



### **Tax Talk- Rummaging of vessels**

Increases in the volume of arriving vessels, aircraft, passengers and cargo has increased the workload of Customs officers worldwide and at the same time increased the potential threat for smuggling and trafficking of illicit items across borders. Fiji's intelligence, surveillance and monitoring systems are continually evolving to ensure that we are in a good position to identify and address any problems, or risks that may arise at the border.

Searching of targeted vessels entering the country or berthed at ports as well as aircraft at airports is an effective and deterrent method to identify and prevent attempts to smuggle prohibited or restricted goods into, or out of the country.

Due to increasing volumes, targeting is an important factor when determining which vessels and craft are high risk. Searching all craft entering or leaving the country is physically impossible and would have profoundly negative effects on legitimate traders and travellers, who make up the majority of border movements.

#### **Rummaging of Vessels by Revenue and Customs**

Last calendar year, Revenue and Customs rummaged (searched) 68 fishing vessels berthed at Suva Harbour. The rummage exercise was conducted after Customs Officers had profiled the vessels for a number of reasons and considered that they may pose a high border risk or may be breaching legislative requirements.

These 68 rummages unearthed a number of irregularities including undeclared alcohol and cigarettes (which attract high tax rates). The teams also located undeclared currencies, environmentally damaging gas which is banned in Fiji and most surprisingly 8 live puppies. In fact, 26 of the 68 searches resulted in an anomaly being detected.

Depending on the items located, Customs worked closely with the Fiji Police Force the Bio-Security Authority of Fiji and the Department of the Environment.

This 2018 year from January has seen the Revenue and Customs team rummage 57 fishing vessels finding anomalies with 10 of them.

These detections included high volumes of undeclared cigarettes and alcohol as well as other dutiable items. During one of the rummages in February, Customs Officers also recovered more than 105,000 liters of excess fuel, which was undeclared.

Total duty collected during this rummage alone was more than \$34,000.

### **Detector Dog Unit (K9 Unit)**

The Revenue and Customs also has its own Fiji Detector Dog Unit to combat illegal activities and smuggling of goods at our ports of entry, and to assist the Police domestically.

The unit which is a collaboration of Police and Customs Officers has teams based at Nadi and in Suva. The unit, which started in Suva -November 2016, has been instrumental in intercepting cases of hard drugs and other contraband amounting to millions of Fijian dollars.

Apart from hard drugs it has also detected other narcotics like cannabis, steroids, Ephedrine (a methamphetamine precursor) and liquid products used for producing explosives.

The K9 unit also has the capacity to detect currencies that are smuggled at borders and so far has contributed to stopping thousands of dollars from crossing our border undeclared. The K9 unit compliments other non-intrusive inspection X-ray technology as well as physical checks carried out by Customs Officers.

They are an extremely valuable asset in helping us to protect our border. The highly trained dogs can detect narcotics, firearms, weapons, explosives and other dangerous items and materials. They are trained to find illegal items hidden in vessels and other craft, shipping containers, luggage, vehicles, packages, and on people.

With an ability to quickly screen a large volume of people or goods crossing our borders, our detector dog's capabilities mean that including them in the layers of Fijis risk detection tools will enhance the overall security of our border and that of neighboring countries as well.

### **Collaboration with Border Agencies**

This year, the Revenue and Customs signed a Fiji Country Plan with the New Zealand Customs Service to improve border management in Fiji.

Improved border management will contribute to economic growth-including the facilitation of legitimate trade and travel as well as improved border security. The plan will not only benefit Fiji but neighboring countries as well. The technical assistance NZ Customs provides will assist to enhance capacity and competency to clamp down risks that pose a threat at our borders.

Furthermore, recently the Revenue and Customs along with 24 other World Customs Organisation (WCO) Member Countries made a commitment to adopt international standards and to share best practices. This will bring consistency with approaches to international trade along with increased ability to protect our borders.

This collaborative approach will not only help curb criminal activities but also enhance investment and trade for economic prosperity. Currently Customs Officers are also part of the HMNZS Taupo deployment into the region. The NZ patrol vessel cadre included Fiji Navy

and Ministry of Fisheries officers. The vessel will patrol Fiji waters and Exclusive Economic Zone for approximately three months.