

**QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION
TO
THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT

REVIEW OF THE OPERATIONS OF COASTWATCH**

1. CONTEXT:

The Queensland Government has a strong interest in the effectiveness and capability of Coastwatch to provide the necessary surveillance activities to adequately protect our extensive coastline from unauthorised entry by sea or air. The potential for the spread of disease across human, animal and plant species from unauthorised entry is very high and could pose an enormous social and economic cost to Australia. A high level of coordination between the Commonwealth and State agencies that intersect with Coastwatch is essential to protect against such outcomes.

The Queensland Government has a number of agencies with an interest in the operations of Coastwatch. To date, however, State Government agencies have had little direct involvement with Coastwatch outside the operations of the Cairns based Regional Operations and Program Advisory Committee (ROPAC).

Queensland Government agencies such as Queensland Police Service (QPS), Queensland Transport (QT), Department of Primary Industries (DPI), Department of Emergency Services (DES), and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) interact with Coastwatch and participate in coastal surveillance activities to varying degrees.

Queensland Police Service

The QPS has established effective working relationships with other State and Federal government departments involved in protecting Australia's national borders. For example, the Water Police work cooperatively with the Australian Customs Service (ACS) and immigration authorities in relation to surveillance and interception duties. However, Water Police patrols around the State are generally intelligence based and target crime and safety issues. Immigration and customs offences are not specifically targeted. Whilst regular patrols are carried out, the Police Service's ability to undertake covert and protracted surveillance is limited. Coastal surveillance policies, procedures and practices for police aircraft deployment are limited to cooperating with Federal authorities when alerted at specific times, for a nominated target, in a defined area.

Queensland Transport

Queensland Transport, through arrangements it has with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA), uses the support of Coastwatch for maritime surveillance activities.

Queensland Transport operates the mandatory ship reporting system (REEFREP SRS) in the Torres Strait and the inner route of the Great Barrier Reef as a joint Commonwealth and State initiative. Information on shipping operations is gathered

through a combination of regular mandatory radio reporting by ships and through radar monitoring at certain focal points in the area of the main shipping routes. The system interacts with participating ships to provide navigational safety information and to act in support of established incident response arrangements. In this way the system contributes to the protection of the marine environment from the risks of pollution caused by shipping incidents. Reports of unidentified ships are immediately and seamlessly sent from the QT operated system to Coastwatch through electronic interfacing mechanisms.

While the REEFREP SRS system is the core business of the Maritime Division of QT, with emphasis on navigational safety and marine environmental protection, QT is conscious of the need to participate in the sharing of information within the overall coastal surveillance effort as a means of enhancing the surface picture of shipping operations off the Queensland coast.

Queensland Department of Primary Industries

The Boating and Fisheries Patrol of the DPI patrol coastal waters to enforce State legislation but officers also undertake enforcement functions on behalf of Commonwealth fisheries. DPI is implementing a vessel monitoring system for the State's commercial fishing fleet that monitors vessel location and speed. There is concern within the fishing industry about the system with regard to data security and commercial in confidence matters. Consequently, DPI maintains very tight controls on access to the data. Since the system was designed, other agencies have sought access, including Coastwatch, ACS, Federal Police, GBRMPA and other State agencies. Access has been denied until DPI finalises the principles under which external agencies may obtain information from the system.

Queensland Department of Emergency Services

The DES is responsible for disaster management arrangements and the coordination of emergency services and volunteer marine rescue and volunteer coast guard organisations. DES operates 3 helicopters as part of Queensland Rescue and tasks various community helicopter service providers.

While the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association and the Volunteer Coast Guard provide information on suspect activity to the Australian Marine Safety Authority, the offshore surveillance capability of these volunteer organisations is limited. They could, however, make a valuable contribution to an effective information collection network.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

The QPWS is responsible for the management of vast tracts of land in the Cape York Peninsula area and marine parks. It has limited resources for undertaking surveillance activities but participates in the Cairns ROPAC for coordination purposes.

2. RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC TERMS OF REFERENCE:

2.1 The role and expectations (both public and government) of Coastwatch.

The expectation is that Coastwatch will utilise all agencies (Commonwealth and State) that have resources relevant to assisting it in its role, ie observation and detection. It is considered that the role of Coastwatch should be to provide the means to effectively coordinate the sharing of information and tasking of resources with agencies that have an interest in the observation and monitoring of Australia's coastline, specifically in relation to the detection of illegal activities and environmental protection. It is expected that the necessary cooperative arrangements to underpin Coastwatch's role will be formally negotiated with agencies that provide Coastwatch with information and/or resources and where Coastwatch undertakes activity on behalf of agencies.

Critical to this is ROPAC which can optimise, by efficient coordination, all regional resources. The membership of ROPAC should include all State agencies that can be of assistance to, or may be called upon to provide support to, Coastwatch. This should include DES who are responsible for coordinating whole-of-Government support on behalf of the State Counter Disaster Organisation in response to major emergencies and disaster situations.

2.2 The relationship of Coastwatch, as “service provider”, and its client agencies, as “service purchasers”.

There are currently no memoranda of understanding between Coastwatch and state agencies that intersect with it in relation to the provision of, or purchase of, services. There is a need for more formal arrangements to be developed between State agencies and Coastwatch to clarify the relationship and ensure that there is ready access to information collected by all interested agencies.

The State has responsibility for matters relating to marine safety and responses to ship sourced oil pollution in Queensland waters. Under the national plan to combat pollution of the sea by oil, QT, on behalf of the State Government, has lead agency status for responses to ship sourced oil spills in Queensland waters.

