



**FOREIGN
AFFAIRS AND
TRADE**

International Organisations and Legal
Division

6 June 2000

Dr Margot Kerley
Secretary
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Dr Kerley,

INQUIRY INTO COASTWATCH

Thank for your letter of 13 April 2000 to the Secretary, Dr Ashton Calvert, inviting this Department to contribute to the inquiry into Coastwatch being conducted by the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA). Dr Calvert has asked me to respond on his behalf.

With regard to the issue of Coastwatch as a service provider, I note that this Department has not had a need to task Coastwatch in recent years. DFAT interests have been served by tasking initiated by other agencies, particularly DIMA. DFAT interests relevant to Coastwatch may be broadly stated as follows:

- foreign policy implications of the transit of vessels through or near Australian waters to Pacific Island Countries (PICs) or New Zealand. The PICs have a genuine concern to receive timely warning of vessels which might be engaged in illegal activity and which could make landfall in their countries. The Australian Government has an obligation to tell regional governments of such transits and to ensure that there is no imputation that we have deliberately diverted such vessels away from Australia;
- an interest in intelligence and information gathering with regard to people smuggling and transnational crime;
- the development of international treaty instruments and other co-operative arrangements to combat people smuggling.

With regard to the last point, DFAT, DIMA and the Attorney-General's Department are participating in the drafting of a Protocol to the proposed Convention on Transnational Organised Crime relating to the smuggling of illegal migrants. Depending on the final text, I expect that the Government would favourably consider becoming a party to the Protocol and encouraging others to do so. Such a Protocol would facilitate greater co-

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operation in our region on prevention methods and would strengthen liaison among enforcement agencies.

This Department is not in a position to comment on the day-to-day operations of Coastwatch. I understand that other agencies and departments more closely involved with Coastwatch than we are are making suggestions in this area.

DFAT would strongly support recommendations to improve information sharing among departments and agencies.

Finally, I would note that new arrangements for Coastwatch could result in increased workloads for our missions in the region. I would not expect this to be a major problem, but it is a factor which needs to be taken into account.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Potts
First Assistant Secretary
International Organisations and Legal Division