



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Customs Service**



***Complaints and Compliments***  
***National Quarterly Report***  
***April – June 2003***

For further details on any of the information contained in this report please contact Manager Performance Evaluation (42 6138) or National Coordinator (42 6499).

## **Introduction**

This report provides statistical data for complaints and compliments received during the period April – June 2003. All statistical data included in this report was extracted on 28 July 2003. Where appropriate, comparative tables and graphs are provided for previous reporting periods.

The purpose of the CCMS is to provide:

- National coordination of complaints and compliments

- Analysis of data

- Reporting of results

- Identification of opportunities for continuous improvement of our processes and practices based on client feedback. The CCMS is committed to recording and reporting all comments provided by clients about their experience with Customs.

Feedback on any information contained in this report should be directed to the following Complaints and Compliments staff:

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## **Executive summary**

This is the Australian Customs Service Complaints and Compliments National Quarterly report for April – June 2003.

### Complaints

A total **325** Customs complaints were reported compared with **352** in the previous quarter. The top three complaints were: “Process took too long” (**42**) “Officer/s was rude” (**32**) and “Didn’t expect duty/tax” (**25**).

### Compliments

A total number of **238** Customs compliments were reported compared with **209** in the previous quarter. The top three compliments were: “Appreciated assistance” (**82**), “Officer/s was helpful” (**57**) and “Officer/s was informative” (**36**).

### Referrals

Customs referred **62** complaints and **0** compliments to external agencies this quarter. AQIS received the most referrals (**29**), followed by brokers (**7**) and airlines (**7**).

### Resolution times

The average complaint resolution time of **10.40** days reported in the previous quarter has decreased to **9.0** days for this reporting period. The average compliment resolution time of **1.69** days reported in the previous quarter has increased to **1.91** days.

Note: These resolution times are within the 15 day service standard

## Significant variations

The following Complaints and Compliments issues are highlighted as areas where a significant variation, increase or decrease, has occurred compared against the previous quarter. Explanations are provided by relevant Regional CCMS Coordinators or specific work areas.

### Issue - Queue delay

The Baggage and Primary Line operations at Melbourne airport has seen a significant decrease in “Queue delay” complaints with **7** received this quarter compared to **37** previously.

This outcome is the result of a decrease in passenger numbers due to a number of factors including the introduction of winter flight schedules, Operation Enduring Freedom in Iraq and an outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Complaints resulting from Increased Quarantine Intervention (IQI) issues have reduced, largely due to reduced passenger numbers at this time of year.

### Issue - Goods were withheld

The complaint, “Goods were withheld” increased significantly from **4** to **22** for this reporting period. These complaints are attributed to the Brisbane (**11**) and Melbourne (**9**) Container Examinations Facilities (CEF) with a single complaint made against Enforcement staff in New South Wales and Postal Operations staff in Victoria.

### Issue - Process took too long

The complaint “Process took too long” increased nationally from **24** to **42** during this quarter.

Victoria received **26** complaints, including **23** for the Melbourne CEF. NSW received **12** complaints including **6** for the Sydney CEF.

This complaint was reported once in the Northern Territory (Baggage), Queensland (Enforcement), Australian Capital Territory (Entry processing) and South Australia (Sea Cargo).

Comment: The high number of CEF complaints, are representative of an ongoing community reaction to Customs operational practices (See Annex E).

