

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

Defence Relationships with Pacific Island Nations – 16 July 2020

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: JSCFADT Inquiry into Defence Relationships with Pacific Island Nations - 16 July 2020 - Q1 - Paladin Contract - Hill

Question reference number: 1

Senator/Member: Julian Hill

Type of question: Spoken

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 10 August 2020

Question:

Mr HILL: Has the department raised any concerns with, say, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade or provided any advice to ministers regarding the concerns that have been raised by the Manus Island governor? The second part of the question is: has there been any assessment or advice regarding the impact of the Paladin contract and the contracting scandals and relationship? Is that something that you've provided any briefings or advice on?

Mr Jeffrey: I won't go into the content and the terms of the advice that we've provided to government. I don't see that as my role, respectfully, Chair.

Mr HILL: Whose role would it be, then?

Mr Jeffrey: I think you would need to direct those questions to the minister.

Mr HILL: You can take them on notice and tell us later that you won't answer them.

Mr Jeffrey: I'm happy to take those questions on notice, but I think that, as an official, it's not my role to talk about the nature of the advice that we provided to government.

CHAIR: I agree with that, Mr Hill. Move on.

Mr HILL: So you're not prepared to provide any comment given the media reporting about the impact of the government's pretty outrageous contracting scandals at Manus Island or your objectives in PNG?

CHAIR: Mr Hill, what you're asking for is advice given by the department to the government. This forum is not an opportunity to get that information.

Mr HILL: It's directly relevant to one of the projects.

CHAIR: My position remains on that one, Mr Hill. If the Department of Defence want to provide that information—but I don't think they're obligated to under these circumstances, as a matter of policy.

Mr Jeffrey: I will just reiterate my point: I'm not prepared to comment on advice that we've provided to government on the issue of the Palladium contract. I outlined that it's not—

Mr HILL: Let me ask a much narrower question, then. Have you provided any such advice? You don't have to comment on what it is.

Mr Jeffrey: On what issue? On the Palladium contract?

Mr HILL: Yes.

Mr Jeffrey: I'll have to take that on notice because that's not within my area of responsibility.

Mr HILL: Sure. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you,

Answer:

No. The Department of Defence has not provided advice on contract arrangements with the Paladin Group in Manus Province, Papua New Guinea.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: JSCFADT Inquiry into Defence relationships with Pacific Island nations -
16 July 2020 - Q2 - Gender Adviser's Course - Snowdon

Question reference number: 2

Senator/Member: Warren Snowdon

Type of question: Spoken

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 10 August 2020

Question:

Mr SNOWDON: Were our two guests able to observe the evidence given to us this morning by CARE Australia and subsequently?

CHAIR: They weren't here and they're shaking their heads vigorously.

Mr SNOWDON: Could they review the evidence given by CARE Australia in particular, in terms of the question of access to the gender advisers course, which was mentioned during the course of their presentation? Their recommendation was that it be opened up to greater numbers of people from the Pacific.

CHAIR: Gentlemen, could you take that on notice?

Mr Jeffrey: We're happy to.

Answer:

Defence is taking a renewed approach to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in the twentieth anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, and with the anticipated release of Australia's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. A key focus for Defence is to grow our meaningful engagement on the WPS agenda with the Pacific.

Since 2019, Defence has trained 60 international students on its Gender Advisor Course, and 19 participants have been from the Pacific. Defence staff taught on Fiji's first Gender Advisor course, and regularly hosts seconded Fijian officers at the Peace Operations Training Centre (in Canberra). We will continue to work with our Pacific partners to build capacity in the Defence and Police forces, and fund participants on the Gender Advisor course through the Defence Cooperation Program.

Defence recognises that women, men, girls and boys experience disaster and conflict differently, and women are often disproportionately affected by conflict and disasters. Defence integrates a gender perspective into the planning and response of humanitarian and disaster response, and has included a Gender Advisor on several humanitarian response operations to the Pacific, including Operation Fiji Assist and Operation PNG Assist.

