

INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGIC PAPERS

Ice dragon: a proposal to target the supply of methamphetamine from China to Australia

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of methamphetamine supply into Australia, aiming to identify viable options to reduce the amount of the drug and its chemical precursors that enter the country, particularly originating from China. It contends that the situation in Australia is quite drastic, exacerbated by the role and impact of organised crime groups, which are targeting Australia because of the demand for amphetamines and the high profits that can be gained as a result.

The paper makes five recommendations aimed at enhancing the detection capabilities and collaborative efforts in reducing the supply of methamphetamine and its precursors into Australia, taking account of the recommendations already made by the National Ice Taskforce. It asserts that the advocated options and recommendations should assist in reducing the supply of methamphetamine from China and, as a consequence, addressing the methamphetamine issue in Australia more generally.

Ice dragon: a proposal to target the supply of methamphetamine from China to Australia

The war on drugs is a war you are going to lose. You may not ever win it, but you've always got to fight it.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott, April 2014 ¹

The responsibility for tackling this very complex problem can't be left to the police alone, we cannot ... arrest our way to success we need to do a lot more.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, October 2016 ²

Introduction

This paper addresses the issue of methamphetamine supply into Australia, aiming to identify viable options to reduce the amount of the drug and its chemical precursors that enter the country, particularly originating from China. It also addresses some of the issues related to methamphetamine use in Australia. The intention is to provide an effective and efficient set of policy options that complement existing frameworks and policies, and enhance the detection capabilities and collaborative efforts in reducing the supply of methamphetamine.

The paper draws on earlier work by the author that addressed gaps in the current framework and approach toward methamphetamine supply reduction.³ It also takes account of the policy options already proposed by the National Ice Taskforce. Its 2015 report made numerous recommendations for health and support services, education and prevention, governance and strategy, along with law-enforcement options.⁴ In particular, it highlighted that existing efforts to disrupt the supply of methamphetamine into Australia need to be more targeted and coordinated, and that continuing work was needed to build the relationships between the relevant Commonwealth, State and Territory agencies.

The UN's General Assembly Special Session of April 2016 similarly highlighted the importance of a global approach to drug policy.⁵ The recommendations of its draft resolution emphasised many key aspects that are consistent with the policy initiatives proposed in this paper. Of particular note is the importance placed by the UN's General Assembly on coordination and collaborative efforts in addressing drug issues both domestically and internationally.

In proposing a number of policy options, the paper will examine and rationalise the logic for the recommendations, outline the specifics of each recommendation and, where appropriate, provide the funding implications associated with the policy proposal.

Part 1: Overview

Australia as an international market

The previous work by the author analysed the extent of Australia's methamphetamine problem. It contended that the situation in Australia is quite drastic. Even though the world-wide prevalence and use of methamphetamine is increasing, Australia stands out as having an over-representation of users per capita. This situation has exacerbated the role and impact of organised crime groups targeting Australia because of the demand for methamphetamine and the high profits that can be gained as a result.

Importantly, the earlier work highlighted the significant role that China—as a country of origin, not as a government or political entity—plays in the organised crime world, both as a key

supplier of precursor chemicals for the production of methamphetamine and the finished product itself as an imported illegal substance.⁶

The impact that China plays in Australia's methamphetamine problem was shown to be aggravated by the changing dynamic of organised crime and the increased interaction between organised crime groups globally. In particular, the emergent relationship between Chinese and Mexican organised crime groups has resulted in increased interest by two of the largest methamphetamine producers in the world in Australia as a market.⁷

The earlier work highlighted that an estimated 70 per cent of the methamphetamine imported into Australia in the last five years originated from China. It also noted that China's massive pharmaceutical industry is a major part of the problem. The diversion of precursor chemicals used to manufacture methamphetamine from the Chinese pharmaceutical industry—and the corruption that facilitates it—has enabled organised crime groups to significantly increase the production and trafficking of methamphetamine both globally and into Australia.

The extent of the problem in Australia, commonly referred to as the 'ice epidemic', led the Australian Government to establish the National Ice Taskforce in April 2015.⁸ Its report, submitted to the Government in October 2015, clearly illustrated the extent of the problem, highlighting that:

Proportionally, Australia uses more methamphetamine than almost any country. More than 200,000 Australians reported using crystalline methamphetamine in 2013 compared to 100,000 in 2010.

In 2014, Australian authorities at the border seized more than 60 times as much ice by weight than in 2010. Over 5 tonnes of ice was seized at the Australian border from 2010 to 2015.

Nationally, a kilogram of ice can be worth \$265,000, which is 80 times higher than the price per kilogram in mainland China.⁹

The methamphetamine situation in Australia

The previous work by the author expanded and analysed issues relating to the expanding drug market in Australia, including the adverse effects and high prevalence and seizure of methamphetamine. In a 2015 study by Louise Degenhardt and colleagues to determine the number of methamphetamine users in Australia between 2002 and 2014, it was estimated that the rate and use of the drug is now at its highest level ever.¹⁰ The study concluded that since 2002, methamphetamine users rose from a population rate of 1.03 per cent to 2.09 per cent in 2014. This represents an estimated 268,000 regular and dependent users of methamphetamine in Australia as at the end of 2014.

The trends that are apparent in the global market for methamphetamine are also apparent in the Australian illicit drug market. According to the Australian Crime Commission (which was renamed the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission in July 2016), Australia's use of methamphetamine—similar to the world market and consumption of illegal drugs—is second only to the consumption of cannabis.¹¹ However, while the increasing global trend in the prevalence and seizure of methamphetamine is reflected in the Australian experience, there is significant variation in the rate and volume of seizures in Australia. This was highlighted in the Australian Crime Commission's analysis that the detection of methamphetamine in Australia increased by more than 85 per cent from 2012 to 2013, while the total weight of seizures increased by almost 516 per cent.¹² But the situation is now even worse.

