

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee

Answers to written questions on notice
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE

Additional estimates 2001—2002; 20–21 February 2002

Operation Relex
QUESTION W19

To date, how many Suspected Illegal Entry Vessels have been intercepted during Operation Relex? Provide a list showing when each SIEV was intercepted.

Of those intercepted, how many SIEVs have been sent back to sea and did not subsequently return?

RESPONSE

During Operation Relex, 12 Suspected Illegal Entry Vehicles (SEIVs) have been intercepted by the ADF. 1922 persons were on board these vessels and were treated as unauthorised arrivals. Of those intercepted, four SIEVs (with 626 persons on board these vessels) were returned to the vicinity of Roti Island, Indonesia, and did not subsequently return. The table below lists details.

SIEV No.	DATE	LOCATION	Number of Persons on Board	Comments
01	7 September 2001	Ashmore Reef	227	
02	10 September 2001	Ashmore Reef	135	
03	12 September 2001	Ashmore Reef	134	
04	6 October 2001	Christmas Island	223	
05	12 October 2001	Ashmore Reef	242	Sent back. Escorted to Indonesian waters by HMAS <i>Warramunga</i> to vicinity of Pepela on 19 October 2001.
06	18 October 2001	Christmas Island	227	
07	22 October 2001	Ashmore Reef	233	Sent back. Escorted to Indonesian waters by HMAS <i>Arunta</i> on 28 October 2001.
08	27 October 2001	Arafura Sea	31	
09	31 October 2001	Ashmore Reef	155	
10	8 November 2001	Ashmore Reef	164	
11	11 December 2001	Ashmore Reef	14	Sent back. Intercepted by HMAS <i>Leeuwin</i> and HMAS <i>Wollongong</i> . Vessel escorted by HMAS <i>Leeuwin</i> and released heading for Roti Island on 13 December 2001.
12	17 December 2001	Ashmore Reef	137	Sent back. Vessel repaired and escorted by HMAS <i>Leeuwin</i> and released on 20 December 2001 in the vicinity of Roti Island.

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Refitting of Hydrographic Survey Ships for Patrol Duties

QUESTION W20

- a) Are HMAS *Leeuwin* and *Melville* currently assigned to a patrolling role? Is this carried out in conjunction with their survey role?
 - Who made the decision to assign a patrol role to these two ships? Why was this decision taken?
- b) Is the current fleet of patrol boats insufficient to carry out the level of patrolling required?
- c) What was the cost of refitting the two ships for this role?
- d) What impact has this decision had on the Navy's oceanographic survey program?
- e) Are there any additional ongoing costs associated with the re-assignment of these two ships?

RESPONSE

- a) Yes. HMA Ships *Leeuwin* and *Melville* are assigned to a patrolling role on a rotational basis. The ships spend approximately six to seven weeks in the patrol area and, in total, eight to nine weeks away from their home port in Cairns.

Each ship, when relieved, returns to Cairns, conducts a two-week maintenance period, prepares and works up for Operation Relex and returns to Darwin for handover from the other hydrographic ship. To date, except for a very small amount of opportunistic survey work, the hydrographic ships have conducted no dedicated hydrographic surveys while assigned to Operation Relex. The nature and location of the tasking has not allowed patrolling and surveys to be carried out concurrently.

The decision to employ these units, in a patrolling capacity, was made by the Maritime Commander Australia in order to develop an enhanced level of capability for survey units to conduct border protection duties. Survey units often operate in remote areas which are potential targets for people smugglers. Participation in Operation Relex will assist in developing a higher level of capability for the Hydrographic branch of the Navy.

- b) The current fleet of patrol boats was sufficient to conduct interception/escort/assist duties prior to the change of Government policy on border protection in August 2001. This change required boarding of the Suspected Illegal Entry Vessels (SEIVs). The change in the concept of operation meant that the small crews of the patrol boats were not able to safely conduct boardings of SIEVs required under the current policy.
- c) The current total cost of refitting the *Leeuwin* class hydrographic ships for the higher level of capability is \$695,000.
- d) At this stage, the ships will not have undertaken four planned surveys, but the full-year impact is uncertain at this time. Actual performance will be reported in the 2001-02 annual report.
- e) Yes. Additional ongoing costs being incurred are related to the additional personnel embarked and there may be additional maintenance costs.

