

Former Ministers media release

Australian patrol in pursuit of suspected illegal fishing vessel in sub-Antarctic waters - Tuesday, 12th August 2003

Joint Media Release - Senator Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Ian Macdonald, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment

An Australian Customs and Fisheries patrol vessel in the Southern Ocean is in pursuit of a foreign fishing vessel suspected of fishing illegally in Australian waters.

It is understood that the vessel has identified itself as the Uruguayan-flagged *Viarsa*.

Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison and the Minister for Fisheries Senator Ian Macdonald said it is alleged that the Australian patrol vessel, *Southern Supporter*, located a vessel on Thursday afternoon (7 August) inside the Australian Fishing Zone adjacent to Heard Island and McDonald Islands, approximately 4,000 kilometres south west of the Australian mainland.

Senator Ellison said despite heavy seas and poor weather conditions, the *Southern Supporter* is pursuing the *Viarsa* as it is believed the vessel may have breached provisions of Australia's *Fisheries Management Act 1991*.

"The *Southern Supporter's* patrol is part of an increased effort by the Australian Government to protect our exclusive economic zone in the Southern Ocean. There is the fundamental consideration of Australia's national sovereignty in this matter," Senator Ellison said.

The Australian Government has made strong representations to the Uruguayan Government asking it to exercise its flag state responsibilities and require the *Viarsa* to accompany the *Southern Supporter* to the nearest Australian port (Fremantle) to enable further investigations to be conducted.

The Uruguayan Government has informed Australia that it is cooperating with this request and the Australian Government anticipates that this cooperation will continue.

Federal Fisheries Minister, Senator Ian Macdonald, said that the Australian Government was well regarded internationally for its efforts in stamping out illegal fishing both in Australia and on the High Seas.

"The Southern Ocean is home to the very valuable Patagonian Toothfish and is a fragile marine ecosystem.

"Given the vulnerability of Patagonian Toothfish to overfishing, poaching represents a threat not just to the commercial interests of legally licensed Australian fishers but the commercial survival of the species," Senator Macdonald said.

Senator Macdonald said that the Australian Government is committed to stamping out illegal fishing in Australian waters.

Dr Sharman Stone, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment, said that Uruguay, like Australia, was one of 24 member countries of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), which manages marine resources in this area.

"Uruguay has a clear responsibility to ensure that vessels registered to fly its flag comply with International laws and internationally agreed conservation measures, and do not fish in Australian waters without authorisation," Dr Stone said.

"Australia has made the CCAMLR Secretariat aware of this issue and is asking all members of CCAMLR to provide assistance in relation to this matter.

"The issue of illegal fishing and vessel compliance will be a key issue in the forthcoming CCAMLR meeting to be held in Hobart where Australia will again push for a centralised vessel monitoring system housed in the CCAMLR Secretariat," she said.

For further information, please contact:

Senator Macdonald's Office: Philip Connole 02 6277 7270 or 0417 063 605

Senator Ellison's Office: Mairi Barton 02 6277 7260 or 0439 300 335

Dr Stone's Office: Amanda Kennedy 02 6277 2016 or 0423 577 045

Photos of the vessel which is being pursued by the *Southern Supporter* are available by contacting Matt Wardell in Customs Public Relations on 02 6275 6508.

Former Ministers media release

Hot pursuit of fishing vessel continues as Australia renews call for Uruguay to cooperate - *Thursday, 14th August 2003*

Joint Media Release - Senator Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Ian Macdonald, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment

The Australian Government continues to urge Uruguay to order a vessel, believed to be Uruguayan-flagged and suspected of fishing illegally in Australia's sub-Antarctic waters, to obey the instructions of the Australian vessel in hot pursuit and head to Fremantle.

Senator Macdonald said Australia had again asked Uruguay to exercise its flag state responsibilities and require the *Viarsa* to accompany the Australian Customs and Fisheries patrol vessel *Southern Supporter* to a port where further investigations could be undertaken.

"Uruguay had initially cooperated with the Australian Government but has now advised that it would only request that the *Viarsa* return to port in Uruguay," Senator Macdonald said.

"This is unsatisfactory. This vessel was detected well inside the Australian Fishing Zone adjacent to Heard Island and McDonald Islands on 7 August.

"Australian authorities need to be able to inspect the vessel in a suitable port as part of our investigations into suspected serious breaches of the Fisheries Management Act 1991.

"I have contacted the Uruguayan Minister for Livestock, Agriculture and Fisheries seeking his urgent assistance in this matter," he said.