Up until 2009, the methamphetamine market in Australia was dominated by local manufacture. Since that time, there has been a significant increase in the amount of methamphetamine imported into Australia.¹³ In 2011-12, the number of methamphetamine detections at the border was 1077, which increased to 1379 in 2013-14. Similarly, there was a substantial increase in the total weight of seizures, with 347 kilograms seized in 2011-12, increasing to an all-time high of 3422 kilograms in 2014-15.¹⁴ The financial year 2014-15 also saw both the greatest ever number of detections and the largest ever total seizure weight of methamphetamine at the border.¹⁵

The seizure rates at the border, however, do not convey the entire extent of the problem. The figures do not include the domestic seizure of methamphetamine nor international disruptions, or the full extent of imported methamphetamine into Australia. This is clearly evident when considering Australian Federal Police (AFP) data on seizures. Between 2013 and 2015, the AFP reported that the total number of seizures of amphetamine-type stimulants was 3351, with a total weight of almost 9 tonnes.¹⁶

Domestically, the situation for amphetamine-type stimulant seizures compounds the problem, with national seizures adding a further 10.5 tonnes in the years 2012 to 2014.¹⁷ In 2014-15, domestic seizures totalled 12.6 tonnes, more than doubling the previous three years combined.¹⁸ This record sits alongside the largest ever number of amphetamine-related arrests in Australia for a single year, which in 2014-15 exceeded 35,000.

The importation of methamphetamine into Australia is conducted through various import streams. The largest number of imports comes via the mail, while sea cargo accounts for the largest quantity, comprising almost 60 per cent by weight.¹⁹

Many transnational crime groups have shifted their focus to methamphetamine as a commodity for supply due to the fact that the illicit trade in Australia is so profitable. According to the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, more than 60 per cent of the highest risk criminal targets now on its National Targeting List are actively involved in the methamphetamine trade.²⁰ A more concise breakdown of the organised crime groups responsible for methamphetamine markets in Australia has also identified that approximately 45 per cent are so-called outlaw motorcycle gangs.²¹

This is a continuing trend for such gangs to have been involved both in manufacturing and distribution for the domestic methamphetamine market.²² As noted by a 2015 Parliamentary Joint Committee's inquiry into methamphetamine, the role that outlaw motorcycle gangs play in the Australian methamphetamine trade is assisted by their links to domestic and transnational crime groups; their access to precursor chemicals; their established networks for drug distribution; and the use of specialist services for money laundering.²³

The role of precursors

The ingredients used in the manufacture of methamphetamine are extremely relevant to any analysis of Australia's methamphetamine problem. The increased trend of the importation of methamphetamine into Australia is mirrored in the border detection and seizure of the key ingredients for the manufacture of methamphetamine, namely ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. Between 2012 and 2014, there were 2078 detections of precursors, with a seizure weight of over 3.2 tonnes. Notably, the majority of precursors used in the manufacture of methamphetamine are made in China, and to a lesser extent India.²⁴

The increase in border detections of both precursor chemicals and end-product methamphetamine is a major concern, as this upward trend has occurred without a reduction in domestic production of the drug.²⁵ The domestic production of methamphetamine is reliant on access to and the availability of precursor chemicals. With the increased detection and seizure of precursors and methamphetamine at the border, it could be expected that there would be a corresponding decline in domestic manufacture. However, this has not been the case. This is highlighted by the increasing number of clandestine laboratories that have been detected in Australia. In 1997-98, there were 95 domestic clandestine laboratories detected, which increased to 381 in 2004-05, and 744 in 2013-14.²⁶

Why China?

The issue relating to China's role in Australia's methamphetamine problem is highlighted by the fact that over the last five years, 70 per cent of all detections of methamphetamine into Australia were identified as being shipped from China.²⁷ However, that is not the entire extent of the problem. There are many other contributing factors that affect how China is contributing to Australia's methamphetamine problem. These include issues such as China's own

methamphetamine production problem, increased globalisation, corruption, Chinese precursor chemical regulation, pull factors, and increasing interaction between Chinese organised crime groups and other transnational organised crime networks.²⁸

As an example, Australia's methamphetamine market has historically been dominated by the involvement of outlaw motorcycle gangs in the manufacture and distribution of methamphetamine. Now, there is an increased prevalence and reliance on the interaction of outlaw motorcycle gangs with Chinese-organised crime groups for both precursor chemicals and end-product methamphetamine. A decade ago, this was completely unheard of.

Part 2: Policy background

Current Australian policy

When the Australian Government established the National Ice Taskforce in April 2015, it was given the mandate to develop a nation-wide strategy to address the methamphetamine problem in a more coordinated manner, and with more targeted efforts to reduce the demand and supply of the drug.

The Council of Australian Governments, meeting in December 2015, agreed that the objectives of the strategy should be to ensure that:

- Families and communities were to have better access to information, support and tools to help respond to drug issues;
- Prevention messages were to target high-risk populations;
- Early intervention and treatment services were to be better tailored to respond to drug-related harms;
- Better evidence was to be made available to drive responses to the effects of drugs; and
- Law-enforcement efforts were to be better targeted to disrupt the supply of illicit drugs.²⁹

To achieve these objectives, the Australian Government committed in July 2016 to spending \$298.2 million over the next four years, with a particular focus on strengthening education, prevention, health treatment, support and community engagement in combating methamphetamine. The funding was broadly allocated in five main areas:

- \$241.5 million for primary health networks to commission drug and alcohol treatment services;
- \$24.9 million for communities to deliver locally-based and tailored prevention and education initiatives;
- \$13 million to introduce new Medicare benefits schedule items for use by addiction medicine specialists;
- \$10.7 million for clinical research for new treatment options, training of professionals and evaluation of the effectiveness of clinical care for methamphetamine users; and
- \$8.1 million to improve data sources on emerging methamphetamine trends, drug use patterns, treatment options and the early identification of emerging drug threats.³⁰

While the National Ice Taskforce specifically acknowledged the critical role that law enforcement plays in reducing the methamphetamine supply, it also recommended that tackling this issue must include education, training and better access to treatment and services. However, no budget was provided for law enforcement to address the issue of supply reduction outside of current allocations and arrangements.

