

Joint Offshore Protection Command

Introduction

- 4.1 In March 2005 the Minister for Defence and the Minister for Justice and Customs, officially opened the Joint Offshore Protection Command (JOPC) to enable a more effective, efficient and coherent whole-of-Government approach to various high priority operations conducted in Australia's offshore areas. The Minister for Defence saw this new command as:

... a key component of an integrated, whole-of-government approach to maritime security ... [with] a single response and interdiction system that can respond quickly to varying national and area-specific counter-terrorism alerts.¹

- 4.2 The Minister for Justice and Customs further added that:

while Coastwatch would continue to coordinate law enforcement activities in the areas of customs, immigration, quarantine and fisheries, the JOPC would deliver an over-arching military capability for offshore maritime protection.²

- 4.3 The Vice Chief of the Defence Force, under the authority of the Chief of the Defence Force, is responsible for the day-to-day command of

1 Joint News Release, Minister for Defence & Minister for Justice and Customs, *Boost for maritime counter-terrorism protection*, 30 March 2005.

2 Joint News Release, Minister for Defence & Minister for Justice and Customs, *Boost for maritime counter-terrorism protection*, 30 March 2005.

ADF operations, joint exercises and ADF contributions to national support tasks through the Joint Operations Command (JOC). JOC was established in 2004 to 'provide simpler and more effective command and control arrangements.'³ JOC comprises the following elements:

- Headquarters with separate strategic and operational level staffs;
- Three environmental components (maritime, land and air);
- Three specialist components (Special Operations, Joint Logistics and Joint Offshore Protection Command); and
- A number of direct command units which provide functional support.

4.4 At the time of the public hearing in relation to the *Defence Annual Report 2004-05*, the ADF activities being performed under the auspices of the JOPC were essentially captured by Operations RELEX II and CRANBERRY.

4.5 Since March 2006, a range of Defence operations, including RELEX II and CRANBERRY, have been consolidated into a single operation to further enhance the security of Australia's offshore maritime areas and streamline the management of resources and personnel. This new operation is termed Operation RESOLUTE. However, for the purposes of discussion and witness testimony throughout this Chapter, Operations RELEX II and CRANBERRY are still referred to as separate operations.

4.6 Defence noted that the ADF achieved a range of peacetime national tasks:

... predominantly through Operation RELEX II, the conduct of air and surface patrols across Australia's northern approaches... [and] continued to work cooperatively with Coastwatch in meeting the requirement of the national civil surveillance program. ADF contributions were conducted under Operations RELEX II and CRANBERRY.⁴

4.7 The Defence Update 2005 noted that in the contemporary strategic and threat environment, a whole-of-Government approach to national security was essential to optimise resources and coordinate response capabilities. The establishment of the JOPC is an example of this contemporising of Australia's approach to security issues.

3 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2004-05*, p. 148.

4 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2004-05*, p. 149.

This Command ensures that Australia has the capability to respond immediately to an emerging offshore maritime terrorism incident and to otherwise protect our borders and critical infrastructure. Defence, the Australian Customs Service and the Australian Federal Police working together provide Australia with the highest level of border protection.⁵

- 4.8 This support to national security operations is likely to remain a feature of ADF tasking well into the future. Indeed, the Defence Update 2005 notes that Australia is increasing its cooperation with regional states 'in the areas of intelligence and surveillance'⁶ and that this cooperation could increase in the future. Accordingly, the diversity of tasks undertaken by the ADF in recent times is likely to remain constant. Such future roles and responsibilities will necessitate the development of strong and positive inter-agency relationships as well the development of clearly articulated reporting and command chains to ensure information dissemination and critical decision-making are not compromised.
- 4.9 This Chapter aims to examine the roles, responsibilities and operation of the Joint Offshore Protection Command in the areas of command and control, operational activities and management of personnel issues.

