



## THE NAVY LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA

A.C.N. 008 451 063

PATRON IN CHIEF – HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR GENERAL  
FEDERAL COUNCIL

The Secretary,  
The Joint Committee  
on Public Accounts and Audit  
on Coastal Surveillance Matters

Dear Sir,

Please find enclosed The Navy League of Australia  
Submission to your Committee.

Yours faithfully,

R.P. Corboy  
Acting Federal Secretary

Enc.

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## **Submission By The Navy League Of Australia To The Joint Committee On Public Accounts And Audit On Coastal Surveillance Matters**

### 1. Background to the Submission

- 1.1 The Navy League was established in Australia in 1901, initially in the form of small branches of the United Kingdom Navy League (established in 1897) and since 1950 as an autonomous national body headed by a Federal Council consisting of a Federal President and representatives of the six States, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory.

The Navy League of Australia is now one of a number of independent Navy Leagues formed in countries of the free world to influence public thinking on maritime matters and create interest in the sea.

- 1.2 The League has had a long standing interest in Coastal Surveillance matters and became actively involved in February 1979 when it responded to a series of questions put to it by the Defence Sub Committee of the Federal Parliament's Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. The League had taken note of comments made during a debate on surveillance arrangements in Northern Australia that had taken place in the Parliament the previous year (refer Hansard 4 April 1978 - Discussion of Matters of Public Importance): The comments strengthened the League's concern about several aspects of the existing arrangements, particularly coordinating responsibilities and cost.
- 1.3 It is appropriate to say that at the time the Navy League felt that Defence, as the principal provider of resources, should co- ordinate the activities of the various authorities with interests at stake, its resources to be augmented for this purpose; however the League rejected the proposed establishment of a separate US-style Coast Guard as being unsound both economically and in practical terms given the limited availability of resources in Australia - especially when compared with the United States.
- 1.4 In the following years the League held to the views expressed in 1979 and made them known from time to time as governments, ministries, departments and office-bearers changed and surveillance arrangements continued to be questioned.

### 2. The Beazley and Hudson Reviews/Reports

- 2.1 Of the numerous reviews and inquiries carried out between the late nineteen sixties and those instigated by the present government in 1999, the Navy League regarded the 1983 Beazley and 1988 Hudson reports of particular value as they provided the public with a comprehensive picture of the issues involved in devising a satisfactory surveillance system.

- 2.2 While both reports tackled the problem of responsibilities and co-ordination - the issue however continued to be argued - the Hudson report was the more important not only because it planted the seed that developed into the present Coastwatch Organisation, but dealt with the vexatious matter of financing surveillance operations and recommended measures which in due course were accepted by the agencies most concerned
3. The Present Outlook
  - 3.1 The Navy League has noted that at various times attention has been focussed on particular aspects of the surveillance task - initially fisheries and incursions into the AFZ; the introduction of exotic diseases, drugs and narcotics, illegal immigration ("the boat people"), the latter in particular attracting media attention often leading to unfair criticism of-the surveillance operators.
  - 3.2 Also it needs to be said that drug etc smuggling and illegal entry are not confined to the sea-coast; it is accepted that arrivals by air at the main airports by people who fail to depart and banned materials in supposedly legitimate containers at the major ports, present a much greater problem for governments and their agencies such as Customs, Immigration, etc.
4. Mid-1999 Re-organisation
  - 4.1 The Task Force established by the Prime Minister to examine surveillance measures following the arrival of "boat people" off the East Coast of Australia in the early part of 1999, appears to have brought matters to a head.
  - 4.2 Although most of the Hudson proposals had been accepted by government and were in place, one of the most important - the establishment of an independent agency with an Executive Director responsible to an appropriate Minister - had not been accepted. To its credit the Task Force, which was headed by the Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department and consisted of representatives of the main "user" departments, rectified this omission in its recommendations to the government.
  - 4.3 After accepting the Task Force's recommendations, all designed to strengthen the revised administrative/co-ordinating structure, the government quickly appointed the Executive Director, selecting Rear Admiral Russell Shalders, one of the R.A.N.'s most experienced officers who's recent appointments included that of Commodore Flotillas, the highest seagoing appointment available to an R.A.N. officer.

5. Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) Inquiry

- 5.1 For an organisation operating for the most part out of sight of the general public in the most remote areas of Australia, Coastwatch, to use its relatively new name, has received a remarkable amount of media attention and experienced more examinations and investigations in its thirty-year history than almost any other government agency.
- 5.2 The Navy League believes its earlier concerns - in particular co-ordination and funding - have been addressed and that the structure put in place in mid-1999 should be allowed time to show its effectiveness - the League suggests at least 3 - 4 years as it will be some time before promised additional resources are available.
- 5.3 In retrospect it is perhaps unfortunate the ANAO examination of Coastwatch already delayed, was not further postponed to give those charged with implementing the new arrangements an opportunity to get on with the job. Because of its earlier work the ANAO report may have been useful to the new administrators but on the other hand it is reasonable to assume most, if not all of its recommendations, were already in train.