The Taskforce made numerous recommendations to address the methamphetamine problem, most of which are encompassed in the funding allocations as described. There is general

agreement that Australian law enforcement cannot arrest its way out of this issue and that there needs to be a focus on the reduction of demand for methamphetamine.³¹ However, the recommendations from the Taskforce in relation to strengthening law enforcement need addressing in both a policy and funding sense, so that supply and demand reduction efforts are harmonised for maximum benefit. Most critically for the reduction of methamphetamine supply, this paper seeks to address the following recommendations of the Taskforce in relation to strengthening law-enforcement efforts:

- Recommendation 25 - Commonwealth Government establishment of a new national platform for criminal intelligence to improve the existing information -sharing infrastructure;
- Recommendation 26 - Commonwealth Government collaboration with States and Territories to operationalise joint national and jurisdictional responses to methamphetamine; and
- Recommendation 27 - Commonwealth Government strengthening of international law enforcement advocacy and engagement on cooperation and information sharing between agencies.³²

It is important to note that while this paper and the preceding analysis by the author focus on the role and impact of China in Australia's methamphetamine problem, the proposed options would have significant benefits to Australia's ability to reduce the supply of methamphetamine from major global suppliers, and may have additional benefits in the detection and suppression of narcotics imported into Australia more generally.

UN General Assembly Special Session 2016

In April 2016, the UN General Assembly held a Special Session to address the world drug problem, which included the formulation of a draft resolution with operational recommendations for law-enforcement authorities on reducing the supply of methamphetamine and similar illegal substances. The draft recommendations are aimed at promoting cooperation at an international level, and reinforce the commitment to conformity with the 1988 UN Convention on Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.³³ They include:

- Prevention of the diversion of chemical precursors, through legislation and regulation and administrative mechanisms, in association with strengthening and the proper functioning of national control and national supply systems;
- Strengthening multidisciplinary measures nationally and internationally, promoting data collection, and the sharing of information for best practices on drug supply measures;
- Monitoring current trends and trafficking routes, and sharing the information and experiences, including initiatives aimed at countering the exploitation of freight containers for drug trafficking and precursor chemical diversion;
- Developing and strengthening mechanisms of domestic coordination, and timely and efficient information sharing between authorities involved in countering drug trafficking and the diversion of precursors; and
- Developing and strengthening bilateral and international mechanisms to share information, including cooperation with the private sector and the use of new technologies.³⁴

The proposal overview

The proposals contained in this paper are categorised into five distinct policy options associated with law-enforcement activity and methamphetamine supply reduction. The initiatives include enhancements to governance and strategy; coordination of operational and intelligence resources; collaboration with academia; diplomatic representation; and public and private enterprise partnerships. They are designed to be a comprehensive suite of options, working in

conjunction with each other and enhancing the ability of authorities to reduce the supply of methamphetamine.

The recommendations could have beneficial effects as individual options, either for selective use or phased implementation. However, the recommendation of this paper is that the entirety of the options be employed for maximum benefit and collaboration.³⁵

The options also need to be considered and progressed at the highest level. The National Ice Taskforce made several recommendations in relation to collaborative efforts, intelligence collection and sharing, and the strengthening of law-enforcement efforts in Australia. However, there needs to be a clearly defined strategy and an agreed governance process to enable the relevant and key components to be successfully activated. In this regard, the establishment of an agreed and nationally unified approach is central to these policy options.

The development of a national-level disruption strategy is also crucial to this policy proposal, which will require coordination between Commonwealth law-enforcement bodies and Australia's State and Territory police forces, as well as international partners. Accordingly, increased resources for the purposes of coordination, intelligence analysis and dissemination, and operational law-enforcement activity are also included in the proposal.

However, the proposed policies are not solely a law-enforcement effort. They are designed to coordinate efforts from diplomatic, public and private sectors to enhance intelligence and detection efforts in reducing the supply of methamphetamine originating from China. They also incorporate contributions that can be made by academia in allowing access to data to enhance and assist in the analysis of intelligence which can be used to target organised crime groups involved in methamphetamine supply chains.

Despite the many challenges that are apparent in dealing with this issue, the main focus should be on ensuring a unified response. This includes, in particular, law-enforcement efforts and collaboration, and the timely exchange of intelligence both domestically and internationally. There also needs to be an enhanced focus on the supply chain, both in Australia and China. While there is currently a reasonable level of international cooperation, improvements in collaboration, cooperation and intelligence sharing offer the best opportunities to further reduce the supply of methamphetamine from China.

The resource costs

The funding of the recommendations and initiatives of this paper have been considered in the context of the financial impact that methamphetamine is having on Australian society. According to the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, serious and organised crime in Australia costs the national economy an estimated \$36 billion annually.³⁶ Of this, \$21 billion relates to criminal activity and \$15 billion to the costs of prevention and response.

Within the criminal activity segment, illegal drug activity is estimated to cost \$4.4 billion, with a further \$6.2 billion the result of consequential crimes, such as offences to fund and support drug purchases, and subsequent crimes such as violence, sexual assaults and property-related offences committed by people using illegal drugs. Additionally, the cost of social and health-related treatments for drug usage in Australia is estimated at \$8 billion each year. These costs, however, do not include the non-quantifiable impacts, such as damage to families and relationships, social cohesion and the loss of public confidence in the rule of law.³⁷

As a proportionate cost to the financial impact of such organised criminal activities, the proposed policy options would be a minor financial impost. Funding could also be enacted through the provisions of the *Proceeds of Crime Act 2002*, with funding allocated from the Confiscated Assets Account.³⁸ A number of initiatives could also leverage off existing frameworks and funding arrangements, such as that already provided for the National Anti-Gangs Squad and the Australian Gangs Intelligence Coordination Centre.³⁹

Part 3: Recommendations and initiatives

This part of the paper outlines the intended initiatives, provides reasoning for each initiative, and addresses the resource implications required to support the recommendations.

