

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION SERVICE

Question No. 97

Senator Feeney asked the following question at the hearing on 8 February 2010:

Over what periods in the last 30 years have there been the highest rates of suspected irregular entry vessels? Provide comment on the push factors behind these trends.

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

For the period 1976 to 2009, the table at [Attachment 1](#) provides overall numbers of vessels and the total number of people. These numbers include people who arrived on the Australian mainland, at excised offshore places and those transferred to offshore processing centres.

The main factors that cause people to come to Australia are part of a global problem and not unique to Australia. Conflicts in Afghanistan, the Middle East and the situation in Sri Lanka mean that large numbers of displaced persons are looking for settlement in stable, secure nations like Australia. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) *2008 Global Trends Report* shows there were 42 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2008, which included 15.2 million refugees. Of all refugees and asylum seekers 44 per cent were children under the age of 18. The *2008 Global Trends Report* indicates that the number of people seeking asylum in Australia reflects a worldwide trend driven by insecurity, persecution and conflict.

A useful publication which provides a detailed discussion of the historical and political context surrounding boat arrivals in Australia, going back to 1976, and covers the Australian Government's policy responses over time and trends in public opinion on the issues, is titled *Boat arrivals in Australia since 1976*, a Parliamentary Library publication by Janet Phillips and Harriet Spinks. This publication also addresses the issue of irregular maritime arrivals in the global context.

Attachment 1

Boat arrivals since 1976 by calendar year

Year	Number of Boats ¹	Number of people (excludes crew) ²
1976		111
1977		868
1978		746
1979		304
1980		0
1981		30
1982–88		0
1989	1	26
1990	2	198
1991	6	214
1992	6	216
1993	3	81
1994	18	953
1995	7	237
1996	19	660
1997	11	339
1998	17	200
1999	86	3721
2000	51	2939
2001	43	5516
2002	1	1
2003	1	53
2004	1	15
2005	4	11
2006	6	60
2007	5	148
2008	7	161
2009	60	2726 ^{3,4}

Source: Figures from 1976 to June 2009 sourced from DIAC advice provided to the Parliamentary Library on 22 June 2009. From June 2009 to the end of 2009, data is sourced from Customs and Border Protection records.

¹ Excludes boats returned from whence they came. Boat numbers before 1989 not available.

² Numbers of arrivals prior to 1989 have been obtained from a 2001 publication '*People and place*, vol. 9 no. 4.

³ This number includes five deceased at sea (SIEV 36) & twelve deceased at sea (SIEV 69)

⁴ This number includes number of crew from SIEV 88 updated 27 January 2010.