

SENATE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL LEGISLATION COMMITTEE
AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE

Question No. 144

Senator Ludwig asked the following question at the hearing on 17 February 2006:

- a) Regarding the 13 officers assigned to the people smuggling strike team, how many of those officers are permanently deployed onto the strike team?
- b) Are their full time duties related only to people smuggling or are they doing any other AFP function?
- c) Why is the people smuggling strike team based in Canberra when the people smuggling occurs mostly in northern Australia in a maritime environment?
- d) In the answer to Question 276, part (a)(iv), it is indicated that there has been a fluctuation in numbers of people assigned to the strike team over the last 3 years, provide a breakdown of what the fluctuations are?
- e) Regarding 59 intelligence reports disseminated by the AFP to the 9 key stakeholder agencies, have any of the 59 reports led to an apprehension and if so, how many?
- f) Have any of those led to charges and have any of those led to convictions?
- g) What portfolio does the people smuggling strike team sit under?
- h) If they are located in Canberra and their only function is assessment and dissemination of intelligence, why is a cross portfolio outcome needed?
- i) Was the people smuggling strike team set up as a specifically funded budget initiative?
 - i) If yes, were any positions tied to the people smuggling strike team?
 - ii) If yes, how many of those have been redeployed out of the people smuggling strike team and what are they presently doing?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- (a) There are 15 officers assigned to the People Smuggling Strike Team (PSST), all officers are permanently deployed to the strike team except for the Co-ordinator who has dual responsibility for the PSST and the Trans-national Sexual Exploitation Team (TSETT). Two of the 15 are responsible for managing the people smuggling intelligence collection, analysis and dissemination.
- b) The members assigned to the PSST are conducting full time investigations into people smuggling activities, however in accordance with the Flexible Teams Model may be deployed to other duties on a temporary basis as priorities require.
- c) AFP investigators are not involved in the interception of vessels at sea. When a vessel has been intercepted, DIMA makes a determination as to whether the matter will be referred to the AFP. PSST investigators are then able to deploy to any geographic location at short notice in order to interview witnesses and offenders.

- d) Over the past three years there have been fluctuations in staffing numbers of the People Smuggling Team. It is not possible without extensive investigation to provide exact times and details because staff numbers fluctuate due to emergency responses like the Bali Bombings and Tsunami, recreational leave, maternity leave, transfers in and out of the team and the lag time replacing some members whilst at other times there is overlap. The people smuggling team however has consistent staffing to meet its work requirements.
- e) A number of apprehensions and successful disruption activities have taken place off-shore by foreign law enforcement agencies as a direct result of liaison activities such as the dissemination of intelligence reports.
- f) Refer to answer e).
- g) The People Smuggling Strike Team (PSST) is under the Border and International portfolio. The People Smuggling Intelligence Team (PSIT) which provides intelligence support for the PSST, is under the Intelligence portfolio.
- h) The PSST is a multi-disciplined, multi-agency team. It is made up of Investigators, Intelligence Officers and Intelligence Analysts, as well as support staff. The PSST team is not only responsible for the collation, dissemination and assessment of intelligence product relating to people smuggling, but is also responsible for the investigation of trans-national organised crime syndicates involved in organised people smuggling to Australia by boat.
- i) The PSST was established in 2000 under an Australian Government initiative providing funding to counter people smuggling by boat, named Operation Piscine. This funding has been extended until 2008.
 - i) When the PSST was first established the original Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlined prescribed numbers of 10 AFP and 4 DIMA investigators. Since the MOU ended in 2004, members have been rotated through this team in accordance with the AFP Flexible Teams Model.
 - ii) AFP members of the PSST are occasionally deployed to other high priority duties for short periods of time when exceptional circumstances arise (for example the Bali Bombings). The AFP continues to place a high priority on the investigation of organised people smuggling. The funding provided for Operation Piscine is only expended on people smuggling related matters.