

Dear Sirs,

Until June 1998, I was employed by Surveillance Australia in Darwin, as a visual and electronic observer on flights conducted as part of the Coastwatch program of the ACS.

My concerns have always been centred around the apparent lack of knowledge displayed by planning personnel of the Coastwatch - of aircraft operational capabilities, aircraft sensor capabilities, search planning procedures and meteorological influences. On more than one occasion this has been actually admitted to me by staff members.

All of the above can have significant impact on the effectiveness of any mission (flight), and if the mission co-ordinator is not totally abreast with the mission requirements and the factors which could adversely influence it, quite often there is a lot of wasted flight time and money.

Prior to joining the organisation, I had come from a significant background of flying (as a pilot) many hours around coastal northern Australia, and also worked at Darwin airport as a qualified aviation weather forecaster and pilot briefing officer. Even when under instruction by officers of the Coastwatch training organisation, there was a distinct ignorance displayed by these staff in basic meteorological principles.

One could not help but notice that most of the instructional staff came from a military background (particularly the RAAF), and although there is nothing inherently wrong in this, I do think that their own knowledge should have been more adequately tested before they were given the responsibility they have.

Perhaps this could lead to questioning the knowledge and aptitude of those at "the top" to be able to form and lead an organisation which has such an important role in the preservation of Australian security.

These are my comments so far, which I would be most willing to discuss further.

Yours faithfully,

Stephen Gillard

1 Myoora Street
Howrah Tas 7018

Ph : (03) 62 473 574 (h)

0401 140 369 (mob)