Governance and strategy

Recommendation 1

That a National Taskforce for Methamphetamine be established, overseight by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, for the nation-wide governance, strategic planning, coordination and direction of law-enforcement efforts in reducing the supply of methamphetamine.

Reasoning for initiative

Currently, each State and Territory in Australia largely operates as a separate law-enforcement entity in relation to methamphetamine. Accordingly, the collection of intelligence, the investigation of offences, and the application of laws in relation to methamphetamine supply reduction remain relatively separate.

There are a number of joint taskforces nationally focusing on the investigation of organised crime. However, none focuses specifically on methamphetamine as a commodity or as its own issue affecting the nation. Hence, the response to methamphetamine to this point in time has been a selective or ad hoc approach. Furthermore, the intent of the National Ice Taskforce recommendations has not been developed into a comprehensive strategy and there are no forged strategic partnerships, at the domestic level, addressing the methamphetamine issue in a unified manner.⁴⁰

Yet significant law-enforcement issues with a national impact have traditionally been addressed in a multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional manner. For example, joint counter-terrorism teams were established across Australia in response to the rising threat of terrorism. Similarly, vulnerabilities in supply chains in the waterfront industry have been addressed by the establishment of Joint Waterfront Taskforces at major Australian shipping ports. Other examples include the establishment of the National Anti-Gangs Squad, incorporating National Taskforce Morpheus, to address the issue and impact of outlaw motorcycle gangs in Australia; the Eligo Taskforce for high-risk money remittance; the Criminal Assets Confiscation Taskforce; and the Australian Cyber Online Reporting Network.⁴¹ All these entities rely on a unified response and joint activity to combat the associated criminal activity.

The proposed initiative would establish a national governance framework to address the methamphetamine problem in a coordinated and collaborative manner, drawing on the combined resources of Australian law-enforcement bodies and relevant regulatory agencies.

Governance framework and responsibilities

Governance and strategic oversight

The existing Board of the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission would become the senior governing body of the National Taskforce for Amphetamine, consisting of all Commissioners of Police, the Commissioner of the Australian Taxation Office, Chief Executive Officers of the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission and the Australian Border Force, Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department and the Director General of Security of the Australian Security

Intelligence Organisation, along with senior representatives of key national security and regulatory agencies.

Management

The existing Serious and Organised Crime Coordination Committee would become the senior joint management committee of the National Taskforce for Amphetamine, consisting of the Assistant Commissioners of Crime and equivalent members from respective departments and agencies. The Committee, which has already been assigned the task of establishing a National Law Enforcement Methamphetamine Strategy (as a result of recommendations from the National Ice Taskforce), would be responsible for the coordination of effort from a strategic, operational and tactical level.⁴² In particular, the Committee would be responsible for increasing collaboration across jurisdictions in order to reduce the supply of methamphetamine in Australia.

The National Methamphetamine Law Enforcement Managers Group would be established as the standing body from each jurisdiction, agency and/or department, responsible for the operationalisation of the National Law Enforcement Methamphetamine Strategy. The Group would effectively be the operational command of the National Methamphetamine Taskforce, and would prioritise the strategy against the requirements of each jurisdiction's requirements and capabilities. Membership would include representatives from each signatory agency from the Serious and Organised Crime Coordination Committee, as well as non-traditional partners as required. The Group's responsibilities would include the development of:

- An action plan for the National Methamphetamine Strategy;
- Business rules on intelligence and information sharing and collation through a Methamphetamine Intelligence Coordination Centre;
- A jurisdictional template for reporting to the Serious and Organised Crime Coordination Committee;
- Tactical options, initiatives and opportunities for combating the supply of methamphetamine; and
- Performance measures/indicators against the above.⁴³

The governance framework would allow for the necessary processes and systems to be developed, including agreements on the timely exchange and use of information and resources. Most importantly, it would highlight the unified commitment for law-enforcement bodies nationally to address the problem in a coordinated and collaborative manner.

