

SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE REFERENCES COMMITTEE

**Inquiry into matters relating to the Torres Strait region
Friday, 18 December 2009**

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Q1

**Operation Resolute - Patrol Boats, Hansard pp47
Senator Trood**

Are there any boats patrolling the Torres Strait region that are part of Operation Resolute involving a plan or program demanding or requiring a patrol boat in the vicinity of the region or patrolling on a daily or weekly basis through the region?

Response

Under the direction of the Border Protection Command, the Torres Strait region is patrolled by both Australian Defence Force (as part of Operation Resolute) and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service. In the Torres Strait, Border Protection Command maintains a permanent presence with an Australian Customs vessel, subject to weather conditions.

Q2

**Operation Resolute – Permanent Officers, Hansard pp48
Senator Trood**

Regarding the form and structure of the 51FNQR, as members of the units are reserve members, are there any permanent members?

Response

The 51 Far North Queensland Regiment (FNQR) currently has 67 Regular Army members posted to the unit. They range in rank from Private to Lieutenant Colonel.

Q3

**Operation Resolute – Deployment and Patrolling, Hansard pp49
Senator Trood**

Can you tell us what percentage of 51FNQR actual deployment and patrolling is done as an Operation Resolute function?

Response

Based on time, the unit spends eight per cent (one month) of its time dedicated to Operation Resolute. The remainder of time is spent on training and sustainment of skills, community engagement patrols, exercises and administration.

Based on patrol activities, the Battalion conducts 50 per cent of its deployments in an Operation Resolute function.

The 51 Far North Queensland Regiment (FNQR) is allocated specific periods to conduct Operation Resolute patrols and is required to achieve 80 patrol days per financial year (1 patrol day = 1 patrol of 6 personnel in the field for 24 hours).

Q4

Operation Resolute – BPC Requesting Assets, Hansard pp50

Senator Boyce

How many times has Commander Border Protection Command requested additional assets from the ADF, and for what sorts of resources? And, if possible, what the object of the exercise was?

Response

Commander Border Protection Command has not requested, as at 22 January 2010, any additional assets from the Australian Defence Force to support operations within the Torres Strait during 2009-10. All operational requirements have been fulfilled by assigned Australian Defence Force or Australian Customs and Border Protection Service units.

Q5

Operation Resolute - Uncharted Waters, Hansard pp53

Senator Bishop

Given the current program and the current level of funding for charting unknown waters over the next three years, will this rate of work conclude all the necessary areas that need to be charted or will we still have outstanding work to be done?

Response

Navy manages the National Hydrographic Surveying and Charting Program (Hydroscheme) that is aimed at supporting Australia's national maritime transport infrastructure. This is achieved by incorporating priorities from all sectors of Australia's maritime community with the primary focus on safety of navigation. Due to the Australian Government's ongoing commitment to border protection and surveillance operations in the Torres Strait, this region remains a high priority.

Hydroscheme (2010-12) identifies a number of outstanding areas in the Torres Strait, including the southern coast of Papua New Guinea between Deliverance Island and Parama Island, and the northern areas of the Great Barrier Reef. These areas are planned to be fully completed in the next three years using a continuation of Navy hydrographic surveys, augmented by commercial contract surveys.

The Australian Hydrographic Service (AHS) has submitted a request for further funding of \$9.65m required to complete those areas along the southern coast of Papua New Guinea identified to be completed using commercial contract surveys in 2010.

Q6

Operation Resolute - Uncharted Waters, Hansard pp53 **Senator Bishop**

Could the committee be provided with some material that indicates how much of the waters in the Torres Strait region have been charted and what are the plans for the next three years.

Response

Hydroscheme 2010-12 details the national charting and survey program for the three year period, that commenced in January 2010. This document outlines the prioritisation of areas requiring hydrographic surveys and charting throughout Australia's Charting Area, including waters of Papua New Guinea.

The current status of survey progress in Torres Strait is shown in Figure 1. Areas remaining in the northern Great Barrier Reef (approximately 6559 square km) are planned to be progressed using Royal Australian Navy ship and airborne assets as part of the broader national survey and charting activities and have therefore been prioritised against other national charting and survey requirements.

The remaining areas in the northern sector of Torres Strait, between Deliverance Island and Parama Island (approximately 4003 square km), have been planned to be completed using commercial contract surveys, subject to the availability of additional Government funding totalling \$9.65m.

Over the next three years 13 new editions of publicly available charts are scheduled for production and publication using data collected from these surveys. These charts are listed below and are illustrated in Figure 2.

