

# A more effective way

*In April 1999 the Prime Minister, Mr John Howard, announced a task force to investigate increased landings of illegal migrants on the coast of Australia. The task force later recommended a \$124 million upgrade in coastal surveillance including a new high-tech coordination centre.*



**O**n 5 April 2000, the Prime Minister officially opened Australia's new Coastwatch National Surveillance Centre within the Australian Customs Service in Canberra.

"The Coastwatch National Surveillance Centre is a major investment in improving Australia's capacity to detect and deter illegal immigration, drug smugglers and illegal foreign fishing," Mr Howard said.

"No coastal surveillance system will ever be foolproof, particularly on a continent as vast as ours. However the Coastwatch National Surveillance Centre and other improvements represent a sound investment and a cost-effective response."

The National Surveillance Centre is located within Customs but is linked electronically to agencies across Australia. As the nerve centre for the surveillance of 37,000 km of

coastline it coordinates the planes and ships that patrol the coast along with shore-based support and intelligence.

The establishment of the centre was one of the key recommendations of the Coastal Surveillance Task Force. All 18 of the Task Force's recommendations have been accepted under a \$124m strategy now being implemented. They include:

- additional flying hours for the Coastwatch fleet;
- provision of two additional Dash 8 long-range surveillance aircraft;
- provision of a night-capable twin-engine helicopter;
- improved inter-agency links; and
- secure satellite-based communications for surveillance aircraft and vessels.

Cooperative arrangements with a number of other countries are also



being upgraded to deter those involved in people smuggling and stop illegal immigrants at their source or in transit. The boost to coastal surveillance is already bringing results. This financial year Coastwatch has detected 98% of vessels bearing illegal immigrants before landfall, compared to 74% last year.

In officially opening the new centre recently, Mr Howard said that Coastwatch also plays a vital role in fighting the drug trade, including its involvement in the recent seizure of 500kg of cocaine, reflecting the excellent coordination with Defence, Customs and Police.

"I particularly thank Rear Admiral Russ Shalders and the other

Defence personnel who have come in and are working very closely with some 60 Customs personnel, who together constitute a very effective unit," Mr Howard said.

"And the evidence is there to be seen. There has been an increase in the detection of illegal immigration. In many ways, Coastwatch is dealing with a reasonably old but growing challenge—illegal drug importation—and also with the comparatively new phenomenon of illegal immigration.

"And illegal immigration does present a very big challenge to our country. Australia is an attractive place to come to by any measure. Because we are a liberal, open society we are seen as a place once

attained, if you can establish your case for staying, your chances are probably better than in any other society.

"That represents a magnet, on the other hand it also represents a challenge to the Australian community, that does not want illegal immigration nor the queue-jumps which thwart the aspirations of others around the world who want to join their families and who want to come and live in Australia. But by the same token, we have to deal in an efficient and humane fashion with people once they arrive in this country.

"The Australian community demands that we detect illegal immigration and deal with it, and these additional resources and Coastwatch and the centre, are a very important part of it."