Command and Control

- 4.10 The long-term effectiveness of the JOPC in enhancing Australia's maritime security will be underpinned by the quality and timeliness of the cooperation and coordination between the agencies involved. Essentially, appropriate command and control structures, with clear and unambiguous reporting processes and information dissemination systems, will generate positive outcomes for the Government in support of Australia's national interests.
- 4.11 Given that the JOPC is a relatively new construct, the Committee sought information on the implementation of the Command, including inter-agency relationships and the management and coordination of operations. The Vice Chief of the Defence Force, in

5 Department of Defence, *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2005*, pp 10-11.

6 Department of Defence, *Australia's National Security: A Defence Update 2005*, p. 15.

his dual role as Chief of Joint Operations, reported that after only a short period of operation, the inter-agency relationships are good.

- 4.12 He further added that while the JOPC itself was a new Command, Defence had been working with the respective agencies for some time. However, the new organisation provided a framework in which a range of activities could be managed and coordinated to achieve the best outcomes. The JOPC:

can almost move seamlessly from worrying about fisheries – working with Customs and fisheries organisations ... to taking on a greater security role when fishing vessels end up as a concern for us because of terrorism, right through to moving further into combat operations.

... I think there is still some way to go, but we are in the early stages of it and I think everybody sees the utility of this organisation and how much better the coordination of a whole range of maritime security issues can be.⁷

- 4.13 The Committee explored the role, and command relationships, of the JOPC with regard to protection of critical infrastructure, such as the North-West Shelf or the Harold E. Holt communications facility, particularly given the dispersed nature of such critical infrastructure and the myriad of associated tasks and agencies with a vested interest. Defence noted that the tasks likely to be undertaken by the ADF had not changed since the establishment of the JOPC, rather, the new Command now enabled a more effective and better coordinated allocation of resources, and subsequent operational control of activities.

- 4.14 A point that Defence stressed in relation to the protection of critical infrastructure scenario above was that dealing with such a security scenario would not be limited to federal agencies alone.

One of the issues that we gain out of having this unified organisation which is looking at all of the crossover points is that we have a much more focused ability to look at those issues and to talk to all of the agencies, including the Western Australian government and the Queensland government, because they have their own sovereignty rights in terms of what part of the water they are responsible for ...

7 Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 37.

What JOPC has enabled us to do is put emphasis into an organisation, get unification of coordination and therefore far better engagement with a whole range of agencies.⁸

- 4.15 In order to ensure the ongoing development of these inter-agency relationships, between both federal agencies and government departments, and the relevant state and territory agencies and governments, an active engagement strategy is in place. This engagement involves, for example, security patrols and the fostering of links with industry to develop the necessary understanding of who has responsibility for what and where. Another key element of this engagement strategy involves planning for likely security contingencies and the subsequent wargaming of these contingencies.⁹

We do that in a multi-agency environment. So not only does Defence have a view of what it would do and who it would do it with, but also we work on that with other agencies. I think it is coming along well.¹⁰

Recommendation 3

- 4.16 **The Committee recommends that an invitation be extended to Defence sub-committee members to observe and/or participate in a security contingency wargaming activity between Defence and relevant government agencies.**

Operations Update

- 4.17 As noted earlier in this Chapter, the two key peacetime national tasks undertaken by the ADF at the time of the public hearing in March 2006, and under the command of the JOPC, were Operation RELEX II and Operation CRANBERRY (since consolidated as Operation RESOLUTE).

8 Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 43.

9 Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 44.

10 Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 44.

