



MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT
Office of the Financial Secretary

MEDIA RELEASE

OPERATION MARAVILLA

On Thursday 3 May 2018 the Combined Law Agencies Group (CLAG) and others met with the Prime Minister. The purpose of the meeting was to finalise the departure of the Nino Maravilla (the vessel) and its crew from Aitutaki.

Operation Maravilla has been a collaborative inter agency operation between CLAG, the Australian Federal Police and the New Zealand Customs Service. The operation resulted in the collection of surveillance which led to the successful prosecution of three individuals connected to the vessel.

It was agreed the vessel and the crew must depart from Aitutaki and the Cook Islands as soon as possible. In order to affect this, Immigration have varied the entry permit of the crew to expire on Friday 11 May 2018. Customs and Crown Law are working with Little Matysik, lawyers for the owner of the vessel, to ensure that any supplies required for departure are provided prior to that date.

On 4 May 2018 a formal demand was made for payment of the costs incurred for the crew's accommodation, food and medical care. Confirmation has been received that the owner has accepted responsibility for the payment for these costs. The berthing fees and associated repatriation costs of the crew have also been forwarded to Little Matysik for payment by the owner of the vessel. Payment of the court fines has already been received by Western Union.

CLAG would like to thank the Aitutaki Island Council and the people of Aitutaki for their patience and assistance during Operation Maravilla. A Rarotongan interpreter was a key part of the investigation and the assistance provided was greatly appreciated.

The success of this operation sends a very strong message that the Cook Islands is serious about protecting its borders and will engage with its international partners to ensure the safety of not just the Cook Islands, but the Pacific region as a whole.

[End]

8 May 2018