



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



***Complaints and Compliments***  
***National Quarterly Report***  
***October-December 2003***

For further details on any of the information contained in this report please contact National Coordinator (42 6499) or Director Corporate Planning (42 5706).

## **Introduction**

This report provides statistical data for complaints and compliments received during the period October to December 2003. All statistical data included in this report was extracted on 12 January 2004. Where appropriate, comparative tables and graphs are provided for previous reporting periods.

## **Executive summary**

### Complaints

A total number of **390** complaints were reported about Customs compared with **351** in the previous quarter. The top three complaints were: "Process took too long" (**74**), "Didn't expect fees" (**35**) and "Always Searched and Queue Delay" (**31**).

### Compliments

A total number of **239** compliments were reported about Customs compared with **220** in the previous quarter. The top three compliments were: "Appreciated assistance" (**82**), "Officer/s was helpful" (**68**) and "Officer/s was professional" (**26**).

### Service Standards

The average complaint resolution time of **9.4** days reported in the previous quarter has increased to **10.62** days. The average compliment resolution time of **0.46** days reported in the previous quarter has increased to **1.21** days. These resolution times are within the 15 day service standard.

## **Significant variations in the December Quarter**

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

### ***Issue - Process took too long***

The complaint “Process took too long” increased nationally from **54** to **74**. This increase occurred mainly in Enforcement Operations within the Container Examinations Facility (CEF) – from **26** to **51**. The complaints increased in Victoria from **9** to **19**, and NSW from **12** to **18**.

In Passenger Processing this complaint decreased from **13** to **4** during this quarter. Sydney, Perth and Brisbane Airports all reduced complaints for this issue.

### ***Issues – Didn’t expect fees and Didn’t expect duty/tax***

The combined complaints of “Didn’t expect fees” and “Didn’t expect duty/tax” increased nationally in from **39** to **58** during this quarter. The main area for these complaints occurred in Sydney with an additional **13** (**11** of which related to the CEF).

### ***Issue – Always Searched***

The complaint “Always searched” increased nationally in Passenger Processing from **17** to **31** during this quarter. Brisbane Airport had the greatest increase in this issue from **7** to **16**.

### ***Issue - Queue delay***

Passenger Processing, nationally, has seen an increase in “Queue delay” complaints with **31** received this quarter compared to **20** previously. Melbourne Airport received an additional **13** complaints, Sydney Airport received an additional **3** complaints and Brisbane Airport received an additional **2** complaints for this period. In Melbourne there were a number of occasions when passengers experienced delays at the airline check-in counters. This frustration was heightened when they had to queue for Customs/Immigration clearance. Perth’s number of complaints regarding “Queue delay” has reduced from **7** to only **1**.

# 1. National Trends

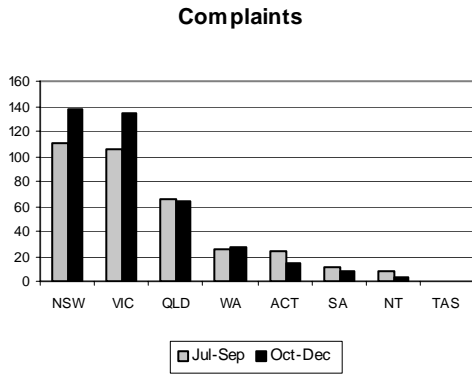


Figure 1. Total number of complaints by region comparing July – September 2003 with October - December 2003

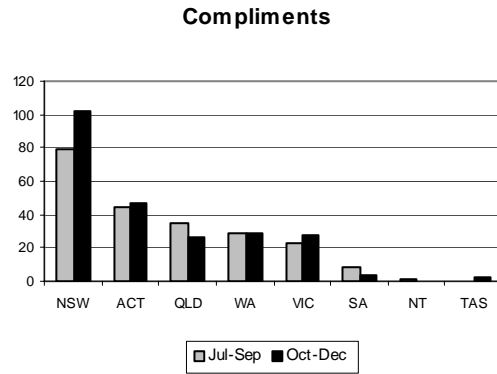


Figure 2. Total number of compliments by region comparing July – September 2003 with October - December 2003

Comparing against the previous quarterly figures (excluding referrals), an increase in complaints occurred in Victoria (+29), New South Wales (+27) and Western Australia (+3), while the Australian Capital Territory (-12), Northern Territory (-4), South Australia (-3) and Queensland (-2) experienced reductions. Tasmania remained static with 0 complaints.

