
SUBMISSION ON COASTWATCH
TO
JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

(July 2000)

PACIFIC CORPORATE AVIATION SERVICES

SUBMISSION ON COASTWATCH
TO
JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS (JCPAA)
July 2000

SUBMISSION ON COASTWATCH
TO
JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

(July 2000)

1. Introduction:

Pacific Corporation Aviation Services ("PCAS") was formed in 1986 and since incorporation, the company has been providing aviation consulting services to general aviation, commercial, airline and para-military and military organizations. In addition, PCAS also represents several aircraft manufacturers and aircraft equipment vendors in the Australian and Asian aviation markets. PCAS is the Australian representative for the U.S. based Lake Aircraft Company – manufacturer of the highly successful Lake amphibian aircraft and multi-role Seawolf surveillance aircraft. (Please refer to Lake Aircraft's website at www.amphib.com and www.lakeaircraft.com for details of the Lake Aircraft organization and the aircraft product range).

The Chief Executive of PCAS has extensive experience in military aviation (twelve years as a pilot and staff officer in the RAAF), commercial aviation (five years experience in areas of management and operations), airline commercial operations (eleven years experience in a senior management position with a major international aircraft leasing organization) and in corporate aviation (three years as chief executive responsible for Learjet support operations with military (RAAF and RAN) and para-military organizations).

The technical staff employed by PCAS have extensive experience in engineering, project management and IT development.

2. Overview:

Being an island nation with an extensive "unprotected" coastline and a very an "attractive" destination for immigrants, Australia has experienced a rapidly escalating illegal immigration problem over the past few years which is threatening to undermine the various legal immigration programs established by the Commonwealth Government. Politically, the question of illegal immigration has been both embarrassing and potentially damaging to both major parties in the state and federal political spheres.

In the past, the federal Government's reaction to these increasing levels of activity has been to "buy more high technology" equipment to supposedly improve the detection capabilities of Coastwatch. (Witness the acquisition on an additional highly specialized DHC 8 aircraft recently). Although providing excellent global surveillance capability, the DHC 8 aircraft are relatively noisy, must operate from major airports and tend to which operate on some what predictable flight patterns and therefore, can be easy tracked by ground or sea-based observers.

SUBMISSION ON COASTWATCH
TO
JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

(July 2000)

After acquisition of a potential "threat" the DHC 8 aircraft have no capability of apprehending illegal immigrants (or indeed illegal fishing poachers or drug smugglers) but must rely on remotely based land forces (police, military detachments or civilians which probably have to position large distances to the target area) to accomplish this task. (Any delay between the detection of a potential "target" and positioning of a task force to apprehend the offenders will greatly reduce the chances of a successful "arrest").

What is desperately needed to support Coastwatch surveillance activities is a covert, highly mobile amphibious aircraft force (the "Force") which is capable of operating by day and night from remote dirt airfields or lakes or inland waterways or from the open sea. To be effective, this Force would need to have an inventory of say six to eight aircraft which would be capable of carrying wing pylon-mounted FLIR detector and video surveillance equipment and powerful search lights and be equipped with on-board surveillance radar, secure communications and GPS navigation equipment. To enhance operational capabilities. To enhance mission roles, the aircraft should also have the capability of carrying additional equipment such as SAR equipment or flares (or armament if require to assist with the apprehension task) on the standard 14 inch NATO wing pylon mounts). The only aircraft currently in production which is capable of meeting these demanding requirements is the Lake Aircraft multi-mission Seawolf aircraft. (Please refer to the above referenced websites for a summary of the unique operational capabilities of the Seawolf aircraft).

Typically, the Force would be deployed in units of two aircraft from bases in say Darwin, Broome and Thursday Island to provide support for the DHC8 operations. These units would be highly mobile and would operate on say a six hour alert status. With an endurance of 12 hours and a ferry range excess of 1,200 nautical miles (n.m.), the Lycoming TIO-540 powered Seawolf aircraft could position to an "active" remote area and operate (unsupported) for several days whilst carrying out surveillance and apprehension activities. With a takeoff distance (at maximum takeoff weight) of only 400 metres on dirt runways and 700 meters from water, and with a landing distance of only 300 metres, the Seawolf could operate from nearly any remote land or water site (including the beach).

From a remote site, a typical mission would be for the Seawolf to position up to 150 n.m. to a "target" search area, remain on station for 5 hours (with standard fuel) or 8 hours (with auxiliary fuel) and then return to the site. Unlike the DHC 8 or other fixed wing aircraft currently in the Coastwatch inventory, after detecting and tracking a target, the Seawolf could land on water, beach or un-made dirt landing areas to affect an arrest.

To complement the current Lycoming piston engine powered Seawolf aircraft, the Lake Aircraft company will be introducing an enhanced turbine powered model of the Seawolf aircraft in late 2003.

SUBMISSION ON COASTWATCH
TO
JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

(July 2000)

In terms of operating economics, the Seawolf aircraft has an enviable record. Based on an annual utilization of 1000 flight hours, typical operating costs would be less than (Australian Dollars) 140.00 per hour per aircraft. This cost is significantly lower than for any helicopter and for most other fixed wing piston or turbine powered aircraft currently operated by Coastwatch.

Recently, we wrote to the Premiers of Victoria and Western Australian and the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory proposing the acquisition of Seawolf aircraft to support state activities against illegal immigration, drug smuggling and illegal fish poaching. All addressees responded very positively and acknowledged the ***immediate*** need for an aircraft with the Seawolf's capabilities and suggested that as a matter of urgency, we should contact the Ministers for Immigration and Customs to further discuss our proposals. In fact the Office of the Chief Minister for the Northern Territory referred our proposal to the relevant Federal Member for his action. (Please refer to the attachment of an edited copy of our submission to the Northern Territory Government).

The JCPAA review provides an appropriate forum for our proposal to be reviewed and assessed by the Committee and by the Commonwealth departments responsible for immigration and customs.

The above proposals contemplate the lease of a fleet of Seawolf aircraft and a fixed price support contract for the provision of operational flight crews and maintenance and spare parts support. This support contract could either be accommodated under the current Coastwatch contract or as a separate contractual arrangement with tasking of the Seawolf fleet being the responsibility of the Coastwatch organization.

3. Recommendations:

To support the surveillance and tracking capabilities currently provided by the DHC 8 fleet, we recommend that as part of the JCPAA review, the Committee should consider the merits of expanding the current surveillance capabilities of Coastwatch to include a fleet of leased multi-mission Seawolf aircraft to provide a covert, highly mobile, land and water based amphibious force which is not only capable detecting and tracking illegal immigrants but also apprehending these offenders.

A combination of DHC 8 and Seawolf aircraft would provide a "global" and "localized" surveillance and apprehension capability which, we have no doubt from the experience gained from other government operations, would prove to be very effective in eliminating the serious problems of illegal immigration, drug smuggling and illegal fishing operations.

The management of PCAS would welcome the opportunity of making a more detailed presentation to the Committee to further highlight the Seawolf's unique multi-mission capabilities and also to discuss the various commercial arrangements that would be available to support the Seawolf programme.