



PRESS RELEASE

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Government response to Saturday's SVA incident

On Saturday afternoon, two men on board a Gibraltar-registered pleasure boat reported to the Royal Gibraltar Police that, whilst fishing well inside BGTW, four pistol shots had been fired in their direction by the crew of the Spanish Customs vessel (SVA) 'AGUILA IV.' The Spanish vessel had first ordered the pleasure boat to stop its engines but when this was not done, the AGUILA IV circled the pleasure boat. Its crew also attempted to board the pleasure boat which took evasive action. During this time, the shots were fired by the SVA crew into the sea near the boat and objects which they believe to have been bricks were allegedly thrown at the local men. After the boat contacted the RGP, the police launch, Sir Adrian Johns, which was in the area quickly made its way to the scene. An RGP officer boarded the boat when they got to it and escorted it to the Gibraltar Government Marine Station, (GGMS) at Gun Wharf.

The RGP continue to investigate the incident.

The two local men have now met with and spoken at length to the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister and described the details of the whole incident. They have fully cooperated with the RGP. There is no suspicion that they were doing anything illegal. They had all necessary fishing permits.

The Chief Minister, the Hon Fabian Picardo QC, said, 'This is the third incident involving the SVA in as many weeks. This illegal incursion by the SVA into BGTW represents an extremely serious escalation of the repeated Spanish violations of British-Gibraltar sovereignty. There is no "law enforcement" excuse this time. Investigations confirm that shots were fired by the SVA at the innocent Gibraltar pleasure boat. The Spanish authorities have, therefore, put the lives of innocent Gibraltar civilians at risk. These actions are criminal offences in Gibraltar. Solely by being in the area, the SVA boat was in violation of treaties and the International Law of the Sea. Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar will not tolerate, under any circumstances, the intimidation or harassment of Gibraltar vessels in BGTW. We are working closely together with the UK Government so that necessary and appropriate action is taken to counter this unacceptable threat. For our part, the Government of Gibraltar has today changed the posture of Her Majesty's Customs Department at sea such that any future SVA incursions are actively challenged by vessels of HM Customs, who are their counterparts in Gibraltar. Proper cooperation remains our aim. The sooner the Spanish authorities adopt a similar cooperative posture the better.'