

## EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

### SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE – QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2005-2006 BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING

**Outcome:** CSIRO  
**Output Group:** CSIRO

#### DEST Question No. E183\_06

Senator Carr provided in writing.

#### Question:

SOUTHERN SURVEYOR: SAFETY

*It has been reported that the problem has been reported and known about for at least two years.*

What does it say about your duty of care that it has taken at least two years, and the threat of losing revenue from Geoscience Australia, for you to do something about a problem that was not only potentially hazardous but which affected the amenity of working and living conditions?

#### Answer:

CSIRO has provided the following response.

#### *Southern Surveyor – Safety*

This problem was first reported in mid-March during voyage SS03/20005. Management of it has been appropriate and does not reflect negatively on CSIRO's management of its duty of care.

Although the problem experienced on voyage SS04/2005 exhibited similar symptoms to those previously experienced, it has become apparent that initial speculations about possible causes were incorrect. The vessel's sewerage treatment plant did not malfunction.

The *Southern Surveyor* has occasionally experienced different, intermittent smells. These have been the result of various causes from the prevailing wind inducing sewerage gases into the vessel's accommodation, through to blocked pipes. All occurrences were promptly dealt with.

In recognition that smells have the potential to compromise the amenity of the workplace, a decision was made to give priority to a program of works to identify and remediate their causes. Identifying causes has been complicated by the elusive, intermittent and inconsistent nature of the smells. Accordingly it was decided to conduct a thorough assessment of the vessel's waste water handling, holding and treatment systems. The first stage in this process was to clean, repair as required and re-coat the vessel's sewage holding tanks. The impact of this was to be assessed and followed up as required, by repairs on the pipe work leading to and from the holding tanks.

This work was undertaken as planned and the system operated without incident on voyages SS01/2005, SS02/2005 and SS03/2005 until heavy weather from cyclone Ingrid was encountered between 9-12 March. Reports of unpleasant odours began to emerge on 14 March 2005. At the time it was believed that these resulted from water being rolled out of wet-seals as a result of the cyclone.

The procedure at Attachment 1 of E180\_06 was implemented immediately and appeared to successfully address the problem until the events of 1-2 April 2005.

The cause of the smells on SS03/2005 and SS04/2005 was identified by the ship's engineers during the port period in Darwin immediately following SS04/2005. The problem arose from a blocked vent which was located and repaired as soon as possible.

Considering the way this problem evolved, it indicates that the vent probably became blocked when the vessel encountered the heavy weather generated by cyclone Ingrid and that the blockage reached its peak in the first week of April.

As with many of the hazards which potentially exist when conducting work at sea, the risk was continuously monitored and managed.