

CUSTOMS RESOURCES DEMONSTRATED IN PACIFIC PROTECTOR

Customs officers from the National Marine Unit and Coastwatch demonstrated their response capabilities during Exercise Pacific Protector in late 2003.

The exercise was the first held under the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and involved military and law-enforcement agencies from Australia, France, Japan and the USA.

The PSI is a result of 11 nations working together to stop the illegal trade in weapons of mass destruction.

Pacific Protector was the first in a series of maritime, land and air interdiction exercises under the PSI and drew widespread interest from international and national media.

Led by Australia, the aim of the exercise was to practice intercepting, boarding and searching a vessel suspected of carrying weapons of mass destruction. It also encouraged international cooperation and the sharing of intelligence, assets and resources.

In the exercise scenario a merchant vessel travelling 100 nautical miles off the Queensland coast was suspected of carrying weapons of mass destruction.

At first light on the morning of the exercise a Coastwatch aircraft and French surveillance aircraft conducted patrols to detect, identify and monitor the target vessel.

Australian vessels HMAS *Success*, HMAS *Melbourne* and ACV *Botany Bay*, US destroyer USS *Curtis Wilbur* and Japanese Coast Guard ship JACG *Shikishima*, moved into position around the target vessel. *Botany Bay* positioned itself close to the target vessel to provide exercise participants, observers and media with the opportunity to witness the event from close quarters.

After unsuccessful requests for the target vessel to stop, the JACG *Shikishima* launched two boarding parties aboard Super Puma helicopters. Japanese Coast Guard officers then

boarded the vessel using fast-roping techniques.

The US Coast Guard sent a boarding party to assist the Japanese secure the vessel. Once the target vessel was stopped, additional boarding teams and specialist chemical defence personnel boarded the vessel to search and secure the simulated contraband.

Customs Marine Standards Manager Warwick Conlin said, "The crew of the ACV *Botany Bay*, led by Commanding Officer Paul Hemmings, demonstrated a large degree of flexibility in being able to operate with an international naval force in close quarters situations and achieve all given tasks".



ACV *Botany Bay* played an important role during Exercise Pacific Protector.