

BRIEFING

Testing Australian sewage has located the nation's ice capital



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Photo: Jack Taylor/Getty Images

Australians are taking illegal drugs on a scale that challenges the rest of the world.

A large testing program of Australia's sewerage system has found hard evidence that highly addictive methamphetamine, or ice, is the most highly consumed illicit drug.

And Western Australia is the ice capital of Australia, with methylamphetamine used at twice the rate of some other parts of the country.

Fifty-one sewerage system sites, 22 in capital cities and 29 in regional Australia, were tested in 2016 for the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission by the University of Queensland and the University of South Australia.

The first round of the study, covering 58% of Australia's population or about 14 million people, focused on legal and illicit drugs, including tobacco, alcohol, methylamphetamine, cocaine and MDMA (ecstasy).

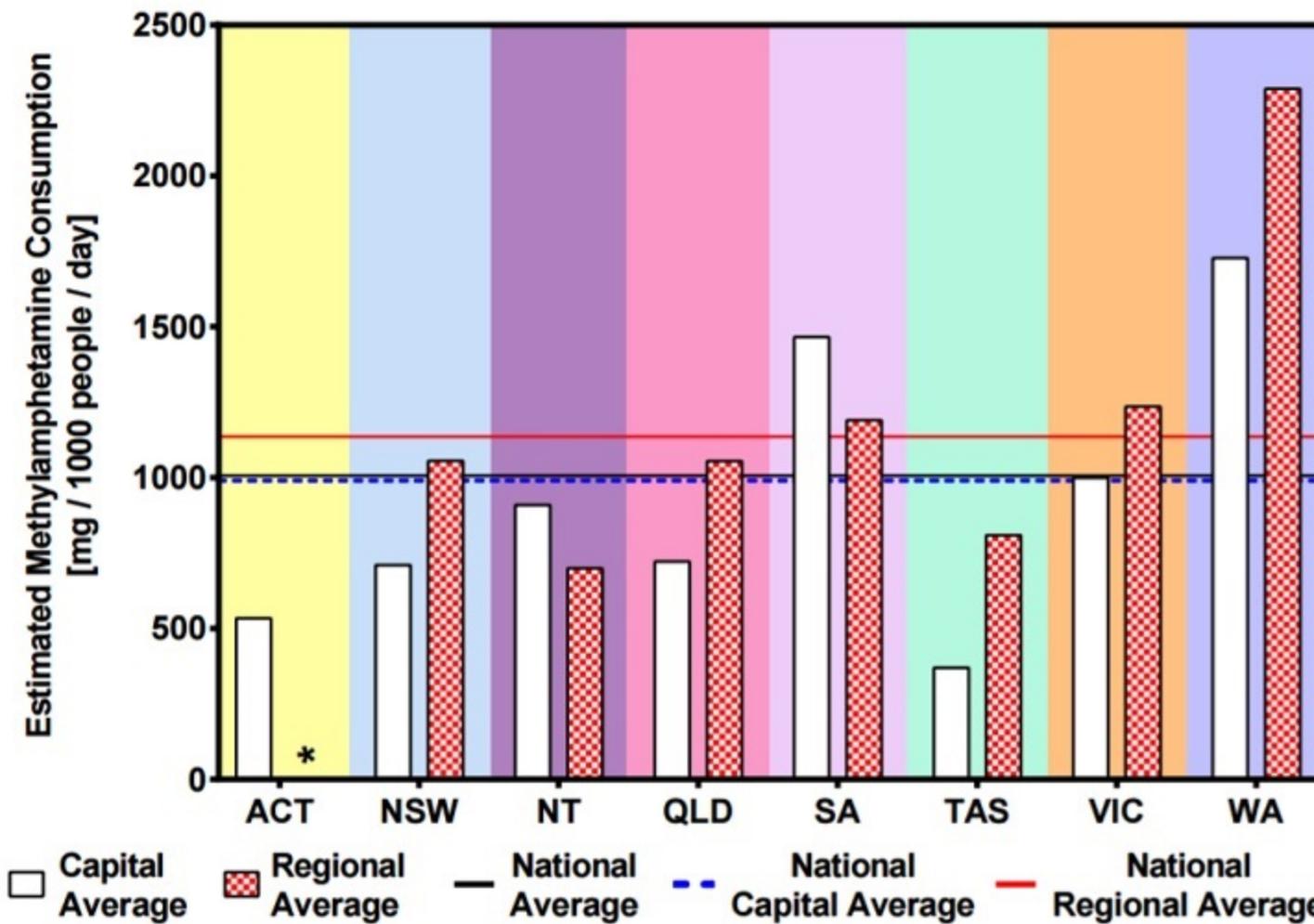
Wastewater is a highly complex mixture made up of waste from toilets, bathrooms, kitchen and laundry appliances as well industrial sources.