# 1. National Trends

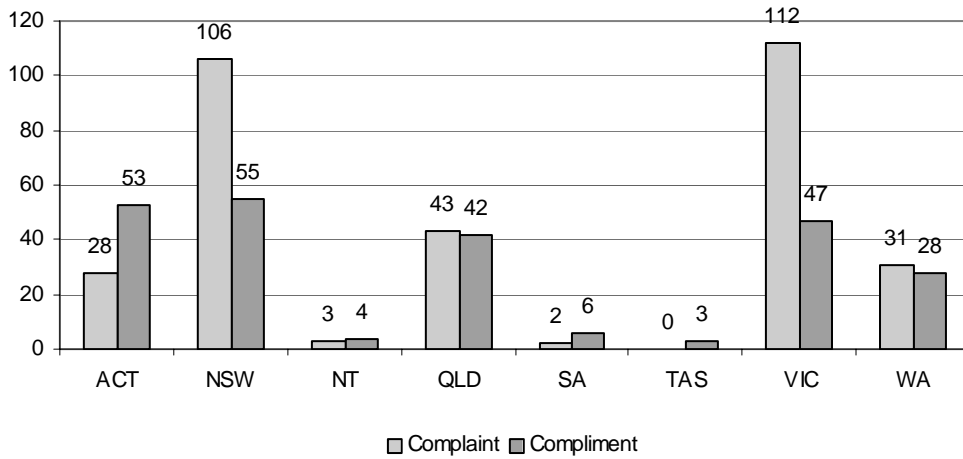


Figure 1. Total number of Complaints and Compliments by region April – June 2003

When comparing quarterly figures an increase in complaints occurred in the Australian Capital Territory (+13) and Western Australia (+8), while Victoria (-36), New South Wales (-8), South Australia (-3) and Tasmania (-1) experience reductions. Queensland and the Northern Territory remained static (43 & 3 respectively). Victorian and New South Wales figures, while greater than all other regions, are actually a reduction when compared against complaint and compliment results from the previous quarter.

A comparison of national trends for compliments between this quarter and the previous quarter revealed increases in New South Wales (+32), Northern Territory (+4), Queensland (+3) and Western Australia (+4). The Australian Capital Territory (-5), South Australia (-6) and Victoria (-3) displayed a reduction, while Tasmania remained static (3).

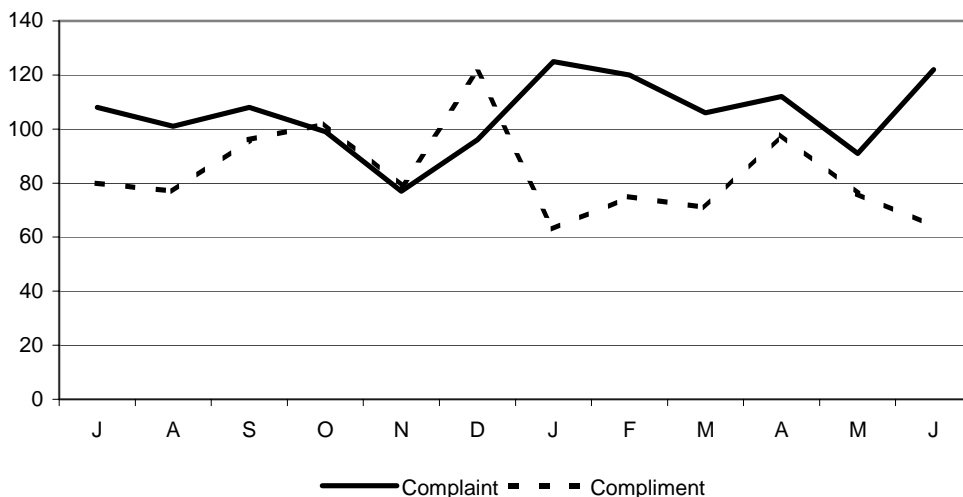


Figure 2. National trends July 2002 – June 2003

Annual national trends reveal that total complaint numbers between April 2003 (112) and May 2003 (91) declined, before increasing in June 2003 (122) to a level above that of April. The total number of compliments during the same period declined (98, 76 & 64).

