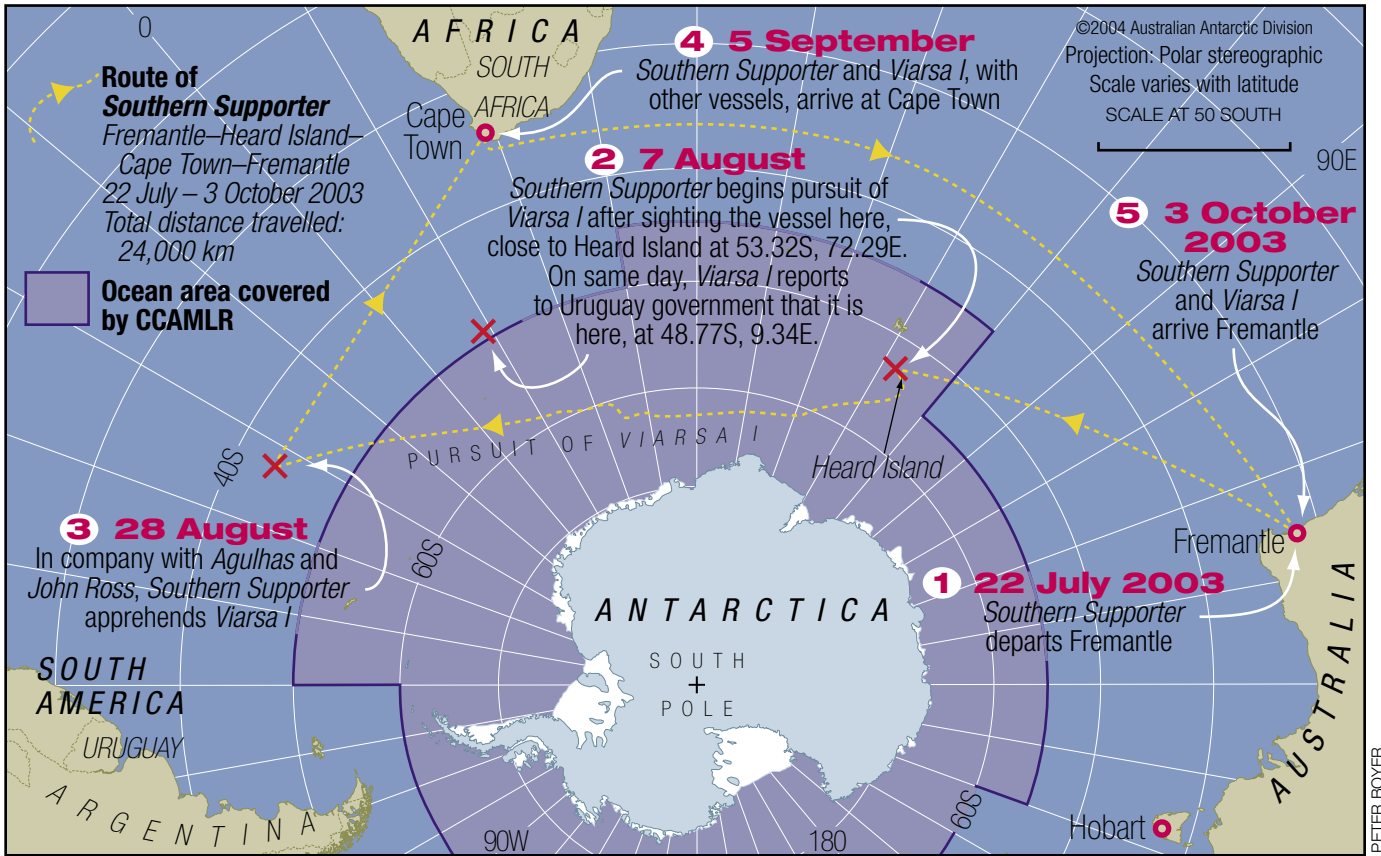


Poachers pursued over 7,000 kilometres



On August 28 2003 Australian Customs and Fisheries officers from the Australian customs and fisheries patrol boat, *Southern Supporter*, backed by armed South African enforcement officers boarded the Uruguayan flagged fishing vessel *Viarsa 1*. The boarding and apprehension ended a record breaking 21-day hot pursuit covering 3,900 nautical miles by *Southern Supporter* and on-the-water support from South Africa and the UK – two nations also concerned about illegal fishing.

