



Mr John Carter  
Inquiry Secretary  
Coastwatch Inquiry  
Joint Committee of Public Accounts & Audit  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Carter

Thank you for your letter of 5 September 2000 seeking clarification and further information in relation to the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service's (AQIS) submission to the Review of Coastwatch.

In your correspondence you have asked as number of specific questions, the following information is provided in response:

1. *Is the information AQIS receives for Coastwatch timely and accurate?*

AQIS is satisfied with the information provided by Coastwatch. AQIS receives timely notification of issues that are of quarantine interest including the arrival of unauthorised vessels in Australian waters. AQIS also receives regular feedback and reports from surveillance activities undertaken by Coastwatch.

2. *Please provide further comment on the AQIS statement 'consideration could be given to the composition of OPAC to ensure only agencies with direct interest in Coastwatch operational planning attend' and provide details of which of the agencies that currently attend such meetings should not be excluded from OPAC.*

The current OPAC meetings typically involve 20 plus participants, which due to the large number, can limit discussion on some issues.

The AQIS submission makes reference to the organisations that have the most regular contact with Coastwatch and are the primary users of the assets. Other agencies (such as DFAT, AMSA, DOTRS and GBRMPA) should attend the meetings when specific issues of interest are on the agenda. The agenda for OPAC may need to be circulated more widely which would allow non-core agencies to send a representative to specific meetings to progress issues of interest.

The AQIS submission also nominated key agencies which it considers should regularly attend OPAC meetings – these include Coastwatch, ACS, DIMA EA, AFMA, Defence and AQIS.

AQIS also makes the point that senior personnel who can make commitments on behalf of their agency should attend the OPAC meetings.



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3. *What impact has the changes to the Customs Act 1901 (giving Customs Officers the power to investigate and enforce some provisions of the Quarantine Act 1908) had on AQIS' ability to perform their duties? Is AQIS satisfied that the training provided for Customs officers prepares them for this role?*

To date the changes to the *Customs Act 1901* have had minimal impact on AQIS' ability to perform its functions. The changes to the legislation provide the authority for Customs to undertake a number of specific functions on behalf of AQIS – most significantly there is now the power to destroy a vessel on the basis that it poses a significant quarantine risk (an action that is not possible under the *Quarantine Act 1908*). AQIS sees these amendments as a positive contribution to the protection of Australia from pests and diseases.

As indicated in the AQIS submission it is important that AQIS, Customs and Coastwatch maintain close liaison and co-ordination in exercising these new powers to ensure that the complex nature of quarantine decision making is not compromised.

AQIS is satisfied with the level of training provided to Customs officers involved in managing quarantine issues. AQIS provides a comprehensive briefing at all Navy Patrol Boat and Customs National Marine Unit inductions sessions. In addition AQIS officers work closely with Customs officers at ports around Australia to ensure the quarantine risk is effectively managed.

I hope the information provided clarifies the issues raised in your letter. AQIS would be happy to provide further comment or additional information if required. If you have any queries or require any further information please contact Ms Helen Gannon on (02) 6272 5700.

Yours sincerely

John Cahill  
National Manager  
Border Management

November 2000