



## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SERVICE IN 2003-04

Protecting Australia's sovereign interests, record-breaking drug seizures and taking the final steps to switching on one of Australia's largest information technology projects were highlights for the Australian Customs Service in 2003-04.

The *Customs 2003-04 Annual Report* said there had been increasingly diverse work carried out by Customs in protecting Australia's borders.

Among a raft of highlights, Customs carried out the longest pursuit in Australian maritime history, and made Australia's largest seizures of pseudoephedrine and MDMA (ecstasy).

A 21-day, 3900 nautical mile chase by Customs and Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) patrol vessel *Southern Supporter* across the Southern Ocean ended when the alleged illegal fishing vessel, Uruguayan-flagged *Viarsa I*, was boarded and escorted back to Australia. An international contingent of vessels was standing by to offer further assistance if required.

The *Viarsa I* was escorted into Fremantle more than eight weeks after it was first sighted within the Australian fishing zone. The vessel and its catch (\$1.5m worth of Patagonian toothfish) were formally seized under the *Fisheries Management Act 1991* in October 2003.

Some months after the chase, in December 2003, Customs was allocated funds over a two-year period for a dedicated vessel and a team of some 60 specialist trained recruits to undertake armed patrols of the Southern Ocean. The first intake of 27 recruits underwent a special 19-week training program and was deployed on 30 June 2004. The patrols will use a civil charter vessel equipped with twin deck-mounted .50 calibre machine guns.

A major international law-enforcement operation involving Customs, the Australian Federal Police (AFP), Queensland Police and the Philippines Drug Enforcement Agency led to the seizure of the largest illegal shipment into Australia of pseudoephedrine, an ingredient in the manufacture of amphetamines.

Five people were arrested and 1.5 tonnes of pseudoephedrine, that could have been used to manufacture up to 1.3 tonnes of amphetamines with a potential street value of up to \$325 million, were seized in the Philippines.

In June this year, Customs combined with the AFP and the Joint Asian Crime Group (including members from the AFP, the Australian Crime Commission, NSW Police and the NSW Crime Commission) to make Australia's largest ecstasy seizure. Over 340kg of MDMA powder with a potential street value of \$68 million was discovered by Customs Sydney container examination facility, concealed in boxes of wonton pastry sheets.

The final steps in the export systems of the Integrated Cargo System (ICS) of the Cargo Management Re-engineering project were made. The "go-live" date for the exports component of the ICS was 22 September. This technology will provide a single, coherent and modern system to replace numerous cargo systems developed over the past 20 years.

Customs boosted border security operations during 2003-04 with Customs patrol boats increasing the number of sea days spent on patrol by over five per cent to 2459 days. At the same time, Coastwatch aircraft conducted more than 4500 surveillance flights over coastal and offshore areas.

Customs processed 18.7 million people through international airports during 2003-2004.