Senator Ellison said that the weather is poor and seas are extremely rough but to their credit, the Australian crew, and Customs and Fisheries officers on board *Southern Supporter*, are maintaining this hot pursuit.

"The *Southern Supporter's* pursuit of the *Viarsa* is now in its sixth day and would continue. Both vessels are headed west in the Southern Ocean and are now located over 700 nautical miles south-west of Heard Island and McDonald Islands," Senator Ellison said.

"Australia has previously raised concerns about Uruguayan-flagged fishing boats operating within the sub-Antarctic waters managed by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) of which both Australia and Uruguay are members," he said.

"Last year, French authorities apprehended a vessel for illegal fishing in its sub-Antarctic waters that had previously been flagged to Uruguay. In early 2002, an Australian boat also sighted an Uruguayan flagged vessel suspected of illegally fishing in CCAMLR waters," he said.

Dr Sharman Stone said the CCAMLR Secretariat had acted on information provided by Australia and alerted all member countries to the pursuit.

"I understand there has already been a very positive reaction from member countries with many offering their support and assistance to Australia," Dr Stone said.

"As a CCAMLR member and under the Law of the Sea Convention and as the flag-State, Uruguay has clear responsibilities to cooperate with other countries to ensure the conservation of marine resources, and stamp out illegal fishing of vulnerable species like Patagonian toothfish," she said.

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Senator Macdonald's Office: Philip Connole 02 6277 7270 or 0417 063 605
Senator Ellison's Office: Mairi Barton 02 6277 7260 or 0439 300 335

Former Ministers media release

Australia will pursue suspect fishing vessel indefinitely - *Thursday, 14th August 2003*

Joint Media Release - Senator Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Ian Macdonald, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment

The Australian Government today confirmed that it was prepared to pursue indefinitely a vessel suspected of fishing illegally in Australia's sub-Antarctic waters.

Fisheries Minister, Senator Ian Macdonald, said the Australian Customs and Fisheries patrol ship, *Southern Supporter*, would pursue the *Viarsa* until it either reached a suitable port or headed to Australia.

"We will do whatever it takes, no matter how long it takes, to see that the vessel is thoroughly investigated for suspected breaches of our *Fisheries Management Act*," Senator Macdonald said.

"At a diplomatic level, Australia has been in contact with Uruguay and other Southern Hemisphere nations to explore ways in which they might be able to assist."

The *Southern Supporter* has been chasing the *Viarsa*, believed to be a Uruguayan-flagged vessel, in the Southern Ocean for the past week.

Justice and Customs Minister, Senator Chris Ellison, said the two vessels are currently heading west, over 1000 nautical miles south west of Heard Island and McDonald Islands near where the *Viarsa* was first located inside the Australian Fishing Zone.

Senator Chris Ellison said the crew had reported that the weather in the area remained extremely poor with rough seas and intermittent ice and snow.

"Despite these severe conditions, the crew aboard the *Southern Supporter* are in good spirits and they are just as determined as the Australian Government to continue this chase," Senator Ellison said.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Dr Sharman Stone, said a growing number of countries had indicated that they would close their ports to the *Viarsa* and prevent any possibility of catch being unloaded.

"This is a significant breakthrough. We are delighted that many of the countries which are members of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) are supporting us in our efforts," Dr Stone said.

"CCAMLR, of which Australia is one of 24 member countries, is concerned with ensuring the conservation of marine resources and stamping out the illegal fishing of vulnerable species like the Patagonian toothfish."

Former Ministers media release

Hot pursuit of suspect fishing vessel - update - Friday, 15th August 2003

Joint Media Release - Senator Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Ian Macdonald, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment

The Customs and Fisheries patrol vessel *Southern Supporter* is continuing its pursuit of the *Viarsa*, the boat suspected of fishing illegally in Australia's sub-Antarctic waters.

The latest report (15 August) revealed that the two vessels were still heading in a westerly direction in the Southern Ocean.

They are now approximately 1,200 nautical miles south west of the Australian Fishing Zone around Heard Island and McDonald Islands where the *Viarsa* was first intercepted eight days ago.

The *Southern Supporter* reports that weather conditions they are encountering remain poor with heavy seas, snow and ice flurries and near freezing temperatures.

Australia welcomes international support for hot pursuit of suspect fishing boat - Tuesday, 19th August 2003

Joint Media Release - Senator Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Ian Macdonald, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment

The Australian Government has welcomed offers of assistance from a number of countries, including South Africa, for the hot pursuit of the suspected illegal fishing boat *Viarsa*.

