



**Submission No 30**

**Inquiry into Australia's aid program in the Pacific**

**Organisation: Department of Defence**

**Contact Person: Mr Alex Tewes**

**Address: Russell Offices  
Department of Defence  
Canberra ACT 2600**

**HUMAN RIGHTS SUB-COMMITTEE  
JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
DEFENCE AND TRADE**

Questions on Notice taken by Defence during hearing on 9 February 2007

**QUESTION 1**

**Small arms proliferation and military armouries in Papua New Guinea**

Mr Sercombe

Hansard 9 February 2007, pp23-24

Could Defence comment on the effectiveness of its efforts in assisting the Papua New Guinea Government in controlling the proliferation of small arms in Papua New Guinea, given that many such weapons seem to come from police armouries?

**RESPONSE**

Proliferation of small arms in Papua New Guinea (PNG) continues to cause concern. Most of the illegal weapons circulating in PNG are 'home-made', but those that represent the greatest danger are higher-powered weapons, such as those that have been stolen from Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) and police armouries.

Defence's focus in PNG is on developing the capacity of the PNGDF. Assistance to the PNGDF is provided through the Defence Cooperation Program (DCP). Defence is not in a position to comment on the leakage of weapons from police armouries.

As part of an agreed DCP bilateral project, Defence works with the PNGDF to improve weapons storage, stock control and weapons management practices. These cooperative efforts appear to be making significant inroads in reducing the total weapons holdings on PNGDF bases, and reducing weapons theft. Since 2002, seven high security armouries at permanent PNGDF bases have been funded and built by Australia under the auspices of the DCP. Projects to upgrade the security and safety of all PNGDF magazines are ongoing. The Australian Defence Staff in PNG is also working with the PNGDF to strengthen security and the overall management of the PNGDF's weapons. This has included implementing weapons management procedures and training for PNGDF personnel.

In 2006, at the request of the Commander of the PNGDF, Defence supported the PNGDF weapons standardisation program, in which surplus and unsafe weapons were identified and destroyed. ADF logistics personnel provided technical advice and some specialist equipment and tools to facilitate this program.

**QUESTION 2**

**Arms proliferation in the Pacific**

Mr Thompson

Hansard 9 February 2007, p24

- a) Beyond military and police armouries, what sources of weapons are there in the Pacific region?

- b) What is the process for assessing small arms proliferation in Tonga, Fiji and Papua New Guinea?
- c) Is proliferation of small arms occurring in Pacific countries regardless of whether they have a defence force?

#### **RESPONSE**

- a) Some small arms and ammunition are probably imported into Pacific island countries by legal means, but we have little visibility of this. Australia and New Zealand maintain strict export controls on firearms and ammunition to the Pacific countries. Consequently, weapons holdings and ammunition for non-approved recipients is generally scarce in the smaller states. Illegal importation probably occurs via small craft (yachts, fishing vessels etc). We have no information on the numbers of illegal imports but presume the majority are shotguns and civilian-type rifles - not military weapons (although they may include modified obsolete military small arms).
- b) The Australian Federal Police is the primary authority on small arms trafficking and regional arms legislation and controls.
- c) While leakage from Pacific nations' security forces (defence or police forces) can exacerbate small arms proliferation concerns, this represents only a component of the broader challenge. The ratio of private ownership of firearms in the community in the Pacific is high and trafficking by criminal networks also complicates the picture. A 2003 Small Arms Survey report by the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva found, inter alia, that:

"Lawfully held civilian stockpiles of small arms in the Pacific include 3.1 million firearms, or one privately held gun for every ten people. This surpasses the global ratio of privately held firearms to population by more than 50 per cent...

By definition, illicit weapons are virtually impossible to count. Given that a full regional analysis may never be possible, this study can only estimate that many hundreds of thousands of illegal firearms exist in the Pacific region...

In the Pacific region, firearms that 'leaked' from lawful owners to criminals are the most common instruments of gun-related crime and violence."

#### **QUESTION 3**

##### **Transport of weapons from Pacific to Sri Lanka**

Mr Sercombe

Hansard 9 February 2007, p24

Could Defence comment on reports that sophisticated weapons were being transported through Guam and Micronesia to Sri Lanka?