On 7 August 2003 *Southern Supporter* sighted *Viarsa 1* allegedly engaged in illegal fishing inside the Australian exclusive economic zone around Heard Island and the McDonald Islands in the Southern Ocean. The pursuit which followed was unprecedented in both distance and level of international cooperation to protect the marine ecosystem and Australia's sovereignty in its waters.

When *Viarsa 1* was first sighted, it had concealed its identity markings. Australian fisheries officers ordered the vessel to accompany *Southern Supporter* eastward to Fremantle to investigate its activities under Australian fisheries law. When the master

Above right: Taking observations from Southern Supporter. Right: Viarsa 1 in heavy seas.

of *Viarsa 1* ignored the order and started on a westward course, the hot pursuit commenced.

From the time of sighting, diplomatic action also took place behind the scenes as part of the international effort to stop the vessel. Uruguayan officials willingly cooperated, and provided the vessel monitoring data used to verify where the



vessel was geographically located. The vessel monitoring data reported that the *Viarsa 1* was 3000 nm west of its actual position, which indicated that the vessel was misreporting its location to the Uruguayan Government. Australia alerted Members of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and key port States about the hot pursuit and the need to ensure that the catch not be off-loaded and traded.

Sixteen days into the hot pursuit, any doubts about the identity of the *Viarsa 1* were answered when crew members repainted the vessel's name, number and port of registration on the hull. The master of *Viarsa 1* advised Australian fisheries officers on board *Southern Supporter* that they had been arrested by the Uruguayan Government and were returning to Montevideo.

At times during the pursuit the vessels headed into Antarctic waters risking their

safety amongst the sea ice. At one crucial stage the master of the *Southern Supporter* had to guide the battered fishing vessel out of danger.

Australia sought and obtained the assurances of other concerned CCAMLR Members that *Viarsa 1* would not be allowed to unload its catch or to refuel in their ports. The Governments of South Africa and the United Kingdom also offered on-the-water support to Australia. As a result the South African icebreaker *SA Agulhas*, the South African ocean-going salvage tug *John Ross* and the United Kingdom fisheries patrol vessel *Dorada*, joined the chase in a multi-national enforcement effort.

By 28 August the vessels were south west of South Africa. The *John Ross* launched a boarding party using two small Australian pursuit boats, with Australian fisheries and customs officers and armed South African enforcement officers on board.

Following the apprehension, Australia sought further support from South Africa by re-provisioning both the *Viarsa 1* and the *Southern Supporter* off the coast of South Africa, before returning to Fremantle.

Australia and Uruguay continue to cooperate while gathering evidence. Officials from both countries have worked together to collect evidence collected from the *Viarsa 1* and from Uruguayan fisheries records.

Charges were laid against the master and four crew members on 10 October 2003 under Australia's *Fisheries Management Act 1991*.

The extraordinary pursuit and successful apprehension of this illegal fishing vessel was only possible due to the cooperation from other nations concerned about illegal fishing in the Southern Ocean.

ANTARCTIC AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY
SECTION, AAD

Crackdown continues: *Maya V* apprehended, *Lena* sunk

Australia sent another clear message to illegal fishing operators around the world after the apprehension on 23 January 2004 of the Uruguayan-flagged fishing vessel *Maya V*. The *Maya V* is suspected of illegal fishing in Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone around Heard Island and McDonald Islands.

The Royal Australian Navy warship, HMAS *Warramunga*, made contact with *Maya V* on 22 January. However, the boarding party was unable to board until the following day due to bad weather conditions.

Maya V, under escort from the HMAS *Warramunga*, reached the port of Fremantle on 1 February, where Fisheries officers conducted a full investigation into the allegations of illegal fishing.

If the *Maya V* is successfully prosecuted under the Australian Fisheries Management Act, it may meet the same fate as the *Lena*, a Russian-flagged vessel scuttled off the coast of Bunbury, Western Australia in December 2003. The *Lena*, now a popular dive wreck, rests around five kilometres off shore, about 18 metres below the surface.

Australia will continue its tough approach against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The arrest of the *Maya V*, the sinking of the *Lena* and the recent announcement of armed patrol vessels

around Heard Island and McDonald Islands showed that the Australian Government will not hesitate in pursuing illegal vessels fishing in Australian waters.

ANTARCTIC AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY
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Right: *Maya V* is intercepted and boarded by the Royal Australian Navy on 23 January 2004, after alleged illegal fishing in the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone.

Below: HMAS *Warramunga*'s *Seahawk* helicopter during transfer of personnel to the *Maya V*.



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