

## CUSTOMS TRIALS NEUTRON SCANNER

The Australian Government has provided \$8.4 million to the Australian Customs Service to trial world-first neutron scanning technology.

The technology is one of the measures Customs and the Australian Government are examining to toughen airport security and air cargo screening. The technology will provide added assurance to the freight industry and air travellers.

The scanner promises rapid and accurate detection of explosives, drugs and other threats in air cargo more effectively than conventional x-ray systems.

A commercial-scale scanner and examination facility will be constructed in Brisbane to trial the technology. The scanner will be extensively tested and screen import and export air-cargo containers.

The technology, developed by the CSIRO, is non-intrusive to minimise its impact on the rapid movement demanded by the airfreight industry. It is estimated that the technology will scan an airfreight container in less than two minutes. This will enable more rapid and thorough scanning of both import and export air-cargo containers.

The introduction of neutron scanning technology follows the success of the sophisticated sea-container examination facilities in securing the Australian border.

## TORRES STRAIT SURVEILLANCE CONTRACT EXTENDED

The future of border surveillance and quarantine protection in the Torres Strait has been secured with Customs extension of its Coastwatch helicopter operation, which provides vital service to the region.

Customs has negotiated a contract with Cairns-based Reef Helicopters to provide a Bell Longranger helicopter surveillance and response service, based at Horn Island.

The extension, for three years from June 2004, will ensure this service is continued while issues relating to Coastwatch's Civil Maritime Surveillance 2004 project (CMS04) are finalised.

CMS04 will ensure Coastwatch strategic and operational goals can be met beyond the period of the current commercial surveillance contracts, which expire progressively between June 2004 and June 2005.

"Performance reviews have indicated Reef has delivered a very high standard of service over the past eight years with a heavy focus on safety, reliability and effective service delivery to Coastwatch," the Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison, said.

The Bell Longranger is used for response, surveillance and logistical support tasks in the Torres Strait and Cape York area. It also contributes to the Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy (NAQS).

It carries out targeted surveillance and transports Quarantine and Customs officers throughout the region to monitor quarantine sensors and respond to border incidents.

"The extension of this contract shows that strong border protection remains a high priority for the Howard Government, including in the critical Torres Strait region," Senator Ellison said.



A Customs Coastwatch Bell Longranger 206