

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION SERVICE

Question No. 75

Senator Barnett asked the following question at the hearing on 19 October 2009:

In relation to the recent spike in asylum seekers entering or attempting to enter Australian waters;

- a) what additional Australian Customs and Border Protection Service resources have been assigned to monitor/intercept people smuggling over the past six months? Please provide details,
- b) is the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service adequately resourced to investigate the increasing number of cases of illegal boats,
- c) what is the Customs' involvement in investigating the source of people smuggling in overseas countries, such as Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Indonesia, and
- d) please provide a status report on Customs' involvement in counteracting people smuggling and the resources committed to this objective.

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- a) The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (Customs and Border Protection) has the additional resources outlined in the recent Federal Budget.
- b) Customs and Border Protection is adequately resourced to respond to the current level of maritime people smuggling activity. The Australian Federal Police is the key agency with investigation responsibility.
- c) Customs and Border Protection is the coordinating agency both overseas and in Australia for operational matters with respect to maritime people smuggling, and contributes investigators to the People Smuggling Strike team led by the Australian Federal Police.
- d) In his National Security Statement of 4 December 2008 the Prime Minister outlined the renaming of the Australian Customs Service the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service.

The Prime Minister tasked the new agency with coordinating the efforts of all agencies to disrupt people smuggling ventures and focus activity on dismantling people smuggling syndicates both overseas and in Australia. As part of this new role, a multi-agency Intelligence Hub has been established in Customs and Border Protection to provide a central coordination point for the collection, analysis and dissemination of maritime people smuggling intelligence. Customs and Border Protection also continues to be the lead agency for maritime surveillance and response, through Border Protection Command.

Many of these new functions are being funded within existing resources; however, Customs and Border Protection received additional funding to address specific maritime people smuggling needs in the 2009-10 Federal Budget:

- o \$53.4 million over two years to extend the lease of the Australian Customs and Border Protection vessel *ACV Triton* to June 2011;

- o \$15 million over four years to establish new Customs and Border Protection posts in Colombo and Kuala Lumpur and deploy additional Customs officers to an existing post in Jakarta;
- o \$22 million over four years for the post interdiction management of suspected irregular entry vessels, including towing and disposal;
- o \$4 million over two years to develop a region-wide communications campaign to counter people smugglers' marketing of maritime people smuggling ventures as a safe, low-risk option;
- o \$16.9 million over two years to increase aerial surveillance in Australia's northern waters; and
- o \$6.3 million over two years to deploy the *Oceanic Viking* to Australia's northern waters for 80 days per year.