

QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 1061
Asked on 28 September 2004

MR O'BRIEN asked the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries (Mr Palaszczuk)—

QUESTION:

What is the rate of suspected illegal foreign fishing in northern Australian waters?

ANSWER:

Responsibility for the detection and processing of foreign fishing vessels (FFVs) rests with the Australian Government.

A range of agencies including Coast Watch and the Navy have the primary responsibility for detection and apprehension of FFVs.

Officers of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries however process FFVs apprehended in areas adjacent to Queensland on behalf of the Australian Fisheries Management Authority.

Data released by Federal Attorney-General Philip Ruddock showed that between 1 January 2003 to 31 March this year Federal Government agencies sighted 1588 vessels in Australian waters suspected of breaching our fisheries law.

Of the sightings, 253 vessels were identified as fishing illegally. Eighty-five of these vessels were boarded with their catch and equipment forfeited, but the vessel and crew were released. Of the other 168 apprehended vessels, 92 were released after the fishers paid bonds to the Federal Government.

During the election campaign, Federal Fisheries Minister Ian Macdonald announced more than 100 foreign-flagged vessels allegedly fishing illegally in Australian waters had been apprehended so far this year.

On the eve of the Federal election, Liberal Party advertising featuring Prime Minister John Howard promised that one of "the first 7 things we will do if re-elected" included putting "into service 14 new patrol boats dedicated to patrolling our northern waters, the first operational by 2005".

I will check to ensure this commitment and greater vigilance in terms of illegal foreign fishing are delivered by the Howard Government.