6. The Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) Inquiry

- 6.1 With regard to the inquiry announced by the Chairman of the JCPAA on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2000, the Navy League offers the following comments. For convenience the items listed as being of particular interest to the Committee have been marked (a) to (g)
- (a) The League sees the role of Coastwatch “to detect and prevent breaches of Australian laws insofar as they relate to the country’s EEZ and littoral zone” and would like to think the community had a similar view. The League however, considers neither governments nor the people generally have appreciated the magnitude of the task and, until recently, the inadequacy of the resources provided to carry it out.
- (b) The League understands Memoranda of Understanding, regarded as important by the ANAO (ANAO recommendation No 2) have been reached with all parties involved with one exception.
- (c) Judged by recently published figures Coastwatch appears to be allocating its present resources sensibly.
- (d) The League believes the new Coastwatch administration is well aware of technologies that will improve performance. This comment includes awareness of the need for the best possible intelligence information.

6. Continued:
- (e) The League has no comment on the need for legislation to underpin Coastwatch other than to suggest time will tell. There does not appear to be a present need.
  - (f) League does not consider a separate, Australian Coastguard is warranted certainly not so soon after new Administrative/co-ordinating structure has been put in place and moreover, has every appearance of working satisfactorily. As this is an item of considerable public interest, it is the subject of the next part of our submission.
  - (g) With regard to the Fremantle Class Patrol Boats (FCPBs) referred to throughout ANAO's report, the League considers that given the importance of the FCPB's to the surveillance effort, a decision concerning their future – an extension of life or replacement – needs to be fast-tracked by Defence and prompt action taken to implement the decision.
7. A Statutory Coastguard
- 7.1 Almost invariably the United States Coast Guard is quoted as a model for Australia. Leaving aside geographical similarities and constitutional and other differences between the two countries, few Australians appear to appreciate the size and cost of the American Organisation - over 40,000 uniformed and civilian personnel plus a Reserve; 199 "cutters" (some comparable in size to the R.A.N's frigates) together with over 1,480 "boats", in all costing \$US4 billion annually (approximately \$A6.6 billion in mid May); while numerous countries title their coastal surveillance organisations "Coastguards", none attempt to emulate the Americans in the way and on the scale they endeavour, to protect their country's territorial integrity.
- 7.2 It is sometimes claimed that legislating to create a new department or agency - a Coastguard - would bring together the responsibilities and resources of a disparate group of Commonwealth agencies resulting in a more effective coastal surveillance organisation. The Navy League doubts this as some of the most important agencies - e.g. Customs, Australian Federal Police, Immigration and Multicultural Affairs - have responsibilities extending much further than watching the sea approaches; to denude them of resources and in the case of Customs for example, professional expertise - would not seem at all helpful. The Legislative changes required would be considerable.

7. Continued:
- 7.3 The League noted that while Beazley and Hudson (referred to in part 2 of this submission) clearly saw the problems involved in managing, coordinating and financing surveillance operations, neither recommended the establishment of a Statutory Authority although Hudson considered the possibility (Hudson 3.48). Instead, a Coastal Protection Unit within the AFP followed the Beazley report and after a delay of nine years the Agency recommended by Hudson was accepted by the present Government.
- 7.4 The League also noted the Federal Opposition's stated intention on 23 January this year to legislate for a separate Coast Guard. The Opposition may not have known of the ANAO's investigation into Coastwatch - which among other things commended the links Coastwatch had formed with the U.S. Coastguard- (ANAO's 4, 54-55) - as the report was not published until April, but even so it would have been wise to wait and to be in a position to make an informed judgment on the newly restructured Organisation at such time it is in office.
8. Summary
- 8.1 As stated in 5.2 and elsewhere in this submission, the Navy League considers the changes introduced in July 1999 to be worthwhile, but those charged with making the system work must have time and the promised resources if the revamped Coastwatch is to be as effective as the Government hopes - and the public no doubt expects.
- 8.2 The League's principal concern is that pressure to form a separate Coast Guard divorced from Defence except for essential resources, apart from the cost of equipping a separate organisation, will inevitably cause competition between Defence and Coast Guard for funds and personnel, both in short supply and most likely weakening the Navy in particular. Defence has enough problems at the moment without adding to them.
- 8.3 The Navy League has confined itself largely to principles rather than details in this submission and hope it will be helpful to members of the Committee.