ILLEGAL FISHERS LAND AT MANINGRIDA

Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries Kon Vatskalis said today he welcomed moves by the Federal Government to tackle illegal foreign fishing incursions in Australia’s northern waters, amid more disturbing reports of foreign fishermen landing ashore this week.

Minister Vatskalis last night met with the Federal Minister for Fisheries Senator Ian Macdonald to discuss the Commonwealth’s funding boost to provide more resources to Customs Officers.

Mr Vatskalis said while the funding is a step in the right direction, illegal foreign fishing incursions are becoming more frequent and are occurring right on our doorstep.

“I have spent the past 18 months trying to convince the Federal Government that something needs to be done here. I am pleased to see that Senator Macdonald is finally taking this problem seriously.

“However, the number of reports I receive about illegal fishing incidents is disturbing. Last year there were more than 11,000 sightings of illegal foreign fishing vessels in our waters. This is a problem that has gotten worse and now we’re hearing about fishermen with knives and machetes.

“As well as the bio-security threats, we now have to be thinking about security generally. There are increasing reports of illegal foreign fishermen approaching local fishing vessels,” said Mr Vatskalis.

He said in the past two days there had been reports from Indigenous marine rangers of illegal fishers arriving at Maningrida.

“Clearly this problem is out of control and the fishermen are becoming more brazen. There have also been reports of a group landing on Groote Eylandt earlier this week.

“Rangers have also informed me they spotted a boat with five Indonesian fishermen fishing in a river at Maningrida. Obviously the locals are very angry about this and want something done.

“Last night I informed Senator Macdonald of the great work being done by the rangers, who work as part of the Government’s Marine Ranger Program. These guys are our eyes and ears on the water and they make a valuable contribution to the fight against illegal fishing,” he said.

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