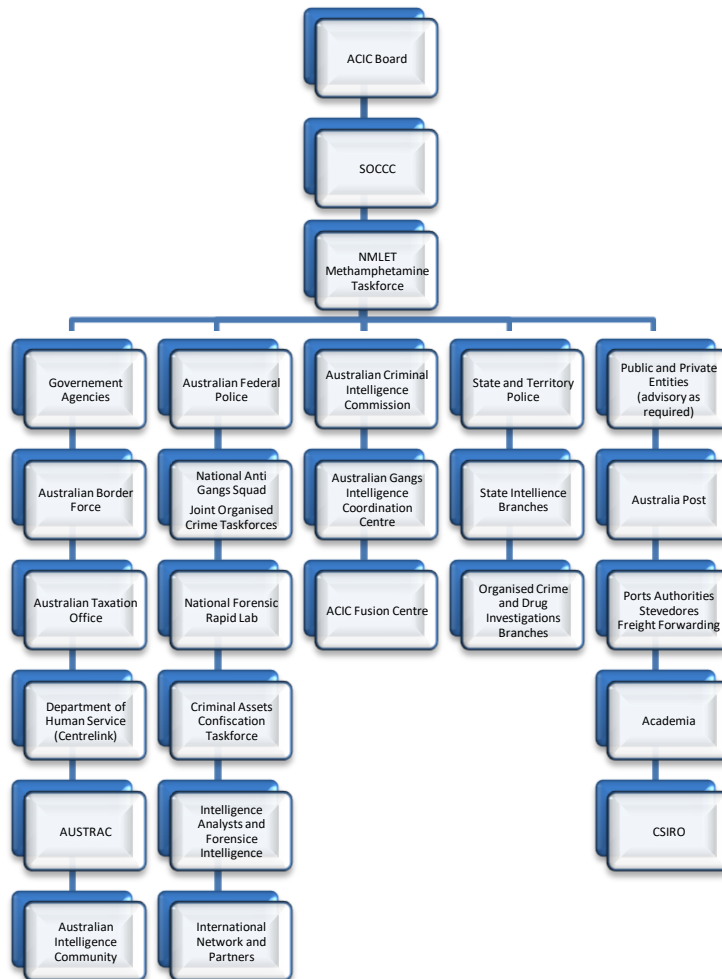


Figure 1: Proposed governance structure for a National Taskforce on Amphetamine

Funding implications

This proposal would have no associated funding requirements from government, as the establishment of a governing structure could be implemented within the existing budgets and functions of the represented parties.

Operational and intelligence resources and coordination

Recommendation 2

That additional resources be allocated for the coordination and operationalisation of actionable intelligence, aimed at reducing the supply of amphetamines into Australia.

Reasoning for initiative

The Australian Government needs to develop a network of agencies with operational, intelligence and supporting roles in the fight against methamphetamine. Currently, a coordinated response to

the methamphetamine issue is yet to replicate similar approaches in Australian law enforcement that have led to successful outcomes across various crime types. Recent examples are Joint Counter Terrorism Teams, the National Anti-Gangs Squad, Waterfront Taskforces, Taskforce Eligo (targeting money laundering) and Project Wickenby (targeting tax evasion and fraud).

Each of these teams has taken the approach of incorporating both State and Federal police, other law-enforcement agencies (such as the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission and the Australian Border Force), and other regulatory agencies such as the Australian Taxation Office.

This policy recommendation includes funding for 16 officers over two years to harness multi-jurisdictional cooperation and information flows from a local level, combining targeted intelligence nationally, through to the incorporation of international partners. The recommendation would require the embedding of selected State and Federal police and other government agency law-enforcement officers in a manner that maximises the collection and analysis efforts domestically and internationally in relation to methamphetamine and its precursors.

The strength, efficiency and impact of this initiative would be realised in a coordinated approach to a nationwide problem. The proposal also includes the development of a technological intelligence platform and a coordination intelligence cell to enable the united analysis of collated information. The proposal aims to leverage the existing framework of the National Anti-Gangs Squad and the Australian Gangs Intelligence Coordination Centre by supplementing staff in these structures for the purpose of concentrating on the coordination of methamphetamine-related intelligence, with particular synergies given the prevalence of outlaw motorcycle gangs in the domestic methamphetamine trade.

The resource requirements include the addition of five State police intelligence analysts in the National Anti-Gangs Squad Strike Teams in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia (one in each State). It also envisages three staff—one each from the Australian Border Force, AFP and the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission—being incorporated into the Australian Gangs Intelligence Coordination Centre to leverage off the intelligence and analytical capabilities already in existence.

In addition, two staff (one from the Australian Border Force and one from the AFP) would be attached to Taskforce Blaze in China to enhance the collection, analysis and dissemination of intelligence.⁴⁴ Two further staff would be added to the National Anti-Gangs Squad Coordination Team, specifically to coordinate the operational and administrative functions of the Methamphetamine Taskforce. The final four staff additions would be two AFP crime scene officers and two AFP forensic intelligence analysts being attached to the National Forensic Rapid Lab for enhanced and timely processing of methamphetamine seizures and intelligence dissemination.⁴⁵

The AFP's capacity for numerous crime types and its network is important because it extends overseas and can bring a range of Australian Government actors with regulatory functions or important taxation, customs, welfare and immigration information to assist with the problem. The capacity to reach both broadly and deeply for information can also be used in ways that would help State police address the domestic methamphetamine problem if the coordination mechanisms and intelligence picture are a collaborative effort.⁴⁶

In particular, leveraging from and enhancing the Australian Gangs Intelligence Coordination Centre with additional officers with a methamphetamine-specific focus would benefit the proposal by delivering analysed and fused data from national and international sources, and creating fewer steps in the intelligence chain.

The initiative is designed to bring enhanced Commonwealth investigative, intelligence and technical capabilities and coordination to support State and Territories in their response to the methamphetamine problem. It aims to deliver enhanced national and international intelligence-led policing and to support, facilitate and enhance the development of national prevention and

disruption activities at a jurisdictional and Commonwealth level by collaborative coordination of participating agencies.

Additional resources to coordinate and operationalise methamphetamine-specific intelligence would enhance the national and international capacity to deal with the issue of methamphetamine in Australia. The intention of this initiative would be to action agreed strategies in a unified and coordinated fashion, with the incorporation of information flow from localised domestic policing, national coordination and analysis, and international connectivity and collaboration to better develop the intelligence picture nationally and internationally.

In practice, the initiative would create a new intelligence structure and process that enables the inflow of intelligence from a variety of sources from domestic-level policing up to intelligence from international partners. It would also incorporate a broad spectrum of law-enforcement agencies that are able to provide intelligence product that supports and enhances the targeting methodologies of the methamphetamine strategy.

The proposal also seeks to tighten existing capabilities and intelligence frameworks to enhance the value of the information currently being obtained so that it would be utilised in a more effective manner. It would also aim to leverage off existing capabilities and frameworks to enable an expedited response. The integration of resources into existing capabilities would also mean that assimilation and communication connectivity would not provide significant issues for implementation of this element of the proposal.

