

Opening Statement

479 Words / 3 min: 30 sec

Good evening, Senators, and thank you Chair for the opportunity to provide an opening statement.

Protection of Australia's maritime borders is critical to the sovereignty of our nation, our economic prosperity and the protection of our communities and environment. I would like to thank all personnel assigned to Maritime Border Command, Operation Sovereign Borders, and all supporting elements, for their efforts in enforcing ensuring the civil maritime security of Australia's maritime borders. These officers patrol our maritime domain, protect our northern approaches, sustain our vessels and inform our operations. They do so with dedication and resolve, protecting Australia's maritime domain and the Australian community from harm and potential threats. These threats include criminal people smugglers selling vulnerable migrants dangerous boat journeys, which are based on false promises of employment opportunities and settlement in Australia.

Challenging economic conditions, conflict, and natural disasters all drive people around the world to bypass border controls, for economic opportunities or to start a new life. Australia remains a target for criminal people smuggling networks, who exploit people in these vulnerable situations. They sell deceit and falsehoods, risking the lives of others while they line their own pockets.

Australia's policy is clear: those who attempt to come to Australia without a visa by boat will not settle in Australia. Operation Sovereign Borders continues to prevent permanent settlement in Australia by people seeking to come irregularly by boat.

People smugglers have adapted their methods. Their boats are smaller and faster. They are attempting to reach Australia in different ways and Operation Sovereign

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Borders continues to evolve to meet these changes. We continue to achieve success through more disruptions, direct returns and international cooperation.

Our international cooperation has resulted in 23 disruptions in 2025 – a 475% increase from 2024. The returns arrangements we secured in 2024 have resulted in the majority of irregular migrants being returned to their countries of citizenship, reducing the time required to resolve our operations.

While the operating environment continues to shift, I will always prioritise safety, operational security and adherence to our domestic and international legal obligations. The protection of sensitive operational information remains critical to our ongoing success. The discussion of operational matters, including the specifics of OSB operations plays into the hands of criminal people smugglers. I cannot allow the release of any information which people smugglers could use to trick vulnerable people into risking their lives at sea and the safety of all officers involved in Operation Sovereign Borders.

I would like to close by thanking all those who continue to protect our maritime domain. It is an enormous task, which cannot be achieved without their dedication and professionalism. Their commitment to duty and ongoing service to the mission is the reason we continue to achieve success.

I thank the Chair and Committee for your time and welcome any questions.

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