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Training of SASR

QUESTION W21

- a) What training exercises did the SASR conduct in 2001?
- b) Did the SASR train for the boarding of ships? If so, was this in any way outside the normal training that has been conducted in previous years?

RESPONSE

- a) During 2001, the Special Air Service Regiment conducted 14 exercises at unit and sub-unit level. The exercises were:
 - two exercises providing Special Operations support to major ADF-sponsored exercises;
 - one Special Operations war roles offshore exercise;
 - one Special Operations joint capability maintenance exercise;
 - seven counter-terrorist maintenance training exercises;
 - one overseas counter-terrorist exercise; and
 - two Special Operations Command Pacific-sponsored counter-terrorist exercises within Australia.
- b) Yes. This training was not outside annual training schedules.

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QUESTION W22

Is this Battalion known within the ADF as 'Howard's own'?

Is the ADO aware of reporting last year that this is how the Battalion is known?

Is the ADF aware of the source of this claim?

RESPONSE

No official or unit assumption of the title 'Howard's Own' exists. Some colloquial assumption, by media and members of the Battalion, has occurred as a result of the Prime Minister visiting the unit prior to its deployment to East Timor.

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Issues raised in the Additional Estimates Statements - Air Force

QUESTION W23

- a) In terms of the Air Force's contribution to the war on terrorism, what is the current deployment and what is their role?
- b) In terms of the concerns raised about ageing equipment, can the Air Force provide more details on the additional costs associated with maintaining ageing aircraft?
- c) Given the stated aim of keeping the F-111s flying to 2015–2020 (current official position on life of F-111s), what implications does this have in terms of maintaining the F-111s flying for another 13 to 18 years?
 - What is the predicted costs of keeping them flying to 2015 and 2020?
 - Is the stated aim of keeping the F-111s flying to 2015–2020 still considered realistic?
- d) What is meant by the statement that “there is considerable pressure on logistic support for the F/A-18 and F-111” on page 35 of the *Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements 2001–02*?

RESPONSE

- a) A detachment of four F/A-18 aircraft, with some 68 air and ground personnel, have been deployed to Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean to assist in providing air defence of coalition forces. A detachment of two B707 tanker aircraft and approximately 80 personnel for air-to-air refuelling of coalition aircraft has been deployed. C-130 aircraft provide air transport support to Australian forces on an as required basis and this includes occasional flights into Afghanistan.
- b) Ageing aircraft require increased technical and airworthiness inspections, greater fatigue and corrosion management, and increased spares and repair requirements. The increased costs for ageing aircraft are not linear, but compound with age. Depending on the aircraft type, the ageing aircraft cost factor is estimated to range from three to seven per cent compounding annually.
- c) The life of type for the F-111 is currently under review by the Air Force following the unexpected failure in February 2002 of a wing during fatigue testing by the Defence Science and Technology Organisation. Detailed analysis of the wing failure mode and cause is being conducted to determine the potential effect on aircraft operating life.
- d) A number of factors are creating pressure on logistics support for the F/A-18 and F-111 including the constraints of the logistics support budget and the growth in costs due to ageing aircraft factors.

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F-111s

QUESTION W24

- a) Can the Air Force confirm that there are 45 F-111s of the various types and that two of those are being used to provide parts for the other aircraft?
 - Confirm how many of the remaining 43 are currently airworthy.
- b) How many F-111s would not have flown at all in the last month? How many would not have flown in the last three months?
- c) Over 2001, can the Air Force indicate the average time spent under repair for F-111s and the average flying time?
- d) What restrictions, if any, are currently placed on the operation of F-111s, eg. limits on flying time?
- e) In terms of the announcement on 20 February concerning the grounding of F-111s, what were the mechanical problems that lead to the grounding?
 - Have these problems been resolved?

