



'The most impressive commercially built patrol boat I have seen for quite some time.'

Customs Bay Class boats approach 'Holy Grail'

Australian Customs Service new Bay Class vessels have been described as being almost the 'Holy Grail'—the most satisfactory patrol boat design in the world.

This is the opinion of a leading magazine in the field, *Work Boat World* and it follows an extensive review of commercially available patrol boats undertaken by Roger Tritton, a former Royal Navy commander of patrol boats in the UK and Hong Kong. Prior to becoming a Philippines-based consultant, Roger Tritton participated in the design, construction, sea-trials and hand-over phases of several Royal Navy patrol boat procurement projects.

The Australian Customs Service is progressively phasing in eight new

Bay Class vessels as part of a \$58m Federal Government program to replace an older Customs patrol fleet of six smaller vessels. The ocean-going capability of the new *Bay Class* vessels will provide an extended coverage of Australia's waters.

Writing recently in *Work Boat World*, Roger Tritton said to find the 'Holy Grail' of a near-perfect patrol boat he would first look for a shipbuilder with a reputation for quality. "The yard must appear likely to remain in business over the 15 years that the



Assertive use of RIBs, day and night, appealed to Roger Tritton.

vessels are expected to operate without major structural overhaul," he said.

"High speed is not as important as range and endurance. The primary role will be to frequently send boarding parties to fishing boats, small traders and just about anything capable of smuggling illegal immigrants, drugs or other goods.

"This is a fairly common requirement and 1999 is a fairly uncommon year in that there is one vessel available that will achieve all this and probably more without much need of alteration.

"*Roebuck Bay* and the other *Bay Class* vessels built by Austal Ships look fit to satisfy my needs almost exactly, particularly with the inclusion of two aluminium RIBs (rigid inflatable boats) installed in a business-like manner which should guarantee my primary role in just about all weathers.

"The flair of the bow should keep the sailors dry as they go about the Queen's business and it will also impress the locals when entering harbour. An endurance of 28 days at

sea is more than enough and the ability to carry additional 'passengers' in a controlled situation with access to baths and heads (toilets) of their own is a feature exclusive to this design.

"I admit that *Roebuck Bay* suits the role that I like best—active long-ranging patrols with assertive use of RIBs, day and night. If that has coloured my judgement then so be it. The fact remains that this is the most impressive, purposeful looking, commercially built patrol boat that I have seen for quite some time."

Renewal of Customs fleet

As they are progressively commissioned, the eight new Australian Customs Service *Bay Class* vessels are named after a bay in an Australian State or Territory. The new vessels feature sophisticated navigation, communication and electronic systems.

Each *Bay Class* vessel has a range of 1000 nautical miles at 20 knots and is powered by twin MTU 1050kw diesel engines to provide a maximum speed in excess of 24 knots.

Each is capable of transporting, for extended periods, up to one tonne of equipment and can accommodate eight people in addition to a crew of up to eight Customs officers. The vessels have two 6.4m aluminium tenders powered by twin 67kw outboards that are capable of travelling up to 40 knots.

Rather than each vessel having a permanent home base, they are positioned to provide an effective and efficient response to areas of greatest risk to the border.

The fleet provides inshore and offshore surveillance and response capabilities. It performs a variety of tasks for Customs and other Commonwealth, State and Territory agencies.

The fleet works closely with Customs Coastwatch Division, which is responsible for civil coastal surveillance. Other tasks include information and intelligence gathering, intercepting unlawful non-citizens and suspected illegal fishing vessels, and checking on environmental pollution. The vessels may also be used for search and rescue.