The Great Barrier Reef is one of the world's great natural wonders, and has been recognised by the International Maritime Organisation as a “particularly sensitive area”. Consequently, the responsibility to protect this marine environment is taken very seriously. In this regard there is excellent cooperation with the AMSA and the GBRMPA to ensure that all its activities remain focused on the preservation of this amenity and that they are as far as possible complementary and consistent.

Coastwatch currently has a client/provider relationship with GBRMPA in relation to surveillance within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Under this arrangement, marine pollution incidents detected by Coastwatch as part of their normal surveillance activities are reported to GPRMPA. However, marine pollution surveillance is not an official task allocated to Coastwatch. Notwithstanding this, it is an arrangement that works well.

An informal arrangement also exists between Coastwatch and AMSA whereby oil pollution incidents sighted in the course of normal surveillance activities are reported to AMSA. While this informal arrangement does allow for limited specific tasking for surveillance of marine pollution incidents, each incident is assessed on its merits.

In view of the extreme sensitivity of this region these informal arrangements are not seen as adequate to give absolute assurance that our agencies receive notification quickly enough to be able to make an immediate and adequate response. Consequently, it is recommended that such additional surveillance and reporting tasks be officially given to Coastwatch and a memorandum of understanding be negotiated between the interested agencies i.e. AMSA, GBRMPA and QT (on behalf of the State Government) and Coastwatch to put in place an agreement that sets out clearly the relative needs of each and the level of service to be expected.

The AMSA requires ships of a certain size operating within the Great Barrier Reef to report their positions at regular intervals. This system incorporates radar coverage of the entrances into the reef passages which can detect vessels passing through. Where an unidentified ship is observed, ie a radar target that does not match information from reporting ships, this information is conveyed to Coastwatch with a request for identification of the target.

The provision of this information alerts Coastwatch to possible illegal arrivals, or may confirm the detection of a vessel attempting to transit the reef passages without reporting or using a coastal pilot where that is required. Such ships pose an unacceptable risk to the region. It is important for both Coastwatch and the State Government that this arrangement is confirmed and strengthened.

The QPS is not a "client" or "service purchaser" of Coastwatch per se, however, a relationship does exist between Coastwatch and the QPS through the medium of the Australian Federal Police and Australian Search and Rescue (AusSAR). The Australian Federal Police are a "client" of Coastwatch and are engaged in the planning of a number of activities associated with Coastwatch operations.

ROPAC, in Cairns, is a multi-agency group comprising Commonwealth and State organisations (including the QPS) which meets regularly to plan and coordinate activities toward the achievement of mutually agreed outcomes. Outside of this particular group, limited direct communication exists between the QPS and Coastwatch.

The relationship between the QPS and Coastwatch has been satisfactory up to date. The need for direct cooperation and liaison in the past has been limited due to the availability of other resources to provide intelligence and information sharing. The multi-tasking of resources already engaged in law enforcement activities should be encouraged. Coastwatch are already carrying out tasks that provide opportunities to include criminal intelligence gathering as an adjunct to "core" business. The provision of this information to law enforcement agencies in Queensland would make criminal intelligence gathering and use more economical and effective.

Increased liaison between Coastwatch and the QPS concerning the gathering and distribution of intelligence on unlawful marine activities would be of benefit to both organisations. This initiative would reduce duplication in the deployment of resources for monitoring vast stretches of the coastline.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that the exchange of information and control of the use of information gathered by Coastwatch and State agencies involved in aspects of coastal

surveillance be carried out on a more formal basis through the use of memoranda of understanding.

2.3 The effectiveness of Coastwatch's allocation of resources to its tasks.

ROPAC provides a multi-agency approach to planning, tasking and operational efficiency of Coastwatch. With particular reference to Coastwatch's allocation of resources to its tasks, ROPAC improves the effectiveness of those operations by multi-tasking the agency at little or no additional operational costs.

Coastwatch resources are inadequate to cover the Queensland coastline. Notwithstanding this, there are State resources and agencies that could be of assistance provided an agreed and coordinated reporting system was developed.

2.4 New technologies which might improve the performance of Coastwatch

There is potential for improvement in coastal surveillance through the use of automatic identification systems for vessels. This is emerging technology which, to date, is not widely used. Recent international agreement through the International Maritime Organisation has resulted in plans to require the carriage of these systems on international ships.

The implementation of these systems is expensive as shore monitoring stations need to be established and ships equipped. In Queensland alone there are over 7000 commercial vessels and the cost of fitting an automatic identification system is approximately \$3000 per unit.

The REEFREP SRS, being implemented by QT, is trialling transponder systems which will allow monitoring of shipping movements within the Great Barrier Reef and Torres Strait as well as allow interaction with ships to exchange safety and ship traffic information.

Research should also be carried out into the potential extension of radar coverage of our coastline and the use of remotely piloted vehicles for surveillance tasks. A number of Australian companies are involved in the development of such technology. High visibility of some existing strategies such as sea patrol can, under certain circumstances, be counterproductive, as vessels alter their illegal activity response accordingly. It is important, therefore, that technology to detect vessels through a variety of mechanisms be explored, particularly for Queensland, given this State's vast and isolated coastline.

2.5 Any other issues raised by *Audit Report 38, 1999-2000, Coastwatch-Australian Customs Service.*

The Audit Office's recommendations are generally supported.

The Queensland Government has no issues to raise in relation to the other terms of reference of the Review.