A comparison of national trends for compliments between this quarter and the previous quarter (excluding referrals) revealed increases in New South Wales (+23), Victoria (+5), the Australian Capital Territory (+3), and Tasmania (+2). Queensland (-8), South Australia (-5), Northern Territory (-1) experienced reductions. Western Australia remained static with 29 compliments.

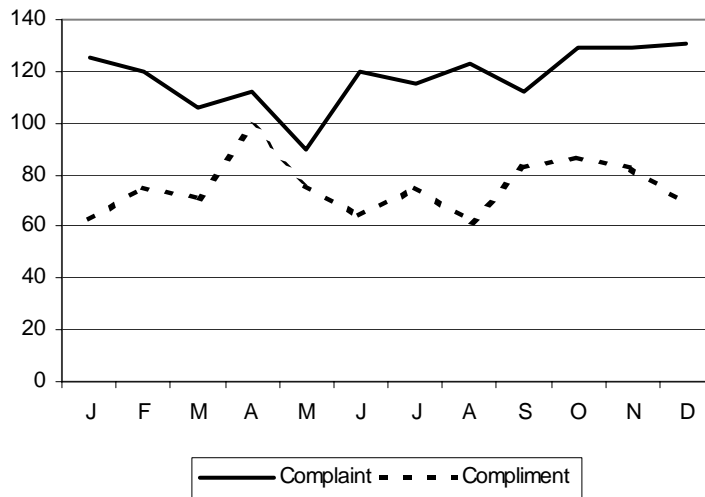


Figure 3. National trends January – December 2003: month- by-month figures

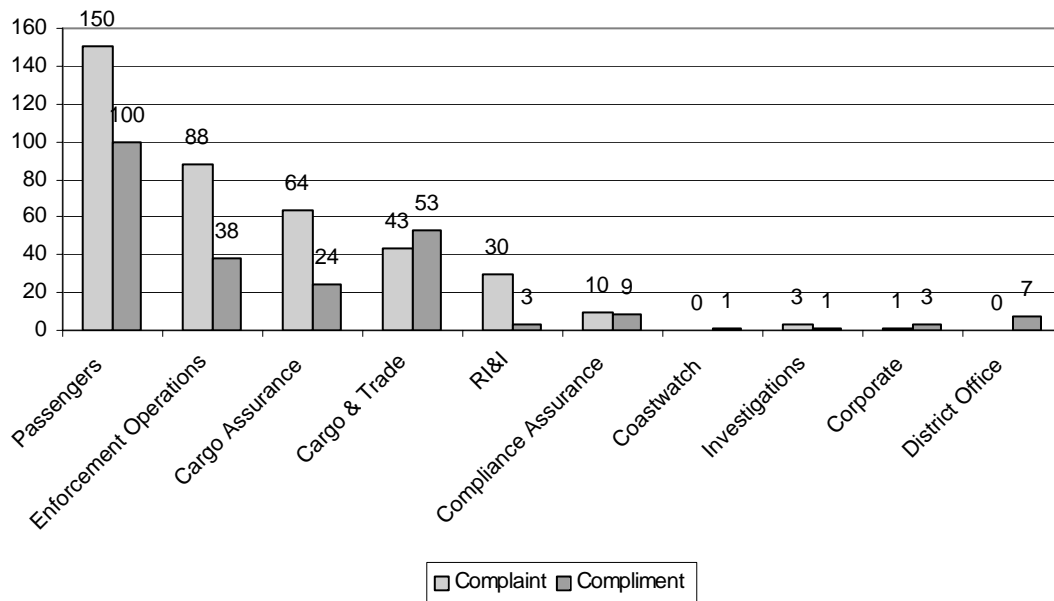


Figure 3: Complaints and compliments by division for October-December 2003

Comparing figures against the previous quarter reveal an increase in complaint numbers for Cargo Assurance (+28), Enforcement Operations (+9), Cargo & Trade (+8) and Compliance Assurance (+3). Investigations has not changed (3). A reduction in complaint numbers was experienced in RI&I (-20), Passengers (-18), Corporate (-11) and CMR (-1).

The largest increase in complaints in Cargo Assurance were attributed to Postal Operations with 43 complaints compared to 22 complaints last quarter – an increase of 21 complaints. This increase largely relates to the issues of ‘didn’t expect duty/tax’ (+8) and ‘Goods were seized’ (+4). Coastwatch and District Offices continue to receive no complaints.

