

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 21 May 2007

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(60) Output 1.2: Refugee and Humanitarian Entry and Stay

Senator Nettle (L&CA 68 and 78) asked:

Would you be able to tell the Committee when Australia first approached the United States about the Mutual Assistance Arrangement?

Are you able to provide us with a timeline? It was in 2000. Have there been ongoing discussions between ministers since then, and up to the signing?

Answer:

In September 2006, the former Minister for Immigration, Senator the Hon Amanda Vanstone met with the US Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration in the margins of the UN High Level Dialogue on international migration and development. One matter discussed at this meeting was scope for mutual assistance in resettlement.

Discussion between the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the US State Department commenced in November 2006 on a possible arrangement in the lead-up to the current form of the Arrangement which was signed in Washington on 4 April 2007.

Australia and the US have had a long established dialogue on matters relating to International Protection and resettlement. The possibility of Australia resettling persons found to require protection from Guantanamo Bay and the United States resettling refugees from Offshore Processing Centres has been raised from time to time over the years.

Australia has agreed in the past, on an ad hoc basis, to accept small numbers of cases from Guantanamo Bay, for example a group of ten Cubans and Haitians in 2002. Prior to this, 51 Cubans refugees were resettled in 1980 and between 1982 and 1994, 25 Cuban refugees were resettled in Australia.