We will continue to actively consider the different needs of women, men, boys and girls throughout preparedness planning and the conduct of emergency assistance. Gender advisor positions exist within the establishment of Headquarters Joint Operations Command, the Service Groups and Joint Capabilities Group, and International Policy Division to assist with this planning.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: JSCFADT Inquiry into Defence relationships with Pacific Island Nations - 16 July 2020 – Q3 - Indigenous Engagement - Snowdon

Question reference number: 3

Senator/Member: Warren Snowdon

Type of question: Spoken

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 10 August 2020

Question:

Mr SNOWDON: The evidence we've received over the last couple of days has been on the desire by Pacific island peoples to have greater interaction with First Nations people from Australia. I'm aware that the Regional Force Surveillance Units in the north have, in the past—I'm not sure what the current arrangements are or if there's any activity—been involved in providing training opportunities, certainly for Timor Leste. I'm wondering whether there's been any people-to-people or unit-to-unit exercises involving RFSUs in the Pacific. If there have, could you give us that information? That would be greatly appreciated. Also, could you expand on the way in which the Blackrock Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Camp will operate? I'd be interested in an expansion of your submission on that issue, too, please.

Mr Jeffrey: Thank you for those questions. On engagement between First Nations peoples and Indigenous communities, at the risk of appearing unhelpful, I would need to direct that to the Office of the Pacific, which I know is doing some work in that area. I just want to agree with the content of the question. It is really an important area of bilateral and regional engagement and one in which we, as a whole-of-government team, could probably do more, but it's not specifically within the realm of Defence.

CHAIR: Could I interrupt there, Mr Snowdon? That is a very important question. What we might do is ask the secretariat to write to DFAT, pose that question to them and ask them to respond in writing. Are you happy with that course of action?

Mr SNOWDON: Absolutely. No problem.

Mr Jeffrey: We're happy to come back to the committee with any activities at the unit-to-unit level that might focus on Indigenous engagement. I don't have the details with me at this time.

Mr SNOWDON: I'm particularly interested in the role of RFSUs, the Regional Force Surveillance Units. I know that NORFORCE, for example, has hosted people from defence units from Timor Leste.

Mr Jeffrey: Indeed.

Mr SNOWDON: I'm wondering whether there have been any other exchanges between the RFSUs—Far North Queensland Regiment, 51 FNQR; Pilbara Regiment; NORFORCE—with

any of the Pacific nations.

Mr Jeffrey: We'll come back to you with some of those details.

Answer:

Army's Regional Force Surveillance Units have had interactions with forces from Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. This has predominantly taken the form of hosting visits to explain the regional force surveillance capability. Defence is also planning to host short term exchanges from Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, once conditions associated with COVID-19 permit. The Regional Force Surveillance Units have been involved in ceremonial occasions with Timor Leste and opportunities for interaction with other regional countries for ceremonial occasions have been explored (but limited by the impacts of COVID-19).

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: JSCFADT Inquiry into Defence relationships with Pacific Island Nations - 16 July 2020 - Q4 - Economic impact of Pacific Patrol Boats - Connelly

Question reference number: 4

Senator/Member: Vince Connelly

Type of question: Spoken

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 10 August 2020

Question:

Mr CONNELLY: As a Western Australian, I've been thrilled to get out to the Austal shipyard to see a couple of Pacific patrol boats that are ready to roll out the door when COVID restrictions are lifted and the crews can come and get them. Undoubtedly it is a great program. My concern is that if we're not taking baseline data on illegal fishing that's occurring now then we will have nothing to compare it to. It's an important story to be able to tell our own population and our Pacific neighbours—about the investment we're making—to help highlight the benefit, not just to say that there's a benefit. So could I respectfully request that you take on notice to get back to us as to whether a baseline is being taken or, if not, whether that will be considered between maybe yourselves and the Office of the Pacific. I think the elements are: What are the numbers of illegal fishing vessels now? If we can quantify it, what is the estimated take, and the value? What's the value of fisheries to each nation now and what will it look like in the future, because we all hope there will be growth? That's really what I'm after to be able to not only say it's a good thing but quantify it with some data.