Compliment figures for this quarter compared to the previous quarter indicate a decrease for Corporate (-8) while increases were experienced in Passengers (+23), Enforcement Operations (+3), Cargo & Trade (+2), Compliance Assurance (+1), Coastwatch (+1) and District Offices (+1). Cargo Assurance was the same with 24 compliments and RI&I was the same with 3.

A more detailed analysis of complaints and compliments for the Container Examination Facility (CEF), Customs Information & Support Centre (CI&SC) and Passengers are provided in Annexes A-C.

## 2. Type of Complaint

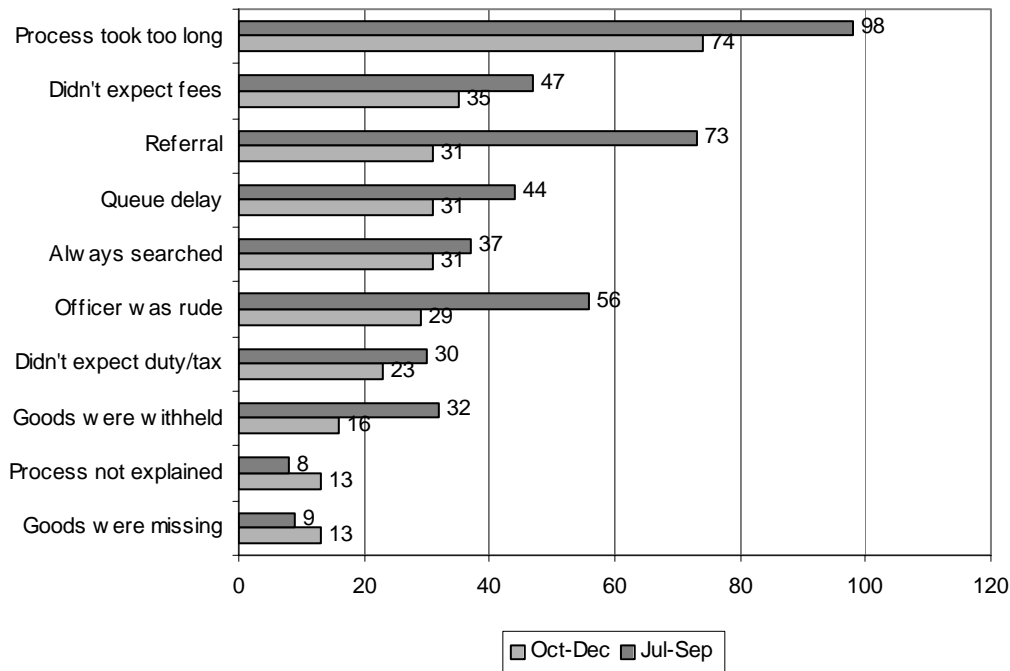


Figure 5. National Top 10 Complaints July-September and October-December 2003

A total number of **390** complaints were made for this quarter (excluding referrals). This compares to **351** for the previous quarter and represents a **11.11% increase** from the last quarter. The top three issues (including referrals) were:

**Process took too long (74):** Enforcement Operations received this complaint most often with **51** complaints, all of which were for the CEF (see Annex A). Cargo Assurance received this complaint **11** times.

