

LANDMARK LAND USE AGREEMENT

The Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison, and the Minister for Defence, Senator Robert Hill, have signed two land-use agreements with Torres Strait Islanders that will lead the way to improved border protection for northern Australia.

The Ministers said the Indigenous Land Use Agreements would permit the Australian Government to set up a trial of high-frequency surface wave radar, via transmitter and receiver sites on two Torres Strait islands.

This trial, part of the Government's 2001 border protection election commitment, uses the latest technology to protect our borders from drugs, disease, illegal immigration and fishing and other threats.

The radar's two-to-three year trial begins in August. During this time it will provide 24-hour, wide-area surveillance of aircraft, ships and boats travelling in the Torres Strait. The \$19 million initiative is jointly funded by Customs and Defence and demonstrates yet again the close working relationship of these agencies in the protection of Australia's borders.

It will also increase the capacity of Defence and Coastwatch to

detect and intercept immigration, quarantine and fisheries offenders, assist with search and rescue operations and provide early storm warnings.

The 440 metre long receiver array will be situated on Dauan Island, in the northern Torres Strait, while the transmitter (model below) will be sited on the uninhabited Koey Ngurtai ("Pumpkin") island in the middle of Torres Strait. The Torres Strait is a highly strategic area and the radar trial will provide an excellent basis for assessing this technology.

The signing of the Indigenous Land Use Agreements was marked by two ceremonies held at Badu and Dauan Islands.

The voluntary nature of the agreements paves the way for the future management of maritime and land environments in this region. The agreements will provide local communities with employment opportunities in site preparation, infrastructure development, and as equipment caretakers undertaking routine inspections and minor maintenance.

