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Australia and PNG fisheries strengthens partnership to stop illegal fishing

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Australiaâ??s Fisheries Minister Murray Watt has met with his Papua New Guinea counterpart Jelta Wong to reaffirm the commitment of both countries to protecting the region from illegal fishing.

Minister Watt said the importance of cooperation between Australia and PNG, particularly in the Torres Strait, could not be understated.

â??We see the benefits of cooperation through opportunities like the management of the commercially-valuable tropical rock lobster, with both Australia and Papua New Guinea contributing to scientific assessments and catch monitoring,â? Minister Watt said.

â??Both countries share in the benefits that sustainable fisheries can deliver given they are the same fish stocks. Australia committed to ensuring that sustainable fisheries, to support the livelihoods and traditional way of life for Torres Strait Traditional Inhabitants, are not undermined by illegal fishing. Itâ??s a crucial part of the local economy, with the annual value of commercial fishing industry in the Torres Strait around $20 million thanks to produce like tropical rock lobster and beche-de-mer (sea cucumbers)" Minister Watt explained.

Additional funding of $1.7 million has been provided to AFMA in the 2024-25 Budget to conduct high visibility patrols and deterrence operations in the Torres Strait and northern Australia, in support of the Australian Border Force. This will benefit Australian and Papua New Guinean Traditional Inhabitants by helping to ensure that commercial fishing is undertaken only by

those that are entitled to do so.

The funding also provides the opportunity for AFMA to work more closely with officials and communities in other countries to deter illegal fishing ventures and promote cooperative surveillance, enforcement, and prosecution where possible.

Work is underway by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) and the National Fisheries Authority of Papua New Guinea to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to further enhance fisheries cooperation in the Torres Strait and beyond.

The new MoU will formalise and broaden this, including opportunities to undertake joint monitoring and compliance activities.

The enhanced compliance activity will target high risk areas for fishing by vessels from other countries as well as addressing the significant issue of boats from outside of Papua New Guinea Treaty Villages fishing illegally in the Torres Strait Protected Zone