

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice
Additional Estimates Hearings February 2014
Communications Portfolio
Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Question No: 218

Program No. Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

Hansard Ref: Page 112/113 (25/2/2014)

Topic: ABC logging of boat arrivals

Senator Seselja asked:

I am interested in who made the decision that the ABC should start logging boat arrivals and other asylum seeker incidents? I understand it is on the website; a log or—

Mr Scott: I will have to check on that. I do not know who—

Senator Seselja: Do you know what the rationale was? It was set up after the federal election in September, I understand.

Mr Scott: I am not aware of that.

Senator Seselja: We had something like 50,000 people arriving under the former government. Boat arrivals were not logged then, but under a change of government we now do see them logged at time when fewer and fewer are coming.

Senator Pratt: There was public disclosure of boat arrivals, unlike under your government. Someone had to try to keep a list.

Senator Seselja: But they are. These are based on departmental figures, I assume.

Mr Scott: Let me come back to you on notice.

Senator Seselja: It does seem odd for a national broadcaster. Obviously the issues around unlawful boat arrivals are fairly contentious and so is the fact that after an election, when there is a change in government, that policy changes. You are not aware as to—

Mr Scott: I am not aware of that. I do not think it is contentious to say that the government was elected on a very clear policy of stopping the boats. That was the clear statement of intention. The minister makes much of the fact of how many days have gone by since boats have arrived, so I can see that it is very central to what the government said it would do and that to put a spotlight on that is not an unreasonable thing. As to the detail of the background of that, I am not so sure.

Senator Seselja: The same could be said of the former government. When Kevin Rudd came in he said that he was going to take a tough line on asylum seekers. Is that the test?

Mr Scott: I do not know, Senator. As I said, let me get back to you.

Senator Seselja: Maybe when you are getting back to us, do you know how many staff are dedicated to collating the figures and updating the boat count link?

Mr Scott: Not too many I would not have thought. I am not sure that it is an onerous task.

Senator Seselja: Can you confirm that the site was last updated on 28 January 2014?

Mr Scott: I can come back to you on.

Senator Seselja: Okay. I understand there is no reference at all to the fact that there have not been any arrivals for over 60 days. Are you aware of that?

Mr Scott: I am not sure I am quite aware of the site, Senator. If no boats has arrived and it is logging the arrival of boats then it does not surprise me that it has not been updated.

Senator Seselja: It is on the *ABC News* site.

Mr Scott: It is a very big news site, Senator. I will track it down.

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Answer:

ABC News considers the Government's border protection policy as a policy of significant interest to the Australian public. ABC News created the Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) boat log in October 2013 as a means of recording boat arrivals and assisting readers to assess the Government's success at meeting its policy commitment to stop the asylum seeker boat arrivals.

The boat arrival figures have not been updated for several months because to the best of the ABC's knowledge, the arrival figures have not changed.

There is no reference on the site to the "fact that there have not been any arrivals for over 60 days" because the page is a log of *arrivals*, not non-arrivals. This has been made clear in the text above the table on the News site.

There are no ABC staff "dedicated" to maintaining the information on the website. ABC News staff will contribute data as it becomes available. The log of arrivals under Operation Sovereign Borders is here: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-10-25/log-of-boat-arrivals-and-other-asylum-seeker-incidents/5014496>