



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

SECRETARY

28 June 2011

Senator Gavin Marshall
Committee Chair
Joint Select Committee on the Christmas Island Tragedy
PO Box 6100, Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Marshall

Claims regarding the SIEV 221 vessel

Thank you for your letter dated 27 June 2011 concerning a claim that a Serco employee was advised by a detainee about the impending arrival at Christmas Island of the SIEV 221 vessel. You have advised that your Committee wishes to know:

1. Whether DIAC was aware of the claims contained in the media reports, and if so, when it became aware of them; and
2. What steps have been taken by DIAC to satisfy itself of the veracity of the claims?

On the basis of checking made in response to your letter, it is my understanding that my department was first made aware of the claims on 24 June 2011 at 6:10 pm (AEST), when a journalist from *The Australian* newspaper contacted the department's media team. The department informed the journalist at that time that, as the matter was currently before the WA Coroner, it would be inappropriate to pre-empt what evidence he might hear and what his findings might be; and that the department is cooperating fully with the Coroner.

The following working day, 27 June 2011, the department's detention infrastructure and services division contacted our detention services provider, Serco, to ascertain whether there was any substance to the claim. I am advised that Serco is currently checking its records but we have yet to receive a response from them.

However, I can confirm that the department's Assistant Secretary on Christmas Island at the time, Fiona Andrew, was not aware of this claim prior to it being reported in the media.

As soon as any further information becomes available I will inform the committee.

Thank you for writing to me on this matter.

Yours sincerely

(Andrew Metcalfe)

people our business