- 4.18 The stated objective of Operation RELEX II was to 'conduct air and surface patrols across Australia's northern approaches to deter unauthorised boat arrivals'.¹¹ This operation had been ongoing since March 2002. The ADF supported this activity with the following resources:
- one frigate and one amphibious ship
 - two P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft
 - up to 6 Fremantle-class patrol boats
 - up to 3 ADF transit security elements¹²
- 4.19 The stated objective of Operation CRANBERRY was 'to coordinate the intelligence and provide surveillance information to the civil authorities that are operating in northern Australia'.¹³ This operation had been ongoing since June 1997. The ADF supported this operation with a range of assets including:
- Fremantle-class patrol boats
 - P-3 Orion maritime patrol aircraft
 - Regional Force Surveillance Units¹⁴
- 4.20 The Committee requested Defence provide information across a range of issues in order to gain an appreciation of the current status of these two operations, and of specific activities associated with the operations. Several issues were of interest to the Committee and these are explored in the following paragraphs.
- 4.21 First, there was concern expressed by some Committee members as to the defensive posture of some of the vessels being intercepted and the subsequent increase in risk to Australian military personnel engaged in boarding party activities. Defence acknowledged that there had been a trend in this direction, which, while not at a level to cause concern, was nonetheless being monitored and appropriate tactics and techniques were being developed.¹⁵

11 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2004-05*, p. 165.

12 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2004-05*, p. 165.

13 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2004-05*, p. 165.

14 Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2004-05*, p. 165.

15 Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 37.

- 4.22 Defence observed that one of the advantages of the new Armidale-class patrol boats was that they could operate in far higher sea states than the Fremantle-class vessels, they have larger inflatable boats and therefore a far better boarding capacity and capability, and have two dedicated boarding teams. These features will mitigate against some of the issues currently encountered when attempting to board the more aggressive 'ice boats'. Furthermore, they have space onboard where they can take apprehended persons and keep them safe and looked after in good condition.¹⁶
- 4.23 Second, the range of options available to the ADF once vessels-of-interest have been detected was pursued by the Committee. For example, were they authorised to apprehend, pass off to another craft, or tow to a port for processing? The time spent waiting for the authorisation to undertake a certain course of action could result in the diversion of resources from further vital surveillance tasks. Defence acknowledged that these were genuine issues to be resolved and that they were actively engaged with other agencies to improve performance in these areas.
- 4.24 Third, a further dimension to the post-detection action that was of interest to the Committee related to the handling and processing of apprehended vessels and personnel. Currently, there are four main ports to which such vessels and personnel can be taken: Broome, Darwin, Gove-Nhulunbuy and Thursday Island. The determination of appropriate ports for processing apprehended vessels and personnel is essentially a matter for the Australian Fisheries Management Agency and Customs, with quarantine and safety considerations paramount.
- 4.25 Defence provided the Committee with an overview of the current practice employed by Navy when handling intercepted vessels. The course of action that is pursued is determined by a number of things, but two in particular: the seaworthiness of the vessel and the weather conditions at the time.¹⁷

Wherever possible, we will try as the first priority, to get the vessel to steam under its own power with a small [ADF] steaming party aboard. If it cannot be steamed ... we will tow it. If we believe it is unable to be towed due to the state

16 Commodore Campbell Darby, Deputy Commander Joint Offshore Protection Command, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 37.

17 Commodore Campbell Darby, Deputy Commander Joint Offshore Protection Command, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 41.

of the vessel, or it is going to sink, then we will go through the process of destroying it at sea. If on our first boarding we determine that the vessel represents a serious quarantine risk ... we will seek permission to destroy it at sea as well.¹⁸

4.26 Fourth, given the strong focus during the hearing on the role of Navy, the Committee sought information about the roles of the Air Force and Army in relation to supporting Operations RELEX II and CRANBERRY.

4.27 Defence reported that Air Force AP-3C Orion aircraft, based out of Darwin, flew 1,745 hours in support of the operations. It is worth noting that the actual performance target set for these aircraft was 250 flying hours. While these hours were nominally in support of Operation RELEX II, the areas where the aircraft were operating contributed to the overall surveillance picture for Operation CRANBERRY as well.¹⁹

4.28 Another contributor to the total surveillance package available to the JOPC is the Regional Force Surveillance Units (RFSU). Defence advised that the RFSUs are focused on patrolling 'areas of interest to either gain intelligence or to observe activities that might be going on to provide evidence.'²⁰ As with the Air Force AP-3C contribution to these operations, the annual performance target for patrol days was exceeded. One of the main strengths of the RFSUs was considered by Defence to be their community engagement network and the benefits these networks brought in terms of intelligence-gathering. The members of these units, and their extended families in the communities throughout the north of Australia are considered to:

keep a pretty good handle on what is going on in that part of the world – far better than people would expect that we could do in an area so vast.²¹

4.29 Finally, the Jindalee Operational Radar Network (JORN) was another capability that contributed to the surveillance picture in the north,

18 Commodore Campbell Darby, Deputy Commander Joint Offshore Protection Command, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 41.