RESPONSE

- a) There are 35 F-111s of which two have been broken down for spares.
- b) Of the 35 F-111s, seven are not maintained in flying condition. From the remaining 28, 19 would not have flown during February 2002, while 13 would not have flown during the period November 2001—February 2002 inclusive.
- c) While the average time spent in maintenance compared to the average flight hours is not a metric recorded by the Air Force, it is estimated that each flying hour requires 30 maintenance hours. Flying hours in 2000-01 for the F-111s was 2,757 hours.
- d) There are no operational restrictions. Restrictions have been placed on the number of fatigue hours that can be accumulated by each airframe.
- e) The problem was associated with fatigue cracking in a number of fastener holes in an F-111 wing fatigue test article, which was under test at the Defence Science and Technology Organisation. This problem is still under review.

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Curtin Detention Centre

QUESTION W25

- a) What is the status of Curtin Detention Centre within the RAAF base at Curtin WA?
 - Is this a ‘temporary’ facility?
 - When the current Centre was established in 1999 was it the intention that the Centre would be a temporary facility?
- b) Did the RAAF have any concerns about locating the Detention Centre within the base?
 - If so what were those concerns?
 - Did these concerns contribute to the decision to designate this Centre a ‘temporary’ facility?
- c) Does the RAAF continue to have concerns about the operation of the Centre within the air base? If so what are they?

RESPONSE

- a) Defence has been advised by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs that the Curtin Immigration Reception and Processing Centre is a contingency detention facility. Contingency facilities are ones which are activated when operationally required.

Defence has been further advised that the Curtin Immigration Reception and Processing Centre was established in March 1995 and decommissioned in December 1995. It was recommissioned as a matter of urgency, in September 1999, in response to a significant increase in the number of unauthorised arrivals which would have exceeded the Port Hedland Immigration Reception and Processing Centre capacity. The Immigration Reception and Processing Centre capacity at Curtin was initially around 400 and was expanded to around 1200.

- b) and c) Yes. The Air Force and Defence expressed concern in 1995 that the presence of the detention centre limited the nature and scale of operations that could be supported by the base. This was the main reason that Defence agreed only to the designation of the facility as a contingency facility.

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Air 87—Eurocopter Project

QUESTION W26

- a) When was the decision taken not to short list tenders for this project?
 - Was the former Defence Minister involved in making this decision?
- b) In the last five years how many times has Defence let only one tenderer enter the detailed evaluation phase of the tender process for a major capital equipment purchase, as occurred with this project?
- c) In terms of the tenders submitted in the initial phase, was the tender from Eurocopter the most detailed tender submitted, in terms of content and length? What was the page length of all submissions in the initial phase?
- d) Why weren't other tenders given an opportunity to provide additional information before announcing that Eurocopter would be the only bidder going into the second phase?
- e) In response to a question on notice in the Senate (No. 3909) it was noted that Eurocopter had submitted a 'stand-out tender which offered better value for money than the other three'. Can Defence indicate the approximate value of the other bids, when compared to the Eurocopter bid.

RESPONSE

- a) There was no decision taken not to shortlist tenders for the Air 87 project. The tender evaluation plan stated that "Tenders that are identified as being uncompetitive at any stage during detailed evaluation may be excluded from the evaluation". The Commonwealth carried out a detailed evaluation of all compliant tenders in order to ascertain which offer provided best value for money over the life of the armed reconnaissance helicopters.
- b) Defence does not record statistics on the number of tenderers admitted to various stages of a tender evaluation process.
- c) During the evaluation process, only one tenderer was excluded from presenting an offer on the basis that it was incapable of being compared to its peers through a lack of completeness. The volume of the tender does not reflect the quality of the issues addressed in the tender. The size of the respective tenders were:
 - Eurocopter 62 Volumes, totalling 12,246 pages,
 - Bell 77 Volumes, totalling 18,442 pages,
 - Boeing 50 Volumes, totalling 6,743 pages, and
 - Agusta 10 Volumes, totalling 1,644 pages.
- d) Tender decisions were based on the offer as tendered. Where it was found that the information provided in a tender did not permit a complete evaluation, was unclear or contradictory statements were found elsewhere in a tender, a clarification question was submitted in writing to the tenderer to improve the level of understanding of the tender. The use of the clarification process was not limited to a single tenderer, but was used to clarify issues in all three complete tenders. Clarifying questions were not used to allow revision of the tenderer's original submission.

