

STRONGER RELATIONSHIP FOR AUSTRALIAN/THAI CUSTOMS

The relationship between Australian and Thai Customs was further strengthened with the recent visit to Thailand, by Australian Customs Chief Executive Officer Lionel Woodward, to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two agencies.

Mr Woodward signed the MOU with the Director-General of Royal Thai Customs, Chavalit Sethameteekul.

The MOU covers customs cooperation and mutual assistance in customs matters. The MOU is a non-legally binding arrangement that will allow for the transfer of information between Australian and Thai Customs.

The Thai Minister of Finance, Captain Suchart Jaovisidha, said, "Thailand welcomed the signing of the MOU and looks forward to further developing the relationship between our customs administrations now that this arrangement is in place".

The MOU is essential in formalising and furthering the relationship between Australia and Thailand and ensuring information can be shared to enable Customs to provide maximum border protection.



Australian Customs Service Chief Executive Officer Lionel Woodward (left) signed the MOU with Director-General of Royal Thai Customs Chavalit Sethameteekul.

A strong cooperative relationship concerning Customs matters already exists between Australia and Thailand and the relationship has previously been enhanced by the posting of a Customs officer in Bangkok since 2000.

Australian Customs has previously provided assistance to Thailand Police with the provision of Customs-bred drug detector dogs and the training of handlers.

The Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison, also visited Thailand on a separate occasion to meet Captain Suchart Jaovisidha.

The MOU and plans for a free trade agreement between the two countries was the focus of discussions with the Thai Minister of Finance and Senator Ellison.

FIJI CUSTOMS ACCEPTS FIRST VESSEL

Australian Customs is playing a role in developing Fiji's marine capability by donating a vessel to Fiji Customs.

Australian Customs CEO Lionel Woodward presented the *Ai Matai* (meaning 'the first') to Solomon Sila Kotobalavu, CEO of the Fiji Islands Revenue and Customs Authority, at a ceremony in Suva, Fiji.

The vessel will provide state-of-the-art support to the Fiji Islands Revenue and Customs Authority.

It can operate at speeds up to 47 knots, 30 nautical miles

offshore with a crew of two and can carry another six passengers for short voyages.

Acquisition of *Ai Matai* was arranged and supervised by the Australian Customs Service and follows an announcement by the Prime Ministers of Australia and Fiji that the vessel would be given to Fiji to enhance its border protection.

Mr Woodward was also in Fiji to sign a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two countries. "Sharing information and intelligence is the only way for us to effectively combat the growing threats of terrorism and trans-national crime at a regional level," Mr Woodward said.

"Australian Customs has been very grateful to our Fijian colleagues for their assistance in a number of key border security operations, as well as their ongoing support in providing information that is vital to our ability to protect Australia's borders."