



Australian
BORDER FORCE

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Commander Maritime Border Command

Opening Statement
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee
Additional Estimates Hearing
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Good Afternoon Chair and Committee members. I am Rear Admiral Justin Jones, the Commander of the Joint Agency task Force Operation Sovereign Borders, and the Commander of the Maritime Border Command.

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide you with an opening statement.

As the Commander of Operation Sovereign Borders and Maritime Border Command, and like my predecessors, I am committed to preserving safety of life at sea. I am also committed to ensuring the integrity of Australia's border is maintained against **all** crime types – including the threat of maritime people smuggling.

Through the collective efforts and capabilities of all Sovereign Borders agencies, the maritime people smuggling threat to Australia remains suppressed, but it is not defeated. As at 31 December 2021, it has been more than seven years since the last successful people smuggling venture to Australia. It has been more than eight years since the last known death at sea from maritime people smuggling ventures en route to Australia. To contextualise this, we should remember that more than 1200 people are believed to have drowned attempting to reach Australia by boat between 2008 and 2013. We remain determined to prevent this from happening again.

Australia continues to be an attractive destination for both legal and illegal migration. We are aware that people smugglers continue their attempts to exploit vulnerable people by marketing illegal maritime people smuggling ventures to our country.

Combatting these criminal syndicates, protecting our borders, and preventing deaths at sea requires constant vigilance and active measures across all three Operation Sovereign Borders lines of effort:

- Disruption and Deterrence;
- Response and Returns; and
- Regional Processing and Resettlement.

The best outcome for Operation Sovereign Borders is to prevent people from boarding illegal maritime ventures in the first place. We continue to focus on upstream effects to combat maritime people

smuggling. This includes deterring people from joining illegal maritime people smuggling ventures, and disrupting ventures in source and transit countries before they reach Australian waters.

We continue to deliver targeted and persistent deterrence messaging to vulnerable people offshore that may be at greater risk of criminal exploitation by people smugglers. This messaging ensures they are aware of Australia's strong border protection policies. We also make them aware of the risks of attempting dangerous voyages, across open oceans, so they are better prepared to counter the lies of people smugglers.

A key element of this messaging is the highly effective 'Zero Chance' strategic communications campaign. Since the campaign's launch in May 2019 to 31 December 2021, the digital component has reached approximately 41.3 million people across eleven source and transit countries.

Our offshore deterrence approach is supported by ongoing engagement with regional law enforcement and security partners to build capacity and to disrupt people smuggler networks and activities at the source. These engagement efforts have continued despite the challenges associated with COVID-19. Our relationships offshore remain strong – delivering great benefits for Australia's maritime security.

Additionally, we maintain a strong air and maritime posture through Maritime Border Command assets. We are ready to rapidly respond

to any potential maritime people smuggling ventures and other on-water threats that seek to test the integrity of the Australian border.

Since the last Senate Estimates hearing, maritime people smuggling activity in the Australian region has remained suppressed. There have been no interceptions of maritime people smuggling ventures targeting Australia. Our strong border protection policies under Operation Sovereign Borders and Maritime Border Command remain an effective deterrent to criminal activity. International movement controls associated with the COVID-19 pandemic have also helped to further suppress maritime people smuggling. Nonetheless, we remain vigilant, and are closely monitoring the maritime people smuggling threat environment to ensure we have early warning of potential unauthorised arrivals.

During my tenure as Commander, Operation Sovereign Borders and Maritime Border Command, we will continue to protect the integrity of the Australian border. We will preserve safety of life at sea through maximised collaboration across government, strong international engagement and formidable border response capabilities.

Our message remains clear. Anyone that attempts to organise an illegal venture targeting Australia, or that attempts to travel to Australia illegally by sea has Zero Chance of success.

I thank the Committee for its time and welcome any questions. Thank-you.