Fisheries Minister, Senator Ian Macdonald, said the offers were further proof of the international support building behind efforts to get the *Viarsa* to accompany our patrol vessel to an Australian port.

"This is not the first time that Australia has united with other countries to tackle the problem of alleged Patagonian toothfish poaching," Senator Macdonald said.

"In 2001, South Africa helped Australian authorities to apprehend the South Tomi, another illegal fishing vessel detected in our sub-Antarctic fishing grounds."

Senator Macdonald said Australia was now working both diplomatically and on enforcement options with South Africa and a number of other countries to develop ways of putting further pressure on the *Viarsa's* owners to comply with Australia's request that the vessel proceed to a suitable port.

Dr Sharman Stone, Parliamentary Secretary responsible for Australian Antarctic Division, said that South Africa was particularly sensitive to illegal fishing for Toothfish.

"Their own fisheries were driven close to commercial extinction just a few years ago when relentlessly targeted by poachers.

"South Africa, like Australia is anxious to see the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) become a more effective vehicle for protecting Antarctic species. The next meeting of CCAMLR in October will be critical," Dr Stone said.

Justice and Customs Minister Senator Chris Ellison said South Africa's willingness to help Australia sent a clear message that the international community would work together to combat illegal fishing.

"By now, it should be pretty clear to the *Viarsa* that its best course of action is to stop trying to outrun our patrol vessel and instead, comply with Australian orders," Senator Ellison said.

Senator Ellison said Australia's Customs and Fisheries patrol vessel, the *Southern Supporter*, had now been in pursuit of the *Viarsa* in the dangerous waters of the Southern Ocean for 12 days.

"Since that time, the two boats have travelled more than 1,800 nautical miles south west from where the pursuit first began inside the Australian Fishing Zone around Heard Island and McDonald Islands," Senator Ellison said.

"Latest reports received back from the *Southern Supporter*, which is 1,200 nautical miles due south of Cape Town, confirm that the weather and sea conditions continue to be icy cold and difficult. However, we remain committed to pursuing the *Viarsa*."

Australian patrol boat encounters pack ice danger as hot pursuit of fishing vessel enters 13th day - Wednesday, 20th August 2003

Joint Media Release - Senator Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Ian Macdonald, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment

The Australian Government today revealed how the Customs and Fisheries patrol boat *Southern Supporter* was forced to radio instructions to help a suspected illegal fishing vessel, that it has been pursuing, avoid pack ice in the Southern Ocean.

Justice and Customs Minister, Senator Chris Ellison, said the *Southern Supporter's* crew had provided navigational advice to the *Viarsa* to help the fishing vessel find its way out of waters dangerously clogged with ice.

Senator Ellison said the *Viarsa* had headed so far south in the Southern Ocean during the hot pursuit that it got very close to pack ice extending out from the Antarctic coastline.

"I am advised that the *Southern Supporter* radioed the *Viarsa* with advice about how it could extricate itself from these dangerous waters," Senator Ellison said.

"While it appears to have been primarily a one-way conversation, I am sure that the *Viarsa's* crew would have appreciated all the help they could get as it became a matter of survival."

Senator Ellison said he remained hopeful that the *Viarsa's* skipper would yet see reason and comply with Australia's request to head to a suitable port and submit his vessel to inspection.

"However, until that happens, the *Southern Supporter* will remain in pursuit," Senator Ellison said.

Federal Fisheries Minister, Senator Ian Macdonald, said that in nearly 13 days, the two boats had travelled more than 1,900 nautical miles south west from where the *Southern Supporter* first began pursuing the *Viarsa* inside the Australian Fishing Zone in the sub-Antarctic.

"As of this morning Australian Eastern Standard Time (20 August), they are some 1,200 nautical miles south of Cape Town in South Africa," Senator Macdonald said.

"The Australian Government was continuing discussions with several nations, including South Africa and the United Kingdom, who were keen to support our efforts to require the *Viarsa* to comply with Australian and international maritime laws.

"For operational reasons, I cannot go into further detail. What I can say is that the offers of help we are getting from some countries is heartening and demonstrates to me that there is a growing determination to put a stop to illegal fishing."

US working with South Africa and Australia as pressure mounts on suspected illegal fishing vessel - Friday, 22nd August 2003

Joint Media Release - Senator Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Ian Macdonald, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment

The international hunt for the fishing vessel *Viarsa* has received a major boost with the United States signalling it will assist Australian efforts to stop any suspect catches of Patagonian toothfish being landed or transhipped through US ports.