**Didn't expect fees (35):** This occurred **27** times in Enforcement Operations. The majority of these were classified against the CEF and relate to client awareness (see Annex A).

**Referral (31):** **12** of the **31** referral complaints were for AQIS.

**Queue Delay (31):** All of these complaints occurred in Passengers. This occurred **15** times in Victoria, **8** times in Queensland and **5** times in New South Wales. **22** of these complaints were for the primary line, **6** were in baggage and **3** were in TRS.

**Always Searched (31):** This occurred **13** times in Queensland. **20** of these complaints occurred in RI&I and **9** of occurred in Passengers. All **20** complaints in RI&I were related to clients always having been targeted for search by the CEF.

### 3. Type of Compliment

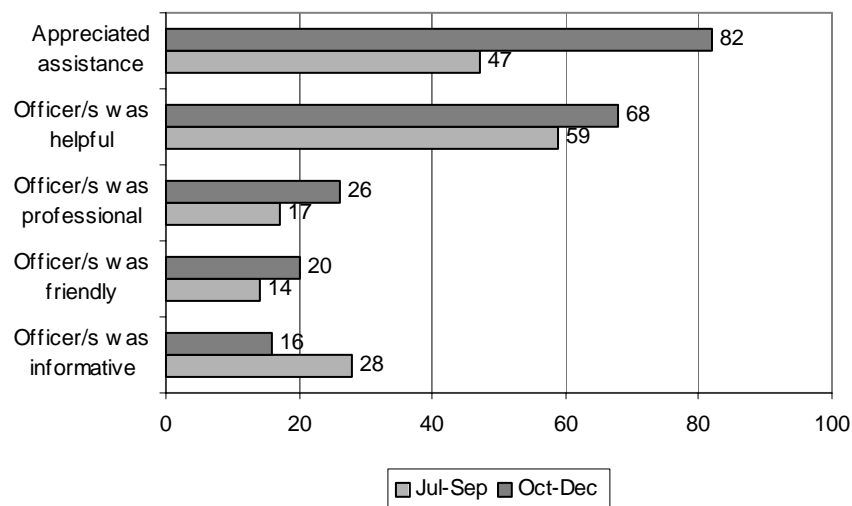


Figure 6. National top 5 compliments July – September and October – December 2003

A total of **239** compliments were registered for this quarter (excluding referrals). This compares to **220** for the previous quarter which represents a **8.64%** increase in compliments. The following provide a summary of the top three issues:

**Appreciated assistance (82):** The National Marine Unit (NMU) received this compliment most frequently (**34**). This is due to high levels of operational interaction with client groups. Passengers (Liaison) also received this compliment (**25**).

**Officer/s was helpful (68):** Cargo & Trade received this compliment most frequently with **29**. **14** of these were for the CI&SC. Passengers received **22** compliments with **6** each for both the Primary Line and the Enquiry Counter. Cargo Assurance received **15** compliments with **9** being for Postal Operations.

**Officer was professional (26):** Passengers received this compliment most frequently with **10**.

### 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 **54** complaints and **2** compliments. The three main referral agencies for referrals were AQIS (**12**), airport operator and Australia Post each with **4**, and DIMIA (**3**).

## 5. Performance Against Service Standards

The Complaints and Compliments Network monitors performance against the Customs Client 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 **19** cases out of a total of **661** cases registered (including referrals) where Customs did not meet the 15 working day benchmark (**2.87%**).

