

Answers to questions on notice
Agriculture, Water and the Environment Portfolio

Committee: Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity

Inquiry: Integrity of Australia's border arrangements

Question No: 2

Hearing Date: 11 September 2020

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Operations Division

Topic: Inquiry into the integrity of Australia's border arrangements - implementation of ANAO audit recommendations

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Question Type: Spoken

Senator Scarr asked:

CHAIR: My last question to the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment is in relation to section 2.5 of your submission, which relates to the integrity mechanisms for border agencies in Pacific nations. There is a reference in that section to the department having primary responsibility for the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy to manage potential biosecurity risks in unregulated pathways in the Torres Strait and northern Australia. I note, from the evidence of the Australian National Audit Office, that an audit was conducted in the 2018-19 year in relation to coordination arrangements of Australian government entities operating in the Torres Strait. Are any of our witnesses who are there today able to address whether or not the recommendations contained in that audit have been implemented?

Mr Tongue: I would have to take that one on notice. In that environment, we work closely with Border Force of course. It is a complex environment. We have around 30 ASL in the Torres Strait and many hundreds of people spread across northern Australia, and we work in what is known as the treaty box between Papua New Guinea and Australia to manage a whole range of traditional movements from Papua New Guinea down through the island chain to Australia. Of course, from a pest and disease perspective, we have to watch that very closely. On the ground, whenever I've been up there, because it's such a remote and difficult environment, I would say I've only ever seen the highest degree of cooperation. Sharing of boats and aircraft and information is kind of the only way to get business done. As to the specifics, I would need to take that on notice.

CHAIR: Thank you. Please take it on notice. Particularly the question is the status of implementation of the recommendations made in Audit Report No. 41 of 2018-19, *Coordination arrangements of Australian government entities operating in the Torres Strait*.

Answer:

Four recommendations were made in Audit Report No. 41 of 2018-19, *Coordination Arrangements of Australian Government Entities Operating in the Torres Strait*, for the Department of Home Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australian Fisheries Management Authority.

No recommendations were made for the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.