Chart No.	Chart Name	Scale	Publication Year
Aus 289	Gannet & Varzin Passages	1: 25 000	2010
Aus 292	Adolphus Channel to Prince of Wales Channel	1: 75 000	2010
Aus 293	Prince of Wales Channel	1: 37 500	2010
Aus 294	Endeavour Strait	1: 75 000	2010
Aus 296	Goods Island to Proudfoot Shoal	1: 75 000	2010
Aus 299	Approaches to Thursday Island	1 : 12 500	2010
Aus 837	Olinda Enstrance to Maer Island	1 : 150 000	2010
Aus 839	Cairncross Islets to Arden Islet	1: 150 000	2010
Aus 840	Arden Islet to Bramble Cay	1: 150 000	2010
Aus 841	Booby Island to Sabai Island	1: 150 000	2011
Aus 842	Booby Island to Torassi River	1: 150 000	2011
Aus 376	Torres Strait	1: 300 000	2012
Aus 377	Bligh Entrance to Eastern Fields	1: 300 000	2012

Figure 1 – Torres Strait - Areas Completed (2008-2009) and Planned (2010-2012)

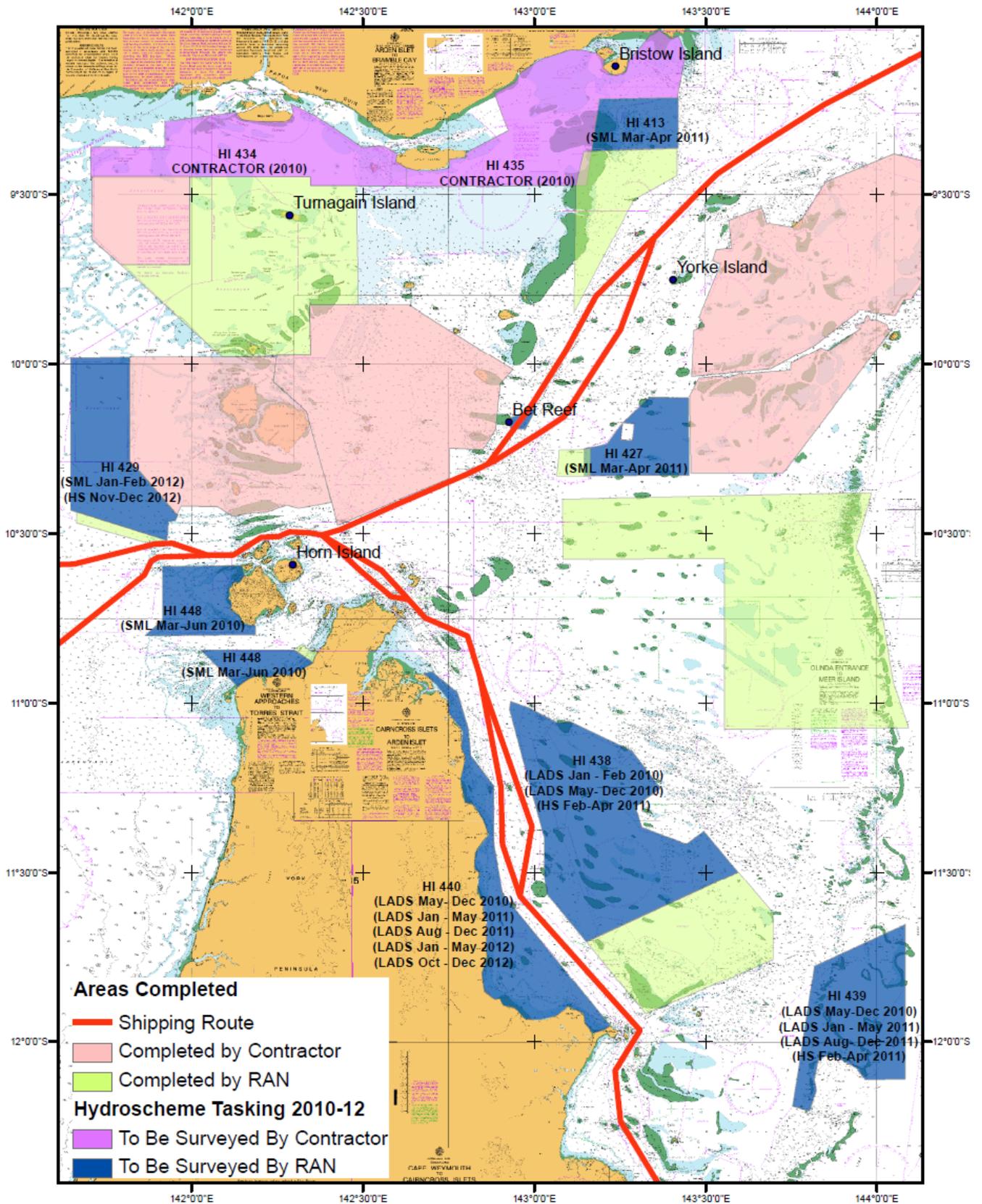
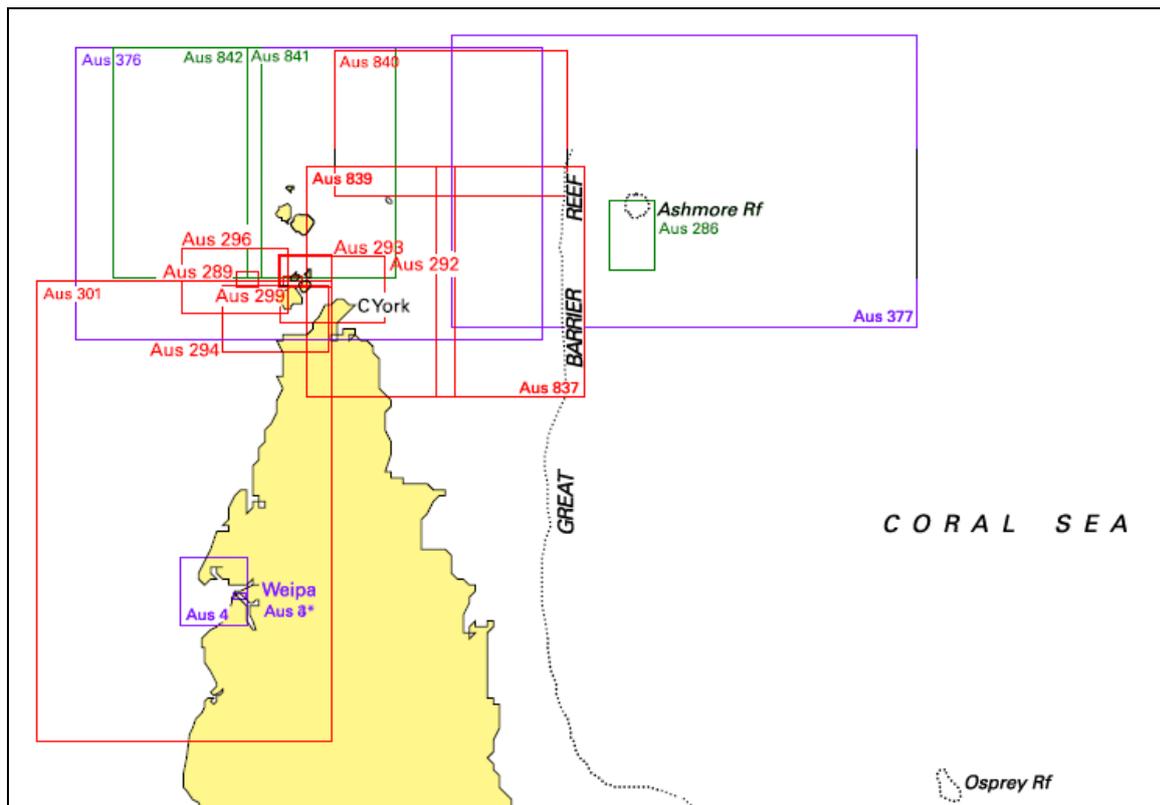


