

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE

Question No. 85

Senator Barnett asked the following question at the hearing on 19 October 2009:

In relation to the recent search and rescue of Victorian Water Minister Tim Holding from Mt Feathertop aided by the use of an Australian Federal Police spy plane;

- a) is use of the spy plane standard operating procedure for missing persons, or was it only used in this case because the missing person was a Victorian MP,
- b) how much did it cost taxpayers for the use of this plane,
- c) who requested the use of the plane, and
- d) if the plane is not mentioned in the AFP's annual reports, then who has knowledge of its existence?

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

a) The Australian Federal Police (AFP) is conducting a twelve month trial and evaluation of the Aerial Surveillance Platform (ASP). As part of the evaluation process the ASP is being tested in a variety of operational situations including in support of national security border operations and search and recovery operations, where its deployment has not been based on the identity of the individual/s concerned. The AFP utilised the capabilities of the ASP to assist the Victoria Police in the search for missing Victorian Minister, the Hon Tim Holding MP.

b) The current arrangements for leasing of aerial platforms by the AFP are Commercial in Confidence and reflect market rates.

c) About 6.15 pm on 31 August 2009, the AFP contacted the Victoria Police offering to deploy the ASP capability in conjunction with Victoria Police efforts to locate the lost Victorian Minister, the Hon Tim Holding MP. Victoria Police accepted the AFP offer of assistance and arrangements to deploy the capability were effected immediately.

d) The trial of the ASP is funded by the Proceeds of Crime Confiscated Assets Trust Fund which is administered by the Attorney-General's Department. Other departments and agencies who have knowledge of this trial capability include relevant members of the Australian Intelligence Community, Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, Australian Crime Commission, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and State and Territory Police Forces (as represented at the National Counter Terrorism Committee).