



SENATOR THE HON DAVID JOHNSTON MINISTER FOR JUSTICE AND CUSTOMS

MEDIA RELEASE

DJ008/07

17 April 2007

New Maritime Capability for Customs

The Australian Government has taken another significant step in the nation's border protection capability with the commissioning today of four new medium patrol boats for the Australian Customs Service.

The Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator David Johnston, said Customs has signed a contract for the delivery of four new vessels, worth \$3.5 million, that will enhance the agency's ability to deal with illegal incursions in Australia's northern waters.

"This initiative is part of the Howard Government's \$389 million plan to deal with illegal fishing in our northern waters. These vessels will provide valuable support to Customs and Navy patrol boats already engaged in responding to and apprehending illegal vessels," Senator Johnston said.

"Customs had undertaken a thorough tender evaluation process before selecting Stebercraft Pty Ltd, based in Taree, NSW to build the new vessels."

When delivered the vessels will be stationed at Darwin, Thursday Island, Gove and Weipa.

Their primary role will be to transfer illegal foreign fishers from Customs' Bay class and Navy's Armidale class patrol boats to shore, allowing the larger vessels an early return to their offshore patrol areas.

This means the larger patrol boats will be able to spend more time at sea without the interruptions of visits to ports to deliver illegal fishers to the mainland.

The new vessels have also been designed to conduct limited inshore patrols in support of border protection activities to detect landings by illegal fishers and other illegal infiltrations of the Australian border.

The first of the four vessels is expected to be delivered by July this year with the remaining vessels rolled-out by December 2007.

A photo of one of the new vessels (digitally altered to include Customs livery) can be downloaded at www.customs.gov.au.

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