

Cannabis Arrests: Australia & Other Selected Jurisdictions, 2004

Background

The data in Table 1 (page 1) provides information about cannabis arrests and all drug arrests in each Australian jurisdiction and the United Kingdom (UK) for the year 2004/2005 and New Zealand and the United States (US) for the year 2004. (Only cannabis arrests for the US data were available for 2004.)

Table 1 confirms high proportions of cannabis arrests across all jurisdictions, indicating that cannabis is a major drug law enforcement (DLE) issue; highlighting the disproportionate amount of criminal justice system resources used to deal with cannabis offenders compared to other types of drugs.

Australia

It can be seen in 2004/2005 that for Australia as a whole, there was a total of 77,333 arrests for all drug offences, of which 54,936 (71.0%) involved cannabis offences.

Table 1 also shows there were marked variations in the rate of cannabis arrests between each Australian jurisdiction. The cannabis arrest rate ranged from 95.6 per 100,000 in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) to 600.7 per 100,000 for Queensland (QLD) – nearly a six fold difference.

This data indicates there is a group of four Australian jurisdictions with comparatively low rates with rates of arrests for cannabis offences of under 300 per 100,000 - the ACT, New South Wales (NSW), Victoria & Tasmania. This can be compared to South Australia (SA), the Northern Territory (NT), Western Australia (WA) & QLD which had rates in 2004/2005 of greater than 400 per 100,000.

The 23,355 cannabis arrests in (QLD) requires further explanation, as this made up 42.5% of the total of 54,936 cannabis arrests for Australia in 2004/2005.

In the State the annual number of cannabis arrests have increased since the Police Diversion Program (PDP) was introduced in June 2001. The PDP requires police to offer a person a 'drug assessment program' if they had committed a minor cannabis offence: s. 379 *Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000*. A contentious aspect of the PDP is that if a person who has been 'cautioned' fails to attend the compulsory assessment session, they will be charged with the offence of failure to follow the direction of a police officer, which has a fine of up to \$3,000.

Other jurisdictions

The data in figure 1 (page 2), which presents a ranking of the estimated rate of arrest for cannabis offences across the 12 jurisdictions, demonstrates that whereas the rate for New Zealand (NZ) of 357.4 was above the Australian national rate of 273.4, the national rates for both the US and the UK were below the Australian national rate.

Whilst in the case of the US, which had a rate of 260 was only just below the Australian national rate, the rate for the UK (142.8) was nearly half the Australian national rate.

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Cannabis Arrests: 2004

Table 1:
Estimated rates & number of arrests for Australia & other selected jurisdictions, 2004

	Cannabis offences (arrests + infringements)		All drug offences n	Estimated resident population	Rate/100,000	
	n	%			Cannabis	All drugs
Australian jurisdictions						
Australia (national)	54,936	71	77,333	20,091,504	273.4	384.9
Australian Capital Territory	310	67.4	460	324,119	95.6	141.9
New South Wales	6,583	65.2	10,101	6,720,791	97.9	150.3
Northern Territory	863	87.7	984	199,834	431.9	492.4
Queensland	23,355	72.5	32,226	3,888,077	600.7	828.8
South Australia	6,296	92.6	6,800	1,532,727	410.8	443.7
Tasmania	1,353	88.1	1,535	482,236	280.6	318.3
Victoria	7,221	58.5	12,347	4,962,970	145.5	248.8
Western Australia	8,955	69.5	12,880	1,978,079	452.7	651.1
Other jurisdictions						
New Zealand	14,654	80.2	18,280	4,100,600	357.4	445.8
United Kingdom	85,438	60	142,338	59,834,300	142.8	237.9
USA	na	na	na		260	na

Source: Crime data
 Australia: Illicit drug data report 2004-05. Canberra, Australian Crime Commission, 2006 (Tables 17 & 18)
 USA: from NORML New Zealand. Research: Recorded cannabis offences down 19%: NZ still number one pot arresting country, 8 June 2007 <www.norml.org.nz/article567.html>;
 New Zealand: from New Zealand crime statistics 2004/2005: A summary of recorded and resolved offence statistics. Office of the Police Commissioner, August 2005;
 UK: from Nicholas S, Povey D, Walker A & Kershaw C. Crime in England and Wales 2004/2005. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 11/05. London, Research, Development & Statistics Directorate, Home Office, 2005 (Table 2.04).

Population data
 Australia: from Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian historical population statistics. Cat. No. 3105.0.65.001;
 UK: from National Statistics;
 New Zealand: from New Zealand crime statistics 2004/2005: A summary of recorded and resolved offence statistics.

Note: Australian & UK data refers to 2004/2005, other jurisdictions refer to 2004.

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Figure 1:
Estimated rates of cannabis arrests for Australia & other selected jurisdictions, 2004

