Australian Navy Frigate Seizes Illegal Drug Shipments in the Middle East

CANBERRA, Australia – The Royal Australian Navy frigate HMAS Ballarat seized more than 900 kilograms of heroin worth approximately $195.2 million during two boarding operations that took place Dec 21-23 as part of Operation Manitou, the Australian Ministry of Defence said in a Dec. 28 release.

HMAS Ballarat conducted flag verification checks by boarding vessels of interest, under the direction of the Combined Maritime Forces' Combined Task Force 150 in international waters in the Arabian Sea. The fishing vessels, known as dhows, were believed to be engaging in illegal activity.

The boarding team discovered and seized illegal narcotics on both dhows; 165 kilos of heroin was found on the first dhow, and 766 kilos on a second. The drugs were transferred to Ballarat for disposal.

"A thorough search by the boarding parties uncovered a large quantity of heroin intended for distribution around the world," said Comdr. Paul Johnson, commanding officer of HMAS Ballarat. "By keeping these illegal narcotics out of the hands of those that exploit others, we improve the lives of those in the region. The crew is well prepared for these activities and I am glad that they have been able to showcase their professionalism in supporting security in this complex maritime environment."

"These drug seizures support Australia's long-term mission to ensure maritime security, stability and prosperity in the region," said Rear Adm. Jaimie Hatcher, commander of Australian Forces in the Middle East. "This operation will impact on the flow of narcotics around the world and the use

of drug money to fund extremist organizations. This is a promising start to Ballarat's work here and the crew should be very pleased with this excellent result."

These are the first seizures Ballarat has made since starting operations in the Middle East Region during November in support of Operation Manitou.