

Media Release

SENATOR THE HON. CHRISTOPHER ELLISON

Minister for Justice and Customs
Manager of Government Business in the Senate
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Better protection for Australia's borders under new \$1 billion Coastwatch surveillance contract

The signing of a new \$1 billion Customs Coastwatch contract will see increased and more effective aerial surveillance of Australia's maritime areas, the Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison said today.

The Minister was in Sydney today to witness the signing of the new agreement between Coastwatch and Adelaide-based company, Surveillance Australia Pty Ltd (SAPL).

The new contract, taking effect in 2008, will run for 12 years to 2020 and will include provision for a contract extension of up to 2 years.

Senator Ellison said the new SAPL service would comprise a fleet of six Dash 8-202 aircraft and four Dash 8-315 longer endurance aircraft, all fitted with improved electro-optics, infrared sensors and radars.

"This will double the fleet of highly capable long-range fully electronic surveillance aircraft available under the existing contract from five to 10.

"The improved sensors carried by these aircraft will also enable crews to detect significantly smaller targets and allow detection of targets at a greater range," Senator Ellison said.

He said the aircraft would operate out of existing Coastwatch bases in Cairns, Thursday Island, Darwin and Broome, and deploy to other areas around Australia as required.

"This fleet forms a vital part of the Government's capacity to detect and deter such illegal activities as drug and people smuggling, illegal fishing and environmental offences around Australia, particularly across our northern coastline," he said.

"Along with support from the Torres Strait helicopter service and regular patrols by Customs and Navy patrol boats, these aircraft will help to ensure that our northern sea borders are closely monitored and protected."

Senator Ellison said the improved sensor equipment carried by the Coastwatch aircraft would be linked directly to a new Surveillance Information Management System (SIM).

"This command and control system actually manages the surveillance sensors and communications and transfers information back to the Coastwatch National Surveillance Centre in Canberra in near real time.

"The SIM will also make better use of surveillance data and facilitate the use of information from other sources including highly classified Defence data."

Senator Ellison said the new contract placed greater emphasis on performance management to ensure that the quality and timeliness of surveillance was maintained.

“The selection process carried out by Customs Coastwatch has been comprehensive and rigorous. It included extensive consultation with industry and thorough probity assessments.

“This new contract will complement other maritime surveillance initiatives by the Howard Government such as the Joint Offshore Protection Command (JOPC), which combines the resources and expertise of Customs and Defence to create a single joint maritime surveillance, response and interdiction system,” Senator Ellison said.

The inshore/offshore surveillance service, also known as the Service A contract, was one of two tender processes conducted simultaneously by Customs Coastwatch as part of its Civil Maritime Surveillance (CMS04) contract process.

The Service B contract for a surveillance and response helicopter service for the Torres Strait was signed with Brisbane-based Australian Helicopters Pty Ltd in August 2005.

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