Federal Fisheries Minister Senator Ian Macdonald said the US was one of the world's biggest markets for the highly valuable toothfish, and its intention to close its markets to any unauthorised products was warmly welcomed by Australia.

Senator Macdonald said the US had previously seized illegal toothfish consignments entering its ports, including 32 tonnes of toothfish in 2002 that had been identified by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority as being illegally harvested.

"The support offered by the US, South Africa and several other nations determined to stamp out illegal fishing would send another strong message to ship masters and companies involved in toothfish poaching that the risks of apprehension were rapidly growing," Senator Macdonald said.

Meanwhile, the hot pursuit of the *Viarsa* in the Southern Ocean by the Australian Customs and Fisheries patrol boat *Southern Supporter*, and the South African icebreaker *SA Agulhas*, has now entered its 15th day.

The *Southern Supporter* first began pursuing the *Viarsa* inside the Australian Fishing Zone around Heard Island and McDonald Islands back on August 7.

Justice and Customs Minister Senator Chris Ellison said weather conditions had deteriorated as the Australian patrol vessel and Uruguayan flagged fishing boat had moved well clear of the ice pack off the Antarctic coast.

Senator Ellison said the *Southern Supporter* and *Viarsa* were now approximately 1,100 nautical miles south, and slightly to the west, of Cape Town, South Africa.

"The *Southern Supporter* reports that it is still encountering small icebergs. Together with winds of up to 50 knots an hour, it makes for a dangerous and uncomfortable environment," Senator Ellison said.

"I am advised that the *SA Agulhas* continues to steam on an intercept course towards the *Viarsa*.

"The *Viarsa*'s skipper should realise that the safest and smartest approach for him to take would be to comply with Australia's request that he head immediately to a suitable port where a thorough investigation and inspection can take place."

The *Viarsa* has admitted who it is - Sunday, 24th August 2003

Joint Media Release - Senator Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Ian Macdonald, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment

The ongoing pursuit of the *Viarsa* took a new twist yesterday (Saturday) when the crew repainted the boat's name and its number on the vessel.

The Australian Customs and Fisheries patrol boat *Southern Supporter* has been pursuing the *Viarsa*, in accordance with Australia's rights under international law, for the last 17 days since it was first sighted in the Australian Fishing Zone around Heard Island and McDonald Islands.

Federal Fisheries Minister, Senator Ian Macdonald, said that since the pursuit of the *Viarsa* commenced on August 7 the boat has had its name and vessel number painted over.

"The Australian authorities believe that the *Viarsa* removed all its identifiers to make any attempt to determine the vessel's flag state and ownership as difficult as possible," Senator Macdonald said.

"Now that the vessel is displaying its name, vessel number and port of registration any possible doubts have been eliminated that the vessel is indeed the Uruguayan-flagged *Viarsa*. I welcome Uruguay's public affirmation of its commitment to cooperate with Australia in this incident.

"I look forward to continuing to work with Uruguay to end this saga satisfactorily by bringing the *Viarsa* to Australia for investigation of suspected breaches of Australian law."

Justice and Customs Minister, Senator Chris Ellison said that the *Southern Supporter* is currently located over 3,300 nautical miles west of Heard and McDonald Islands and around over 1,100 nautical miles from Cape Town.

"The *Southern Supporter* and the *Viarsa* are both avoiding occasional icebergs and are under the influence of the Antarctic Convergence Zone weather conditions," Senator Ellison said.

"The Australian Government is working closely with a number of nations, particularly South Africa and the United Kingdom to ensure the *Viarsa* is brought to an appropriate port for investigation into alleged breaches of Australia's laws.

"The *SA Agulhas* continues to steam on an intercept course towards the *Viarsa*."

For further information, please contact:

Dangerous ice pursuit of *Viarsa* now longest in Australian maritime history -

Monday, 25th August 2003

The ongoing pursuit of the suspected illegal fishing vessel *Viarsa* in the Southern Ocean has now entered its 18th day, surpassing the previous Australian record of 15 days and 3,300 nautical miles (around 6,100 km).

The Australian Customs and Fisheries patrol vessel *Southern Supporter* has been pursuing the vessel through treacherous Antarctic waters since it was first sighted in the Australian Fishing Zone around Heard Island and McDonald Islands on 7 August.

More than 70 icebergs have been sighted by the *Southern Supporter* in the past 24 hours, representing a major challenge to safe navigation.

