

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING : 19 October 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(SE15/015) - Senator Peris's refused request visit the facility - Programme 1.1: Border Enforcement

Senator Carr, Kim (L&CA 56) asked:

Senator KIM CARR: I am told that Serco agreed to the visit but that the department refused Senator Peris's request to visit the facility.

Mr Pezzullo: I might ask the commissioner who oversees detention operations to explain the approvals process, without in any way asking the commissioner to comment on something that he has no direct knowledge of. The centres, certainly from 1 July of this year, are not run by Serco. Serco provides support services. They are run by the commissioner. There are protocols in place to support the visit of VIPs. A senator would certainly qualify as a VIP. I might ask the commissioner to speak either directly or through one of his officers to the approval process. If in the course of that evidence other colleagues are able to ascertain the facts of what may or may not have happened on 9 October, then all to the good.

Mr Quaedvlieg: Briefly, let me confirm I have no knowledge of an application by the senator in relation to a visit to Christmas Island. The secretary is correct: as of 1 July the ultimate accountability for the operation of the centres sits with the Australian Border Force. There is a process in place for visitations. Requests can be submitted through the Serco process by either detainees or visitors who wish to meet the detainees. Those applications are assessed. A number of factors come into play in relation to why they should or should not be allowed. One of those factors is the profile of the visitor. Visitors with a higher profile bring a greater security risk in terms of managing that person through a centre. We need to ensure that they do not create a public disorder event or that they are not vulnerable to some sort of assault themselves. It does require a higher level of assessment in relation to high-profile visitors. I have no information on the specific matter that you mentioned. I will take it on notice—

Senator KIM CARR: First of all, could you confirm that an application was made, because that may well explain it. You are saying that there was no application.

Mr Outram: I did not say that. I am not aware of an application.

Senator KIM CARR: That is right. I understand that. But it is strange that a senator from the Northern Territory who sought to visit the facility is not known to you. If there was an application, could you indicate to us the reason for the rejection of that application.

CHAIR: Senator Carr, I think everyone at the table said they know nothing about it and they will make inquiries and get back to you.

Answer:

On 7 October 2015, the Department received advice from Senator Peris' Chief of Staff advising that the Senator was currently visiting Christmas Island and would like to visit the Immigration Detention Facility on 9 October 2015.

The application was refused for a number of reasons:

1. the protocol requires a member or senator to give 7 days' notice of a visit to an immigration detention facility
2. To support such a visit requires a risk assessment which could not be undertaken in the available time.
3. There was a high degree of operational activity at the time of the requested visit to the Immigration Detention Facility on 9 October 2015.

On 9 October 2015 the Australia Border Force informed Senator Peris of the decision not to grant permission to visit the Immigration Detention Facility on this occasion, as there was insufficient time to allow for appropriate arrangements to be made.

Guidance has been provided as per the above link to Senator Peris' Office to support future visits to Immigration Detention Facilities.