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‘CHILDREN OVERBOARD’ COMMITTEE STARTS ITS HEARINGS

The Select Committee looking into the children overboard affair and the Pacific solution begins public hearings in Canberra on Monday 25th and Tuesday 26th March.

Committee chair, Senator Peter Cook, says that this opening round of hearings should help the Committee to satisfy itself concerning many of the facts about the original ‘children overboard’ incident. “We are trying to be very strategic in our approach to the inquiry,” Senator Cook said. “In the first two days we are concentrating on Defence personnel. We may be calling additional Defence witnesses at a later stage. The Committee needs to be very clear about the events of the 6th-8th October. We will pursue what happened after that in terms of who knew what when, and how this was conveyed to the Australian public.”

“As the hearings progress we will be exploring the roles of key players in the whole affair, including the People Smuggling Task Force and those to whom the Task Force reported,” Senator Cook said. “We have a big job ahead of us examining the unfolding of the Pacific solution. The latest term of reference given to the Committee also requires us to look at the actions of the navy in ensuring the safety of asylum seekers entering Australian waters. We are determined to reach our reporting deadline of 16 May, but the Committee’s work will need to be expedited at every stage if this deadline is to be met.”

Witnesses appearing at the first round of hearings include Defence Secretary Dr Allan Hawke, Vice Admiral Shackleton, HMAS Adelaide’s Commander Norman Banks, Rear Admirals Ritchie and Smith, the Head of Strategic Command Air Vice Marshall Alan Titheridge and the Commander Northern Command Brigadier Silverstone.

The hearings, which are open to the public, will be held in Room 2S1 in Parliament House, commencing 9:30am on Monday morning, and are expected to run late into the night on that first day. All the public proceedings of the Committee will be broadcast.

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