



Keeping an eye on Australia's wharves

Every moment of the day, Customs closed-circuit television cameras monitor the comings and goings on Australia's wharves, in major ports and remote locations. These electronic eyes are on watch at 32 of the major ports around the country and by the end of 2007 a further 31 places will be covered.

These 63 locations represent all of Australia's proclaimed seaports where ships arriving from overseas are required by law to make their first call and complete Customs, Immigration and Quarantine formalities.

While Customs has officers assigned to each of these places, the CCTV cameras play an increasingly important role in the work of border protection. They are used to provide 24/7 surveillance and response capability and each of the cameras on the various wharves can be used for general or targeted monitoring activities as well.

All are linked in a national network controlled from the National Monitoring Centre at Customs House in Melbourne. The centre was established in 1997 and now has a team of 15 officers who work around the clock.

All the new cameras will relay digital images to the centre and to local Customs Houses and regional monitoring

centres. These images can be viewed, assessed and acted on immediately or stored for future use as part of ongoing intelligence-gathering operations.

If the officers at the centre observe unusual activity at a remote site, they contact the local Customs office or the on-call officer as well as alerting other partner government agencies as necessary.

While the centre monitors wharf activity covering vessels, movement of containers and vehicles and people, it also has additional responsibilities including receiving and assessing phone calls to the Customs Hotline and providing a national communications centre for the high-frequency radio network used by Customs.

Each year the Customs Hotline—1800 06 1800—receives thousands of calls from members of the public and industry contacts who are members of the Frontline program. The centre is responsible for assessing the information and forwarding it to relevant operational areas for action. These calls relate to various issues including terrorism, narcotics, wildlife, immigration and quarantine.

Many illegal foreign fishing vessels intercepted by Customs are detected as a result of such calls (see page 8). The



Opposite page: Customs officer Miles Pearman (left) and Cliff Brown at work in the National Monitoring Centre in Melbourne.

Above: One of the six-screen monitors at the National Monitoring Centre in Melbourne.

centre also takes after-hours calls from state police and refers these to appropriate areas of Customs.

Whenever important information relevant to Customs is received, an intelligence report is created and regional and operational areas are notified to enable them to respond accordingly.

The centre is Customs 24-hour radio base station. The primary communications role involves maintaining a listening watch for the high frequency radio network used by the National Marine Unit, Coastwatch and land patrols. Radio communications between Customs maritime and airborne assets are often passed through the centre.

Land patrols from remote Customs offices are able to use the centre as primary or backup communications, using the radio network or satellite telephone.

Over the next four years, \$27 million will be allocated to further enhance the CCTV network, extending it to Australia's international airports. To be collocated with the National Monitoring Centre in Melbourne, the air monitoring centre will also operate in a similar fashion 24 hours a day.

The main airports of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane will be linked to the new centre in the initial stages.

Hotel worker reports bird smuggler

A hotel worker reported suspicious activity to the National Monitoring Centre. A male guest had checked out of the hotel about 30 minutes before, leaving several empty cages in his room. The worker provided the man's name, date of birth and passport details from the hotel records. The Passenger Analysis Unit in Canberra found the man was scheduled to leave Australia that evening. Customs officers at Sydney Airport found 10 live finches and nine native parrots in his hand luggage. The offender appeared in court the next day and received a \$5000 fine and a three-year good behaviour bond.

Fishing worker reports foreigners

The National Monitoring Centre received a call on **1800 06 1800** from a worker on board an Australian fishing vessel in the Arafura Sea, north of Darwin about an Indonesian fishing vessel three or four nautical miles off the Australian coast and heading towards shore. Within minutes, two Customs vessels operating in the area responded. The fishing vessel was apprehended before reaching the coast and a further four were found. The vessels were taken to Darwin where the crews were charged and their vessels impounded. The vessels were destroyed.