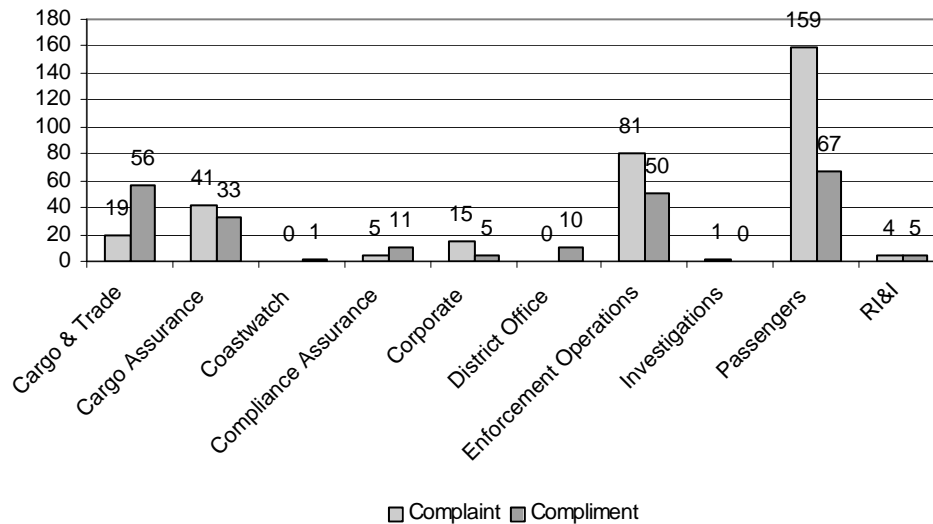


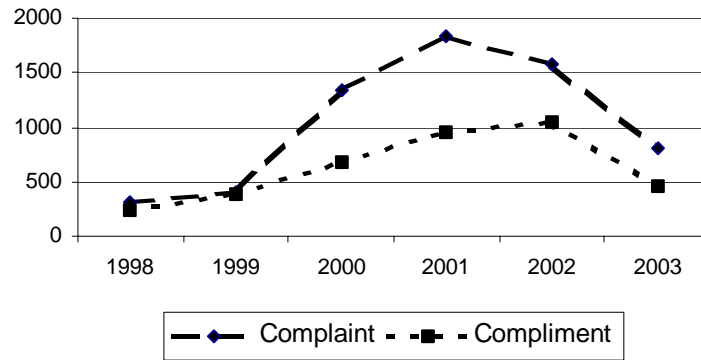
Figure 3. Complaints and Compliments by division for April – June 2003

Comparing figures against the previous quarter reveal an increase in complaint numbers for Enforcement Operations (+58), Corporate (+9), Cargo Assurance (+7), RI&I (+4] and Investigations (+1). The Enforcement Operations increase is attributed to CEF operations; the Corporate complaints are due to consumer comments on the ‘Sixty Minutes’ program about Customs averments shown in July 2003. A reduction in complaint numbers was experienced in Passengers (-84), Cargo & Trade (-20) and Compliance Assurance (-1). Biggest reductions in complaints were attributed to Passengers (-63)(fewer travellers) and Cargo and Trade (-13)(reduction in sea cargo complaints in Victoria). Coastwatch and District Offices continued to receive no complaints.

Compliment figures for this quarter compared to the previous quarter indicate significant increases in Cargo & Trade (+16), Cargo Assurance (+13), Compliance Assurance (+3) and District Office (+3), while reductions were exhibited in Passengers (-4), Coastwatch (-1) and Enforcement Operations (-1). RI&I and Corporate remained unchanged (5 each).

A more detailed analysis of complaints and compliments for Passenger Processing, Cargo and Trade, National Marine Unit, Tourist Refund Scheme and the Container Examination Facility are provided in Annexes A-E.

Below is a graph which shows the total number of complaints and compliments nationally since the CCMS first began in New South Wales in 1998.



*Figure 4: Total number of Complaints and Compliments by year – 1998-2003*  
1998 – NSW was the only region to be using the CCMS  
1999 – other regions commenced using the CCMS

