



# Pilot patrol program helps to combat illegal foreign fishing

**Above:** Customs officers aboard an illegal fishing boat in northern Australian waters.

**Efforts to combat illegal foreign fishing off Australia's coastline have been strengthened—thanks to an innovative pilot patrol program involving indigenous communities around Australia.**

An Indigenous Marine Ranger Program involving the Bardi Jawi people was formally launched at One Arm Point in Broome, WA. It is the first of three trial programs being undertaken in WA, the Northern Territory (Maningrida) and Queensland (Aurukun).

The programs are an innovative 12-month trial which involve joint coastal patrols with sea rangers from indigenous communities to combat illegal foreign fishing and to help monitor the bio-security risks from illegal foreign fishing vessels.

The former Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator David Johnston, said that since the Australian Government stepped up its efforts to fight illegal foreign fishing last year, sightings and apprehensions in Australian waters have dramatically reduced.

“The patrols were valuable in providing potential warning of illegal fishing activity in remote regions,” Senator Johnston said.



**Above:** The patrol boat operating in waters off One Arm Point.

## The One Arm Point trial

The trial being conducted at One Arm Point is being run in partnership with a number of agencies, including:

- Ardyaloon Aboriginal Corporation (Bardi Jawi community at One Arm Point)
- Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
- Department of Fisheries (WA).

The objectives of the program are to detect and report illegal foreign fishing vessels and landings, particularly in areas adjacent to community trochus fishing grounds.

A typical patrol, which usually lasts for five to ten days, consists of:

- searching heavy mangrove forest areas suitable for concealment of illegal foreign fishing vessels

- patrolling reefs, creeks, inlets, bays, fresh water holes, rivers, passages and open water
- identifying suitable covert surveillance locations
- liaising with community members
- liaising with charter, commercial and recreational vessels
- providing training for Marine Rangers.

Marine patrols involve a Customs and WA Fisheries officer going out on the water with a trained Marine Ranger from the Bardi community,

The patrol area consists of traditional trochus fishing grounds and cover the majority of the Buccaneer Archipelago and northern reaches of King Sound.

Since the patrols began in October 2006, no illegal activity has been reported.



The patrols are part of a Government initiative to combat illegal foreign fishing in northern Australian waters. The strategy also includes a long-range helicopter response capability, upgrading and establishment of processing facilities for foreign fishers, civilian charter vessels to tow apprehended vessels to shore, and an armed trimaran (*Triton*) to assist in apprehensions of foreign fishing vessels in Australian waters.

The results of the pilot programs will determine the longer term future of such programs.

Amanda Palmer

## TACKLING FOREIGN FISHING

Illegal foreign fishing has a negative impact on Australia's fish stocks and marine environment. Illegal fishers operating in Australian waters also pose security and quarantine risks.

Customs works closely with the Department of Defence, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, and other agencies to stop illegal foreign fishing.