



Australian High Commission
Vanuatu

7 September 2022

Media Release

ADF contingent departs Port Vila following a successful Operation Island Chief

An Australian Defence Force (ADF) contingent departed Port Vila last month after supporting the successful conduct of Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA)-led Operation Island Chief from 15 – 26 August.

Operation Island Chief is one of four annual FFA-led regional maritime surveillance operations focussed on detecting and deterring Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported (IUU) fishing in the Pacific.

As part of the ADF's contribution to Operation Island Chief 2022, a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) C-27J Spartan aircraft and contingent of 16 RAAF personnel based out of Port Vila to provide surveillance, and reconnaissance support to the FFA.

During the two-week operation, RAAF members partnered with representatives from Vanuatu Police Force, Department of Fisheries and Department of Customs and Inland Revenue to conduct 11 surveillance flights in Vanuatu's Exclusive Economic Zone, resulting in more than 50 vessels being spotted and reported to the FFA.

Mr Yakar Silas, Principal Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Officer from the Department of Fisheries said he appreciated the cooperation and work done as part of Australia's support to Operation Island Chief to keep Vanuatu's borders safe and assist Vanuatu in countering IUU activities.

“As Vanuatu is moving forward and identifying its oceans and maritime boundaries as an important area to invest, we – as an independent state – will always maintain good relationship with Australia through FFA,” Mr Silas said.



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Flight Lieutenant Silas Cocks, Royal Australian Air Force Air Element Contingent Commander, said Australia was committed to working together with its Pacific family and likeminded partners to help protect fisheries and other natural resources in the region, which were critical to the Pacific's economic development and prosperity.

“It's been great to work so closely with Vanuatu Government agencies in support of our shared interests; seeing what we have achieved together during this operation has been an unbelievable experience.”

“It's one of my proudest moments and I hope I can come back soon,” said FLTLT Cocks. Operation Island Chief is just one example of the ongoing cooperation and engagement between Vanuatu and Australia's security forces under the Vanuatu-Australia security partnership, a partnership which dates back to Vanuatu's independence.

Chief Inspector Hamish Garae, Operations Officer in the Vanuatu Police Force, who participated in one of the surveillance flights, said Australian had always been ready to assist the people of Vanuatu.

“Australian Defence Force has helped us in the past and now in the present, it's good to see support from our friend, helping us patrol our borders when we need help,” Chief Inspector Garae said.

“I've been working with Australians since 1999, it's been great knowing you have a brother [partner] always there for you.”

In 2022, engagement between the ADF and VPF continues to deepen, with the forces partnering to deliver projects including the Vanuatu Government National Emergency Radio Network, the Cook and Tiroas Barracks Redevelopment, and RVS Mala Base Wharf Redevelopment.



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Caption: Vanuatu Police Officer and Republic of Vanuatu Ship Takuare Executive Officer Lieutenant Gary Aru (front left) and Feeongka Kaltho (front right) from the Vanuatu Fisheries Department gather with Royal Australian Air Force NO. 35 Squadron personnel, prior to conducting a maritime surveillance mission out of Port Vila, Vanuatu.

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