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Civilian aircraft given major role

COASTLINE PATROLS TO BE STEPPED UP

Bigger naval fleet for war on smugglers

THE watch over Australia's coastline is to be intensified with the deployment of chartered aircraft, extra navy patrol boats and the development of a volunteer coastwatcher system.

The Federal Government has rejected for now the concept of a separate coastguard and will rely more heavily on the use of chartered civilian aircraft.

The new measures, announced yesterday by the Minister for Transport, Mr Nixon, will cost an estimated \$15 million this year. They include:

DEPLOYMENT of 13 chartered aircraft on surveillance work from the West Australian coast to north Queensland.

By DOUG HOLDEN

BACKBONE

One reason for the increased reliance on civilian resources is the substantial capital cost involved in upgrading defence force surveillance. The Defence Department says its resources are already strained by present requirements in this field.

Backbone of the new coastwatch system will be a pool of 19 civilian aircraft chartered on long-term contracts by the Department of Transport.

It is estimated that these aircraft — with three others chartered by customs authorities — will fly 31,000 hours surveillance work in the next 12 months.

This compares with a total of 400 civilian charter hours flown in 1977-78.

The pool aircraft, which will have a pilot and observer trained in surveillance work by the Department of Transport, will fly daily missions along the 14,000km coastline from Geraldton, in Western Australia to Cairns, Queensland, each covering a different section of the coast.

Their principal role will be quarantine checks but they will also provide a service for fisheries, customs, immigration and other authorities.

The three aircraft chartered

by customs authorities will be based in northern Australia. They will carry more sophisticated equipment and check reports of smuggling and other unusual activities.

The search aircraft will be able to summon customs launches or naval patrol boats to apprehend suspected offenders or investigate sightings more closely.

The Government wants twin-engined aircraft of the Beechcraft Baron or Nomad type for its surveillance charters. But it does not intend to use Nomads from the Government Aircraft Factory in Victoria.

This will be a blow to the factory, which was hoping to get government orders when the new coastwatch policy was announced.

The two extra naval patrol boats will be of the Attack class used in search and interception work. The increased force of nine will be located at Geraldton, Port Hedland, Broome, Darwin, Cairns and Sydney.

The RAAF will step up its coast watch from 4700 flying hours last year to 6000 hours in the next year.

While the civilian force will be primarily engaged in close inshore surveillance, the defence forces will concentrate on off-shore patrols, policing the new 200-nautical-mile fishing zone, the approaches to Darwin and areas of high smuggling risk.

AN INCREASE from seven to nine in the naval patrol boats used for this purpose.

SETTING UP of a coastal surveillance centre.

ENCOURAGEMENT of voluntary coastwatch work by licensed fishing vessels, and other members of the public.

Mr Nixon said the changes reflected the Government's concern at increased evidence of smuggling, unauthorised landings, quarantine breaches and other illegal activities along the northern coastline.

"They also take account of the need to enforce Australia's fishery laws when the 200-nautical-mile Australian fishing zone is proclaimed," he said.

The minister added that the Government's approach to the surveillance problem sought to achieve "maximum practical effectiveness at reasonable cost."

The new measures follow a detailed report by a committee of government department heads. They involve a limited expansion of surveillance work by the Defence Department, and a massive expansion of civilian participation.

The Government expects to declare the new fishing zone within the next few months.

Mr Nixon said yesterday there was no reason to expect any sudden invasion of the zone by foreign vessels when this happens. They will have to display adequate identification, give regular position reports and call at Australian ports for inspection.

Licensed vessels operating in the zone will be encouraged to report illegal intruders.

To spur public reporting of unusual air or sea sightings a special free-telephone service is to be set up. The number will be Canberra 47 6866.

The Opposition spokesman on transport, Mr Peter Morris, said the measures were unrealistic.

"The initiatives announced by Mr Nixon make a mockery of the Government's dire warnings six months ago," he said.

"The activities of the new Australian Coastal Surveillance Centre won't greatly inconvenience organised drug smugglers or intending illegal immigrants."

"The proposed \$5 million expenditure is a shoestring approach."



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'Racket' in refugees

Grafters aid boat people, says Hayden

THE Federal Opposition Leader, Mr Hayden, has been told of a lucrative racket involving the ferrying of boat-loads of refugees to Australia.

He said yesterday the racket enabled Vietnamese businessmen and others who had enough money for the passage to make their way to Australia under the guise of being refugees.