Mr JEFFREY: We're happy to take that on notice. I don't think Defence will be the repository of that information, but we'll work with OTP on that. It may also be that the Forum Fisheries Agency, which is the PIF body for coordinating activity on fisheries protection, for example, might have some data on that that could be germane as well.

Mr CONNELLY: Wonderful. Thank you.

Answer:

In a global fisheries context, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is the main term used to refer to the various types of illicit fishing activity. The nature, scope and magnitude of IUU fishing varies greatly depending on the definition of IUU and the context and location being considered.

Regarding the Pacific region, in 2016, the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), a regional collective of fifteen Pacific Island countries along with Australia and New Zealand, commissioned a study by MRAG Asia Pacific “*Towards the Quantification of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing in the Pacific Islands*”¹. This study was the first comprehensive effort to determine a baseline for IUU fishing in offshore tuna fisheries in the Pacific. The FFA study estimated that, in 2015, the value of product caught or transhipped involving IUU fishing activity in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean was USD616 million, while the resource rent loss attributable to IUU for Pacific nations is estimated to be around USD152 million. A key finding of this study was that, in the Pacific tuna fishery context, underreported fishing is more of an issue than illegal fishing. This accords with Australia’s experiences in undertaking compliance operations on the high seas adjacent to our waters.

In 2016-18 the average value of catch in FFA waters was USD2.9 billion, accounting for 51 per cent of the total value (average USD5.7 billion 2016-18) of the Western and Central Pacific Ocean tuna fishery².

The FFA study did not provide an estimate of the number of illegal or IUU-associated vessels active in the Pacific, but instead a best estimate of values and volumes of product derived from IUU fishing activity. Due to the highly complex and dynamic nature of IUU fishing, there are not any reliable estimates of this nature available. However, the Pacific’s understanding of its key IUU risk areas allows for effective and targeted responses and treatments to these risks. These responses utilise the existing regional monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) framework, and the high level of regional cooperation between all Pacific countries. Australia provides significant support to implement the regional MCS framework, including the provision of the Guardian-class Patrol Boats (and their predecessors, the Pacific Patrol Boats) to support regional efforts to combat IUU fishing.

In June 2020, Forum Fisheries Committee Officials agreed to commission an update to the 2016 FFA quantification study to provide updated estimates to inform progress against the region’s continual efforts to reduce IUU fishing in the Pacific.

In addition to regional cooperation through FFA and other activities (such as joint operations through regional Defence partnerships), there is a process through the multilateral Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) to identify and “blacklist” vessels that have engaged in IUU fishing and the flag State has not yet taken effective action. There are currently three confirmed IUU vessels on the WCPFC IUU List³; the whereabouts and current activities of these vessels are unknown, as confirmed to the WCPFC by parties most recently at the 16th Commission meeting in December 2019.

¹ MRAG Asia Pacific (2016). *Towards the Quantification of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in the Pacific Islands Region*. 101pp. Available at:

<https://www.ffa.int/files/FFA%20Quantifying%20IUU%20Report%20-%20Final.pdf>

² Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (2019) Tuna Economic and Development Indicators 2019.

³ The WCPFC IUU Vessel List can be found at: <https://www.wcpfc.int/doc/wcpfc-iuu-vessel-list>

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: JSCFADT Inquiry into Defence relationships with Pacific Island Nations - 16 July 2020 - Q5 - Aerial Surveillance Contract - O'Neill

Question reference number: 5

Senator/Member: Deborah O'Neill

Type of question: Spoken

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 10 August 2020

Question:

Senator O'NEILL: During a parliamentary delegation to the Pacific I was able, with colleagues, to actually go and observe the international station with regard to fisheries. Their data, I think, is accessible.

