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American company Technology Service Corporation (TSC) will provide up to 1,400 hours of aerial surveillance per year across the central and western Pacific Ocean after winning a Defence contract worth up to \$15 million per year.

Tendered as part of the Pacific Maritime Security Program that will also see Australia gift 19 Pacific Patrol Boats to island nations, the aerial surveillance contract is designed initially to help protect fishery resources.

Selection of a US provider has created consternation among Australian aerial surveillance companies, with industry sources saying at least three submitted compliant bids

ADM understands that flights began from Micronesia in December 2017 using a twin-engine Cessna 337 aircraft, which will be replaced by two Beechcraft King Air B200 twin turboprop aircraft in full service.

The aircraft carry TSC's [Sea Dragon](#) airborne surveillance system, designed specifically for use in smaller aircraft, which includes a synthetic aperture radar (SAR) for target detection over 80 nautical mile wide surveillance areas at 1-10 metre resolution. It is also equipped with an electro-optical/infrared multispectral imaging system mounted on a gyro-stabilised turret, HF and VHF radios, INMARSAT data link, and an L-3 Bandit Line Of Sight data link.

Funded by Defence, aircraft tasking will be coordinated by the [Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency](#) (FFA), an agency shared by 16 independent and self-governing Pacific Ocean states. The FFA provides expertise and technical assistance to help Forum members manage fishery resources in each nation's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

Surveillance data will feed data in to the FFA's Honiara, Solomon Islands office, which coordinates Forum assets such as Pacific Patrol Boats and national law enforcement agencies for apprehension and arrest.

Australia, NZ, France and the US have previously provided ad hoc or project-related military aircraft for aerial surveillance in the Pacific Islands, including deployments by RAAF and RNZAF P-3K Orion maritime patrol aircraft, French Dassault Falcon Guardian jets and US C-130 Hercules.

"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," **Minister for Defence Senator Marise Payne** said on announcing the contract win.

"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."