

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS SERVICE

Question No. 37

Senator Birmingham asked the following question at the hearing on 18 February 2008:

With reference to the exclusive release to Channel 9 and The Daily Telegraph of footage from the Oceanic Viking on 7 February 2008:

- a) Why was the footage released on an exclusive basis to these agencies and whose decision was this? Why would Customs support the initial release of footage to one or two media agencies when it was clearly in the public interest?
- b) Was the Customs consulted on the release of this footage?
- c) Did Customs support the media strategy for the release of this footage?
- d) Why was the original decision made not to release this footage? Who made this decision and why was this decision changed?
- e) If and when footage is gained by the Airbus A319 subleased by Customs from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, will Customs provide a commitment that it will not release exclusively to select media agencies such footage that is clearly in the public interest?

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

- a) No footage was released exclusively to Channel 9 and The Daily Telegraph. Photographs were released to these media outlets to maximise public exposure and discussion. Footage and photographs were made available to all media outlets shortly thereafter. The decision to release the footage and photographs was determined by the relevant Ministerial Offices.
- b) Yes.
- c) Customs provided images to the Office of the Minister for Home Affairs. The Minister's Office arranged distribution.
- d) The Government took advice and reassessed the operational requirements on a regular basis.
- e) The aircraft is not subleased by Customs. It is operated on behalf of the Australian Antarctic Division by a commercial company. Questions about any footage which may be collected by the aircraft should be referred to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and the Arts.