

Tabled 11/7/14 by Lt. Gen. Campbell

**OPENING STATEMENT TO SENATE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO THE INCIDENT AT THE MANUS ISLAND
DETENTION CENTRE**

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COMMANDER OPERATION SOVEREIGN BORDERS
JOINT AGENCY TASK FORCE**

Good morning, Chair and members of the Committee. I would like to make a brief contextual statement about Operation Sovereign Borders and the offshore processing centres (OPCs), including on Manus Island.

Operation Sovereign Borders is, as you know, a coordinated multi-agency effort to defeat maritime people smuggling. It involves a range of activities conducted offshore, onshore, at our borders and in collaboration with our international partners. The operational elements of Operation Sovereign Borders are delivered via three Task Groups - the Disruption and Deterrence Task Group, led by the Australian Federal Police, which works both offshore and onshore to break up and prosecute people smuggling syndicates; the Detection, Interception and Transfer Task Group, led by Border Protection Command and responsible for the on-water component of our operations; and—most relevant to today's proceedings—the Offshore Detention and Returns Task Group led by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and responsible for Australia's day-to-day contribution to the offshore processing system.

Operation Sovereign Borders is delivering results. It has now been more than six months since a people smuggling venture successfully reached Australia. By late 2013, we saw the number of boats arriving in Australia reduce from a mid-year high of 48 in July to just five in each of October and November. In this effort I acknowledge in particular the work of Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea and Nauru, and of course the policy settings of both the current and former governments.

Five boats a month, or roughly one boat a week, is still too many when they are being sent by profiteering criminals. Some simple mathematics is instructive. Just one boat a week, 52 weeks a year, 50 people on a boat, equates to 2600 people a year.

Should 50 boats a year arrive into Australia, we know from recent experience, that many more would follow. The numbers on the move globally are so large, and the profits to be made so attractive, that both smugglers and their prospective clients would not stop, indeed did not stop, at 50 boats.

Furthermore, it is unreasonable to assume in our planning that Papua New Guinea and Nauru would simply keep accepting 50 boat loads of transferees into their Offshore Processing Centres, each year, year after year. Eventually these nations may no longer be prepared to provide settlement options to a continuing

flow of transferees. Nauru after all has a population of only 10,000 citizens.

So from mid-December 2013, as an additional measure, we have turned back boats where it is safe to do so.

No ventures have departed Indonesia since early May 2014. There have been no known deaths at sea since 9 December 2013 and no deaths at all in Australian territorial waters since Operation Sovereign Borders began. The Disruption and Deterrence Task Group, working with regional partners, has contributed to 204 arrests, including 49 organisers and 34 facilitators, as well as the disruption of 44 ventures. The PNG and Nauru Refugee Status Determination and resettlement processes have commenced at the OPCs and, in the absence of new arrivals, the population pressure is being removed from the offshore processing system.

People smugglers used to be able to say, "Give me all your money and I'll get you to Australia," but this is no longer the case and smugglers are being forced to resort to even greater depths of dishonesty in their struggle to remain in business. We know of one client who, after being disrupted in Indonesia, informed the Indonesian authorities that the smuggler he engaged had promised to get him to New Zealand. When their boat ran aground, the client was told that they had arrived in Australia

instead. In reality, they had merely come ashore elsewhere in Indonesia. If the people smugglers were honest, they would now have to say, "Give me all your money, but you won't get to Australia and I won't give you your money back."

As this example shows, people smugglers are motivated by profit, not by compassion. They are organised criminals who operate across international borders. They are persistent, adaptive and resilient. They will exploit any vulnerability or easing of our border security measures to resume their exploitative trade. As I have said elsewhere, the price of border security is eternal vigilance, and that security supports the credibility and coherence of Australia's managed migration program including its Humanitarian Assistance component. I am hopeful that, through Operation Sovereign Borders and in concert with our regional partners, we are changing the paradigm of people smuggling to one in which it is sovereign states like Australia, Indonesia and Malaysia, and not the criminal smugglers, who hold the initiative. The effective management of the OPCs is an integral part of the Operation Sovereign Borders architecture. Although much of the initial interest in Operation Sovereign Borders has focused on the on-water activities, it is clear that the OPCs are no less important. Deterrence is central to the success of Operation Sovereign Borders. Successive Australian Governments have directed that

people who arrive illegally by boat will not be resettled in Australia. A fully functioning offshore processing system is a key element of this policy; its safe, secure and sustainable operation is of critical importance to Operation Sovereign Borders as a whole.

In recognition of this fact, in early October 2013, right at the beginning of Operation Sovereign Borders, the Acting Commander of the Joint Agency Task Force, then-Air Marshal Mark Binskin, initiated a security risk assessment of the Manus Offshore Processing Centre. The intent was to assess the capabilities and security limitations of the OPC and identify risks that required mitigation. Similar reviews have been conducted for the OPC in Nauru and the immigration detention centre on Christmas Island.

Security is not achieved through one initiative or infrastructure project alone. It is the result of a collaborative and all-encompassing effort combining physical, procedural, cultural and attitudinal factors. Any approach to security risk management must also evolve as the circumstances pertaining to Offshore Processing Centres change over time.

Since the October 2013 review, there have been regular progress assessments – each of which continues to improve the security arrangements at the Manus OPC. The Joint Agency Task Force

works closely with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and the Government of Papua New Guinea to improve the Manus OPC. It is in our collective interest to support the Government of Papua New Guinea to develop an OPC that is safe, secure and sustainable.

Before concluding, I note that Senators Carr and Singh have previously, through Senate Estimates, requested access to the recommendations of the Manus OPC security risk assessment of October 2013. While I cannot release the full text of that classified assessment, to assist the Committee, as I indicated at the last Senate Budget Estimates, I have had prepared a tabular summary of the recommendations and their current implementation status as at 23 June 2014. This table will also be lodged in response to related Senate Estimates Questions on Notice.

Thank you. With your concurrence, after my colleague Mr Cormack has had the opportunity to make an opening statement, I would welcome any questions you may have.