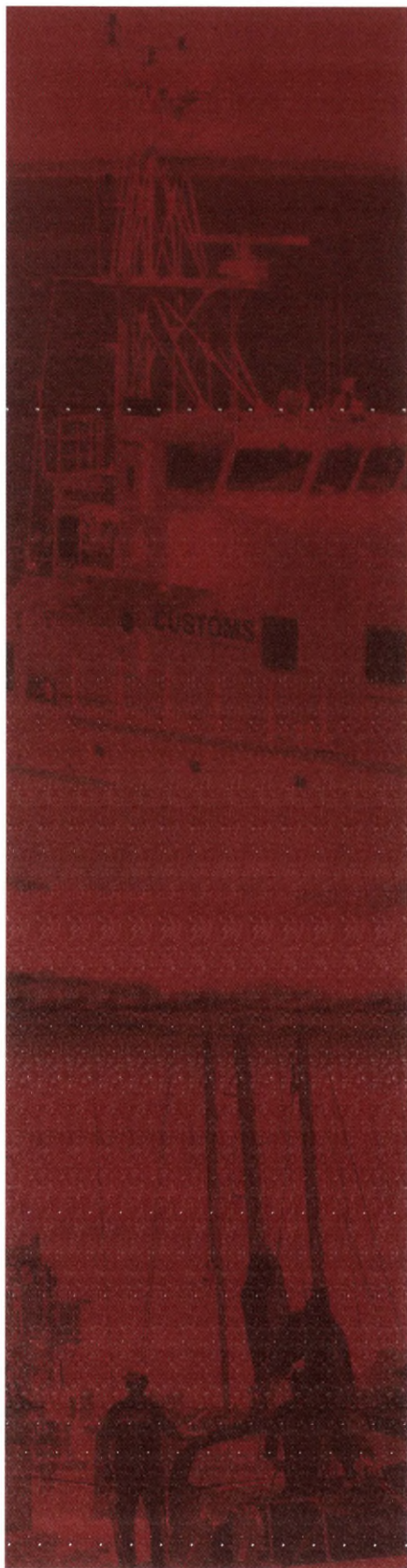


Customs border taskings—meeting the challenge



Getting a vessel or aircraft where it's needed when it's needed is paramount during any border operation, and with this in mind, Customs has established a Border Operations Coordination Unit (BOCU) in Canberra.

While the unit does not run an operation, its assistance and advice to those working the operation is critical. The unit provides advice about suitable tasks that use Customs assets appropriately and to a premium capacity. Working as a central coordinator, the unit assists with tasking appropriate Customs assets for critical periods during border operations. Ensuring tasks are received from the appropriate areas within Customs is also part of the unit's role.

Those working in the unit have a good working knowledge of the elements of border operations as well as a good knowledge of available Customs assets. Recently, Customs marine and air assets have been upgraded to sophisticated high-tech platforms with the introduction of new aircraft and marine vessels.

Variables affecting possible taskings include availability of assets, planning, regional conditions such as wet and dry seasons, land and coastal anomalies, competing tasks and other local factors. For this reason, according to the unit director, Mr John Howard, the importance of a central point for people throughout Customs, as well as external agency contacts, is a critical factor to successful and effective operational work. "It's important to remember that the people running the operation are the people with the local

knowledge," Mr Howard said. "They need timely and accurate information, and sometimes at short notice. It is the task of the unit to provide that information, or to get approval for use of an aircraft or vessel."

BOCU plays a key role in coordination and liaison of Customs activity in joint operations with other border agencies, such as the Australian Federal Police, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, the National Crime Authority, and the Australian Fisheries Management Authority.

Customs Border Division has more than 50 long-term tasks logged with Coastwatch, a division of Customs. These tasks are updated every six months. In the past year, the marine unit has been called in to operations around Australia, dealing with matters relating to interceptions of craft suspected of carrying narcotics, district offices using vessels to update information about their area of operation, to federal and state police requesting assistance with operations.

Brian Parker, a Canberra officer well known to Border staff in all regions, retired from Customs on 5 July after nearly 13 years' service. Brian spent the past two years helping to establish the unit, bringing with him considerable knowledge of regional activities.

"With Brian's assistance, the newly formed unit soon established a reputation for service delivery with all its stakeholders," Mr Howard said. "Brian had the knowledge and skills needed to provide wide-ranging operational advice in the use of Customs air and marine assets. Added to his experience was

his professionalism and ability to work effectively with people at all levels at all times. People liaising with Brian were confident of the advice they received, and that helped to build recognition of the unit as an effective and much-needed addition to Customs."

Describing himself as easygoing, Mr Parker said the success of the unit had overall benefits for Customs, bringing together Customs and external resources for the quality assurance of operations.

"It is important that the unit does not lose sight of its focus – to co-

ordinate border input for the successful completion of operations," Mr Parker said. "It is essential that Customs continues to use its assets to their maximum capability."

In mid-2000, Mr Parker was invited by New Zealand Customs to act as an observer/adviser during an illegal entrant vessel exercise. This visit led to a 30-day deployment of Australian Customs vessel *Storm Bay* to New Zealand.

Exercises carried out during the visit across the Tasman provided good insight into procedures and

interoperability between New Zealand agencies and Australian Customs. The deployment proved successful for all agencies, highlighting the benefits of closer trans-Tasman operational relationships.

"BOCU's aims – to use resources fully and to build strong and effective ties internally and externally – can assist Customs to continue working at a professional level in a fast-paced society," Mr Howard said.



Customs marine and air assets are used to optimum levels in surveillance and other operational tasks. Brian Parker who is featured in this article is on the left in the picture bottom right.