19 Commodore Campbell Darby, Deputy Commander Joint Offshore Protection Command, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 46.

20 Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 46.

21 Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 46.

and was an integral part of the total ADF package available to the JOPC.

People

4.30 The Committee observed that the operational tempo across the board for the ADF had increased markedly in recent times, particularly in relation to deployed commitments away from Australia. At the same time, several of the national security activities underway, which are now commanded through the JOPC, are long-standing operations and were stood up before the current level of deployment activity commenced. In the context of this increased tempo, and noting the finite resources available to the ADF, the Committee sought to understand the impact of this tempo on the individual servicemen and women engaged in Operations RELEX and CRANBERRY in particular, and generally supporting maritime security undertakings.

4.31 The Vice Chief of the Defence Force provided a strategic level assessment of the tempo and concurrency of ADF operations when he advised the Committee that:

One of the principal tasks as the Chief of Joint Operations is to balance our preparedness requirements and the concurrency issues that affect the current deployments and possible or contingency deployments ... I am comfortable at the present time that the oversight we pay to preparedness is that we are capable of sustaining the current effort for operations like RELEX and CRANBERRY and their not having an adverse impact on what we are doing in the Middle East or Afghanistan.²²

4.32 The personnel management and leadership implications in relation to tempo and tasking, specifically as they related to Operations RELEX and CRANBERRY, were further explored by the Committee. For example, access to recreation and shore leave entitlements, and recruitment and retention impacts. The Vice Chief of the Defence Force advised that initiatives were in place to look after people, particularly in Navy, and that attaining an appropriate balance

22 Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 33.

between work, recreation and family was an important issue to manage, because 'we work some of our people particularly hard'.²³

- 4.33 The Deputy Commander JOPC outlined some of these initiatives including extra crewing, building up of the numbers of people on board a ship, and multi-crewing when the new patrol boats come into service. He explained that the way he currently operates the vessels, under direction from Chief of Navy, is that Fremantle crews, for example, can only be used for 70% of the time that they are at sea doing their job and the remaining 30% of the time they must be alongside for respite from the arduous operations they undertake.²⁴
- 4.34 The Deputy Commander JOPC advised that when the fleet of new patrol boats were into full operational service, he would have more flexibility because they would be multi-crewed and he could use them for 90% of the time they would be at sea. The Committee sought further information in relation to the multi-crewing concept.
- 4.35 Essentially, when the new Armidale class patrol boats are in service and in a mature state, there will be 14 vessels and 21 crews and they will be broken up into divisions of four. Six crews will therefore rotate between the four vessels in a division to give a minimum of 250 days at sea on patrol. These six crews will remain with a particular division of four patrol boats and rotate between them. (Defence noted that at this stage the management of the extra vessels – hulls 13 and 14 – is still to be determined by Navy.)²⁵
- 4.36 The Deputy Commander JOPC anticipated the amount of time a crew member would be at sea in the new multi-crewing construct would be in the order of 130 to 140 days per year. At the moment he foresees a routine of eight to nine days at sea and then one day alongside for a logistics visit. They would then go out again for a patrol period of a maximum of six weeks. On return after this patrol period, there would be a crew change, with the new crew remaining alongside for around three weeks for training, to clear leave balances and get ready for the next patrol.²⁶

23 Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 34.

24 Commodore Campbell Darby, Deputy Commander Joint Offshore Protection Command, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 34.

25 Commodore Campbell Darby, Deputy Commander Joint Offshore Protection Command, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 35.

26 Commodore Campbell Darby, Deputy Commander Joint Offshore Protection Command, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 38.

