

“That sort of decrease in capacity is common in all marine animal groups,” Dr Leis said.

The ability of this expertise to be replenished by a new generation of marine biologists is being undermined by funding cuts for research institutions, which means new positions are not being created for graduates.

“They move from one side of the country to another or even overseas for jobs but eventually they get discouraged because there is no career path for them,” Dr Leis said. “Ultimately they drop out and go into another field.

“We are constantly looking for outside sources of funding. We are even looking for endowments – getting people to write the museums into their wills, which a few people have done.”

Despite the concerns about the scientific base supporting aquaculture in Australia, the inquiry heard Australia can have a competitive advantage in the growing industry.

Warwick Nash, of Queensland’s Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, believes Australia’s biggest advantage would be to sell high-quality aquaculture products that have been grown sustainably.

He rates the quality of Australian product far above that coming out of Asia and the Middle East.

“I know from talking to people who sell into that region, that as soon as they find out there is an Australian producer, that is the product they want,” Mr Nash said. “The products coming out of parts of Asia are seen as being of poor quality and of questionable production having used chemicals or having been grown under poor conditions.”

Dr Len Stephens, Managing Director of the Seafood Co-operative Research Centre, said Australia should and can produce high-value expensive products that go into top-line markets.

“We emphasise the quality of our product and its freedom from disease and contaminants,” he said. “There is simply no way we can compete with the Asian aquaculture industry [on a quantity basis].” •

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Data deficiencies limit law enforcement

Criminal data kept on 30 different systems.



MISSING LINK: *Crime databases not well connected*

Outdated and poorly connected data systems are limiting the ability of Australia’s law enforcement agencies to collaborate and share information.

The Australian Crime Commission (ACC) told federal parliament’s Law Enforcement Committee criminal intelligence is currently stored in more than 30 different systems which only have limited connections between them.

“There is no single and complete point-of-truth for Australian criminal intelligence holdings, or an automated process for searching across all systems simultaneously,” the ACC said.

“While the ACC can lawfully request information and intelligence from its partners, this can be a highly inefficient process. The absence of a consistent request for information (RFI) process amplifies this problem.

“Access to a single and complete point-of-truth for Australian criminal intelligence holdings, as well as a

consistent approach to RFI, would resolve this issue.”

The ACC said criminal intelligence must be treated as a national asset that is available to and shared by all relevant agencies. It claimed issues with current methods of collecting and sharing intelligence cause duplication of effort and inefficiency.

“Producing the national picture of serious and organised crime is complicated by a number of issues relating to the collection, use and sharing of criminal intelligence, including limited availability and accessibility of current and complete criminal intelligence and other information used in the production of criminal intelligence; and the absence of agreement on a consistent way in which Australian agencies collect, collate, analyse, produce, store and disseminate criminal intelligence,” the commission said.

“To address these issues, the ACC is pursuing an environment where

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criminal intelligence is treated as a national asset – something that is collected once and used often for the benefit of many – and support is given to an Australian Criminal Intelligence Model and Strategy that secures the free flow of criminal intelligence across the law enforcement, policing and national security domains.”

The national information-sharing service for Australia’s police, law enforcement and national security agencies, CrimTrac, said it is important for all agencies to collect and enter data in the same way and using the same coding so they can link with each other.

“If reference data provided by the agencies is consistently provisioned, linked to a common ‘code’ and provides a search tool operating on the basis of this standardised code directory, the time, cost and complexity placed on the investigative and intelligence functions may be reduced,” CrimTrac told the inquiry.

Senior lecturer in criminal intelligence at Charles Sturt University and former analyst with the ACC, Patrick Walsh said part of the problem is that the ACC and Australian Federal Police (AFP) have inherited legacy databases which were never designed to be utilised as intelligence databases.

“For example, the PROMIS system used by the AFP and the ACC is a case management system – good for investigators during an operation – but not good for sharing intelligence across an agency amongst intelligence officers or between agencies,” he said.

“Another poor ‘intelligence database’ which is coordinated by the ACC on behalf of all law enforcement agencies is the Australian Criminal Intelligence Database (ACID). Again this is not a user-friendly system and while the ACC regularly post its intelligence products on it ACID is not used extensively by all law enforcement agencies.

“This reduces national knowledge about certain criminal threats and degrades law enforcement’s ability to do effective strategic intelligence which can provide warning to government about the potential development of future organised crime threats. ACID needs replacing with a system that all law enforcement agencies will distribute national significant intelligence onto.”

The Police Federation of Australia believes the future of law enforcement is the free flow of criminal intelligence through modern intelligence-sharing technical capabilities.

“In an ideal world all law enforcement and other relevant agencies would be connected into a single criminal intelligence database,” the federation’s CEO, Mark Burgess said.

“The ACC has a legislative mandate to maintain such a database, but is hampered by a lack of modern technology, and an absence of mandatory requirements for agencies to contribute intelligence to that database.”

The federation has asked the parliamentary committee to recommend the development of technical capacity to facilitate the free flow of criminal intelligence between law enforcement agencies, and to put in place legislation that obliges agencies to share intelligence. It said the current system of ad hoc memorandums of understanding, individual agreements or requests for information create an incomplete intelligence picture.

“The free flow of intelligence would greatly assist police officers in the performance of their day to day duties,” Mr Burgess said.

“Police officers should be provided with direct real time access to intelligence holdings on operational grounds. Police officers and those they interact with are most at risk when an officer is forced to operate in a situation without proper intelligence regarding the circumstances of the situation. [Information sharing] needs to be ‘real time’ – e.g. within 48 hours.” •

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DIRECT ACTION: Stronger steps to fight pirates

CLOSING THE NET ON PIRATES

Australia will increase its efforts in the fight against piracy and armed robbery against ships under an international agreement reviewed by federal parliament’s Treaties Committee.

The Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) targets pirates by requiring member countries to take action to protect ships from piracy, arrest pirates and seize their ships and rescue victims held by pirates.

Member countries must also endeavour to extradite pirates or persons who have committed armed robbery against ships, at the request of another member with jurisdiction over them.

Piracy and armed robbery against ships remains a significant issue in the Asian region and high profile piracy incidents in Africa have drawn widespread concern.

While the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) said the risk of piracy within the Australian region is low, the threat towards Australian cargo transported via international shipping was as high as for any other international shipping country.

DFAT recommended to the committee that Australia join the agreement, saying it was in Australia’s interests to reduce piracy in the Asia region.

“For vessels transiting to and from Australian ports, piracy potentially impacts on ship routeing, cargo competitiveness, crew safety and maritime insurance premiums,” DFAT said.

“Each of these factors has the potential to contribute to increased