

**Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

Supplementary Budget Estimates October/November 2005

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

**Question:** Additional F&F 01

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Sustainable Fisheries

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Siewert asked:**

What action is the Department taking to comply with United Nations General Assembly resolution 59/25 on sustainable fisheries particularly as it applies to

*'Take action urgently and consider on a case by case basis etc... to prohibition of destructive fishing practices, including bottom-trawling that adversely impact on vulnerable marine ecosystems?'*

**Answer:**

Australia's actions to comply with United Nations General Assembly resolution 59/25 by

- (1) ensuring all Australian fishing vessels on the high seas comply with relevant domestic fisheries legislation as well as additional regulations specifically imposed on high seas vessels in line with the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement; and
- (2) through establishing effective high seas governance frameworks through Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMO's) to effectively govern destructive fishing practices on the high seas. This has been demonstrated in our negotiations with Chile and New Zealand to establish a RFMO within the South Pacific.

**Question:** Additional F&F 02

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Siewert asked:**

How many federal fisheries officers will be based in Broome and northern WA?  
Why is it better to locate them in Darwin?

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**Answer:**

The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) is establishing new offices in Darwin and Thursday Island dedicated to its foreign illegal fishing program. The offices will comprise a total of 26 fisheries officers - all of whom will be available to service AFMA foreign illegal fishing requirements in Western Australia.

**Question:** Additional F&F 03

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Siewert asked:**

Are officers allowed to share information with their state counterparts?

**Answer:**

Fisheries officers are allowed to share certain information with state fisheries officers if the provision of that information is consistent with Commonwealth legislation.

**Question:** Additional F&F 04

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Siewert asked:**

How many Indonesian fishing vessels have been observed and apprehended fishing in the Australian Fishing Zone this year?

How many of these Illegal fishing vessels were in possession of shark or shark fin?

What species of sharks were being taken?

What are the stock sustainability implications for the northern joint authority and northern Western Australian shark fisheries?

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**Answer:**

A total of 201 Indonesian foreign fishing vessels have been observed and apprehended in the Australian Fishing Zone to 30 October 2005. A further 249 were subject to forfeiture of catch and/or gear.

A total of 217 of these vessels were notified to the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) as found to be in possession of shark or shark fin.

The species of shark taken is undetermined. Identification of shark by species is difficult and further complicated as most Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) shark catch consists of the fin only. AFMA recently entered a research contract with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) titled "*Shark Identification from Shark Fins*". The research explores the feasibility of a tool to quickly and accurately identify species of fin using fin DNA, fin denticles, fin morphology or a combination of these diagnostic properties.

The impacts of IUU fishing on the northern Australian joint authority shark fisheries are presently unknown. However IUU fishing was regarded at the most recent meeting of the Northern Australia Fisheries Managers workshop to pose a significant risk to the sustainability of these shark stocks. The workshop identified a need for research on the impacts of IUU fishing on shark stocks, tropical snappers and the broader ecosystem. The northern Western Australia Shark Fishery is managed by the Western Australian State Government. While any illegal foreign fishing in these waters will place further pressure on the sustainability of those stocks, the exact implications are unknown.

**Question:** Additional F&F 05

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Domestic Shark Fisheries

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Siewert asked:**

How many Australian vessels are engaged in shark-finning for export in northern Australian waters?

**Answer:**

All of the fisheries that target shark in northern Australian waters are managed by the States and the Northern Territory through Fisheries Joint Authority arrangements. Consequently, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) does not maintain a record of vessels engaged in shark finning for export in northern waters, nor does AFMA collect data on the export of shark from Australia.

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**Question:** Additional F&F 06

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic: Domestic Shark Fisheries**

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Siewert asked:**

How is compliance with anti-finning regulations monitored?

**Answer:**

The Australian Fisheries Management Authority conducts at sea and in-port inspections and fish receiver inspections of the Commonwealth fishing fleet to monitor shark finning and other requirements.

The States and the Northern Territory also have compliance programmes to monitor shark finning regulations for State/Northern Territory licensed fishers.

**Question:** Additional F&F 07

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic: Domestic Shark Fisheries**

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Siewert asked:**

How many domestic shark fishery inspections were conducted in the Northern Territory this year and by whom?

**Answer:**

The Northern Territory (NT) Government has responsibility for the day-to-day management of the NT Shark Fishery, which is the only fishery in NT that targets shark. The NT Government have advised the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry that in 2004, 43 shark fishery inspections were conducted by NT Police Marine Fisheries Enforcement Section. During the period between January and September 2005, 21 inspections were conducted.

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**Question:** Additional F&F 08

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic: Domestic Shark Fisheries**

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Siewert asked:**

Was there evidence of illegal finning in the domestic fleet?