## 2. Complaints

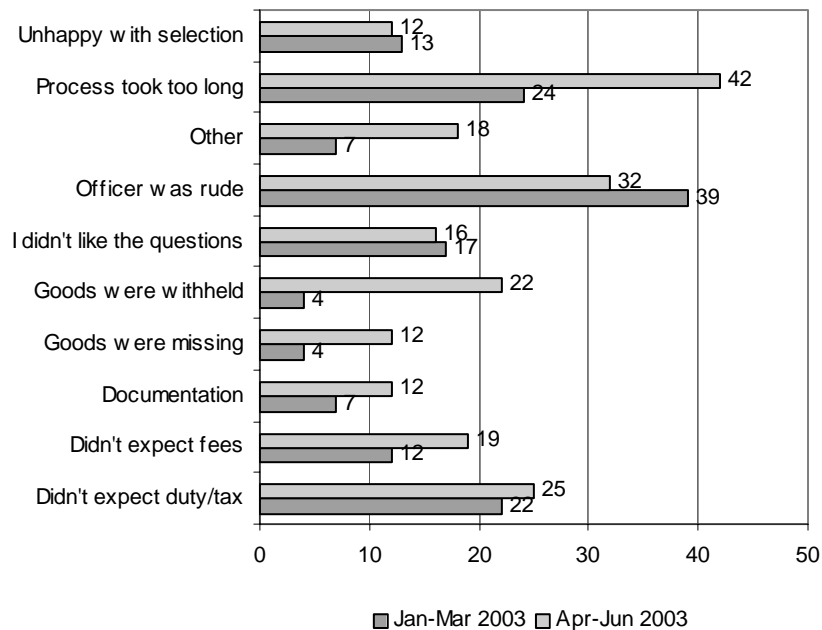


Figure 5. National Top 10 Complaints January – March and April - June 2003

A total number of **325** complaints were made for this quarter (excluding referrals). This compares to **352** for the previous quarter. This is a **7.67%** decrease from last quarter. The top three issues:

**Process took too long (42):** The Victoria Container Examination Facility received this complaint most often with **23** complaints.

**Officer/s was rude (32):** This occurred across all of the larger regions. New South Wales Enforcement showed an increase in this complaint (from **3** to **8**).

**Didn't expect duty/tax (25):** This occurred across all of the larger regions.

The increase in numbers of cases listed as 'other' includes 5 cases regarding the Sixty Minutes program about Customs averments shown in July 2003, as well as some other one-off complaints such as: speeding boat, speeding vehicle, request for compensation, wharf storage costs in WA, drinking water on a marine vessel and general officer behaviour.

### 3. Compliments

A total **238** compliments were registered for this quarter (excluding referrals). This compares to **209** for the previous quarter. This is a **13.87%** increase in compliments. The following paragraphs provide a summary of the top three issues:

**Appreciated assistance (82):** The National Marine Unit (NMU) received this compliment most frequently (**47**). This is due to high levels of operational interaction with client groups.

**Officer/s was helpful (57):** Cargo & Trade in New South Wales and Cargo Assurance in Queensland received the most compliments in this category, both with **14**.

**Officer was informative (36):** Cargo & Trade in Victoria received **15** compliments for this particular behaviour.

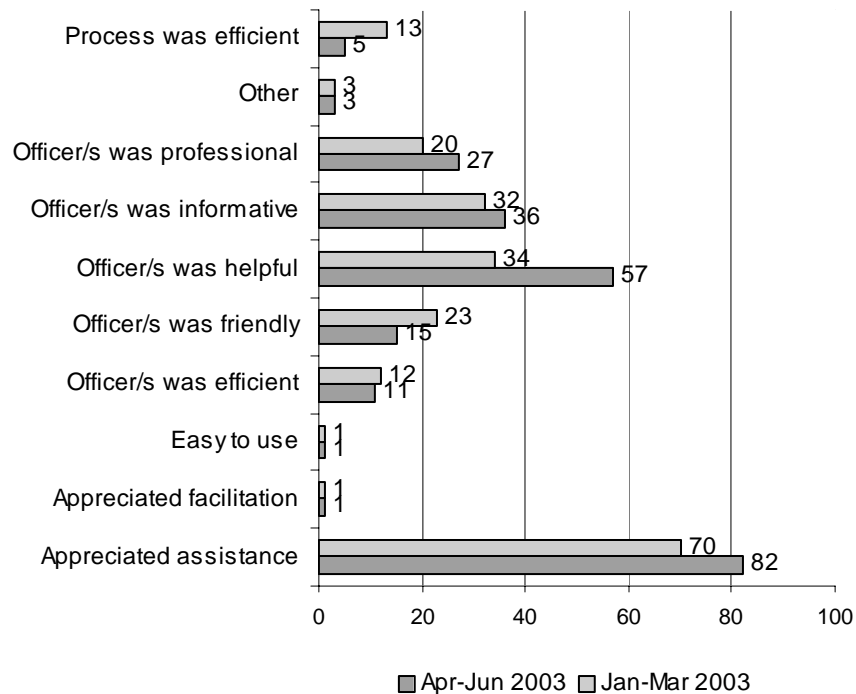


Figure 6. National Top 10 Compliments January – March and April - June 2003

The cases listed as ‘other’ includes a compliment relating to the Sixty Minutes program about Customs averments shown in July 2003.

