

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 22 May 2006

IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO

(233) Output 1.3: Enforcement of Immigration Law

Senator Nettle asked:

Regarding the People Smuggling Taskforce, post arrival of 43 West Papuans:

1. How often has it met? When was the last time it met? Will it have an ongoing role? What is the membership of the group?
2. Who is it reporting to? What decisions has it made? Has it consulted with any representatives of the Indonesian Government?
3. When did Australian officials first have knowledge of the 43 West Papuans heading to Australia?

Answer:

1. The People Smuggling Taskforce (PSTF) met on 13 occasions in relation to the arrival of the 43 Indonesians from Papua Province of Indonesia and last met in respect of the arrival on 13 April 2006. There was also a meeting on 16 January prior to the arrival. The committee does not have an ongoing role in respect of the 43 Papuans. Membership includes: Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Australian Federal Police; the Attorney-General's Department; Customs; Defence; the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs; and the Office of National Assessments. Other agencies attend when circumstances suggest that such input is appropriate, for example the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.
2. The PSTF provides advice to government collectively or through relevant ministers. Its role is to examine the latest intelligence regarding possible targeting of Australia by people smugglers, to discuss possible options and strategies to combat this, and to coordinate and implement government policies comprising the interception, reception, processing and return of unauthorised boat arrivals. The PSTF did not consult with representatives of the Indonesian Government.
3. It is not appropriate to comment on intelligence matters in a public forum.