- 4.37 Navy is intending to home port four of the vessels in Cairns with the remainder home ported in Darwin.
- 4.38 The first Armidale-class patrol boat, *HMAS Armidale*, was commissioned on 24 June 2005. On current planning, five Armidale-class patrol boats will be brought in to service by the end of 2005-06, with the remaining seven patrol boats (and their eleven crews) being progressively brought into service by July 2007. These first five boats will be supported by seven crews enabling the Navy to implement the multi-crewing concept.²⁷

Recommendation 4

- 4.39 **The Committee recommends that Navy reports on the utility and effectiveness of the multi-crewing concept once a full Division of Armidale-class patrol boats (for crew rotation purposes) has been delivered.**
- 4.40 While the multi-crewing concept will assist in achieving a better balance in the working and personal lives of Navy personnel supporting JOPC tasking, there was a further dimension requiring management and that was the manner in which the operations were being conducted. The Vice Chief of the Defence Force believes that the ADF is using their limited assets more wisely than in the past and still achieving the same outcomes. He advised that the seasonal nature of much of the illegal fishing, combined with the knowledge that this activity tended to happen at certain places and at certain times, has over time enabled a more effective utilisation of people and vessels.²⁸
- 4.41 Nonetheless, Defence added that the threat was still constant throughout the year, because of the three different sorts of vessels being encountered:
- Fast, high-speed, cheap to build vessels that can get in and out fairly quickly.

27 Defence Portfolio, Portfolio Budget Statements 2005-06, Department of Defence, p. 125.

28 Lieutenant General Ken Gillespie, Vice Chief of the Defence Force, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 34.

- Smaller, type-3 boats that have further to travel and tend to be weather restricted.
- Larger 'ice-boats' which tend to follow where the fishing is best rather than being restricted by weather.²⁹

4.42 Defence advised that the intelligence-gathering process was improving as was the manner in which this intelligence was used. And while Operations RELEX and CRANBERRY were two distinct operations³⁰, Defence was becoming more flexible in the manner in which resources allocated to these operations were used so that assets could be moved between one and the other as tasking requirements dictated. This approach to resource allocation allowed patrols to cover a broader area with much quicker reaction times.³¹

Conclusion

- 4.43 Since the formal establishment of the Joint Offshore Protection Command, Defence and the other government agencies who are part of, or work with, the Command, have made excellent progress in pulling together as an entity to achieve a whole-of-Government approach to national security. The Committee notes that achieving a high level of coordination and cooperation is essential to optimise scarce resources and the progress to date is promising.
- 4.44 The activities and operations which fall within the JOPC span of control are complex, demanding and risky for the ADF personnel involved. Further, effective detection, interception and apprehension of those undertaking illegal activity in Australia's maritime approaches has a direct and critical bearing on our national security. The Committee notes the manner in which lessons learned are being incorporated into the overall planning and prosecution of the range of maritime security operations.

29 Commodore Campbell Darby, Deputy Commander Joint Offshore Protection Command, Department of Defence, Transcript, pp. 35-36.

30 Operation RELEX is primarily focused on air and surface patrols to deter illegal migration. Operation CRANBERRY is primarily focused on surveillance and intelligence-gathering to support the civil agencies operating in northern Australia, of which detecting illegal fishing activity is a part. Both Operations have since been consolidated as Operation RESOLUTE.

31 Commodore Campbell Darby, Deputy Commander Joint Offshore Protection Command, Department of Defence, Transcript, p. 35.

- 4.45 While the outcomes of the range of maritime security operations being commanded by JOPC are generally positive, there is no doubt that these are coming at a price, that is, the negative impacts on the servicemen and women engaged in these tasks. The tempo and persistence of operational tasking is high, and regular respite from arduous and demanding duty is necessary for the long term health of not just the individuals, but the actual workforce itself. The Committee acknowledges that the ADF is taking steps to minimise these impacts and that personnel management strategies are being developed and implemented which address individual needs and recruitment and retention concerns.

