

New era of cooperation with PNG



Now-retired CEO Lionel Woodward and the Commissioner General of PNG Internal Revenue Commissioner David Sode at the signing.

By John Kerlin

Australia entered a new era of cooperation in border protection with its nearest neighbour, Papua New Guinea (PNG), when the two countries' customs agencies signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Then Chief Executive Lionel Woodward visited Port Moresby to sign the new MOU with his counterpart, David Sode, Commissioner General of the PNG Internal Revenue Commission. The agreement will see both agencies working more closely to share information and intelligence.

Mr Woodward said the agreement would also build upon an earlier MOU signed in 1999 between the two agencies to provide mutual assistance and cooperation in relation to the Torres Strait.

"Papua New Guinea and Australia clearly share more than just a maritime border. Our customs agencies also share concerns about a range of security issues so it is vital that we are able to keep each other informed.

"These issues include transnational crime such as drugs and gun smuggling, illegal people movements, as well as terrorism threats."

Following the signing of the MOU, the first of planned annual bi-lateral talks took place with assurances by Mr Woodward that Australian Customs would continue to support PNG's commitment to modernising its Customs service.

Mr Woodward's visit to Port Moresby also enabled him to meet senior PNG Government officials and to view first hand the Australian Government's Enhanced Cooperation Program (ECP) that has already seen the deployment of five Australian Customs officers to PNG to help improve border and revenue protection arrangements. The MOU complements this initiative.

The ECP aims to support PNG's efforts to improve law and order and economic management and to deliver assistance in these areas, including public sector reform, border control, and transport security and safety.

Four Australian Customs officers are working in PNG in areas such as executive management, passenger processing, intelligence, revenue policy and port security. A fifth officer recently returned after a six-month attachment developing the program plan.

"These roles have given these officers the opportunity to pass on Australian Customs substantial expertise and train PNG staff to eventually take over these roles," Mr Woodward said.