

**THE COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA (INC.)**  
A CONSTITUENT SOCIETY OF THE ASSOCIATED COUNTRY WOMEN OF THE WORLD

2 June 2000

The Secretary  
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir

The efficiency or otherwise of Coastwatch operations has profound implications for all Australians. In particular, the possible impact on the rural industry of poorly executed coastal surveillance could prove to be disastrous. With a membership whose income is drawn largely from rural industry and associated businesses, the Country Women's Association of Western Australia welcomes the opportunity to comment on the JCPAA Review.

It is acknowledged that Australia is confronted by a unique set of circumstances not faced by other countries in relation to guarding against unwelcome and illegal intrusions along its coastline. These also relate to the difficulties of providing an effective safety net for people engaged in activities such as fishing, off shore drilling, tourism or simply recreational pursuits.

Australia is an island continent and is the only country having the responsibility of an entire continent. The physical dimensions of the coastline are daunting enough. Aligned with a sparsely populated coastline, the task of adequate surveillance and safety service assumes a problem of enormous proportions.

With these facts in mind CWA of WA makes the following comments:

- ◆ Creation of an Australian Coastguard: The majority of members' comments indicated that this was not a viable answer to improving the current Coastwatch operations. Reasons put forward were:
  - ◆ The expense of the establishment of a new organisation
  - ◆ The time involved in the establishment from the setting up of a network, purchasing of equipment and facilities as well as training personnel.
  - ◆ The waste of resources already available which could be coordinated, rather than having a single purpose service.
- ◆ The Role and Expectations of Coastwatch: Members have expressed concern that the current resources are inadequate to cope with the increasing need to deal with immigrants accessing entry illegally via boats hired to land them in remote sections of the coast. It is the threat of disease, which could thus be brought undetected to this country, which raises alarm. The threat is to people and to rural industry. In Queensland disease was introduced through poultry brought in by illegal immigrants. This proved to be disastrous for the poultry producers in the region concerned. Drug smuggling, and its consequences to the safety and health of the population of the

country as a whole, is certainly another area which is of concern to members of the Association. Whether justified or not, there is the perception that currently there is insufficient effort being made to control drug smuggling carried out by illegal landing along the coastline.

- ◆ Legislation: Of paramount importance are clear and concise guidelines contained in legislation to underpin the functions and charter of Coastwatch. A review of current legislation needs to be undertaken to assess inadequacies and to address them.
- ◆ New Technology: Rapid advances in technology will continue to improve communication between the service providers. However, extreme caution must be exercised in the implementation of these. There is a tendency to view technology as a replacement for human input rather than an extremely useful tool. There is no substitute, for instance, for local knowledge of coastal areas. However, it is necessary to ensure adequate financial provision within the budget for the updating and renewal of essential equipment. In outsourcing services it is essential to ensure that the provider has the best technological resources available as well as well trained personnel.
- ◆ Operation of Coastwatch: The majority of members who forwarded comments believed that a variety of service providers need to be employed. Suggestions were as follows:
  - ◆ Naval and Airforce expertise could be utilised, perhaps by a contract arrangement. It is envisaged that such an arrangement also has the potential to be of benefit to the services in training for “search and intercept” exercises. Deployment of the armed forces at ground level is also seen as another option beneficial to both sides.
  - ◆ Sea Search and Rescue are another group, usually with extensive local knowledge, whose services could be utilised.
  - ◆ During World War II a civilian coast watch existed. Whilst members are aware of the possible dangers of unwise actions, with the advancement in technology in the last fifty years, there is an option to provide responsible people living along remote sections of the coastline with suitable communication equipment in order to alert air and sea search providers to possible breaches of the law, or alternatively of a possible trauma in their vicinity.

Summation: The CWA or WA applauds the current efforts of Coastwatch but believes that events have escalated at a rate not anticipated, rendering available services inadequate at this time. Before the situation deteriorates any further urgent action is required to upgrade current services and to provide a network which interacts efficiently without overlapping.

Thank you for the opportunity of presenting the views of members for many of whom the lack of constant vigilance can mean loss of livelihood.

Yours sincerely

Anne Gething (Mrs)  
General Secretary  
*for and on behalf of*  
Rosa Tognela (Mrs)  
State President