

Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Inquiry into the main economic and security challenges facing PNG and the island states of the Southwest Pacific

Question taken on notice at hearing 21 November 2008

Attorney-General's Department and Australian Customs Service

Nature of question	Senator	Page of Proof Hansard
1. Vessels not paying dues or royalties	Bishop	p.58
2. Transshipment points for illicit drugs	Bishop	p. 59
3. Transshipment activity of narcotics and weapons, states involved, existing capacity of Pacific Island countries to investigate and pursue offences	Bishop	p. 59
4. Crime syndicates using Pacific Island countries as a base	Feeney	p. 60
5. Corruption trials in PNG	Feeney	p. 64



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1. *Vessels not paying dues or royalties (Senator Bishop, p.58)*

Australian Customs supports a number of maritime surveillance patrols involving relevant PNG border management agencies. One such patrol, "Op Protect 02/08" on PNG Defence Force patrol boat HMPNGS MORESBY, successfully apprehended a fuel tanker in September 2008. This tanker contained undeclared fuel, described as water, as well as other undeclared goods.

2. *Transshipment points for illicit drugs (Senator Bishop, p.59)*

PNG does not currently feature prominently as a source country or transshipment point for illegal goods entering Australia. Nevertheless, Australian Customs has ongoing concerns regarding the capacity of border control and law enforcement agencies in PNG to effectively address the activities of organised crime groups operating in the country. Although there are few confirmed cases of large scale trafficking in illicit goods, potential remains for cross-border criminal activity. The nature of PNG's borders makes them difficult to patrol and secure. When this is combined with limited border enforcement capability and close proximity to Australia, these factors contribute to an ongoing potential threat.

3. *Transshipment activity of narcotics and weapons, states involved, existing capacity of Pacific Island countries to investigate and pursue offences (Senator Bishop, p.59).*

While the transshipment of drugs through the Pacific is known to occur; the precise levels of trafficking are unknown. Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga and PNG have in the past been identified as transshipment points for large drug consignments. The following seizures relating to the Pacific illustrate the nature of this trafficking activity:

- 357kg of heroin destined in part for Australia was seized in Fiji in 2000;
- 74kg of methamphetamine was found on a ship in Singapore headed for Fiji and Australia in 2002;
- 160k of heroin was shipped from Myanmar to Vanuatu, presumed to be en route to Australia, in 2001;
- 120kg of cocaine was found buried at a beach in Vanuatu in 2004;
- 98kg of cocaine believed to be bound for Australia was seized in Tonga in 2001; and
- the International Narcotics Control Board thwarted an attempt to import 12 tonnes of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine into PNG in 2002.

Transshipment of weapons through the Pacific is believed to occur; the precise levels of trafficking, however, are unknown. Anecdotal information has surfaced periodically regarding a 'guns for drugs' trade through the Torres Strait but no evidence has been uncovered of significant criminal operations of this nature. The Pacific remains a region of on-going operational focus for Australian Customs in relation to the movement of illicit goods.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sachin Wimmer', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Sachin Wimmer
National Manager
International Branch
19 December 2008

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE
INQUIRY INTO THE MAIN ECONOMIC AND SECURITY CHALLENGES FACING PNG
AND THE ISLAND STATES OF THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC

ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Question No. 4

Senator Feeney asked the following question at the hearing on 21 November 2008:

In your policy work do you look to where such [sophisticated crime] syndicates might come from?

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

The Attorney-General's Department's policy work is focused on raising awareness of the threat from, and capability to respond to, precursor chemical diversion and consequently illicit drug manufacture and trafficking in the South Pacific region. In formulating the policy work we are cognisant of the potential for organised crime to exploit vulnerable states. From a policy perspective we do not have any particular focus on where an organised crime network may come from. The origin of a crime networks and its operation is a matter which may be of more significance to operational agencies. However, we continue to work closely with operational agencies with a view to identifying strategic intelligence which may inform policy direction. This could include aspects of organised crime networks operations which may highlight the need to consider appropriate policy responses, including the origin of the network.

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ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Question No. 5

Senator Feeney asked the following question at the hearing on 21 November 2008:

Can you tell us a bit about the corruption trials [in Papua New Guinea]?

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

The Attorney-General's Department supports a number of officers working in Papua New Guinea under the whole-of-government Strongim Gavman Program (SGP), including five prosecutors who provide support to the PNG Public Prosecutor's Office in a range of matters.

Of relevance to the Senator's question is the role SGP prosecutors perform in relation to alleged breaches of the PNG Leadership Code (Part III Division 2 of the Constitution which relates to the responsibilities of PNG office holders). In particular, SGP prosecutors provide advice to the Ombudsman Commission in respect of the form of evidence required for prosecutions relating to breaches of the Leadership Code.

Recently, SPG prosecutors have been engaged in the matter of the National Provident Fund, a complex trial involving significant allegations of corruption. The trial is ongoing. SGP prosecutors also provide advice to the National Fraud and Anti-Corruption Directorate in relation to certain corruption investigations.