Minister for Justice and Customs Senator Chris Ellison said grave fears were held for the safety of the *Viarsa* if it continued on its present course.

"Advice from the *Southern Supporter* is that the navigation of the *Viarsa* in these conditions is reckless. The master has ignored strong recommendations to head north out of danger," Senator Ellison said.

"It is pointless for the *Viarsa* to continue on its present course, which presents a high risk of collision with an iceberg. The master should immediately cease compromising the safety of his vessel and crew and comply with the directions of the Australian officials aboard the *Southern Supporter*."

Federal Fisheries Minister Senator Ian Macdonald said that the vessel had travelled westward over 3,700 nautical miles (over 6,800 km) since the chase first began, with no signs of slowing.

"The vessel, with the *Southern Supporter* on its tail, is currently located about 1580 nautical miles (around 3,000 km) south west of Cape Town, South Africa," Senator Macdonald said.

"Now into its 18th day of pursuit, it has taken the record for both the distance travelled and the number of days defying the lawful requests of the Australian authorities.

"The previous Australian record for the longest pursuit was set back in March 2001, with the pursuit of the Togo-registered *South Tomi*, also suspected of illegally fishing for Patagonian toothfish in Australian sub-Antarctic waters.

"In this case, what followed was a 3,300 nautical mile pursuit by the *Southern Supporter* which lasted 15 days, ending when the *South Tomi* was boarded near Cape Town by Australian Defence Force personnel assisted by South African Defence Forces. The *South Tomi* was eventually brought back to the Australian port of Fremantle and will enter a watery grave later this year.

"The chase for the *Viarsa* has now surpassed that historic effort."

Senator Macdonald said that the *Viarsa* was fast running out of options, with the South African icebreaker *SA Agulhas*, on a direct intercept course.

"The best action the *Viarsa* could take right now would be to stop trying to outrun the *Southern Supporter* and to comply with orders to return to an appropriate port."

South African and UK vessels close on *Viarsa* - Wednesday, 27th August 2003

Joint Media Release - Senator Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Ian Macdonald, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment

An international contingent of vessels has converged on the alleged illegal fishing vessel *Viarsa* in the South Atlantic Ocean overnight (Australian time).

The Australian Customs and Fisheries patrol vessel *Southern Supporter* has been pursuing the vessel through treacherous Antarctic waters since it was first sighted in the Australian Fishing Zone around Heard Island and McDonald Islands on 7 August.

Federal Fisheries Minister, Senator Ian Macdonald, and Justice and Customs Minister, Senator Chris Ellison, said that overnight a South African ocean-going salvage tug had rendezvoused with the Australian Customs and Fisheries patrol vessel *Southern Supporter* and the *Viarsa*.

Senator Ian Macdonald said that the tug, *John Ross*, left Cape Town on 21 August with an Australian fisheries officer and armed South African Fisheries officers on board to join the pursuit of the *Viarsa*.

"In addition, a UK fisheries vessel, based at the Falkland Islands, has arrived to join the pursuit and assist the Australian and South African vessels," Senator Macdonald said.

Senator Chris Ellison said that all four vessels are now in visual range of each other approximately 1800 nautical miles west-south-west of Cape Town.

"The South African polar ice-breaker *SA Agulhas*, is still proceeding to the scene to offer additional support as required," Senator Ellison said.

"The weather conditions have turned extremely severe with the four vessels encountering snow storms and the full impact of the Roaring Forties.

"The Australian Government is continuing to work with Uruguay to bring the vessel to account - in our view this includes ensuring the *Viarsa* complies with all instructions from Australian authorities."

The record breaking hot pursuit of the *Viarsa* by the *Southern Supporter* has now entered its 20th day.

The pursuit has covered more than 4000 nautical miles (7400km) since the *Viarsa* was allegedly detected fishing illegally inside the Australian Fishing Zone near Heard Island and McDonald Islands on 7 August 2003.

Diplomatic negotiations continue for apprehension of *Viarsa* - Wednesday, 27th August 2003

Joint Media Release - Senator Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Ian Macdonald, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment

Talks with the Uruguayan Government continue as an international contingent pursues the alleged illegal fishing vessel *Viarsa* in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean.

Federal Fisheries Minister, Senator Ian Macdonald, said that a productive meeting had taken place this morning between Australian and Uruguayan officials.

"The Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Mr Michael Taylor, this morning met with Uruguayan Ambassador, His Excellency Pedro Mo Amaro to discuss the current situation," Senator Macdonald said.

"It is clear that there is a prima facie case of the *Viarsa* breaching international, Australian and Uruguayan laws."

