

The Hon Darren Chester MP Visits HMAS Coonawarra

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, the Hon Darren Chester MP, made his first visit to the Headquarters Northern Command and HMAS *Coonawarra* today, where he met with personnel and toured the Navy's most northerly base.

After an invigorating physical training session with personnel from AWARE One, Mr Chester toured one of Navy's 14 Armidale Class Patrol Boats and spent time speaking with personnel about the challenges of implementing the Government's border protection policy.

During his visit to the Headquarters Northern Command – also home to the Headquarters Joint Task Force (JTF) 639 – Mr Chester received a brief by Commander Northern Command, Air Commodore Ken Watson about current Defence involvement in Operation RESOLUTE, the ADF contribution to Australia's whole of government domestic maritime border security effort. Mr Chester then embarked in HMAS *Broome* for an overnight patrol to get up close and personnel with Navy crew as they performed their duties.

"Darwin is a gateway to our Northern neighbours and the Headquarters Northern Command and patrol boat base HMAS *Coonawarra* plays an important role," Mr Chester said.

"Six hundred Navy men and women work at the base supporting fleet operations. Each year the base hosts around 100 visiting Australian and foreign warships, which take part in important Royal Australian Navy and multi-national exercises.

"*Coonawarra* is also home to 10 of the Navy's fleet of 14 Armidale Class Patrol Boats and is a key element in the front line of Navy's support to Operation Sovereign Borders.

"The visit has been a great chance to see the facilities that support the boats and ships involved in border protection operations and meet the personnel that do this important work," Mr Chester said.