#### **RESPONSE**

Defence has seen no corroborative reporting to suggest that weapons are transiting these territories to Sri Lanka.

#### **QUESTION 4**

##### **Pacific Patrol Boats**

Mr Thompson

Hansard 9 February 2007, p27

Is the Pacific Patrol Boat program capability sufficient in dealing with over-fishing in the Pacific?

#### **RESPONSE**

The Pacific Patrol Boat (PPB) program was designed to provide participating countries with a means to monitor their 200 mile exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and assist in the protection of their fishing resources. Under the auspices of the PPB program, 22 boats have been provided to 12 Pacific island countries. The through-life support arrangements include: crew training; in-country Royal Australian Navy (RAN) maritime surveillance advisers and technical advisers; continuing maintenance support; and, in some cases, subsidies for the PPBs' operating costs.

The PPBs supported through Defence's program of ongoing assistance represent a considerable capability and a deterrent to illegal and predatory fishing practices, but they should not be considered as a total solution. The reasons for this include:

- The vast size of the maritime environment in the South Pacific, with the Exclusive Economic Zones alone representing some 19 million km<sup>2</sup>, or nearly one million km<sup>2</sup>, per patrol boat.
- Patrol boats are only one necessary element of an effective surveillance and enforcement system. Others include intelligence, planning, tasking, reporting, and a coordinated multi-agency approach. While many Pacific nations are achieving very good results, the coordination of these elements presents many with significant challenges.
- Aerial maritime surveillance can cover greater area more quickly than surface vessels and therefore serves as an effective adjunct in the detection of potentially illegal activities. Most Pacific countries do not possess their own aerial surveillance capabilities. Military aircraft from Australia, New Zealand and France are able to provide such surveillance in support of PPB operations from time to time, but they are scarce and expensive resources.
- The patrol boats are national assets of the recipient countries and carry out a range of activities in addition to fisheries patrol tasks. Example of such activities are: search and rescue operations; disaster relief; quarantine and policing tasks; VIP transport and nation-building tasks.
- Although a well-managed PPB should be capable of achieving about 150 sea days per annum, the boats achieve, on average, only 55–65 days. This is often a consequence of poor maintenance – itself a result of failure by some countries to

make provisions towards maintenance, crewing and support, and even fuel costs, in the budget cycle.

While many countries utilise their vessels effectively, there is scope for the PPBs to be used more frequently. Poor governance in some of the countries, including coordination and the management of resources, is a major contributing factor which cannot be overcome easily or quickly. Defence continues its efforts to improve the program's effectiveness in various ways:

- At annual Defence Cooperation talks, Australian Defence delegates remind the PPB countries' representatives and officials, at the highest levels, about their responsibilities in relation to their ownership and operation of the PPBs.
- RAN maritime surveillance advisers located in the PPB countries actively encourage increased patrols and participation in multilateral operations which include aerial support to detect and apprehend illegal fishermen. They assist the countries in planning these operations, which are largely funded by Defence, to maximise the capability the PPBs provide. The technical advisers also play an important role in assisting the nations plan and budget for the ongoing maintenance of their vessels, with significant supplementation of resources provided by Defence.
- An RAN officer is posted to the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) as the Surveillance Operations Officer. His role is to provide professional support to the operational activities of the FFA's Regional Fisheries Surveillance Centre (including coordination of aerial support to regional operations) and assist with training conducted by the FFA's Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Division.
- Quadrilateral South Pacific Defence Coordination Talks between Australia, New Zealand, France (New Caledonia) and the United States provide a forum to consider issues relevant to the Pacific region, from both policy and operational perspectives – including coordination of activities such as aerial maritime surveillance in the region.
- Defence is encouraging all FFA member countries to sign Niue Treaty Subsidiary Agreements to allow their vessels to patrol within each other's EEZs and, if necessary, apprehend illegal fishing vessels. Some such agreements are already in place. Multilateral agreements may be developed in the future.
- Effective fisheries surveillance relies on access to the FFA Vessel Monitoring System data. Defence encourages all FFA member countries to maximise the utility of this information by sharing their data with each other to enable improved tracking of suspicious vessels from one EEZ into another. A number of countries have agreed to do so.