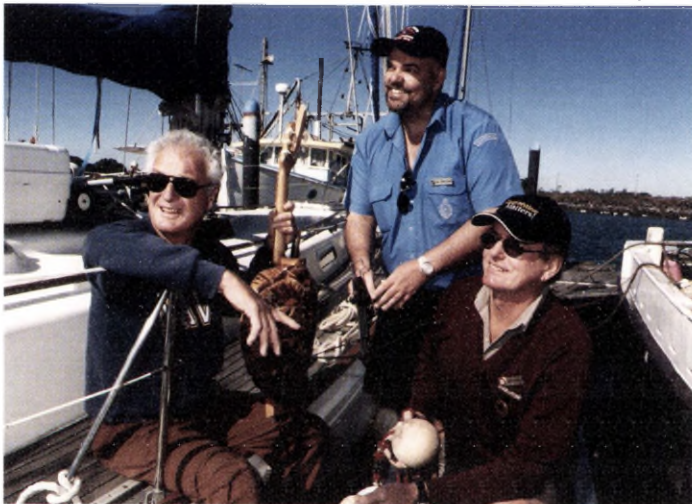


Customs and Quarantine—a river journey

Customs in Bundaberg is turning back the clock and patrolling rivers as part of a Queensland initiative that has Customs and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) in Bundaberg working on a joint operation.

In the pre-federation era, river patrols were a regular event for Customs officers as a way to ensure against smuggling across colonial borders. Today, the main purpose



Customs officer Mr Nev Templeman and Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service staff member Mr Denis O'Brien show a local man a turtle shell guitar.

of the patrols is to educate people about their responsibilities regarding Customs and current quarantine issues.

The first patrol was conducted in May and, although it was a very

rainy day, Customs officer Nev Templeman said the day was worthwhile.

"It gave us the chance to speak to local water users and to identify the types of vessels that use the river system," Mr Templeman said.

The first patrol of the Burnett River sighted 120 vessels, including local and overseas yachts.

"The best time to be out on the rivers looking for suspicious activity is during the yachting season, mid-December through to September, as this is when the seas become rough and the yachts will be forced to come in closer to land," Mr Templeman said.

This year the patrols will cover the following: Burnett River, Baffle Creek, Burrum River, Elliott River, Kolan River, the Mary River and the waterways of the Great Sandy Straits and Tin Can Bay.

Customs and AQIS are co-located in Bundaberg with the first two patrols using an AQIS vessel. Future patrols will incorporate a Customs ready-response vessel in Mackay and a tactical-response vessel in Gladstone.

"The working environment between both agencies in Bundaberg has been exceptional and such patrols will further enhance future joint patrols in the area," Mr Denis O'Brien, from AQIS in Bundaberg, said.

The patrols also check that vessels on the rivers have either a cruise permit, allowing them to travel anywhere between two points, or a control letter, allowing them to travel within port limits.

The patrols are also used as an opportunity to tell people about Customs Watch, a community-participation program that asks people to report anything unusual or suspicious to a 24-hour free-call number, 1800 06 1800.

"It's people like fisherman who use the rivers daily that are going to be more likely to see something unusual or suspicious," Mr Templeman said. "For that reason, it is important that they know what to look for and what to do with the information."

River users and people in remote areas are encouraged to contact Customs Watch if they see any unusual or suspicious activities.