



Australian Government
**Australian Customs and
Border Protection Service**

Customs House
5 Constitution Ave
Canberra, 2601

21 June 2011

Mr T Watling
Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on the Christmas Island Tragedy
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Watling

In my opening statement at the 27 May 2011 hearing of the Joint Select Committee on the Christmas Island Tragedy, I provided an update regarding the status of the eight recommendations from the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (Customs and Border Protection) SIEV 221 Internal Report.

Five of the eight recommendations were implemented at the time we lodged our submission. As advised on 27 May 2011, seven of the eight recommendations are now implemented and further progress has been made on the one outstanding recommendation.

Recommendation 4 was completed by conducting a multi-agency desk top exercise on Christmas Island on 19 May 2011 to test instructions and guidelines. Recommendation 7 was completed with the finalisation of a gap analysis of the communications equipment available to our officers on Christmas Island. Work on recommendation 2, which relates to the on-land radar trial, remains underway. On the basis of trial results to date, we are planning to extend the radar trial beyond 30 June 2011.

Attached is a more detailed summary of the activity undertaken by Customs and Border Protection in relation to these particular recommendations.

Please let me know if the Committee requires any further information from Customs and Border Protection to assist with its inquiry.

Yours Sincerely

MARION GRANT
Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Border Enforcement

SIEV 221 Internal Review – Update for Recommendations 2, 4 and 7

Recommendation 2 – *That the trial of a land based radar surveillance system of the northern maritime approaches to Christmas Island be completed and considered as a priority.*

Status of Recommendation: Ongoing

Action:

As part of the ongoing trial, a dedicated Evaluation Test period was conducted from 20 May to 30 May 2011. The purpose of this Evaluation Test period was to examine the detection and tracking capabilities of the two commercial radar systems installed by Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) against targets simulating the Radar Cross Section (RCS) presented by wooden fishing boats used as irregular entry vessels (3m² to 10m²).

While the report from this test period will not be available until 30 June 2011, early analysis indicates the results achieved during the test period are consistent with the data gathered during the broader trial. Specifically, both radars could detect the target out to ranges of at least 10 nautical miles in conditions up to sea state 4, without significant rain, with some degree of reliability. The S-band radar achieved a maximum detection range of 14 nm and consistently outperformed the X-band radar. In the rain conditions experienced, the S-band radar proved superior in relation to range and reliability of detection compared to the X-band radar.

While these results appear promising, it should be noted that the radar equipment currently in use is not an operational system due to the developmental nature of the software and the reporting interface. It should also be noted that the DSTO Interim Trial Report indicated a coherent radar system may be better suited to the maritime surveillance task.

In order to determine the suitability of a radar system for detecting SIEVs and other vessels in the full range of conditions experienced at Christmas Island a further phase of trialling will be conducted from 1 July 2011. This will be undertaken by Customs and Border Protection in conjunction with DSTO. It will test performance in the monsoon season and explore use of a coherent S-Band radar which may provide better performance than the radar components used to date. Agreement to use the current site until 30 June 2012 was given by the Christmas Island Shire Council on 7 June 2011.

Recommendation 4 – *That, in collaboration with relevant agencies, specific procedures be developed, documented and exercised for dealing with SIEVs arriving directly at Christmas Island in severe weather conditions.*

Status of Recommendation: Implemented

Action:

Customs and Border Protection conducted a multi-agency exercise on Christmas Island on 19 May 2011 to assess and validate documented procedures. The desktop exercise contained a scenario in four parts that focused on SIEV arrivals directly to Christmas Island. No issues relating to further requirements for procedural changes were identified. Some suggestions for minor changes in wording were made and incorporated into the Customs and Border Protection Instruction and Guideline. These changes were approved and the updated Instruction and Guideline was published on 26 May 2011.

Recommendation 7 – *That communication protocols and procedures between Customs and Border Protection at Christmas Island and BPC response vessels should be reviewed.*

Status of Recommendation: Implemented

Action:

An audit of the technical capabilities and limitations of communications equipment currently held on Christmas Island was undertaken. This was followed by a gap analysis which recommended the procurement of dual UHF/VHF hand held radios as an improvement for officers (by negating the need to carry two radios). It was also identified that the installation of repeater infrastructure on Christmas Island would further improve radio coverage. The procurement of the dual UHF/VHF hand held radios and repeater equipment is being progressed.