Average resolution times (in days) for the **661** complaint and compliment issues reported during this quarter are as follows:

	October	November	December	Average
<b>Complaint</b>	11.92	12.12	8.14	10.62
<b>Compliment</b>	1.36	1.80	0.20	1.21

## 6. How People Contact Us

The main methods for contacting Customs during this quarter were by email (**184**), phone (including the 1800 number) (**144**), brochure (**136**), letter (**67**) and remote entry (**56**). During this quarter clients tended to use email and the phone more often, and letters less.

*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.*

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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## Container Examination Facility (CEF)

The following table provides details of the total number of complaints registered for each of the four CEFs for this quarter (**87** compared to **73** for last quarter – an increase of **19.18%**).

Symptom	ACT	NSW	QLD	VIC	WA	Total
Didn't expect fees	1	11	4	11	-	27
Goods were damaged	-	1	-	-	-	1
Goods were withheld	-	-	-	5	-	5
Misinformed by Customs	-	1	-	-	-	1
Process not explained	-	1	-	1	-	2
Process took too long	2	18	10	19	2	51
Total	3	32	14	36	2	87

*Table 1. National CEF complaints by region for October-December 2003*

The three main complaint issues were:

Issue - 'Process took too long' (**51**) is an increase from **26** last quarter. Complaints occurred in Melbourne (**19**), Sydney (**18**), Brisbane (**10**), Fremantle and Canberra both with **2**. These were largely relating to the time taken for containers to be released after arrival in Australia (more than three days) as well as the resulting storage fees incurred.

Issue - 'Didn't expect fees' (**27**) is an increase from **19** last quarter. Complaints occurred in Melbourne and Sydney both with **11**, Brisbane (**4**) and Canberra (**1**). These were specifically concerned with fees which accrued as a result of storage fees while containers were held at the wharves.

Issue - 'Goods were withheld' (**5**) is a decrease from **13** last quarter. These complaints occurred in Melbourne (**5**) and related to containers being chosen to be searched and thereby held by Customs.

The three cases classified against Canberra were more policy related rather than operational.

A trend graph for all CEF complaints received since the facilities commenced operations is shown below.

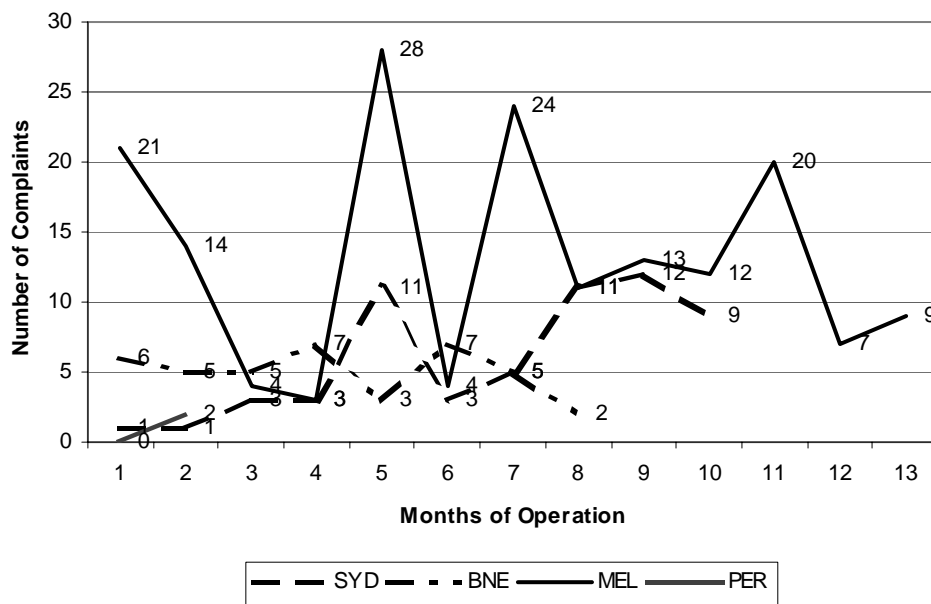


Figure 1. Comparison of complaints re CEF per month of operation eg Melbourne has operated for 13 months, Sydney for 11 months, Brisbane for 10 months and Fremantle for less than 2 months

During this quarter the number of complaints received nationally for the CEF was **84** (excluding those responded to by the ACT). This is 1 complaint for every **158.29** containers which were chosen for examination (totaling at 13,296 for the quarter).