There's a question that I want to ask as a follow-up to Mr Connelly's. There is a sense of a United Nations responsibility for the preservation of biodiversity in the Pacific. I'm interested in your articulation of the interplay between aerial surveillance, which is actually a necessity for the scale at which this has to occur; how much we are investing in that; and what partnerships we have to strategically section the Pacific and provide the degree of care that's needed. This is devastating the economies of these great Pacific nations, which I very much enjoyed your description of—there is an island but there's a huge water mass that they are managing. There are reports of exploitative relationships from other players in the area about trading, potentially off-deck, for access to fish; my understanding is that it is already underway. So I'd like your response to that observation and whatever you can add to what I've just said.

Mr JEFFREY: I'll just make a few points and then hand over to Air Commodore Edgeley in relation to any specific numbers we might be able to offer. The aerial surveillance component is something that we fund through a contracted supplier. They work out of the region—they fly in and out of the region—doing the aerial surveillance.

Senator O'NEILL: So that's a private company?

Mr JEFFREY: A private company, yes.

Senator O'NEILL: So we don't have any strategic partnerships with any other defence forces to provide cover?

Mr JEFFREY: That was the other area I was going to. The private contract is part of the Pacific maritime patrol boat program. That's designed to provide information specifically for the use of the patrol boats.

Senator O'NEILL: Can I ask how much we expend on that, Mr Jeffrey.

Mr JEFFREY: We might have to take that on notice.

Senator O'NEILL: And who is the provider? Could you give me the details of that? What's the contract where I would find it if I were looking, the quantum and scale?

Mr JEFFREY: PMSP is a \$2 billion program over 30 years, and that \$2 billion includes the aerial surveillance contract. We'll just need to get you the details of that. -

Answer:

The Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP) builds on the success of the Pacific Patrol Boat Program by broadening and strengthening the region's capability to respond to maritime security, transnational crime and fisheries protection. The PMSP (AUD2 billion over 30 years) consists of three components: replacement of the current Pacific Patrol Boats with new Guardian Class Patrol Boats; integrated aerial surveillance; and enhancements to regional cooperation.

On 8 December 2017, Defence signed a contract with Technology Service Corporation to deliver aerial surveillance services across the Western and Central Pacific region. The contract amount for the current six year contract is AUD71.957 million and is publicly listed on the AusTender site.

When fully implemented, the PMSP aerial surveillance will provide up to an average of 1,400 hours of aerial surveillance each year across the Western and Central Pacific through two dedicated long-range aircraft based in the region. The PMSP aerial surveillance will provide targeted maritime patrolling, enhancing the ability of Pacific Island Countries to defend against regional maritime security threats such as illegal fishing and transnational crime.

The PMSP Aerial Surveillance is available to 15 countries; Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Defence

Topic: JSCFADT Inquiry into Defence relationships with Pacific Island Nations - 16 July 2020 - Q6 - Satellite Surveillance to Combat Illegal Fishing - O'Neill

Question reference number: 6

Senator/Member: Deborah O'Neill

Type of question: Spoken

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 10 August 2020

Question:

CHAIR: Can I just jump in there? Is the large-scale surveillance that which was previously undertaken by the Orions and is now being undertaken by the Poseidons, which replaced the Orions?

Air Cdre Edgeley: It depends. I can't be 100 per cent sure that we have used a Poseidon in that role yet, but, yes, the primary asset we used would have been the P-3 Orion. But, of the four nations that are there, we will use the best asset for the type of surveillance that's required. It can be any military aviation asset that has a surveillance capability. It doesn't necessarily need to be a maritime patrol aircraft. As long as it has some sort of capability to identify targets on the ocean, it will be used from one of those four nations.

CHAIR: The four countries are Australia, New Zealand, France and—

Air Cdre Edgeley: The US.

Senator O'NEILL: Can I ask about satellite data? Is that used?

Air Cdre Edgeley: I'd have to take on notice whether we use satellite data to cue. I don't know. I'd have to get that answer for you.

Answer:

Pacific QUAD (Australia, New Zealand, France and the United States) partner nations do not provide satellite data to the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) members. The FFA uses a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS), which is a satellite tracking system, to monitor all licenced FFA vessels in the Pacific. Additionally, the FFA use commercially available Automatic Identification System (AIS) information. These two datasets are fused to provide a maritime picture which can be used to cue aerial and surface surveillance missions.