

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

Question No. 24

Senator Humphries asked the following question at the hearing on 16 October 2012:

Senator HUMPHRIES: I understand. Have any Customs vessels intercepted or assisted boats arriving from Sri Lanka outside our territorial waters? If so, how many?

Mr Pezzullo: We would not intercept vessels outside of the Australian contiguous zone. It is not practised and indeed it is not consistent with our international legal obligations to do so. We might have rendered assistance at the request of the master and, more often than not, under AMSA tasking, outside of the contiguous zone. I might see if the admiral has got any details on that.

Rear Adm. Johnston: I do not have the exact numbers but in the two circumstances as Mr Pezzullo described, vessels from Sri Lanka proceed both to Cocos (Keeling) Island and Christmas Island. We do intercept inside the contiguous zone in both locations but also in both locations we have rendered assistance outside of Australian waters acting in support of AMSA.

Senator HUMPHRIES: Could you take on notice how many times that has occurred both inside and outside contiguous waters?

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

In 2012 (to 31 October 2012) there have been 103 suspected irregular entry vessel (SIEV) arrivals carrying only Sri Lankan nationals onboard to Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. SIEVs have been boarded outside the Australian Contiguous Zone in both of these locations, in order to render assistance consistent with Safety of Life at Sea obligations.

2012 (to 31 October 2012) SIEV arrivals to Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands with only Sri Lankan nationals onboard

	Sri Lankan SIEVs apprehended inside the Australian Contiguous Zone	Sri Lankan SIEVs rendered assistance outside the Australian Contiguous Zone¹
Christmas Island	36	4
Cocos (Keeling) Islands	58	5

¹ SIEVs are boarded outside the Australian Contiguous Zone with the permission of the master in order to render assistance consistent with Safety of Life at Sea obligations.