Breaking this figure down further:

CEF Location	Number of Complaints	Containers Examined	Number of Containers for Every Complaint
Melbourne	36	5045	140.14
Sydney	32	4809	150.28
Brisbane	17	3214	189.06
Fremantle	3	228	76

Table 2. Number of complaints lodged compared to the number of containers chosen for examination for Oct-Dec 2003

Note: The above container figures include import and export containers.

You will also note from the above table that Brisbane had the lowest number of complaints per container examined, and Fremantle had the highest number of complaints per container examined.

## Customs Information and Support Centre

### Complaints

During this quarter **15** CI&SC complaints were recorded, compared with **12** for the previous quarter. The most common complaint related to the phone (**6**) where it was either not answered, or the clients felt that they were on hold for too long. Also “Misinformed by Customs” received **5** complaints.

### Compliments

The CI&SC received **21** compliments this quarter whereas they received **23** last quarter. The CI&SC became aware of the value of reporting compliments received in approximately April which accounts for the increase in compliments recorded in the trend graph below.

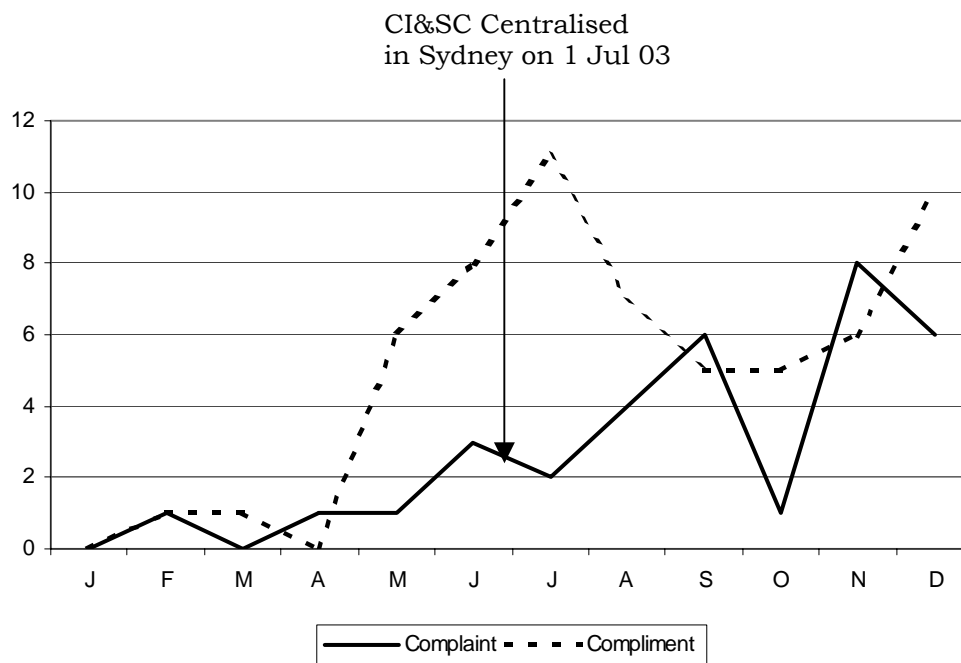


Figure 1. CI&SC monthly trend for January 2003-December 2003

## Passengers

### Complaints

There were **150** complaints registered for Passengers during this quarter, a decrease of 11.24%. (It should be noted that the number of passengers arriving in Australia increased by **12.59%** this quarter). This decrease in client complaints occurred primarily in the enforcement area regarding passengers being questioned in both Victoria and New South Wales. See a comparison of Passengers complaints in Table 1 below.