The National Forensic Rapid Lab is a key resource that has been developed over the last few years. It is an AFP-led resource that identifies methodologies and key intelligence in relation to the importation of illicit goods. It has the potential to provide a significant link between agencies, as well as providing an invaluable capability to coordinate intelligence both nationally and internationally. Since 2013, the Lab has detected almost two tonnes of illicit drugs through the international mail system, along with other psychoactive substances that potentially could be used to create precursor chemicals.⁴⁷

The value of the Lab in combating methamphetamine supply is in its ability to establish forensic intelligence links between serial drug importations. This forensic intelligence picture, however, needs a coordinated effort, not just from the AFP but also from State and Territory police, as well as other law-enforcement agencies, to enhance the capability to its full potential. This also includes the international intelligence aspects, whereby information sharing of this nature may prove extremely useful for disruption efforts abroad.

To enable this national coordination of information, there is also a requirement in this proposal to include an intelligence platform to consolidate and allow for the dissemination of actionable intelligence via a nationally accessible database. This proposal includes the recommendation that a national methamphetamine database be developed and maintained by the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission. This technological initiative would be modelled on the National Gangs List and the Gangs Intelligence Hub, which were specifically developed to strengthen the ability to share information about gangs domestically and overseas. The system would be tailored for methamphetamine-related intelligence and would be accessible for relevant State, Territory and Commonwealth partners for national coordination and strengthened information sharing.



Figure 2: Representation of the intelligence sources and framework for the proposed Methamphetamine Intelligence Coordination Centre

Funding implications

The funding requirements for this proposal include 16 staff costed at \$120,000 per annum over two years. The two offshore staff are costed at \$240,000 a year each. There would also be an additional \$0.5 million in capital costs for infrastructure requirements associated with the embedding of staff into existing National Anti-Gangs Squads nationally.

A further \$0.5 million would also be required for the development of the enhanced intelligence platform for national coordination of intelligence, modelled on the existing frameworks of the National Gangs List and the Gangs Intelligence Hub.

The total funding requirement for this recommendation would be \$5.48 million over two years.

Academic research and collaboration

Recommendation 3

That funding be provided for academic research to enhance current intelligence collection and investigative methodologies that focus on the origins and networks of the supply of methamphetamine to Australia.

Reasoning for initiative

Previous work by the author highlighted that organised crime groups have shown an escalating degree of interaction and cooperation with crime groups globally, particularly in relation to the manufacture and trafficking of methamphetamine. This is evidenced by the linkages between Mexican Sinaloa cartels and methamphetamine manufacturing groups in China, as well as triads

operating out of the south of China actively involved in the trafficking of precursor chemicals to Sinaloa cartels.⁴⁸ With Mexico being one of the top producers of methamphetamine in the world, and with already established illicit trade routes to Australia through the Pacific, the China-Mexico 'dark network' relationship exacerbates the impact of methamphetamine importation into Australia.⁴⁹

The situation is further compounded by the increased interaction between Sinaloa cartels and Australian-based organised crime groups, often involving diaspora Chinese and outlaw motorcycle gangs.⁵⁰ In April 2016, Anthea McCarthy-Jones reported a mounting correlation between the activities of criminal Mexican cartels and Chinese-organised crime groups, which together are responsible for the overwhelming bulk of the world's methamphetamine production and distribution. As a criminal network, they are involved both in the importation of precursor chemicals from China to Mexico, and the importation of the finished product from Mexico back to China.⁵¹

The aim of this initiative would be to allow academic researchers partial access to restricted police intelligence, information and data to facilitate a more comprehensive analysis of criminal structures and networks. This would enhance the current police intelligence picture in relation to criminal networks involved in methamphetamine and precursor importations, and allow for prioritised targeting opportunities.

McCarthy-Jones contends that analysis of this data would be an extremely beneficial tool for law-enforcement analysis of various crimes.⁵² In order to map the network, an initial analysis would need to be undertaken of both open- and closed-source intelligence. The objective would be to identify critical junctures or nodes across the network. This would then allow law-enforcement agencies to focus on parts of the network that could be disrupted through kinetic and non-kinetic actions. By utilising network analysis, law-enforcement agencies would be able to identify critical regional nodes, which are the organisations and resources relied on by these networks to function effectively. From a longer-term perspective, this analysis would support decision makers to develop longitudinal planning prescriptions rather than fixating on immediate law-enforcement actions.⁵³

This initiative would also include collaboration with academia to develop a prototype software package that would allow law-enforcement agencies to continually feed intelligence into the program in order to generate real-time maps of the network.⁵⁴ This would enable law-enforcement agencies to map changes in the network and identify changing hubs of activity, as well as the power distribution between actors in the network. The findings could then be used as a policy-framing instrument for interdiction strategies and operational activities. The program would need to have the capacity to map the network in a number of ways. For example, it could map the connections between organised crime groups in the network, it could map where the majority of seizures are taking place in relation to quantity and frequency, and it could generate a map of how the network operates across the Asia-Pacific region.

The intelligence and mapping outcomes of this proposal would be directed into the Methamphetamine Intelligence Coordination Centre for prioritisation and enhancement of traditional law-enforcement intelligence collection and analysis.

Funding implications

This proposal could likely be completed in a two-year project involving a small team of academic researchers and a software developer, working in conjunction with the AFP's National Coordination Team.

The total funding is estimated at \$1million over two years, comprising \$0.25 million each year in 2017-18 and 2018-19 for funding of the research team, and \$0.5 million in 2018-19 for software development.

Diplomatic representations

Recommendation 4

That diplomatic representations be made by the Australian Government to the Chinese Government, seeking to curb the supply into Australia of methamphetamine precursors from Chinese chemical companies.

