



**Australian  
BORDER FORCE**

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**RADM JUSTIN JONES CSC  
COMMANDER JATF, AUSTRALIAN BORDER FORCE  
Senate Estimates**

**Opening Statement  
Monday 23 October 2023**

The Joint Agency Taskforce Operation Sovereign Borders was established to disrupt these maritime people smuggling ventures and prevent vulnerable people risking their lives on dangerous sea journeys to Australia. Ten years later, Operation Sovereign Borders continues to deliver on this mission, which is a central element of Australia's broader civil maritime security program.

During my time as Commander Joint Agency Task Force Operation Sovereign Borders, I have heard repeated accounts from people who have unwittingly become entangled in this criminal trade, falling victims to the lies and misinformation used by people smugglers to convince them that taking risky boat journeys will lead to a better life in Australia. Under Operation Sovereign Borders, these journeys will not succeed. We will not allow that door to such tragic loss of life and criminal exploitation to open again.

On this occasion, in my final appearance before this Committee as Commander Joint Agency Taskforce Operation Sovereign Borders and Commander Maritime Border Command, I would like to reflect on the dangers of attempting to come to Australia by boat, and emphasise why I feel so strongly about delivering this element of Australia's maritime border security program.

While this is good news, there is an inherent risk of tragedy in **every** maritime people smuggling venture, and despite our successes, during **almost every one** of the past ten years, our people have been tasked to respond to one or more people-smuggling vessels within the Australian maritime domain.

Of the seven ventures intercepted en route to Australia in 2022, all vessels were assessed as unseaworthy. Our maritime crews, both Australian Defence Force and Australian Border Force,

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work in dangerous conditions to intercept these vessels and risk their own lives to ensure the safety of those on board. During one of these operations in 2022, the maritime crew responding spent over 20 hours in suboptimal sea conditions, transferring passengers and crew from their foundering vessel to safety. The risk to life and safety of all involved is real. This is why we work so hard to protect people from the false promises of criminal people smugglers.

*To quote Sarah Lou Ysmael ARRIOLA, Regional Director Asia for the International Organisation for Migration: "Smugglers are selling hope."*

There are too many recent examples across the globe of failed irregular maritime migration attempts and traffic losses of life. The vessel *Adriana* capsized in the Mediterranean in June, resulting in the deaths of approximately 600 migrants in a single incident, demonstrating the criminal disregard smugglers have for the welfare of those they exploit.

In closing, as Commander of both Operation Sovereign Borders and Maritime Border Command, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all staff and officers involved in the delivery of the important maritime border security outcomes we work to achieve every day.

There are currently 1037 ABF and ADF people assigned to Operation Sovereign Borders and Maritime Border Command, including 689 active sea crew and 398 in the Canberra headquarters or in the regions.

Of course, maritime people smuggling is not the only threat we deal with, and the hard work of maritime border security officers does not end with OSB. These officers continue to protect Australia's maritime domain from the eight civil maritime security threats, 24-hours a day, and 365 days a year. This includes significant efforts to counter the scourge of illegal foreign fishing, and to interdict any shipments of border-controlled drugs that may be targeting our shores.

The dedication of our people is rarely visible to the Australian public, and I thank them for their service.

I thank the Chair and Committee for your time and welcome any further questions.