Branch	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec
Baggage	35	32
Client education	1	4
Enforcement	59	33
Enquiry Counter	3	-
Other activity	4	4
Primary line	31	45
TRS	36	32
Total	169	150

Table 1. Passengers complaints - comparative assessment  
July -September 2003 and October-December 2003

Figure 1 below compares New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland against the national trend for Passengers complaints for the previous twelve months.

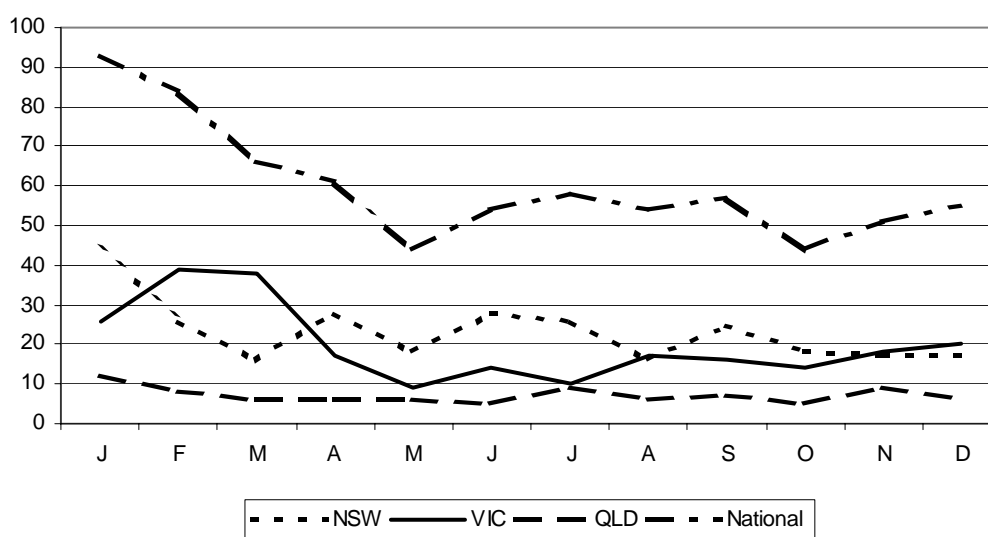


Figure 1. Trend Graph of New South Wales, Victorian and Queensland Passengers complaints shown with the national trend for January - December 2003

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 saw a significant increase in “Queue delay” complaints for that quarter. This was the result of staff actively seeking client group reaction to facilities at the airport.

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

During the period 1 October to 31 December 2003, **2,462,171** passengers arrived through Passengers nationally. Numbers of passengers arriving through each major airport are shown in Figure 3 below:

The number of complaints received nationally for Passengers was **150** during this quarter which is 1 complaint for every 12,940 passengers arriving.

Breaking this figure down further:

Airport	Number of Airport Complaints	Passenger Arrival Numbers	Number of Passengers for Every Complaint
Sydney	52	1,119,591	21,530
Melbourne	51	499,392	9,792
Brisbane	17	399,692	23,511
Perth	14	249,195	17,799

*Table 2. Number of complaints lodged at major airports compared to the number of arrival passengers for Oct-Dec 2003*

You will note from the above table that Brisbane airport had the lowest number of complaints per passenger arrivals, and Melbourne airport had the highest number of complaints per passenger arrivals.

### Compliments

There were **100** compliments for Passengers during this quarter, representing an increase of **29.87%**. See a comparison in Table 3 below.

Branch	Jul-Sep 03	Oct-Dec 03
Baggage	9	3
Client education	8	4
Enforcement	8	13
Enquiry Counter	4	7
Liaison	13	27
Other Activity	12	12
Primary line	20	26
TRS	3	8
Total	77	100

*Table 3. Passenger compliments - comparative assessment July – September 2003 and October – December 2003*