

excisable goods, revenue evasion and prohibited imports and exports such as narcotics and fauna; Resources and Energy, onshore and offshore resource exploration and development; Australian Institute of Marine Science and CSIRO, both of which have interests in marine activities; Bureau of Meteorology, maintenance of automatic weather stations around the coast and offshore islands and reefs, and gathering of weather information during surveillance activities; Territories, responsible for island territories; Transport and Communications, for its Marine Search and Rescue Service and Australian ship reporting system, anti-oil pollution measures, ship routing zones and control and disposal of wrecks; Defence, a major provider of surveillance resources, RAN patrol boats and RAAF long-range patrol aircraft.

Funding problem

Funding for the various activities also was a continuing problem. For instance, the littoral aerial surveillance was funded by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, while Great Barrier Reef surveillance by the GBR Marine Park Authority was financed jointly with the Australian Fisheries Service and the Department of Transport and Communications. Support services provided by DOTC were primarily funded by that Department, along with the Quarantine and Fisheries services.

Mr Dixon points to the problems caused by such widespread interests as being one of the reasons why Cabinet decided in August last year, after a review by Mr Hugh Hudson, then retiring Chairman of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, to hand Coastwatch over to the Australian Customs Service.

"If we had got what we wanted we would have been able to run a very efficient Coastwatch Service," Mr Dixon said. "In the last 12 months before we handed over to Customs, the detection of numbers of Indonesian vessels in our seas showed that we had succeeded in our efforts. The system, with its limitations, was working. We had become a professional organisation.

Public program

"We had built up an extensive public awareness program which included publications, audio-video presentations and a general acceptance of the importance of people in remote areas to the

How long is Australia's vulnerable coastline?

It's not possible to give an accurate answer because the coastline has never been fully surveyed.

Resorting to statistics is of little help. In 1979, the year the Government declared a 200 nautical mile fishing zone in Australian waters, figures quoted for the country's coastline were many and varied. The Year Book of Australia said 36,735km. The Australian Handbook put it at 19,320km. Some estimates included Tasmania, others did not. Some included other islands, others didn't.

A study by the Division of Land Use Research, CSIRO, released the same year, came to the conclusion that the total length for the mainland, plus all islands greater than 12 hectares, ranged from 24,330km to 69,630km, depending on whether you use a 1:250,000 scale map, with 100km intercepts, or 1:250,000 scale with 0.1km intercepts.

One thing they all did agree on was that Australia has far more coast per head of population than any other continent. ■



An Indonesian fishing vessel lies hidden in mangroves in an attempt to evade capture during an illegal fishing operation within Australian waters.

success of the coastal surveillance role. The co-operation we had from people in the outback areas was tremendous," he said.

"The CPU continued to monitor and assess new developments in surveillance hardware right up to the handover to Customs. We also developed a number of new operational trends which had enhanced the role. CPU field operations with the Army, in particular, had proved very useful. For example, Norforce operations in the North-West had become more orientated towards the detection of intrusions into the area from the sea."

Although Coastwatch was with the AFP for only four years, Mr Dixon sees

those years as a foundation period for the service.

"It has come a long way since coastal surveillance had its beginnings in 1967 when the declared fishing zone covered up to 12 nautical miles from the coast and the RAAF and RAN began fisheries patrols."

Today, Coastwatch is an important link in Australia's security chain. And AFP personnel who played a vital part in forging that link consider their work has not been in vain.

As Mr Dixon puts it: "It's just another example of the versatility and professionalism that goes to make up the profile of the AFP." ■