### 4. Referrals to other agencies

Where a complaint or compliment is not related to Customs operations or procedures the Complaints and Compliment network refers these to the relevant agencies. During this quarter Customs referred **62** complaints and **0** compliments. The three main referral agencies for complaint referrals were AQIS (**29**), airlines (**7**) and Australia Post (**7**).

## 5. Performance Against Service Standards

The Complaints & Compliments Network monitors performance against the Customs Service Charter. The Client Service Charter states:

### **If you write to us or email us**

We aim to acknowledge your communication within 5 working days and to respond within 15 working days of receipt of your email or written correspondence. If we cannot fully answer your query in that time, we will give you an interim response and advise as to when a final response can be expected.

In responding to clients, there were **17** cases out of a total of **625** cases registered where Customs did not meet the 15 working day benchmark.

Unadjusted average resolution times (in days) for the **625** complaint and compliment issues (including referrals) reported during this quarter are as follows:

	April	May	June	Average
<b>Complaint</b>	10.60	8.62	7.71	9.00
<b>Compliment</b>	2.44	1.19	1.91	1.91

## 6. How People Contact Us

The main methods for contacting Customs for this quarter are by email (**154**), phone (including the 1800 number) (**122**), letter (**100**) and brochure (**99**).

*Note: 'Remote' entries are originally made by phone or email direct to a Customs work area. A Customs officer then forwards the complaint or compliment to their regional coordinator via a remote entry icon on their desktop.*

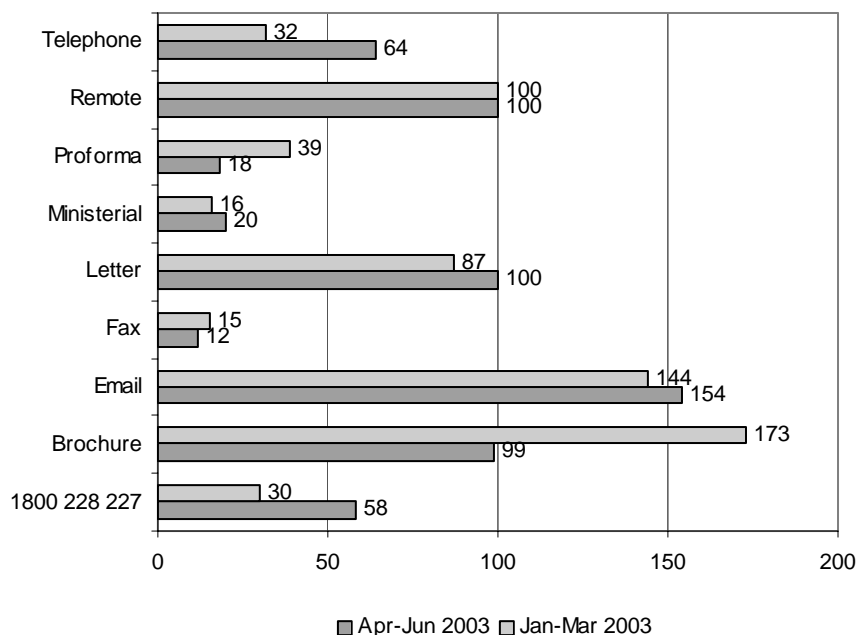


Figure 7. Client contact January – March and April – June 2003

## Passenger Processing

There were **159** complaints registered for Passenger Processing during this quarter, a decrease of **52%**. This significant reduction in client complaints occurred in Victoria, primarily in the Baggage area and was largely due to a decrease in morning flights scheduled during the winter period as well as the commencement of the 'Operation Enduring Freedom' in the Gulf and the outbreak of SARS. Complaints resulting from IQI issues have reduced, largely due to reduced passenger numbers at this time of year. See a comparison in Table 1 below.

### Complaints

Branch	Jan-Mar 03	Apr-Jun 03
Baggage	55	29
Client education	1	-
Enforcement	55	63
Enquiry Counter	3	2
Other activity	5	4
Primary line	42	29
TRS	82	32
Total	243	159

Table 1. Passenger complaints - comparative assessment  
January - March 2003 and April - June 2003

There were **67** compliments for Passenger Processing during this quarter, a decrease of **5.6%**. See a comparison in Table 2 below.

