



CPSU Submission

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Review of Coastwatch

June 2000

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The CPSU welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Coastwatch. The CPSU has thousands of members employed by agencies and organisations that are responsible for elements of the Coastwatch service.

Terms of Reference

The Committee will inquire into the operations of Coastwatch in particular:

- The role and expectations (both public and government) of Coastwatch;
- The relationship of Coastwatch, as “service provider”, and its client agencies, as “service purchasers”;
- The effectiveness of Coastwatch’s allocation of resources to its tasks;
- New technologies which might improve the performance of Coastwatch;
- The adequacy of existing or proposed legislation which underpins Coastwatch’s functions;
- Whether an Australian Coastguard should be created to take over Coastwatch’s functions; and
- Any other issues raised by Audit Report 38, 1999 -2000, Coastwatch - Australian Customs Service.

About CPSU

The CPSU represents staff in the both major client agencies of Coastwatch and Coastwatch service providers that provide most of the operational services at the border, they are:

Australian Customs Service

Department of Defence

Australian Quarantine Inspection Service

Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs

Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

Surveillance Australia Pty. Ltd.

Powers of Coastwatch

The CPSU considers that the effective operation of the service requires the Coastwatch service to be under the supervision, and control of one government agency rather than in a separate border agency. The Customs Act and the Border Protection Act enable the Australian Customs Service to have a multi jurisdictional role and responsibility. The CPSU believes the current legislative framework provides an adequate base for the effective operation of Coastwatch.

Resources

The CPSU supports the increased funding allocation provided in June 1999 to combat illegal immigration, especially the additional equipment and staffing resources to increase Coastwatch capability. The CPSU notes that in the 1989/1999 financial year normal monitoring levels of fifteen percent were not able to be achieved due to staff shortages in Canberra and Darwin combined with a high demand for Observer training throughout the year. The CPSU calls for the ongoing review and reporting of monitoring rates to ensure that staffing levels are at least sufficient to maintain normal monitoring rates at fifteen percent throughout Australia.

The CPSU notes that Customs have leased an additional vessel through contractors to transport refugees from up north to Port Hedland. The CPSU understands why the government may wish to outsource transport arrangements for refugees, but would strongly oppose the outsourcing of any of the related Customs' Marine/Border functions. CPSU believes that these law enforcement functions must remain under direct government control.

Industrial Relations and Personnel Issues

The CPSU places on record its utmost concern regarding the conditions of employment of Coastwatch Observers employed by Surveillance Australia Pty Ltd. Surveillance Australia Pty Ltd. has taken over the flying surveillance work previously done by Skywest. Surveillance Australia Pty Ltd. has the main surveillance contract, which expires in three years time. The CPSU calls on the contractor to ensure that in future they provide fair wages and conditions of employment for Observers. In particular, Observers' employment conditions should be covered by a collective agreement not an individual contract. CPSU considers Observers' AWAs failure to provide shift penalties, special payments for public holidays, emergency duty overtime, public holiday replacement days, and a proper dispute resolution procedures is unacceptable. Coastwatch Observers receive a total composite annual salary of \$35,000 for carrying out dangerous low flying observations. These conditions are far inferior to other personnel on award conditions in the aviation industry.

Future Directions

The CPSU notes that the Audit Report 38, 1999-2000 Coastwatch-Australian Customs Service recommendation number 15 recommends that Coastwatch separate its budget/financial data for reporting purposes from other Australian Customs Service budget/financial data, so that this information is more accessible from the portfolio budget statements. CPSU has no objection to this

requirement on the basis that this arrangement is not the precursor to a further separation or distancing of the relationship between Coastwatch and the Australian Customs Service. The CPSU would oppose such a move as having the potential to impact on the effective operation of the Australian Customs Service.

The CPSU considers that the creation of a Coastguard or single border agency is not necessary, and would be likely to incur higher operating costs and excessive co ordination work between related government agencies. Nor does CPSU support a fully contracted out at 'arms length' from government Coastwatch service. It is not in the public interest for non government agencies, without judicial oversight, to exercise search, entry, and arrest powers conferred by Commonwealth legislation.

Conclusion

The CPSU supports the retention of a properly resourced and skilled Coastwatch service with high levels of accountability to its client agencies. The CPSU believes that since the inception of the Border Protection Act and the recent increased resource allocation that the Australian Customs Service is well positioned to co ordinate the Coastwatch function and related contracted services. The CPSU considers that the effective operation of the service requires the Coastwatch service to be under the supervision, and control of a one government agency.

The CPSU calls for a review of the existing contractual arrangements with Surveillance Australia Pty Ltd. to ensure that fair wages and conditions of employment are provided to staff contracted to do the surveillance work. Our Coastwatch service should be built on fair wages and conditions for both frontline and client agency support staff to acknowledge that the quality of their service represents good value for money.