



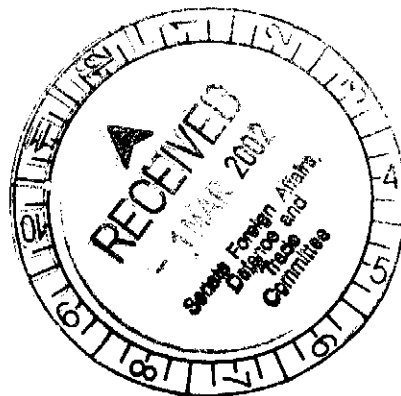
AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE HEADQUARTERS
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE
CANBERRA, A.C.T., 2600

CHIEF OF
THE DEFENCE FORCE

27 February 2002

CDF 117/2002

Mr Brenton Holmes
Secretary
Senate Legislation Committee on Foreign Affairs,
Defence and Trade
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Mr Holmes

I write in relation to the evidence I gave at the Senate Legislation Committee additional estimates hearings on 20 and 21 February 2002 concerning the question of whether children were thrown from the vessel known as SIEV 04.

At the time I gave evidence before the Committee, I was not persuaded that there was compelling evidence that the initial report of the Commanding Officer of HMAS Adelaide was wrong.

Subsequent to my evidence before the Committee, I have received information which now leads me to conclude that there is no evidence to support the claim that children were thrown overboard from SIEV 04 on 7 October 2001.

I attach, for the Committee's information, a media statement which I released this morning on this matter. I will forward to the Committee a transcript of the associated media conference when it becomes available.

Yours sincerely

C.A. BARRIE
Admiral, RAN
Chief of the Defence Force

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CHIEF OF
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Wednesday, 27 February 2002

MEDIA STATEMENT – ADMIRAL BARRIE

I have today announced a top level CDF/Secretary taskforce to examine communication problems which arose during the SIEV 4 incident in October 2001 and advise on actions required to address these problems.

It is clear from the findings of both the Powell and Bryant reports and from evidence presented to various Senate Estimates Committees that considerable confusion surrounded the communication of details of the events related to SIEV 4.

Following a review of the material relevant to this incident and after speaking at considerable length on Sunday with Commander Banks, the Commander of the HMAS ADELAIDE, I have now reached the conclusion that there is no evidence to support the claim that children were thrown overboard.

This is not consistent, however, with the original message which reached both myself and Ministers. It is of particular concern that Ministers have received and acted upon inaccurate information.

It is imperative that the lines of communication are reviewed and tightened to ensure that such situations do not arise again in the future. This will be the taskforce's top priority.

The taskforce will also need to view these issues in relation to the need for Defence to effectively interact with other Government agencies through inter-departmental committees, as was the case with SIEV 4.

I acknowledge and support the view of the Minister for Defence, Senator Hill, that it is important for Defence to learn from this experience and to move forward. This taskforce will be a significant first step in that process.

The taskforce, however, now gives the ADF the opportunity to ensure that there are better communications within Defence, between Defence and other departments, and between Defence and the Minister's office.

The taskforce will be headed by Rear Admiral Gates who has had a distinguished career in the ADF and is a former Commander of the HMAS ADELAIDE.

I am appreciative of the support of the Secretary and the Chiefs in moving this process forward. The taskforce will commence work immediately.

I would also like to commend Commander Banks and his crew for their efforts during the SIEV 4 incident and for their subsequent work as part of Australia's contribution to the war against terrorism.