The Uruguayan Ambassador agreed that illegal fishing is of serious concern for both countries and that Uruguay, as the flag State, would cooperate to ensure that the *Viarsa* is brought to account.

"The strong supportive enforcement response, which includes cooperation from South Africa and the UK, is an indication of just how seriously the international community views these alleged offences and is a demonstration that we can work together to combat illegal fishing," Senator Macdonald said.

Faced by such a show of international unity on the high seas, we expect that the Master of the *Viarsa* should comply with directions to follow the Australian patrol vessel to an appropriate port.

South African ocean-going salvage tug *John Ross* has joined the Australian Customs and Fisheries patrol vessel *Southern Supporter*, with an Australian Fisheries officer and armed South African fisheries officers on board, and a UK vessel has also been deployed from the Falkland Islands to assist the other vessels which are now surrounding the *Viarsa*.

Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison, confirmed that he is aware that a Uruguayan official is aboard the *Viarsa*.

"Until we apprehend the vessel and its crew, and there is a full investigation, we cannot speculate on the involvement of the Uruguayan scientific observer who is on board the *Viarsa*. The observer is only one of a crew that consists mainly of Uruguayan, Spanish and Chilean nationals," Senator Ellison said.

Senator Ellison praised those Government agencies which had worked around the clock to coordinate the international support that Australia was receiving, and the efforts of those officers on-the-water.

"Australian officials have been working day and night, across time zones, to coordinate the arrival of the vessels from South Africa and the UK. This great work complements the extraordinary professionalism of the Australians on the patrol vessels," he said.

Former Ministers media release

Viarsa is boarded - Thursday, 28th August 2003

Joint Media Release - Senator Chris Ellison, Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Ian Macdonald, Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation and Dr Sharman Stone MP, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment

Australian Customs and Fisheries officers from the *Southern Supporter*, supported by armed South African enforcement officers, boarded the alleged illegal fishing vessel *Viarsa* at 1.50 am AEST (3.50 pm local time) today (Thursday, Australian time).

Federal Fisheries Minister, Senator Ian Macdonald, and Justice and Customs Minister, Senator Chris Ellison, said that the South African ocean-going tug *John Ross* and the United Kingdom fisheries patrol vessel *Dorada* provided support at the scene, over 2,000 nautical miles (3,700 km) from Cape Town in the South Atlantic.

Justice and Customs Minister, Senator Chris Ellison, praised the superb efforts of the Australian Customs and Fisheries officers and the crew of the *Southern Supporter* who have undertaken a 21 day, 3,900 nautical mile chase - the longest in Australia's maritime history - through some of the most inhospitable sea and weather conditions.

Federal Fisheries Minister, Senator Ian Macdonald, said that this chase is a warning to the pirates and poachers who invade Australia's waters to fish illegally, possibly destroying a fragile marine ecosystem and threatening the sustainability of valuable fish stocks, that Australia will pursue them to the end of the earth to stamp out this illegal activity.

"I am pleased to advise that the boarding occurred with no injuries being sustained to the boarding party or the crew of the *Viarsa*," Senator Ellison said.

"The boarding followed cooperation and dialogue between Australian and Uruguayan officials since the *Viarsa* was sighted allegedly operating illegally inside the Australian Fishing Zone around Heard Island and McDonald Islands on 7 August 2003, at which time the *Southern Supporter* initiated the 21 day hot pursuit. We will continue to keep the Uruguayan Government fully informed and look forward to working with Uruguay as the investigations proceed," Senator Macdonald said.

"The *Southern Supporter* and the *Viarsa* will now steam towards Australia and may have their supplies replenished and change crews on the journey," Senator Ellison said.

"The journey to Fremantle will probably take until late September."

"I wish to thank South Africa and the United Kingdom for their assistance to the Australian Government in this pursuit. In the last week I have approached my South African and British Ministerial colleagues seeking their Government's assistance. It is pleasing to see that there exists a high level of international cooperation to combat the illegal toothfish trade," Senator Macdonald said.

This chase, and the eventual boarding and apprehension, focuses world attention on the need for stronger measures to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Australia will renew its efforts in international fora to have a more stringent legal regime and improved international cooperation to stamp out IUU fishing," Senator Macdonald said.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Dr Sharman Stone, said that Australia will be urging the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) member nations to adopt stricter measures at their forthcoming meeting in Hobart to combat IUU fishing.

"I am delighted with the strong offers of support that Australia has received from most of our CCAMLR partners