

The Gatekeepers

A television view of the work of Customs



The Gatekeepers, a one-hour ABC television documentary, broadcast across Australia in June 1999, gives a unique insight into the varied and vital work of the Australian Customs Service.

The documentary was part of the ABC's 'Inside Story' series. It portrays a typical 24 hours in the work of Customs and involved officers in the Torres Strait, on Customs vessels, and in Broome, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Canberra. It also shows scenes from a joint patrol of Australia-Papua New Guinea border areas.

For producer Jack King, the documentary is the fulfilment of an idea he first had in the early 1990s when he saw a Customs exhibit travelling by train in Queensland. "It was like an Aladdin's cave with everything from turtle shells to false-bottomed suitcases and, if my memory serves me well, a fully grown stuffed bear in one corner," he said. "My ideal would have been a six-part series based on David Day's marvellous history books* but money and time beat us. However, we've ended up with a one-hour special that attempts to reflect 24 hours in the life of the service as it operates throughout the country."

Jack King said the documentary owed a lot to the cooperation the film crew received at all levels of Customs. "Everyone went out of their way to help either being filmed in their work activities or in re-enactments of seizures when some were happy to play the parts of "baddies".

The Gatekeepers is scheduled for a repeat broadcast on ABC TV on 5 August.

*At top: Customs trainee Fritz Loban and local resident Dino Seden (with boat) pretend to be cannabis smugglers for a scene from *The Gatekeepers*. Torres Strait.*

* David Day, *Smugglers and Sailors. The Customs history of Australia 1788-1901*, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1992.
David Day, *Contraband and Controversy. The Customs history of Australia from 1901*, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1996.

The Gatekeepers showed the work of Customs in often remote parts of Australia.

Below, from top: Meeting a cruising yacht while on patrol. Near King Sound, Western Australia.

Confiscated illegal fishing vessels are burned. Willie Creek, near Broome.

Villagers say goodbye to Customs Thursday Island District Manager Geoff McKay (centre) as a joint Australian-Papua New Guinea border patrol left Daru, PNG.

Below, from top: Searching for places where illegal foreign fishing vessels could hide. King Sound, Western Australia.

ABC television producer Jack King (left) instructs Customs officer Mick Yankovic for his role as a gun carrying shipboard drug smuggler. Melbourne.

Val Morton, from Customs Broome office, explains the Customs Watch program to members of the Dodnun Community. Kimberley, Western Australia.

