

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 27-28 May 2013

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(BE13/0103) PROGRAM – 3.1: Border Management

Senator Hanson-Young (L&CA 32) asked:

Senator HANSON-YOUNG: Could you take on notice, please, where it happened previously and where that fitted in relation to the entry interview—was it before or after? Mr Bowles, what was the rationale for changing the process and introducing the enhanced screening process on 27 October?

Answer:

For persons not subject to enhanced screening, an arrival interview occurs before a person has a screening outcome. For persons subject to enhanced screening, an arrival interview does not occur; instead a person has an enhanced screening interview before they have a screening outcome.

In late 2012, enhanced screening was implemented in response to a very specific set of circumstances. Over a short period of time, there had been an unprecedented expansion of irregular movements from Sri Lanka to Australia. This increase surpassed all previous experience of Sri Lankan Irregular Maritime Arrivals (IMAs) including the previous high in mid-2009 following the defeat of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam).

This sudden and dramatic increase was contrary to Sri Lankan asylum seeker movements internationally. Country circumstances in Sri Lanka have been improving.

Initial interviews with Sri Lankan IMAs at the beginning of this surge also suggested that a significant proportion of the cohort were coming to Australia for economic reasons.

This unprecedented expansion demanded a specific response, particularly given the risks to life for people undertaking hazardous sea voyages.

The former Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, the Hon Chris Bowen MP, approved this initiative on 27 October 2012. Further approval to continue this initiative was provided by the Minister on 22 November 2012.