

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION SERVICE

Question No. 81

Senator Ronaldson asked the following question at the hearing on 26 May 2011:

- a) Do Customs and Border Protection maintain statistics on the number of asylum seekers who drown at sea whilst trying to enter Australia?
- b) How often are these statistics compiled?
- c) Are these statistics regularly provided to the Minister or to the Cabinet?
- d) How many asylum seekers drowned at sea on route to Australia in 2009, 2010 and in 2011 to date? How many of them were men? How many of them were women? How many of them were children?
- e)
 - i. As at 18 October 2009, what did Customs and Border Protection put as the figure for the number of people who had died whilst trying to reach Australia illegally by boat? How many were men? How many were women? How many were children?
 - ii. Had the Minister or any ministers been advised of these figures as of 18 October 2009?
- f) What was the final figure of the Christmas Island Tragedy? How many men, women and children died in that incident?
- g) Since Julia Gillard became Prime Minister, how many men, women and children have died on leaky boats trying to get to Australia?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- a)-b) Customs and Border Protection is not able to keep full and accurate statistics on the number of asylum seekers who drown at sea while trying to reach Australia. Customs and Border Protection does not know – and will never likely know – the number of vessels that go missing or the number of people that may have died on the high seas trying to reach Australia. Customs and Border Protection updates information as the agency becomes aware of relevant incidents. However, figures cannot be verified because Customs and Border Protection does not ordinarily receive official notification about people who drown in other countries' waters.
- c) Statistics are not regularly provided to the Minister. It is not appropriate to comment on whether information is provided to the Cabinet.
- d) e)(i) and g)
Customs and Border Protection maintains the following information regarding loss of life at sea in 2009, 2010 and 2011 to date. The accuracy of information regarding loss of life at sea outside the Australian maritime domain cannot be guaranteed as some of the figures are based on unconfirmed reports.

**Suspect Irregular Entry Vessels Inside Australia's Maritime Domain
Involving Loss of Life**

Year	Men	Women	Juveniles	Total
2009	10	0	2	12
2010	16	11	8	35*
2011 YTD	0	0	0	0

* A further 20 people are missing, presumed drowned.

Customs and Border Protection Command maintains the following figures on loss of life at sea prior to 18 October 2009.

Year	Men	Women	Juveniles	Total
2001	65	144	146	355
2009	5	0	0	5

e) (ii) No.

f) Western Australia Police and Australian Federal Police investigations estimate that there were 92 people onboard SIEV 221 when it foundered on rocks at Christmas Island. Of these, 41 people were rescued from the water and one man made it to safety on the Island. 30 deceased people were recovered, comprising 11 adult males, 11 adult females, three juvenile males, two juvenile females, one infant male and two infant females. The AFP estimates that a further 20 people are still missing presumed drowned. This finding is subject to a Western Australia Coronial Inquiry, which is presently underway.