### Compliments

Branch	Jan-Mar 03	Apr-Jun 03
Baggage	19	6
Client education	1	6
Enforcement	4	4
Enquiry Counter	5	3
Liaison	11	14
Other activity	1	12
Primary line	23	13
TRS	7	9
Total	71	67

Table 2. Passenger Compliments - comparative assessment  
January - March 2003 and April - June 2003

Table 3 shows complaints for Passenger Processing nationally by month.

Month	Baggage	Enforcement	Enquiry Counter	Other activity	Primary line	TRS	Total
April	10	25	1	2	8	15	61
May	8	15	-	1	10	10	44
June	11	23	1	1	11	7	54

Table 3. Passenger Complaints by Month - April - June 2003

A trend graph comparing Victoria and New South Wales Passenger Processing complaints for the previous twelve months with the national figures is below.

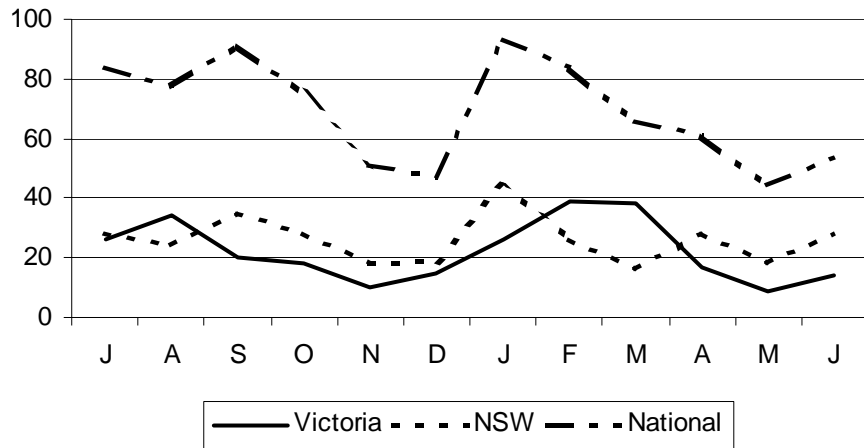


Figure 1. Trend Graph of Victorian and New South Wales Complaints Passenger Processing with national figures - July 2002 - June 2003

The peaks in January and February 2003 largely result from complaints in: Enforcement and TRS at Sydney Airport resulting primarily from increased travel movements, and the Baggage and Primary Line operation at Melbourne airport which has seen a significant increase in “Queue delay” complaints for this quarter. This is the result of staff actively seeking client group reaction to facilities at the airport.

The trough in May 2003 is largely due to the decrease in morning flights scheduled during the winter period.

## Cargo and Trade

There were **19** complaints received from Importers during this quarter for the Cargo & Trade Branch, a decrease of **55.81%** from the previous quarter. The majority of these complaints related to payment of duty/tax and difficulties in completing Nature 10 forms. For details see Table 1 below.

<b>Complaints</b>		
<b>State</b>	<b>Branch</b>	<b>Complaint</b>
ACT	Client education	1
	Entry Processing	2
	Import clearance	1
	Sea Cargo	1
NSW	CIC/Helpdesk	5
	Import clearance	1
QLD	CIC/Helpdesk	1
SA	Sea Cargo	1
VIC	CPR	1
	Entry Processing	1
	Import clearance	1
	Liaison	1
WA	Entry Processing	1
	Sea Cargo	1
Total		19

*Table 1. Cargo & Trade Complaints – April - June 2003*

The decrease in complaints is largely due to Sea Cargo in Victoria (which had **11** complaints in the previous quarter) and Entry Processing in New South Wales (which had **6** complaints in the previous quarter).

There were **56** compliments from Importers during this quarter, an increase of **40%**. The majority of compliments relate to helpful, professional and efficient staff. For details see Table 2 below.

