

# Commencement of aerial surveillance - Pacific Maritime Security Program

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A civilian aerial surveillance service has begun across the Central and Western Pacific region as part of the Australian Government's \$2 billion Pacific Maritime Security Program.

When fully implemented, the Pacific Maritime Surveillance Program Aerial Surveillance will provide up to 1,400 hours of aerial surveillance each year across the Central and Western Pacific through two dedicated long-range aircraft based in the region. The surveillance, in conjunction with the Pacific Patrol Boat program will provide targeted maritime patrolling and enhance the ability of Pacific Island Countries to defend against regional maritime security threats such as illegal fishing and transnational crime.

Minister for Defence, Senator the Hon Marise Payne said the protection of oceans and regional resources is vital for all Pacific Island Forum countries and Australia.

"The Pacific Maritime Security Program is an important investment in regional security. Australia is committed to further strengthening the capabilities of Pacific Island countries so we can work together in support of our shared interests," Minister Payne said.

"I reiterated this commitment with my Pacific counterparts on my visits to Papua New Guinea and Fiji and at the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting in Auckland last year. I'm very pleased to see the aerial surveillance aspect of the Program get underway," she said.

The introduction of this new capability, and the Government's commitment to providing this support for the next 30 years, is fundamentally changing the way the Pacific region identifies and responds to maritime security threats. For the first time, Pacific countries will have access to surveillance information 365 days per year to support intelligence-targeted patrolling and protection of their resources.

The \$10 million aerial surveillance service is fully funded by the Department of Defence. Aircraft tasking will be coordinated by the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). The inaugural flight occurred out of Micronesia in December 2017.

As the only regional surveillance centre in the Pacific, the FFA is responsible for the day-to-day coordination of the platform and facilitating communication with regional maritime law enforcement agencies.

Defence has engaged Technology Service Corporation (TSC) to provide the aerial surveillance service. TSC has previously provided aerial surveillance support to the Pacific region through the FFA in its largest annual surveillance operation.

The Pacific Maritime Security Program is the centrepiece of Australia's defence engagement in the Pacific and affirms Australia's commitment to assist Pacific Island Countries combat a wide range of maritime security threats within the region.

