



PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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The Royal Australian Air Force and the Royal New Zealand Air Force are to make joint surveillance flights to scrutinise the activities of driftnet fishing fleets in the South-West Pacific.

I launched the joint surveillance flights initiative in Auckland in February this year with my then New Zealand counterpart, Geoffrey Palmer, at the signing of the "Convention for the Prohibition of Fishing with Long Driftnets in the South Pacific".

The signing of the Convention and commissioning of the surveillance flights are further indications of Australia's commitment to rid the South Pacific of the driftnetting fleets. Australia, along with New Zealand and the South Pacific nations, has a proud record on this issue beginning with our efforts which led to the incorporation of the Tarawa Declaration in the 1989 South Pacific Forum Communiqué. The international push culminated in the resolution on driftnetting passed by the United Nations General Assembly in November last year.

Through the surveillance flights, Australia and New Zealand will provide South Pacific Forum countries, via the Forum Fisheries Agency, with important data on the frequency and range of driftnetting activities. The program schedule will be conducted by the Australian Fisheries Service and the New Zealand Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries in conjunction with the Forum Fisheries Agency.

The surveillance operation - starting from this month, the beginning of the driftnet season - will maintain the pressure which has already led Distant Water Fishing Nations (DWFNs) to respond to the concerns of South Pacific nations by agreeing to abide by the terms of the United Nations resolution on driftnet fishing. It was in response to this pressure that, earlier this year, Japan suspended driftnetting by its fleets in the South Pacific. Taiwan has also reduced its fleet numbers but has indicated it will continue some driftnet fishing this season.

The RAAF and the RNZAF will coordinate flights of P3 Orion aircraft over the Tasman Sea until the driftnet season ends in March.

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