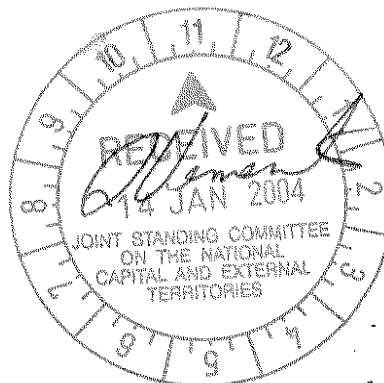




SUBMISSION 17

Our Ref: 200315578, 200315310



13 JAN 2004

Senator Ross Lightfoot
Chairman
Joint Standing Committee on the
National Capital and External Territories
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Lightfoot

INQUIRY INTO THE AUSTRALIAN ANTARCTIC TERRITORY

Thank you for your letter dated 17 October 2003 inviting a State Government submission on the Joint Standing Committee's inquiry into the Australian Antarctic Territory and the Territory of Heard and McDonald Islands.

The Western Australian State Government has two issues of interest to this inquiry. The first concerns the adequacy of resources provided for the protection of Australian fish stocks in the Australian Fishing Zone adjacent to Heard and McDonald Islands. The future management and sustainability of Antarctic fish resources is of interest to Western Australia and as your letter indicates, is consistent with the goal set for Australia's Antarctic interests, of protecting the Antarctic environment. In addition, Western Australia's very successful fishing industry relies on continued access to the Southern Ocean fisheries.

Western Australia has a long history of supporting compliance operations in the waters off our coast and in the Southern Ocean. The State Government remains concerned with the existing level of funding provided to protect the current and potential fish stocks in Australia's Antarctic Territory. The compliance program for the Southern Ocean fisheries appears to have developed on an ad hoc basis and it may now be an appropriate time to review the future compliance needs and resource allocation to protect this important resource. The attached submission from the WA Department of Fisheries addresses these issues in greater detail.

The issue of the role of Defence assets in fisheries compliance operations was also raised at the Defence-WA State Government consultative meeting on 27 November 2003. Participants noted that Western Australian based Navy vessels have participated in past compliance operations, resulting in the successful apprehension of illegal fishing vessels. The Committee may wish to consider the interrelationship of the roles and funding for fisheries management in the Southern Ocean that are allocated to the Commonwealth Departments of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Defence and Environment and Heritage.

The second issue of interest to the State Government concerns the suitability of the Western Australian city of Albany as a supplementary air base for flights to and from the Antarctic Territory and as a base of operation for surveillance of the Southern Ocean fisheries. Albany is ideally suited as an additional base to support the planned permanent air link between Australia and our Antarctic Territory. Albany has the advantage of having a range of excellent facilities suited to both the support roles for the Australian bases in Antarctica and the surveillance and compliance of Southern Ocean fisheries. Albany also has a strong community connection to both causes, retaining long standing cultural and economic links to the entire Antarctic and Southern Ocean region. I understand the Great Southern Development Commission and City of Albany have already provided the Committee with a joint submission on this issue.

In relation to the Committee's public hearings planned for Albany in 2004, I understand the City of Albany and the Great Southern Development Commission have indicated a willingness to appear. The Department of Fisheries would also be very happy to provide officers to appear before the Committee.

I would commend both submissions to the Committee and urge that serious consideration be given to the proposals contained in them. The State Government would welcome any positive recommendations from the Joint Standing Committee in relation to these important matters.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission on this matter.

Yours sincerely



DR GEOFF GALLOP MLA
PREMIER

Atts

15 DEC 2003