**Answer:**

The Australian Fisheries Management Authority has advised that there is evidence of illegal finning in the domestic fleet.

It should also be noted that a national study on crime in fisheries is being conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Australian Crime Commission. The study is nearing completion and will be provided to the heads of all Australian fisheries agencies. In addition, a copy of an associated literature review undertaken by the Australian Institute of Criminology will be provided the Australian Fisheries Management Forum.

**Question:** Additional F&F 09

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic: Domestic Shark Fisheries**

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Siewert asked:**

Is there a black-market in shark fin products operating in the Northern Territory?

**Answer:**

A trends and issues paper entitled Crime in the Australian Fishing Industry: Key Issues, released by the Australian Institute of Criminology in April 2005 indicates that Australia is both a source and destination market for illegal shark fin product. It did not specify where these markets were operating within Australia.

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**Question:** Additional F&F 10

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

In the light of recent announcements on increased funding to deter illegal fishing can you outline for the Committee how this money will be expended?

**Answer:**

The funding of \$179 million announced in January and October 2005, will provide for a series of measures including:

- Customs to operate an Immediate Transport Model for Illegal Foreign Fishers (IFFs), under which an aircraft is available within six hours of notification to transport IFFs as soon as possible from ports (Broome, Darwin, Gove and Horn Island) to an immigration detention facility;
- Customs to arrange contingency measures in the event that aircraft are not available at short notice with boat-based detention only to be considered as a last resort;
- Customs to acquire four small boats to facilitate the removal of IFFs from their vessels as soon as they are brought to port by an Australian Customs vessel or a Royal Australian Navy vessel;
- the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) to complete and manage a short-term holding facility in Horn Island as a contingency in the event that aircraft are not available at short notice;
- AFMA to dispose of boats as required;
- up until June 2006, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) to receive and manage detention of IFFs when transferred to immigration detention facilities in South Australia (Baxter) and Western Australia (Perth);
- DIMIA to operationalise Darwin Detention Facility; and
- from June 2006, DIMIA to receive and manage detention of IFFs when transferred to the Darwin Detention Facility.

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**Question:** Additional F&F 11

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

Is it reasonable to conclude that the new measures are designed primarily to deal with illegal fishermen once they are apprehended rather than deterring the activity from taking place in the first instance?

**Answer:**

No. The funding provides for a series of measures to ensure that enforcement agencies can respond to vessel sightings and undertake apprehensions of illegal foreign fishers and deterring illegal incursions into Australia's northern waters.

**Question:** Additional F&F 12

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

Can you outline how the role of the Australian Fisheries Management Authority will change this year in terms of their role in the detention of illegal fishermen?

**Answer:**

The Government has agreed that the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) cease its role in detaining suspected illegal foreign fishers, except in circumstances where fishers are held in the accommodation facility to be constructed on Horn Island.

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**Question:** Additional F&F 13

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

How will the transfer to immigration detention affect the ability of Fisheries Officers to conduct interviews?

**Answer:**

The transfer of suspected illegal foreign fishers to immigration detention will not affect the ability of fisheries officers to conduct interviews.

**Question:** Additional F&F 14

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

Can the Commonwealth Government provide an estimate of the average catch per year of illegal foreign fishing vessels in the Australian Fishing Zone?

**Answer:**

Northern waters

The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) has no recent estimates on the average catch per year of illegal foreign fishing vessels in the Australian Fishing Zone (AFZ). AFMA is currently assessing a research proposal aimed at providing an estimate of shark taken illegally from northern waters of the AFZ.

Southern Ocean

The Government estimates illegal, unreported and unregulated catch of Patagonian toothfish in the Heard Island and McDonald Islands exclusive economic zone annually as part of its reporting requirements to the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

Estimates cover 1 December to 30 November to align with the CCAMLR fishing season and represent whole weight catch:

- 2002-03 948 – 1,348 tonnes
- 2003-04 434 – 634 tonnes
- 2004-05 0 – 150 tonnes



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**Question:** Additional F&F 15

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

What guarantee can the Commonwealth Government provide, with its responsibility for illegal foreign fishing, that the rights, livelihoods and investments of the regionally based Australian fishers, who are licensed to take tropical shark species in the Australian Fishing Zone will be protected?

**Answer:**

Australian fishers may fish, in accordance with relevant laws available, tropical shark stock.

**Question:** Additional F&F 16

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

What is the Commonwealth Government position on Australian fisheries that are currently registered for export as sustainable under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* when resource sustainability is being threatened by illegal foreign fishing?

**Answer:**

Registration for export is assessed on a periodic basis in accordance with available information. No information on resources sustainability has been presented for review at this time.

