



**Australian
BORDER FORCE**

COMMISSIONER

OCOM 2017/108

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

I write regarding the Committee's inquiry into the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Territories. Please find below a short submission representing the views of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (the Department) on the Indian Ocean Territories regional security environment and contingencies, and the related impacts on local communities.

Overview

Australia's maritime environment makes up around 10 per cent of the earth's surface and our Exclusive Economic Zone is the third largest in the world. This makes the border one of Australia's key strategic assets and its integrity is reliant on effectively managing waters surrounding our territory.

The Indian Ocean Territories are a critical part of the Department's protection and enforcement activities. Through the Maritime Border Command, the Department has a unique role in protecting Australia's civil maritime domain and is the primary deterrence to the eight civil maritime security threats:

1. Illegal maritime arrivals
2. Illegal exploitation of natural resources
3. Illegal activity in protected areas
4. Marine pollution
5. Prohibited imports/exports
6. Compromise to bio-security
7. Piracy, robbery or violence at sea
8. Maritime terrorism

Maritime Border Command is also a first responder to civil maritime security incidents.

The Department uses an intelligence-led, risk-based intervention approach to prioritise operations to counter these civil maritime security threats.

The changing regional security environment and security contingencies

Christmas Island and Cocos (Keeling) Islands have been consistently targeted by organised people smugglers and as landing points for the import and export of prohibited goods and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The Department assesses that

because of their proximity to trafficking and smuggling corridors the Indian Ocean Territories will continue to be a target for illegal maritime ventures.

The Indian Ocean Territories are strategically important for the Department and other Commonwealth agencies to support and stage operations responding to the eight civil maritime security threats. In addition to ground based radar, the Department deploys both aerial and marine surveillance and enforcement capabilities from Christmas and Cocos (Keeling) Islands, as well as from Perth, Darwin and other parts of the west and north-west Australian coast.

The Department operates the Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre and has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in place with the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development to use Quarantine Station on Cocos (Keeling) Islands as temporary accommodation for illegal maritime arrivals until they can be transferred to Christmas Island for processing. These facilities are critical to maintaining the integrity of Australia's migration framework and ensuring our international obligations are met.

The Department assesses there is an enduring and credible threat to Australia from organised illegal maritime ventures, particularly through the Indian Ocean Territories. The Department continues to plan with Commonwealth partners, particularly the Department of Defence, to mitigate these threats into the future and ensure Australian Border Force (ABF) operations retain priority access to relevant facilities, infrastructure, services and support capabilities for these locations.

Impacts on local communities

The local communities of the Indian Ocean Territories are critical to the Department's operations and ongoing support of these communities is important. On Christmas Island, the Department has an MOU with the Australian Federal Police to provide policing services, an emergency response capability and a major incident response capability for incidents at the detention facility. This arrangement ensures the safety of staff, detainees and the local community.

The Department has invested in the critical infrastructure of Indian Ocean Territories for its operations, which also provide increased benefits for local communities. The Department has contributed to improvements to local roads and airports and access to reliable internet and other communication services which have delivered increased services to Indian Ocean Territories communities.

The Department-led increase in commercial flight traffic to and from the Indian Ocean Territories has also boosted tourism and local hospitality sectors in these locations. Likewise, the Department's operations provide a source of employment for local communities – the Department seeks to utilise local labourers, tradesmen and businesses to support ABF operations where possible.

I look forward to the findings of the inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Roman Quaedvlieg APM
Commissioner

19 January 2017