

Dog program expands into firearms detection

In recognition of increasing threats to Australia's borders in a variety of environments, Customs is expanding its Detector Dog Program to include training firearms detector dogs with an explosives-detection capability.

Traditionally the Customs Detector Dog Program focuses on narcotic detection. Both its drug detection training and breeding programs are recognised internationally and have supported many countries in their efforts



to establish or improve their detector dog capabilities.

To counter the illegal importation of firearms, component parts and explosives, Customs has begun a pilot training program with six dogs, especially chosen from its breeding pool as ideal candidates for the training.

The dogs, training with their handlers, will acquire firearms detection capability and will be cross-trained with explosives-detection capability. Training

will take place at the Detector Dog Training Centre in Canberra.

Once the training program has been successfully completed, the six dogs and their handlers will be deployed at strategic locations around Australia and work in the freight, postal and maritime environments.

Prior to the development of the Firearms Detector Dog Program, the Chief Instructor at the Detector Dog Unit, Rob Webb, spent four weeks in the United States tapping into the knowledge and experiences of that country's explosives and firearm canine detection training.

During this time, Mr Webb participated in a canine explosives course conducted by the Canine Detection Training Centre in Alabama for handlers of the US Coast Guard and observed explosives-detection canines at work at the Coast Guard port facility in Mobile, Alabama. Here dogs undergo rigorous training in many areas, including helicopter transport and winching aboard Coast Guard frigates.

Mr Webb said that the valuable knowledge gained on this trip added to that obtained from working closely with State and Federal agencies including NSW Police, the Australian Federal Police and the Department of Defence.

To complement the expansion of the Detector Dog Program, Customs is developing an intelligence-based, national strategic and tactical tasking regime to use the firearms detector dogs and handlers to their maximum potential.