Many had left their homes not by force but by choice.

Mr Hayden stopped short of proposing that boat people be expelled from Australia, but called for an overhaul of the country's refugee policy and said there was a general belief in Bangkok that anyone who could pay their way was guaranteed entry and settlement in Australia.

He was speaking in Manila at the end of his month-long, eight-nation tour of Asia. He returns to Australia this morning.

He warned that the Minister for Immigration, Mr MacKellar, could get a frosty reception when he visited Thailand this month.

Thai officials have expressed fears that most of the 9000 refugees Australia has agreed to accept this year will be boat people.

This would mean that about 100,000 refugees in land-locked camps throughout Thailand would be virtually excluded from Australia.

Mr Hayden said thousands of genuine refugees were being left in overcrowded camps while the ones with money could jump the queue and get to Australia ahead of them.

He said that if Mr MacKellar could put forward positive proposals for a co-ordinated

By GRAEME ATHERTON

international refugee relief program, he would be welcome in Thailand.

Mr Hayden said "It's quite clear from what I've heard that a lucrative racket has been developed in providing facilities for those who can afford to buy a passage to Australia."

It is thoroughly undesirable that the Government has allowed hijackers to leave for and to settle in Australia under the ostensible but deceitful guise of being refugees.

As long as people could continue to pay the flow of boat people would increase and Australia's immigration and refugee policies would become irrelevant.

On Australia's trade future Mr Hayden said his tour confirmed that the country was wrong to spend so much time trying to revive trade with Europe while ignoring the potential on its own doorstep.

He said he found disappointment among Asian leaders that so few Australian leaders visited their countries.

Mr Hayden, during his tour, established himself in the minds of Asian leaders as a potential Australian prime minister vitally interested in the region.

Most countries he visited placed great importance on his tour and in five of them he was received as an official government guest.



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THE AUSTRALIAN

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We must plan for a coastguard

THE Federal Government's plans, announced yesterday, to increase the effectiveness of surveillance of the waters to our north and north-west show a proper regard for what has become a major problem. At the same time, the announcement points up the difficulties associated with the problem along with the depressing certainty that it will continue to grow greater and cost more as year follows year.

Proclamation of the 200-nautical-mile zone around our shores will compound the problem and its costs enormously, while greater mobility will continue to increase the adventurousness and penetrative ability of would-be refugees and villains alike.

Less than three weeks ago, on June 21, we published figures which showed a staggering increase in the cost and scope of coastal surveillance: long-range maritime patrols by Orion aircraft had increased from 42 flying hours in 1973-74 to 2500 flying hours in 1977-78; costs over the same period rose from \$90,000 to \$5.4 million; patrol boat days spent on surveillance had increased from 395 to 1600 in the same period; and their costs had increased from \$520,000 to \$24 million.

These are rises to take the taxpayer's breath away. But yesterday's announcement indicates that much more will have to be spent in the future — and there is no way in which we can avoid it. Nor should we try: security cannot be bought on the cheap.

Given the costs involved, the Government's approach is probably the right one in these economically difficult times. However, we must beware of the danger of allowing what is essentially a stop-gap measure to become a permanent arrangement —

something which can happen all too easily. The result will be that, in a few years, we will have an expensive, over-bureaucratised, makeshift system which will be inefficient.

For a start, it is wrong that our surveillance system should be under the control of the Minister for Transport and run by the Marine Operations Centre — a search and rescue service, even if it is renamed the Coastal Surveillance Centre. Coastal surveillance must be an integral part of our defence system and must be under the control of the Defence Department or closely allied to it.

Mr Nixon in his statement yesterday did not rule out the concept of an Australian coastguard, although he made it clear that the Government had rejected the idea for the time being. Yet this must be our eventual aim . . . and it should not be held too long in abeyance.

The Defence Department and the services must rethink their approach to coastal surveillance and the part in defence which a coastguard could play in an emergency. Navy and air force ships and planes are not necessarily, and should not be, the most efficient and economic tools for coastal surveillance. Pilots and crews need to be trained for combat not for patrol work and for them to try to do both will result in their being efficient at neither.

The Government's plan is a practical and useful stop-gap measure. But it must be regarded as just that: something to fill in while an overall plan is worked out to establish a coastguard and incorporate it into our defence planning — and into our defence expenditure, thus ensuring that we get maximum value for our money along with the most efficient service.