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It is contrary to Commonwealth probity requirements to allow responses to clarifying questions that changed, or were interpreted as changing, the tenderer's original response.

- e) Defence does not provide details in relation to tendered bids.

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Refurbishment of Victoria Barracks—Melbourne

QUESTION W27

Has any refurbishment work been carried out in Victoria Barracks over the last 12 months (including work still in progress)? Including any internal work on partitioning or office relocation.

- If so, what is the nature of that work?
- What is the cost of that work to date?

RESPONSE

Yes. One significant refurbishment project is in progress and various minor works have been completed recently.

Currently, works are being undertaken in seven buildings at Victoria Barracks in support of the relocation of Defence Materiel Organisation staff. These range from minor reorganisation of workstations to provide better functionality through to complete refurbishment of some floors with the installation of new partitioning and workstations.

In addition to works within the existing buildings, temporary accommodation was provided to allow personnel to continue functioning while works were carried out.

The guiding principle for the works has been to apply the Russell Office accommodation redevelopment standards where possible to Victoria Barracks (subject to the constraints imposed on heritage buildings).

The cost of this work to date is \$2.2 million.

Various minor works associated with the general improvement and upgrading of existing facilities and services in Victoria Barracks have been undertaken during the past twelve months. These works comprised air-conditioning upgrades, fire and electrical systems upgrades, accommodation renovation, general repairs and building maintenance and computer upgrades.

The cost of these works was approximately \$1.8 million.

Included in these works was the provision of office accommodation for the Minister for Defence and his staff. The office space is also available for visiting senior Defence officials. The cost of the office fit out was \$6,500, plus IT requirements.

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Evaluation of New Weapon Technology

QUESTION W28

- a) Is the Minister aware of representations made to the previous Minister for Defence regarding SVP Industries and their High Velocity Liquid Carbon Dioxide (HVL–CO) technology. Since the 24th of September 2001, has the Minister received any further advice on this technology from DSTO, as that organisation is maintaining a “watching brief” on HVL–CO.
- b) Does the Government have any intention to support and/or adopt this technology?
 - If not, what developments would SVP Industries need to achieve in order to be eligible for funding?

RESPONSE

- a) The Minister is aware that Mr Reith wrote to the then Shadow Minister for Defence on 24 September 2001 regarding Defence’s involvement with SVP Industries concerning the company’s HVL–CO technology. The Defence Science and Technology Organisation maintains regular contact with SVP Industries.
- b) Funding for the defence application can be pursued by applying to the Defence Capability and Technology Demonstrator Program in its next round of considerations. Applications for the program will be advertised around mid–May 2002.

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Trial of Dapsone in 1968

QUESTION W29

- a) Is the Minister aware of a medical trial of a drug called Dapsone, conducted on Australian soldiers in Vietnam in 1968, called 'AFV Trial No. 9/68'?
- b) Were the servicemen who took part in the trial informed that they were part of a medical trial? Were they told of all the aims, methods, anticipated benefits and potential hazards of the study?
- c) Did the servicemen provide consent in writing to the trial? If not, why not?
- d) What ongoing care was given to those who participated in the trial, both during and after the trial?
 - Have there been subsequent health assessments of those involved in the trial?
 - Is there any evidence of servicemen suffering long lasting adverse health effects from this trial?
- e) What was the stated purpose and outcome of AFV Trials 1–8/68?

RESPONSE

- a) Yes.
- b) Yes, Service personnel were aware that they were part of a trial. There is no evidence to indicate whether the servicemen involved were fully informed about the study.
- c) There is no evidence to indicate whether consent in writing was obtained. The National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines on medical research, which required written consent, were not issued until 1982.
- d) All Service personnel are provided with a full range of health care throughout their full-time military service and undergo regular medical examinations, up to and including their final medical board on separation from the permanent component. A report commissioned by the Department of Veterans' Affairs in 1990 found no evidence of long-lasting adverse health effects from Dapsone.
- e) To date, there is no information on AFV Trial 1–8/68. A search for information is continuing in the Australian War Memorial, the repository for Vietnam War material. The committee will be informed if the search is successful.