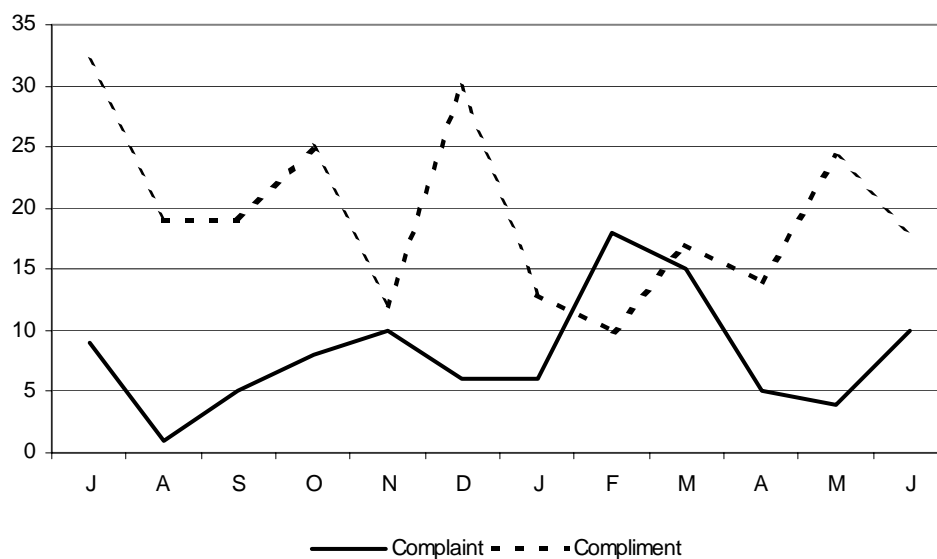
## Compliments

State	Branch	Compliment
ACT	Broker Licensing	1
	Liaison	1
NSW	CIC/Helpdesk	14
	Entry Processing	1
	Import clearance	5
	Temporary Imports	1
QLD	CIC/Helpdesk	1
	Other activity	1
SA	Broker Licensing	1
	CIC/Helpdesk	1
TAS	Client education	2
	Import clearance	1
VIC	Broker Licensing	1
	CIC/Helpdesk	15
	Client education	1
	Entry Processing	1
	Import clearance	1
	Liaison	1
WA	CIC/Helpdesk	2
	CPR	2
	Import clearance	1
	Sea Cargo	1
Total		56

*Table 2. Cargo & Trade Compliments - April - June 2003*

The increase in compliments is largely due to the CIC/Helpdesk in New South Wales (which had **2** complaints in the previous quarter).

An annual trend of complaints and compliments can be seen in figure 1 below.



*Figure 1. Trend Graph of Complaints and Compliments in Cargo and Trade July 2002 - June 2003*

### National Marine Unit (NMU)

During the current quarter, the NMU received **47** compliments and **2** complaints. All compliments were regarding 'appreciated assistance' where clients valued the professionalism and helpfulness of marine crews in undertaking their tasks. The two complaints were about the quality of the drinking water and a vessel which was perceived to be speeding. In the previous quarter the NMU received **49** compliments and **1** complaint.

An annual trend of complaints and compliments can be seen in figure 1 below.

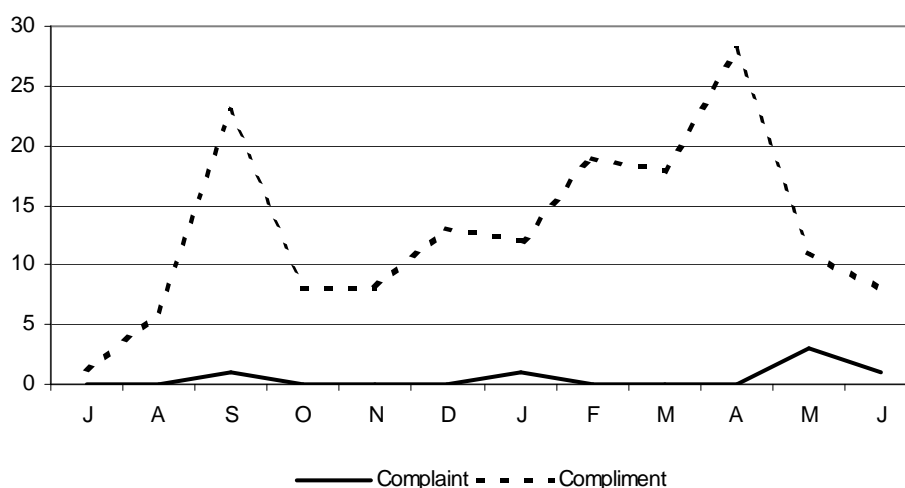


Figure 1. Trend Graph of Complaints and Compliments for the National Marine Unit July 2002 to June 2003

The peak in the number of compliments received in August and September 2002 was due to:

- a. Coral Sea patrol conducted on behalf of Environment Australia, and
- b. a patrol undertaken in southern PNG.

