

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES – 26 – 27 MAY 2014

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(BE14/386) PROGRAMME – Operation Sovereign Borders

Senator Conroy (Written) asked:

At estimates in November, General Campbell provided the committee with a list of reasons that he established protocols for the release of information to the public and the Senate:

“Specifically, I am seeking to avoid a circumstance in which the following occurs:

- 1) We give advantage to people smugglers;
- 2) Provide people smugglers with material that may be used to manipulate or confuse their prospective customers;
- 3) We undermine regional relationships necessary to deal with this complex regional problem; or
- 4) We endanger our people.”

Is this still a complete list of the reasons that you rely upon to decide whether or not information to be released to public? If not, please provide a complete list.

In relation to some of the questions on notice that were not answered, which of these published reasons is being relied upon in the following cases:

- a. Question on Notice #354 where I asked if any of the asylum seekers intercepted as part of OSB has made a claim for asylum.
- b. Question on Notice #328 where I asked about what the definition of “OSB patrols” and “OSB tactical missions” is and what the difference between them is.
- c. Question on Notice #342 where I asked what flag that the orange lifeboats are flying.
- d. Question on Notice #343 where I asked whether or not the orange lifeboats carried identification information noting the vessel from which they were launched.

Answer:

Operation Sovereign Borders’ approach to public information is designed to preserve the integrity of OSB operations and, in that respect, are consistent with what would be expected in any complex operation, particularly one that involves diplomatic, law enforcement and security aspects.

The circumstances mentioned above, were not offered as a complete list; they are indicative and demonstrate key types of concerns over the release of some types of information. Please refer to the OSB media transcript of 15 November 2013 which provides further detail on the reasons for the public information protocol.

Unrestricted answers to the QoNs referred to above would impact the integrity of OSB on-water operations and have the potential to see some or all of the circumstances listed above emerge.

As OSB has progressed, information has been reviewed in an ongoing manner. This has seen the release of a substantial amount of information to the Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, and the public, regarding the arrival of illegal maritime people smuggling ventures and search and rescue incidents during OSB.