Figure 2 – New Editions of AUS Charts (to be produced during 2010-2012)



Q7

Operation Resolute – Horn Island Airfield, Hansard pp54
Senator Bishop

Was the department consulted, or does it have a view, regarding plans to use the Horn Island airstrip for wider border security and defence type activity, or is it actively using the Horn Island airstrip at the moment?

Response

On 20 December 2008 the Torres Shire Council wrote to the then Minister for Defence requesting Defence funding assistance for strengthening the two Horn Island Airport runways and extension of the main runway. The Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support responded on 2 February 2009 stating that the current runways satisfy Defence's requirements and that Defence was unable to assist Torres Shire Council with funding for the runway upgrades.

In relation to the future use of the airstrip for security activity, Defence is unable to comment on what planning or operations it may be developing due to operational classification. In addition to this, Defence is not in a position to pre-empt any Government decision regarding this matter.

Defence presently uses the Horn Island airstrip for helicopter operation only. Occasionally, these helicopters use the Horn Island airstrip as a landing and refuelling point, as well as to

clear Customs, en-route to Papua New Guinea for high density altitude and tropical weather flying training activities. However, the frequency of such use is infrequent and sporadic.

In addition to this, some Air Force aircraft have occasionally used Horn Island airport in support of Army activities. Prior to retirement, the Caribou aircraft used Horn Island and it is likely that its interim replacement, the King Air 350, may also access the airport. However, this is likely to be on an infrequent basis. The largest Air Force aircraft able to use Horn Island airport in support of Army activities is a C-130 Hercules, which would only occur on rare occasions.