The first National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program report shows that ice consumption in Western Australia and South Australia is higher than the national average, in both the capital cities and regional areas.

High levels were also recorded in regional sites in Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania.

Here's how the states compare for ice use:

Estimated average consumption of methylamphetamine for capital and regional sites by state/territory.



Source: National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program Report

Cocaine use was the highest in New South Wales, almost double the second highest jurisdiction the Northern Territory, in terms of doses consumed per day. The ACT recorded the third highest.

Australia's high methylamphetamine consumption puts its illegal drug use high on a world scale.

Here's what Australia looks like compared to Europe:

The total amount of stimulant consumed (as doses per 1 000 people by a country as a population weighted average of the number of reported sites brackets after country name).

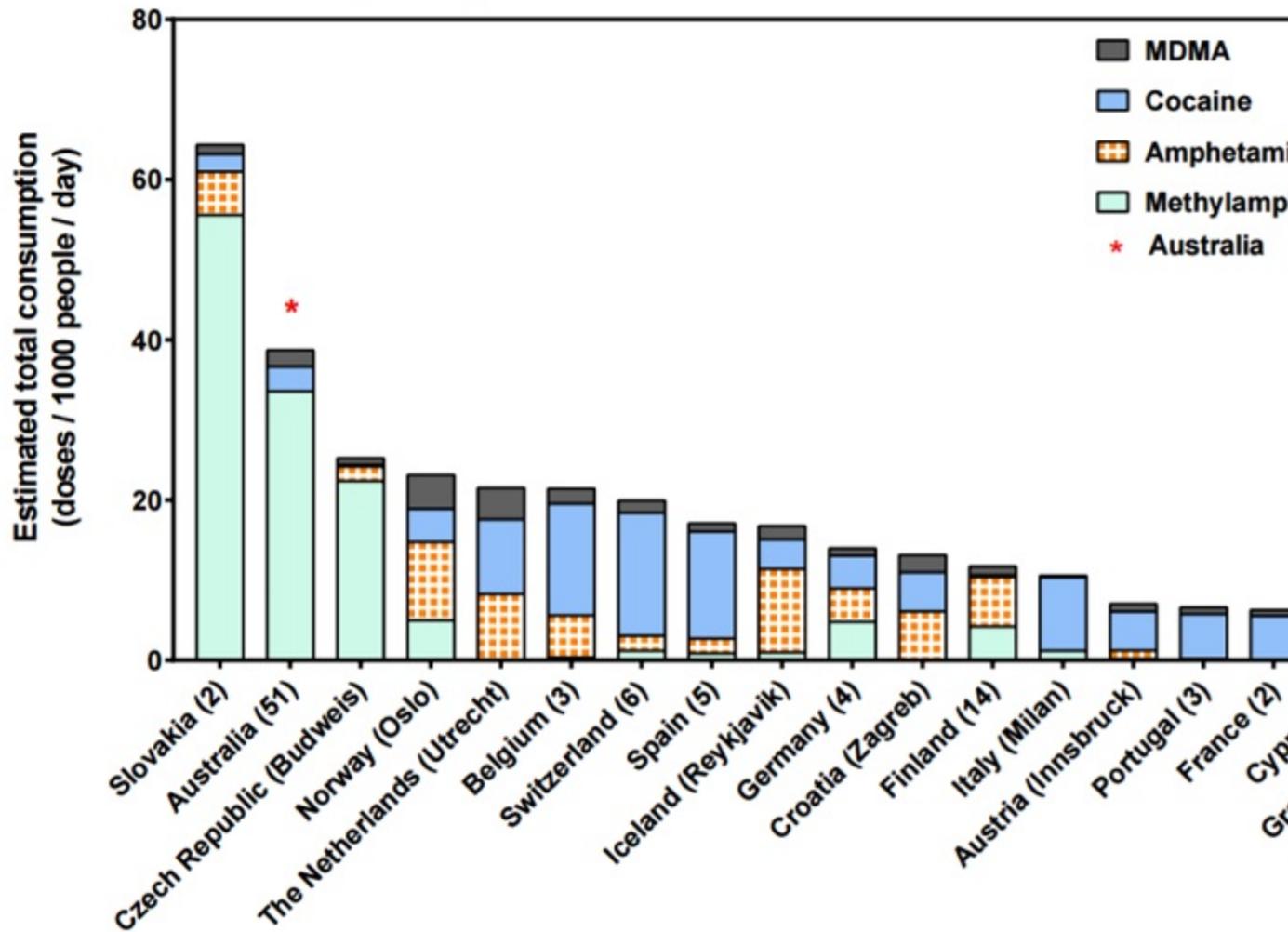


Image: National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program Report 1, 2017

Australia has the second highest total consumption.

The national testing program of Australia's sewerage system is the first of nine planned over the next three years.

