territory police and government agencies, as well as developing partnerships with industry to identify potential drug diversion and trafficking.

Other initiatives implemented include establishing specific task forces and working collaboratively with national and international police and government agencies. For example:

- **National week of action**—In June 2019, in addition to conducting other activities as part of a national week of action targeting several border-controlled drugs, Australian and Hong Kong authorities seized 20 litres and 6.4 kilograms of GHB. The week of action was undertaken in response to increasing detections of GBL and 1,4-BD at the Australian border and the impact and harm these drugs have on Australia.
- **Joint Agency Ice Strike Team (JAIST)**—The JAIST is a multiagency taskforce formed to target the supply and distribution of methylamphetamine in South Australia and reduce the drug's significant impact on the community. In February 2019, the JAIST detected the importation of 200 litres of 1,4-BD and made three arrests.
- **Actively screening for illicit importation**—A joint initiative involving the Australian Border Force (ABF) and Victoria Police. Although 1,4-BD is not a Commonwealth border-controlled substance, ABF is actively screening for suspicious packages arriving to Victorian addresses where there is evidence of mislabelled or deceptive packing or the provision of false information on incoming imports. When an import is detained, Victoria Police sends a letter to the nominated consignee/address seeking a response with a legal justification for the import within 21 days. If no response is obtained, the package is destroyed by Victoria Police Hazardous Material Management Unit.

Supporting and promoting legislative changes:

- In June 2019, the Victorian *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* was amended to include an offence of trafficking a 'large commercial quantity' of GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD, with the threshold being 20 kilograms or more—the maximum penalty for trafficking large commercial quantities is 25 years.
- Queensland Police Service is reviewing harmful impacts of GBL and 1,4-BD use.

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ABBREVIATIONS

1,4-BD	1,4-butanediol
4-MMC	4-methylmethcathinone
AAS	Anabolic-androgenic steroids
ACIC	Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ANSPS	Australian Needle and Syringe Program Survey
ATS	Amphetamine-type stimulants
CEN	Cannabis Expiation Notice
CIR	Cannabis Intervention Requirement
DIN	Drug Infringement Notice
DUMA	Drug Use Monitoring in Australia
EDRS	Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System
ENIPID	Enhanced National Intelligence Picture on Illicit Drugs
Eph	Ephedrine
FDI	Forensic Drug Intelligence
GHB	Gamma-hydroxybutyrate
GBL	Gamma-butyrolactone
IDDR	Illicit Drug Data Report
IDRS	Illicit Drug Reporting System
INCB	International Narcotics Control Board
LSD	Lysergic acid diethylamide
MDMA	3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine
NDSHS	National Drug Strategy Household Survey

NEC	Not elsewhere classified
NMI	National Measurement Institute
NPS	New psychoactive substances
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
NWDMP	National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program
P2P	Phenyl-2-propanone
PIEDs	Performance and image enhancing drugs
PSE	Pseudoephedrine
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SCON	Simple Cannabis Offence Notice
Tas	Tasmania
THC	Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol
TSOC	Transnational serious and organised crime
UK	United Kingdom
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
US	United States
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia
WCO	World Customs Organization
WWA	Wastewater analysis