Reasoning for initiative

With an estimated 160,000 chemical companies, China is one of the world's most prominent sources of pharmaceutical chemicals. Much of the output is intended for legitimate domestic use, with China being the single largest pharmaceutical market in the world. In addition, pharmaceutical companies worldwide rely on China for the supply of chemicals for their own legitimate business interests, with more than 65,000 kilograms of various products being exported annually.⁵⁵

However, some of the chemicals produced in China are also precursor chemicals in the manufacture of methamphetamine, notably ephedrine and pseudoephedrine (which are also legitimate chemicals used in the manufacture of cold and flu medications). The concern is that significant quantities of these precursors are being illegally trafficked from China to other countries, including Australia, for use in manufacturing methamphetamine in the target country.⁵⁶

In March 2015, the International Narcotics Control Board reported that during the previous six years, more than half the precursor chemical seizures made by law-enforcement authorities in East and Southeast Asia originated within the region—and that almost half of all precursor chemical seizures in Australia and New Zealand had originated in East or Southeast Asia.⁵⁷

In China, the regulation of these precursors is governed by the stipulated controls included in the 1998 UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.⁵⁸ Additionally, Chinese authorities have made stricter controls enforceable in provinces that have displayed a tendency to be involved in illegal exporting activities associated with chemical diversion.

Despite these efforts, it is generally accepted by law-enforcement authorities worldwide that China is the major supplier of precursor chemicals to 'super labs' in Asia and Mexico, designed for the large-scale manufacture of methamphetamine.⁵⁹ There has also been open criticism by senior UN drug officials of the regulation of the Chinese pharmaceutical industry, citing the seeming ease with which chemicals are being diverted from companies by corrupt officials.⁶⁰

With more than 6000 manufacturers of chemicals and another 14,000 distributors involved in the legal Chinese pharmaceutical industry, regulation poses many issues for authorities.⁶¹ The efforts to date by Chinese authorities to curb chemical diversion have not been greatly successful. This is complicated by the lack of regulation of the industry itself, with the number of unregistered or unlawful precursor chemical factories operating in China currently unknown to authorities.⁶²

It is important to note, however, that although China has the second largest pharmaceutical industry in the world—and has significant issues with its regulation—there are a number of other countries impacted by precursors emanating from China. As an example, Mexican cartels produce approximately 90 per cent of the methamphetamine seized in the US, with 80 per cent of the chemicals sourced from China.⁶³

Diplomatically, efforts need to be made to encourage China to resolve this issue, particularly since it is in China's interests to do so, given its own large-scale methamphetamine use and dependency.⁶⁴ Half of China's estimated 13 million drug addicts are thought to be using methamphetamine. While data about users is difficult to verify, drug seizure data is clear. Over the last decade, China's methamphetamine seizures have risen 437 per cent to 26,000 kilograms in 2014.⁶⁵ The main reason Chinese manufacturers of methamphetamine precursors have been able to flourish is because the industry continues to be poorly monitored and has weak regulation.

The aim of this initiative is to enhance diplomatic efforts, both bilaterally and multilaterally, to assist China with its own methamphetamine and precursor problems, as well as reducing supply to affected nations such as Australia, Mexico and the US. This initiative is consistent with Australia's advocacy and support for global, regional and bilateral security frameworks and norms based on the UN Charter, including international security and accountability for international crimes.⁶⁶

It also accords with Australia's commitment to international drug control efforts based on the policy foundations of three UN treaties, namely, the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs; the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances; and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. More than 95 per cent of UN member states, including China, Australia, Mexico and the US, are parties to these treaties.⁶⁷

The treaties have been designed to limit the international production and trade of a defined set of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and the precursor chemicals used to make these substances. The treaties also establish international mechanisms, through the International Narcotics Control Board, to monitor treaty adherence and for the collection of data related to the illicit production and manufacture of proscribed drugs.

From a global policy perspective, the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs monitors global drug trends, develops strategies for international drug control, and recommends measures to combat the world drug problem. Similarly the UN Office on Drugs and Crime is mandated to assist UN member states in combating transnational organised crime, including drug trafficking. Australia has consistently provided funding assistance to aid programs supported by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.⁶⁸

Outside of the UN framework, there are a number of regional counter-drug organisations that assist in supplementing global drug efforts. Such groups include the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission,⁶⁹ which is the drug control aspect of the Organization of American States. It is the regional policy forum for all aspects of western hemisphere illegal drug issues, including drug demand reduction, treatment, and rehabilitation in the Asia and Pacific regions. The US also has a direct US-Sino Joint Liaison Group on Law Enforcement Cooperation. While Australia is engaged with China in a law-enforcement sense, such as Taskforce Blaze and the AFP's international network, any further opportunities to engage with like-minded countries such as the US and Mexico in relation to methamphetamine and precursor issues should be a priority.

The Australian Government needs to identify and prioritise opportunities from senior levels of government through to law-enforcement liaison. This would highlight the issue with both the Chinese Government and its law-enforcement agencies, along with other countries experiencing similar issues on account of methamphetamine and its precursors originating from China. As international agreements define the minimum standards or levels of control that signatory countries need to apply to the issue of methamphetamine and its precursors, more dialogue is needed to encourage conformity to the standards. Countries such as China also need stricter enactment of legislation, and regulatory and administrative systems to control the manufacture, distribution of drugs and precursors.

In this regard, the policy recommendation includes the formation of an Australian Inter-Departmental Working Group across government agencies such as the Attorney-General's Department, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Health, and the AFP. Such a group would identify and prioritise opportunities and strategies to raise the level of

urgency in respect to the need for more concerted efforts to increase the standard of regulation and monitoring of the Chinese pharmaceutical and chemical industry.

This proposal also advocates greater multilateral engagement with law-enforcement partners regionally and of interest to this issue. Agencies such as the AFP and the US Drug Enforcement Administration, along with Chinese and Mexican authorities and the International Narcotics Control Board, should be actively and frequently engaging on the issue to highlight the problem and to seek opportunities to exchange information and expertise on how best to approach the problem collaboratively.

Funding implications

There is no requirement for specific funding for this policy proposal. Diplomatic efforts, along with the formation of an Inter-Departmental Working group to strategise the issue, could be progressed within existing frameworks and budget allocations.

