

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 25 February 2014

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(AE14-30) Australian Customs and Border Protection Service

Senator Xenophon (L&CA 38) asked:

Senator XENOPHON: Now for something completely difference. According to a recent United Nations report, I understand Afghanistan's opium output is up nearly 50 per cent in the last year. Late last year, Ohio Attorney-General Mike DeWine warned that 'a heroin epidemic' had seized his state, and Russia's director of the federal narcotics service warned that heroin is a 'dragon' that is 'ravaging our youth,' and there is fear that, when allied forces leave Afghanistan or withdraw substantially from Afghanistan, it will become a 'failed narco-state' with an increase in the influence of the Taliban who obtain enormous revenue from heroin production. In terms of risk assessment, is that something that is on the radar of Customs, given that the UN is saying that there has been a massive increase in opium production in Afghanistan?

What implications does that have for your service—and I am happy for you to answer it in part and then on notice—and do you think it will pose a challenge to the resources of Customs given what we have seen in other countries? [...]

Senator XENOPHON: Is it something that would be a challenge to your resources? The Ohio state Attorney-General is saying that this has become a major issue in his home state. Heroin use rates have skyrocketed in his home state. Is that something that you are concerned about in Australia? [...]

Senator XENOPHON: If it is appropriate, you could answer some of that on notice, given that this issue of the Taliban's resurgence in Afghanistan and the increase in opium production

Answer:

Responses to Senator Xenophon's questions regarding the impacts of Afghanistan opium production were answered by the Chief Executive Officer, Mr Michael Pezzullo, and Deputy Chief Executive Officer Border Enforcement, Mr Roman Quaedvlieg, during the Additional Budget Estimates Hearing on 25 February 2014. These responses can be found in the Hansard on pages 38-39 and are as follows.

Mr Pezzullo: The short answer is: yes, it is on the radar. [...] We are looking at the trends in Afghanistan, through dialogue with not only the UN Office of Drugs and Crime but also our other partners—regional partners and bilateral partners. It is of interest to our partners in the Asia Pacific and of interest to our colleagues in the drug enforcement administration and our colleagues here in the Australian Federal Police. [...] We are all looking at the same issue. [...]

Mr Pezzullo: I might ask the deputy for border enforcement to add to my answer but terms of challenges, there are lots of challenges on resources. I would not want to particularise

one. Volumes are a challenge to resources. [...] The more containers that are coming through the more you have to screen, using your resources. Criminal gangs in Latin America are forming alliances, allegiances and associations with Chinese and other criminal groups in East Asia and penetrating our borders that way. That is a concern. The Russian groups and other Eurasian groups looking to source from Afghanistan going forward—whether or not in some kind of evil pact with the Taliban, were they to reassert themselves—would be a pressure on resources. [...]

Mr Quaadvlieg: As part of our annual global scanning of threats to the border one of the issues we look at is opium production globally. It is not just in south-west Asia; it also occurs in South-East Asia. We have recently, on the back of the UNODC report, undertaken a strategic assessment in relation to the potential risk to the Australian border. We do not assess that there is a correlation necessarily in the increase in opium harvest with the manifestation of heroin on our streets. In fact, over the last decades, there has been no direct correlation between increases in opium production and harvest in any region in the world with the manifestation of heroin on our streets. It goes to issues of the ability of criminal syndicates to take the raw opium harvest and transport and transplant it into morphine and heroin. Whilst we are watching it, it is not something we are overly concerned about at this point in time.