

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Additional Estimates Hearings 2002-2003, 10-11 February 2003

Question: PM3-6

Outcome 1, Output 2.1

Topic: SIEV X

Hansard Pages: F&PA 34-43

Senator Faulkner asked: Who saw the DFAT cable and when?

Answer: The following officers of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) accessed the DFAT cable of 23 October 2001 titled “Indonesia: Sinking of Illegal Immigrant Vessel” (O.JA25691) from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) SATIN High system:

Officer	Division	Date
Stefan King	International	23/10/01
Michael Potts	International	23/10/01
Ann Jones	Records Management Unit	24/10/01
Pam Ward	International	24/10/01
Harinder Sidhu	International	20/12/01

There is no evidence that the cable was accessed from the SATIN High Network by staff in the Prime Minister’s Office.

Mr Mathew Healy, Social Policy Division, picked up the copy of the cable printed by Ms Jones on 24 October 2001. There is no record of which individual officers saw this printed copy.

Question: PM7

Outcome 1, Output 2.1

Topic: SIEV X

Hansard Pages: F&PA 40

Senator Collins asked: Is there a declassified version of the cable that went on e-mail?

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Answer: A declassified version of this cable was not e-mailed by anyone in the Department.

Question: PM8

Outcome 1, Output 2.1

Topic: SIEV X

Hansard Pages: F&PA 41

(a) Senator Collins asked: Which agencies provided the information that SIEV X sank in Indonesian waters?

Answer: The Department has contacted the author of the brief, Ms Catherine Wildermuth, a Departmental officer who is currently overseas on long term leave. Ms Wildermuth advised that the 24 October 2001 brief to the Prime Minister, which includes the section headed "Boat sunk in Indonesian waters", was based on information provided by the agencies listed in the "Consultation" section of the brief.

Ms Wildermuth does not recall whether information about the status of SIEV X was already to hand as part of the exchange of information between agencies on unauthorised arrivals matters, or whether information on this matter was sought specifically to inform the brief.

Ms Wildermuth recalls that the brief dealt with a number of unauthorised arrivals issues, and information from the agencies listed in the "Consultation" section of the brief may have been used and/or sought in relation to any of the matters addressed in the brief.

(b) Senator Collins asked: Provide a copy of the brief that was provided to the Prime Minister on 24 October 2001.

Answer: Please find attached a copy of the brief that was provided to the Prime Minister on 24 October 2001 and has now been declassified for release to the Committee. Material disclosing opinion, advice or recommendations provided to Ministers, or disclosing government deliberations, where disclosure would be contrary to the public interest has been deleted and is marked with the key 'GD'

The Committee should note that reference to SIEV 4 in the first and third paragraphs of the brief are incorrect. The references to SIEV 4 in these paragraphs should read SIEV 5. Additionally, the references to SIEV 5 in paragraph headed "Manus Island (PNG) processing facility" are incorrect and should read SIEV 4.

(c) Senator Collins asked: Why was the question overlooked?

As stated at the hearing of the Committee on 10 February 2003, the Department was not aware that this was an outstanding question on notice. When the Department

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reviewed the transcript shortly after Ms Halton's appearance before the Committee, it did not consider that Ms Halton had taken this question on notice.

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D. DEPARTMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET

Prime Minister (for information)

UNAUTHORISED ARRIVALS STRATEGY – UPDATE 24 OCTOBER 2001

Purpose: To provide an updated status report.

Current state of play

SIEV 4 group – we understand that the 237 people aboard SIEV 4 which was returned to Indonesia have been escorted by Indonesian police to the IOM camp in Kupang.

SIEV 6 moored off Christmas Island – security personnel from *HMAS Warramunga* boarded SIEV 6 early on Monday 21 October, took control of the vessel, provided food, water and other provisions, and evacuated several family groups (about 90 people) to *HMAS Warramunga* to secure their health and safety. The vessel was sabotaged (holed, set alight and the engine and gearbox sabotaged) and Defence and a civilian marine engineer are continuing with repairs. While the engine is running, it needs further repairs for a return journey. In addition, weather has now closed in with high swells, and it may not be possible to attempt the return to Indonesia for 2-3 days.

SIEV 7 – remains moored at Ashmore Island. Its estimated 217 passengers are reported to be restless, and aware of the successful return of SIEV 4 to Indonesia, increasing the likelihood of agitation and their sabotaging the vessel.

Manus Island (PNG) processing facility – Transfer of the 216 people from SIEV 5 to Manus Island was completed on Monday evening, 22 October. The group objected strongly to being taken to PNG, and a disturbance broke out during IOM's initial camp briefing. This exposed strong tensions within the group and culminated in IOM and security staff withdrawing from the camp and leaders of the SIEV 4 group taking control. Around 40 asylum seekers breached the perimeter of the camp and ran to the local medical clinic (where four people who acted as translators for Australian officials while the SIEV 5 group was on Christmas Island remain separated for their own protection), but people were quickly rounded up and returned inside the perimeter. 30 additional PNG soldiers will arrive today to bolster base security.

IOM reports that one person, a ringleader, has received medical attention for self-harm and he and a confidant have been separated from others. The asylum seekers are now cooperative and their hunger strike is over, following assurances that Australian entry teams will arrive mid next week to commence registration. Tensions remain high however. We understand that the PNG government has not yet formally requested UNHCR involvement in processing claims.

The two Macedonians arrived on Manus on 23 October and, subject to documentation arriving, are to be repatriated to Macedonia on Saturday, 27 October.

Boat sunk in Indonesian waters – a boat carrying 421 people (thought to be mainly Iraqis intending to join family members in Australia) left Indonesia in the early hours of Thursday, 18 October. We understand that a number refused to board the boat initially for safety and seaworthiness concerns, and that 24 people left the boat later that morning when it took shelter in the lee of an island to avoid bad weather. At around 3.00pm on Friday afternoon, 19 October, the boat capsized and sank quickly south of the western end of Java, with loss of possibly 352 lives. 44 of the 45 known survivors (including five

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Mr Sinodinos
Mr Jordana
Secretary
Mr Potts
Ms Edwards
Ms Bryant

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children) have been taken to a camp near Jakarta. AFP is offering assistance to Indonesia to provide information and facilitate prosecution of the organisers.

Holding capacity – Christmas Island will have capacity for up to 900 by the end of this week. Sewerage upgrade work is being completed on Cocos Island but significant environmental concerns remain. If more than 100 people were to be accommodated there, we would need to either follow statutory processes under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* or apply for an exemption in the national interest which would be highly controversial. Forty Sri Lankans who have been screened out will be repatriated to Sri Lanka mid next week.

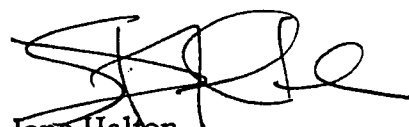
GD [REDACTED]

Subject to the agreement of the PNG government, 100 more asylum seekers could be accommodated on Manus Island immediately, but expansion beyond this would not be possible for around four weeks. Discussions are continuing with PNG authorities, with the proposal likely to be considered by the PNG Cabinet early next week.

Further prospective arrivals – reports indicate that two smaller boats (180 and 170 people) may have departed for Ashmore Island over the weekend.

GD [REDACTED]

Recommendation: That you note the current state of play.


Jane Halton

Executive Coordinator
Social Policy Group

27 October 2001

JOHN HOWARD

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Consultation: DFAT, DIMA, DTRS, A-Gs, Defence

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