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**Question:** Additional F&F 17

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

Can the Commonwealth Government explain why the number of automatic forfeitures continues to increase in the face of increasing illegal activity?

**Answer:**

The number of forfeitures of catch and gear has increased in 2005 from previous years in conjunction with an increase in apprehensions of vessels. The increase in the number of forfeitures of catch and gear and vessel apprehensions, are a result of increased Government resources directed to combating illegal foreign fishing.

**Question:** Additional F&F 18

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

Instead of 200 arrests and 242 automatic forfeitures why was there not 442 arrests?

**Answer:**

Forfeitures of catch and gear are an efficient means of enforcement in situations where the apprehension of vessels is not considered to be the optimal response for operational reasons, such as in situations where there are higher priority targets.

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**Question:** Additional F&F 19

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

Can the Commonwealth Government explain its prosecution policy with respect to illegal foreign fishermen?

Does the policy require that all culpable fishermen are charged?

**Answer:**

The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) regularly recommends that charges are laid against the masters of illegal foreign fishing vessels as well as recidivists. However, in the case of Patagonian Toothfish poaching, the Australian Government at times takes a stronger stance depending on the nature of the activity

**Question:** Additional F&F 20

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

Can the Commonwealth Government provide data on the total number of sea days by surface vessels for dedicated patrols to detect illegal fishing activity in the Australian Fishing Zone (during the last month / year / 3 years)?

**Answer:**

Northern Waters

Assets that support the Civil Maritime Surveillance Program (CMSP) are multitasked to identify all activities of interest to the clients of the Program. There are no assets assigned exclusively in respect of suspected illegal fishing. The agreed rate of effort for Defence assets supporting the CMSP is 1800 patrol days per annum and the agreed rate of effort for Customs Bay Class vessels supporting the CMSP is 2400 sea days per annum

Southern Ocean

The Australian Government has allocated \$217.2 million over five years for year-round dedicated, armed patrols of the Southern Ocean. This dedicated capability is

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enhanced by regular on-the-water cooperation with France through joint patrols of our respective Southern Ocean Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).

Operational details of patrols are important tactical information and if made public could compromise future monitoring, surveillance and enforcement activity against illegal fishing vessels in the Australian Heard Island and McDonald Islands (HIMI) and Macquarie Island EEZs. At a broad level, the performance target for marine patrols in the Southern Ocean during 2005-06 is set at 200 sea days.

**Question:** Additional F&F 21

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

Can the Commonwealth Government provide an estimate of the total number of illegal foreign fishing vessels operating in the Australian Fishing Zone and the average number of fishing days per boat (during the last month / year / 3 years)?

**Answer:**

Northern Waters

Most Foreign Fishing Vessels (FFVs) are of very similar construction and carry no identifying markings, and there is therefore no accurate way of discerning individual vessels from the air. As a result, in areas of concentrated aerial surveillance, the same vessel may be sighted and counted by multiple flights. Additionally, from the air it is difficult to discern with accuracy whether a vessel is fishing illegally or is legitimately transiting Australian waters.

Sightings report statistics must also be considered in the context of the patterns and hours flown by Coastwatch aircraft. Government agencies are unable therefore to estimate the number of illegal foreign fishing vessels operating in the Australian Fishing Zone (AFZ).

Southern Ocean

Information on suspected illegal vessel contacts inside the Heard Island and McDonald Islands (HIMI) and Macquarie Island Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), including the dates and nature of the source advising of these contacts, is classified. It is important that such tactical information is not made public as this type of disclosure could compromise the outcome of future monitoring, surveillance and enforcement activity against illegal fishing vessels in the HIMI and Macquarie Island EEZs.

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However, the general trend is that the Government's dedicated Southern Ocean patrols, combined with Australia's on-the-water cooperation with France and successful apprehensions of illegal vessels, is deterring illegal fishing in Australian waters. The Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), at its annual meeting in October/November 2005, noted a significant decrease in illegal fishing in the HIMI EEZ (which falls within the CCAMLR Area) as a result of Australia's strong patrol presence.

**Question:** Additional F&F 22

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

What is the ratio between the numbers of foreign fishing vessels sighted by surveillance platforms versus those that are effectively apprehended?

**Answer:**

Northern Waters

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry understands that Customs maintains figures on the number of reports of sightings of foreign fishing vessels, but for the reasons outlined in the answer to Additional F&F 21, is unable to correlate these reports to actual vessels. During 2004-05, 203 vessels were apprehended in Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone

Southern Ocean

Information on suspected illegal vessel contacts inside the Heard Island and McDonald Islands (HIMI) and Macquarie Island exclusive economic zones (EEZs), including the dates and nature of the source advising of these contacts, is classified. It is important that such tactical information is not made public as this type of disclosure could compromise the outcome of future monitoring, surveillance and enforcement activity against illegal fishing vessels in the HIMI and Macquarie Island EEZs.

