

FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE REFERENCE COMMITTEE
AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION SERVICE

The Chair asked the following question regarding the restrictions placed on Bay Class vessels operating in uncharted waters in the Torres Strait, at the Hearing dated 17 December 2009:

"Do you keep statistics on, or do you have information about the number of occasions where that has been an impediment to the conduct of your search activity?"

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

Since November 2007, Australian Customs Vessels (ACV) have apprehended eight Foreign Fishing Vessels (FFV) that were identified as potentially operating illegally in the Torres Strait. Four FFVs were initially detected in unsurveyed waters. They were subsequently apprehended by an ACV that either diverted around the unsurveyed areas, or intercepted the FFVs as they transited through surveyed waters. Data prior to November 2007 is not available.

Papua New Guinea (PNG) Joint Cross Border Patrols were introduced in February 1998 as part of the Prime Minister's National Illicit Drug Strategy. On average of 3 to 4 patrols per year were undertaken between 1998 and 2004. Patrols ceased due to delays in reaching agreement between PNG and Australia on an appropriate process that would allow ACVs to legally carry their armament while operating in PNG waters. Upon agreement of an approval process, patrols recommenced in February 2008. As a result of the limitations imposed on ACVs by uncharted waters, more innovative mission planning has seen the introduction of helicopters as a secondary patrol platform enabling a wider reach in the number of villages visited.

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Mrs Grant undertook to provide statistics to the Chair regarding the average number of surveillance flights that over flew the Torres Strait, at the Hearing dated 17 December 2009:

"I can provide you, on notice, with the average number of flights each month, if that would be of assistance to your enquiry"

The data provided is as follows:

Over the period of July 2009 to June 2010 there were a total of 739 surveillance flights, averaging 62 per month, as per below.

2009-2010	Partial - Gulf *	Partial East Coast **	Torres Strait ***	Total
July	19	5	36	60
August	19	4	46	69
September	28	4	30	62
October	34	4	26	64
November	27	16	13	56
December	31	14	6	51
January	31	24	5	60
February	25	20	10	55
March	30	23	15	68
April	22	27	12	61
May	32	28	6	66
June	34	25	8	67
Total	332	194	213	739

* Combined Gulf of Carpentaria and Torres Strait flights

** Combined East Coast and Torres Strait flights

*** Torres Strait only flights