Private and public partnerships

Recommendation 5

That law-enforcement agencies implement a collaborative pilot partnership with public and private entities to enhance the border detection of methamphetamine, with a particular focus on the phased integration and use of innovative technology and methodologies.

Reasoning for initiative

Since the terrorist attacks of September 2001, there has been increased focus on the importance of cooperation and partnerships between law-enforcement agencies and private and public enterprises. These partnerships have recognised the benefits of working together and the improved ability to share timely information and to leverage from capabilities. The partnerships have also developed at a time when there is an increasing sense of 'corporate citizenship', with industries accepting a sense of responsibility to share resources and expertise for the benefit of national security.⁷⁰

Partnerships between law enforcement and private industries allow communities to leverage scarce resources and apply a 'force multiplier' effect in public safety and national security. This type of force multiplier combines the resources, expertise, information and technology of law enforcement and business. By working closely with private enterprises, there is a great deal of information sharing and technology that can be utilised to maximise public safety.⁷¹

Government agencies and industry have a shared responsibility for border security. An example of this type of approach is the Border Watch initiative that enables anonymous information to be passed to law-enforcement agencies regarding illegal activities in respect of cargo and logistics. However, more needs to be done. With emerging technologies, global customs reforms and the streamlining of cargo reporting, there has been movement in the stevedoring industry towards the automation of terminals. This has limited human involvement in the handling of containers which, in turn, has reduced the risk of corrupt interference with cargo. The next step would be to implement technologies to provide an ongoing x-ray system on the docks rather than just the examination of 'high-risk' shipments.⁷²

This initiative would provide funding for a pilot project to incorporate automated scanning technologies of shipping containers for an enhanced detection capability at Australian ports. The use of technology, particularly advanced x-ray technology, has been the subject of joint collaboration between Chinese authorities and the CSIRO in recent years. In 2008, the CSIRO

collaborated with the Chinese company Nuctech to develop an advanced scanning capability that combines high-energy neutrons with gamma-rays.⁷³

Traditional x-ray technology is capable of producing images that show the shape of objects, whereas this new technology is capable of identifying the composition of an object, which includes narcotics. The added benefits of this technology are that it allows for the rapid identification of drugs such as methamphetamine (and other contraband) and can also be adapted for use in scanning air, sea and truck cargo.⁷⁴ The more extensive use of this type of technology could potentially provide a much greater rate of detection of methamphetamine being imported into Australia and could assist in attacking the supply chain.

Currently available technologies enable the rapid scanning of closed shipping containers using x-ray and radiation scanning equipment in a manner that does not impede economic considerations such as time delays in cargo movement. Technologies such as the SAIC integrated container inspection system and the Rapidscan Eagle allow for truck-mounted containers to pass through inspection infrastructure, enabling the scanning of the container contents in less than 30 seconds. Other options include radiation technology, such as the VeriTainer container crane-mounted detection system that performs a scanning procedure as each container is unloaded from the ship. This system is integrated into existing infrastructure at container terminals and does not impact on the efficiency of cargo movement.⁷⁵

The recommendation to fund a pilot program utilising an emergent technology at an Australian port would be conducted in partnership between the Australian Government and a selected private port entity, in conjunction with law-enforcement representatives. This would enable the full range of resources, information and expertise to be considered in the process.

Once the pilot program was completed, any beneficial methodology identified could be expanded throughout the Australian stevedoring industry, with negotiation between government and industry in relation to funding arrangements. Any such expansion may also require regulatory or legislative enactment or amendment.

As the flow of methamphetamine into Australia, by volume, is most significant in the mail stream, this initiative also includes the establishment of new x-ray and radiation detection technologies in the International Mail Centre to enhance the detection capabilities of the postal service, to be implemented in collaboration with Australia Post.

Funding requirements

The funding requirement for this initiative would total \$12.5 million over two years. The port-based scanning technology would likely cost \$7 million in total (with expenditure of \$6.5 million in 2017-18 and \$0.5 million in 2018-19). The postal scanning technology would likely cost \$5.5 million (with expenditure of \$5 million in 2017-18 and \$0.5 million in 2018-19).

Total policy proposal funding requirements

The total funding for the entirety of this proposal would be \$18.98 million over two years.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to address the methamphetamine issue in Australia by recommending a number of options to reduce the amount of the drug and its chemical precursors from entering Australia, in particular from China.

In 2015, the National Ice Taskforce proposed a number of options relating to identifiable gaps in services, systems and approaches to the methamphetamine problem in Australia. The Taskforce's final report included recommendations relating to improvements to health and support services, education and prevention, governance and strategy, as well as law-enforcement options, together costing almost \$300 million.

The recommendations of the National Ice Taskforce highlighted the importance of disrupting the supply of methamphetamine into Australia and recommended that effort by law-enforcement agencies needed to be more targeted and coordinated. However, the recommendations did not include strengthening law enforcement. Moreover, the current arrangements are neither a coordinated nor collaborative response to disrupting methamphetamine supply between Commonwealth and State and Territory agencies.

This paper has made five recommendations to address the detrimental effect that amphetamine and its precursors are having across the nation. The initiatives include enhancements to governance and strategy; coordination of operational and intelligence resources; collaboration with academia; diplomatic representation; and public and private enterprise partnerships. The initiatives are designed to be a comprehensive suite of options, working in conjunction with each other and enhancing the ability to reduce the supply of methamphetamine.

The funding of the recommendations has been considered in light of the huge financial burdens that have been created by the impact of methamphetamine in Australia. By any measure, the funding implications recommended in this paper are very minor in contrast to the related costs and harms that are being borne by Australian society today. In combination, the options and recommendations advocated in this paper should assist in reducing the supply of methamphetamine from China and, as a consequence, addressing the methamphetamine issue more generally.

Notes

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