

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

Question No. 88

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

- a) Can Customs and Border Protection confirm a report in the Australian on 10 May 2010 that five Sri Lankans drowned off the coast of the Cocos Islands?
- b) Were any of the people who drowned children?
- c) When were these deaths reported to the Minister of the Prime Minister?
- d) What steps were taken by the government to prevent further lives of men, women and children being lost on leaky boats en route to Australia in response to these deaths?

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

- a) Customs and Border Protection identifies this as SIEV 143. Customs and Border Protection is informed that five men are missing, presumed drowned.
- b) Customs and Border Protection has no information that any juveniles are missing, or presumed drowned.
- c) Information was provided to the offices of the Minister for Home Affairs and the Prime Minister on 7 May 2010.
- d) Customs and Border Protection undertakes a range of activities to prevent potentially dangerous vessels from departing for Australia and to discourage people from seeking to board such vessels.

Customs and Border Protection coordinates the Australian Government's efforts to combat people smuggling operations – specifically operations which are designed to:

- disrupt people smuggling criminal syndicates;
- discourage potential irregular immigrants from boarding people smuggling vessels; and
- prevent such vessels from leaving foreign shores, using lawful means of collaboration with international partners.

In the past three years, more than 285 ventures involving approximately 7600 potential irregular immigrants have been disrupted and more than 270 arrests have been made offshore.

In addition to coordinating operational activity to stop potentially dangerous vessels from departing, Customs and Border Protection coordinates the implementation of offshore counter-people smuggling communication campaigns to dissuade potential irregular immigrants, potential crew and community members from participating in or facilitating maritime people smuggling activities. Campaign messages highlight the risks and consequences of engaging in irregular migration, including the dangers associated with a high-risk sea voyage to Australia. Discrete counter-people smuggling communications campaigns have been conducted or are underway in key source and transit countries, including: Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Malaysia. These campaigns complement a domestic information strategy – also highlighting the dangers of a risky sea voyage – targeting relevant diaspora communities within Australia which is conducted by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.