

SENATE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL LEGISLATION COMMITTEE
AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS SERVICE

Question No. 217

Senator Webber asked the following question at the hearing on 31 October 2005:

- a) Can Customs provide an estimate of the total number of illegal foreign fishing vessels operating in the AFZ and the average number of fishing days per boat (during the last month/year/3 years)?
- b) What is the ratio between the number of foreign fishing vessels sighted by surveillance platforms versus those that are effectively apprehended?
- c) What is the cost effectiveness of the current foreign fishing vessel compliance program versus alternative sources of delivery such as smaller dedicated patrol vessels?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- a) During the year 2004/05 Coastwatch aircraft reported 8111 sightings of vessels. This figure does not, however represent the actual number of vessels fishing illegally as, in areas of concentrated aerial surveillance, the same vessel may be sighted and counted by multiple flights. Additionally, from the air it is difficult to discern with accuracy whether a vessel is fishing illegally or is legitimately transiting Australian waters.

Sightings statistics must also be considered in the context of the patterns and hours flown by Coastwatch aircraft.

Government agencies are unable therefore to accurately estimate the number of illegal foreign fishing vessels operating in the AFZ or the average number of fishing days per boat.

- b) Customs maintains figures on the number of reports of sightings of foreign fishing vessels, but for the reasons outlined in (a) above, is unable to correlate these reports to actual vessels. During 2004-05, 203 vessels were apprehended in Australia's AEEZ.
- c) Customs does not have the data to make such a comparison.