In the period 1 January 2005 to 31 October 2005, the *Oceanic Viking* apprehended one foreign fishing vessel in the Southern Ocean. The *FV Taruman*, flagged to Cambodia, was apprehended in September 2005 for alleged illegal fishing in the Macquarie Island EEZ. There have been no apprehensions for illegal fishing in the HIMI EEZ since the *Maya V* in January 2004.

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**Question:** Additional F&F 23

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

What is the cost effectiveness of the current foreign fishing vessel compliance program versus alternative sources of delivery such as smaller dedicated patrol vessels?

**Answer:**

During the process of preparing tenders for the purchase of current Bay Class vessels, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry understands that Customs undertook extensive consultation with clients, including the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs in relation to their requirements for offshore protection activities. These requirements were translated to tender deliverables in terms of range, fuel, maximum endurance, crewing, speed, and capacity to tow apprehended vessels and transport apprehended crew, to provide the most cost effective capability for the new vessels. Similar extensive consultations were undertaken during the current process for tendering for the Coastwatch aerial surveillance contracts, and for the Armidale Class Patrol Boats.

In order to supplement the current maritime surveillance and response capability of Customs and Defence, the Government has also provided funding to Customs to purchase four new tactical medium response vessels. When purchased and deployed, these vessels will take over responsibility for apprehended FFVs from Customs or Defence vessels as they near port, so that the larger vessels are able to return more quickly to their patrol and response activities.

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**Question:** Additional F&F 24

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

If the States / Territory were to commit resources to assist the Commonwealth in foreign fishing vessel compliance, will the Commonwealth provide normal Commonwealth support in the prosecution and repatriation of any foreign fishing vessel crews apprehended by State / Territory officers, whether apprehended in Commonwealth or State waters?

**Answer:**

The Australian Government will consider any proposal from the States and the Northern Territory seeking assistance for the prosecution and repatriation of foreign fishing vessel crews apprehended by State / Northern Territory officers.

**Question:** Additional F&F 25

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** NA

**Senator Webber asked:**

Will the Commonwealth continue to provide legislative authority under the *Fisheries Management Act 1991* to State / Territory officers so they can expeditiously deal with breaches committed by foreign fishing vessels in Commonwealth waters which are detected by State / Territory officers?

**Answer:**

The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) will continue to appoint state / Northern Territory fisheries officers under the *Fisheries Management Act 1991*. The appointments provide powers for the officers to investigate breaches committed by foreign fishing vessels in Commonwealth waters which are detected.

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**Question:** Additional F&F 26

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

To what degree has the Commonwealth Government cooperated with the States / Territory in relation to the resources that the States / Territory may be able to provide to assist in the provision of coastal surveillance?

**Answer:**

Relevant Commonwealth Government agencies have a range of linkages with State and Territory Government agencies and are able to draw on State and Territory resources to identify and respond to threats in Australia's maritime domains. Recent examples of this cooperative approach have been: the involvement of officers of the Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services, and the Northern Territory Police in Operation CLEARWATER; and the valuable assistance provided by the Western Australian Police vessel *Walcott* and the Queensland Boating and Fisheries vessel *Wilson*, in combating illegal fishing in the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone.

**Question:** Additional F&F 27

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

Has the Commonwealth Government explored the possibility of incorporating the management of illegal foreign fishing incursions solely within the Australian Customs Service and developing fisheries compliance expertise within that group as part of a broader approach to border security?

If so, would that expertise be regionally located to take advantage of existing knowledge and expertise?



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**Answer:**

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Portfolio is responsible for the oversight of the *Fisheries Management Act 1991* and the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1994*. These two Acts define foreign fishing offences, consistent with Australia's international obligations under the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea. Accordingly, the Portfolio, and in particular the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), needs to maintain an active role in the management of illegal foreign fishing incursions.

**Question:** Additional F&F 28

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

If the States / Territory were to commit resources to assist the Commonwealth in foreign fishing vessel compliance, will the Commonwealth continue to support the provision of security clearances to State / Territory officers?

**Answer:**

The Australian Government will provide sponsorship for Commonwealth security clearances for state/Northern Territory officers whenever such clearances are necessary to fulfil the requirements of the Government's foreign compliance functions.

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**Question:** Additional F&F 29

**Division/Agency:** Fisheries and Forestry

**Topic:** Illegal fishing

**Hansard Page:** Written question

**Senator Webber asked:**

Will the Commonwealth continue to provide high grade foreign fishing vessel intelligence information on an ongoing confidential basis?

**Answer:**

The Commonwealth will continue to provide high-grade foreign fishing vessel intelligence information to client agencies on an ongoing confidential basis.