This is a seasonal peak and should be expected each year. The second peak period occurred around April 2003 with similar patrols plus some smaller tasks for a number of client agencies.

## Tourist Refund Scheme

During this quarter **32** TRS complaints were recorded, compared to **82** for the previous quarter. This represents a **61%** decrease in complaints for the TRS. The downward trend in TRS complaint numbers identified during the October – December 2002 quarter, has returned in January 2003. The three most common complaints recorded were “Goods not in possession” (**10**), “Unhappy about the 30 minute rule” (**6**) and “Unhappy about 30 day limit” (**5**). The TRO suggests this trend may be the result of a seasonal effect.

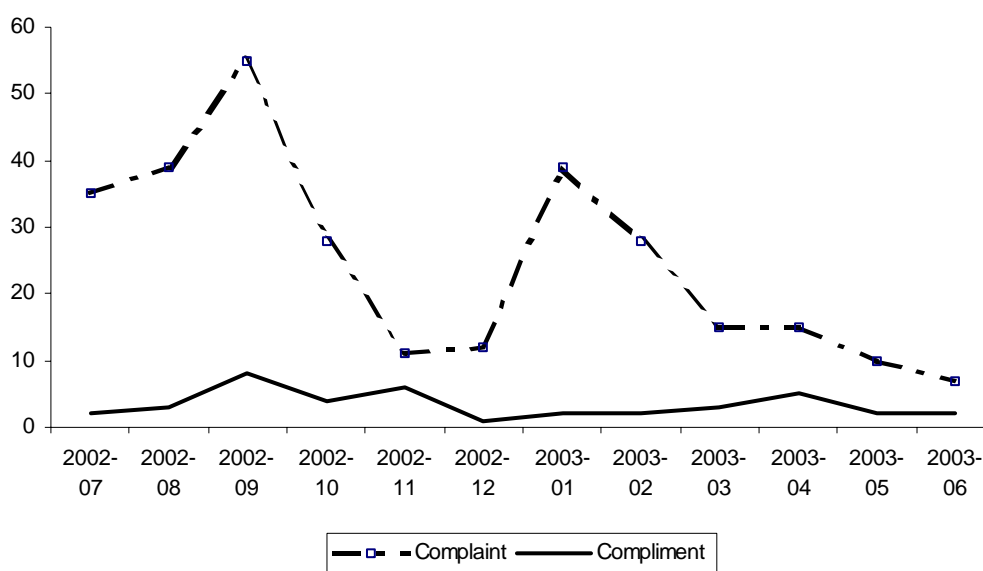


Figure 1. TRS trends July 2002 to June 2003

Note: The variance in TRS complaints numbers identified in October 2002 is noted. There is no single cause for this variation.

See Table 1 for a comparative assessment of TRS related complaints and compliments for January - March 2003 and April – June 2003.

Issue	Complaints	
	Jan-Mar 2003	Apr-Jun 2003
Claim not made	4	-
Goods not in possession	17	10
Officer was rude	6	1
Unhappy about \$300 limit	6	4
Unhappy about 30 day limit	10	5
Unhappy about refund	16	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>23</b>

Table 1. TRS comparative assessment of top 6 complaints January to March 2003 and April to June 2003

**Container Examination Facility (CEF)**

The following table provides details of the total number of complaints registered for each of the three CEFs for the current quarter.

Symptom	NSW	QLD	VIC
Always searched	-	-	1
Didn't expect fees	-	-	19
Goods were withheld	-	11	9
Process not explained	1	-	4
Process took too long	6	-	23
Total	7	11	56

*Table 1. National CEF complaints by region April to June 2003*

'Process took too long' complaints in New South Wales and Victoria were largely relating to the time taken for containers to be released after arrival in Australia (more than three days) and the storage fees incurred.

'Goods were withheld' complaints in Queensland and Victoria related to containers being chosen to be searched and thereby held by Customs with storage fees charged.

'Didn't expect fees' complaints in Victoria concerned the fees which accrued as a result of storage fees while containers were held at the wharves.

CEF complaints (**74**) accounted for **92.5%** of total Enforcement Operations Division complaints (**81**).