

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION SERVICE

Question No. 105

Senator Humphries asked the following questions at the hearing on 24 May 2012:

- a) Given the increasing rate of unauthorised boat arrivals, has Customs increased staffing numbers for Border Protection Command?
- b) Can you outline how many vessels are used by Customs Border Protection Command and whether any of them have been out of action for maintenance or for other reasons over the past 6 months?
- c) The Budget indicated that \$7.2 million would be cut from civil maritime surveillance and response. (2012-13 AGs PBS pg 123)
- d) Where exactly are these cuts coming from? Will it affect Customs' ability to detect illegal maritime arrivals?
- e) How many patrol days are currently allocated to BPC?
- f) What is the total cost to run the patrol vessels in the last financial year?
- g) Given the increase in IMAs, will patrol days need to be increased over the next financial year and by how much?
- h) How many hours are allocated to aerial surveillance?
- i) How many aircrafts are used for aerial surveillance and what is the total cost of aerial surveillance over the past financial year?
- j) How has this figure compared to previous years?
- k) Will there be a need to increase aerial surveillance in the next financial year?

The answers to the Honourable Senator's questions are as follows:

- a) Current Customs and Border Protection staffing levels for Border Protection Command (BPC) are meeting operational needs. Staffing levels for both BPC headquarters in Canberra and Darwin and in regional offices are below:

BPC average number of Full Time Employees for BPC Canberra, Darwin and regional offices

BPC Headquarters, Darwin and Canberra			
Financial Year	Customs and Border Protection	Defence	Regional
2008-09	87	110	7.7
2009-10	88	110	7.5
2010-11	88	113	10.1
2011-12 YTD (March 2012)	88	110	8.9

NOTE: Staff numbers attributable to Defence may also contribute to other Defence related activities outside of BPC civil maritime security tasks. The above figures are headquarters only and do not include personnel operating on assigned vessels or aircraft.

- b) BPC typically has 18 vessels assigned to it from both Customs and Border Protection and the Australian Defence Force.
- Customs and Border Protection provides eleven vessels to BPC; eight *Bay Class* vessels, the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service Vessel (ACV) *Ocean Protector*, the ACV *Triton* and the ACV *Ashmore Guardian*.
 - The ADF provides up to seven Armidale Class Patrol Boats (ACPBs), with an additional ACPB available at 48 hours notice and one Major Fleet Unit (MFU) on standby.

NOTE: In answering a question from Senator Brandis during the May 2012 Senate Legal & Constitutional Affairs Committee Budget Estimates Hearing (Proof Committee Hansard page 12-13) the Commander of BPC referred to the number of vessels available to BPC on 24 May 2012, which excluded vessels that were not fully mission capable. This answer refers to the total number of vessels assigned to BPC, which includes both vessels undergoing maintenance and vessels that are fully mission capable.

Customs and Border Protection BPC-assigned vessel availability

From December 2011 to May 2012, Customs and Border Protection vessels under the operational command of BPC have not been operational for 2.07% of the total available patrol days. Availability has been affected by unscheduled maintenance and unscheduled absences due to injury or illness.

ADF seven BPC-assigned Armidale Class Patrol Boat availability

From 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2012, ACPBs assigned to BPC have not been operational for 6.9% of the total available patrol days. This had been due to unscheduled maintenance.

All sea going vessels require ongoing maintenance to ensure they can perform at full capacity. The entire ACPB fleet is currently undergoing a planned program of essential maintenance, and Customs and Border Protection continues to collaborate with Defence to ensure appropriate assets are made available to BPC.

- c) and d) There are no changes to the number of vessels or aerial surveillance hours available for BPC. There is a drop in funding reflected in the PBS for Program 1.4 of \$7.3m between 2011-12 and 2012-13. This reduction is comprised of two components:
- Departmental items – which remained stable across the two years, reducing by \$454,000.
 - Expenses not requiring appropriation, which reduced by \$6.826m.

In 2011-12, expenses not requiring appropriation included depreciation as well as an expense caused by the downward movement in the bond rate, impacting on employee provisions. This issue will affect all Commonwealth agencies for 2011-12. A component of this expense has been attributed to Program 1.4 in 2011-12 which accounts for the movement between years.

- e) Border Protection Command is assigned surface assets from both Customs and Border Protection and the Australian Defence Force with a combined total of 5,645 patrol days in 2010-11 financial year.
- f) In the 2010-11 financial year, the total cost for Customs and Border Protection was \$118,036,542.

The costs for the ACPBs were \$91,980,000.

NOTE: Customs and Border Protection and Defence use different methods to record and report vessel operating costs. Consequently, operational costs cannot be compared on a like-for-like basis.

- g) BPC works with its asset providers, primarily Customs and Border Protection and the Australian Defence Force to maximise the effectiveness of operational activity, including that in response to Irregular Maritime Arrivals (IMA).

BPC employs assets provided by both Defence and Customs and Border Protection using an intelligence-led, risk-based approach. This means BPC deploys assets as required by threat and risk levels. BPC assets are deployed to full capacity.

- h) Customs and Border Protection is funded for 18,778 hours of aerial surveillance in 2011-12 - this includes the additional 2,215 hours of aerial surveillance funded in the 2011-12 Budget. Defence also contributed an additional 2,255 hours of aerial surveillance in the same financial year.
- i) 14 aircraft are currently used for aerial surveillance by Customs and Border Protection. In the 2011-12 financial year, to May 2012, the total cost of aerial surveillance for Customs and Border Protection was \$96.414m.

Three Defence P3 Orion aircraft are also made available to BPC. Based on the 2011-12 financial year target of 2,255 hours it is forecasted that the direct operational costs will come to \$35.164m for the 2011-12 financial year.

- j) Direct operating costs for the P-3 Orion aircraft have remained stable over previous years, rising in line with the Consumer Price Index.

The following table captures the cost of aerial surveillance for Customs and Border Protection aircraft from the 08/09 financial year:

Financial year	Cost of aerial surveillance
2008/09	\$107.772m
2009/10	\$117.921m
2010/11	\$112.882m
2011/12	\$105.589m

- k) See answer provided at (g).