

## **QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**

### **BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARINGS: 23 MAY 2011**

#### **IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO**

#### **(BE11/0250) Program 4.3: Offshore Asylum Seeker Management**

Senator Cash (L&CA 45) asked:

In relation to the article that did appear in the Sydney Morning Herald concerning the fate of 91 people who vanished on a boat destined for Australian waters that allegedly left Indonesia on 13 November, who were the individuals that approached the department, were they clients in the detention centre or were they members of the community?

*Answer:*

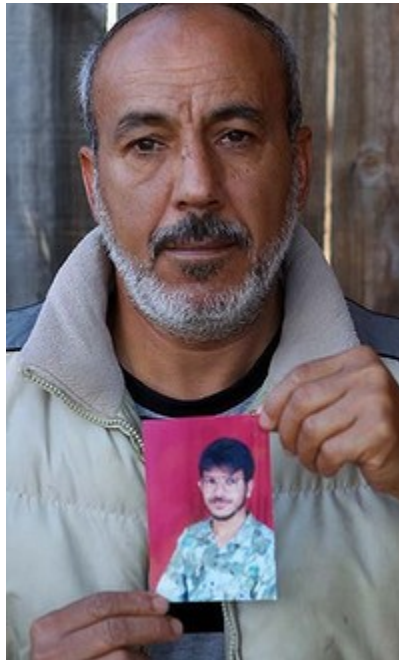
A number of enquiries were received by the Department relating to people who were believed by family members to have travelled from Indonesia to Australia on or around 13 November 2010 and had not been heard from since. These calls were received via the SIEV 221 hotline established following the Christmas Island boat crash disaster on 15 December 2010. The SIEV 221 hotline's call logs indicate that all of the enquiries were from Australian residents or from people residing overseas.

The Department operates a general enquiry line, however, there are no records of any enquiries being received through this number about missing boats after 14 November and before the SIEV 221 hotline was established on 16 December 2010.

## The 97 who vanished

**Natalie O'brien**

May 8, 2011



Anguish... Kareem Othman is desperate for news of his brother. *Photo: Jacky Ghossein*

AT HIS modest home in the western Sydney suburb of Blackett, Kareem Othman waits anxiously for news of the fate of his younger brother.

The 51-year-old last heard from a relative that Ahmed Hadadd Mohammed Othman was on a boat carrying 97 asylum seekers leaving Indonesia on November 13 last year. Kareem, himself a refugee from the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, has not heard of his brother since.

"I warned him not to come by boat, that it was too dangerous," he said.

Advertisement: Story continues below

Ahmed, 43, was on a boat carrying asylum seekers from countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran which left Indonesia on November 13 headed for Australia. It is feared lost.

*The Sun-Herald* revealed in December that the boat never arrived at Christmas Island. It is now 175 days since there has been word from those aboard.

Another vessel with the same number of passengers arrived at Christmas Island three weeks later, but Ahmed was not aboard. Subsequent checks with Indonesian agencies including the Red Cross's international tracing arm and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to find out if they had been arrested in Indonesia have been unsuccessful.

Mr Othman has called every detention centre in Australia looking for his brother. He has also sought, unsuccessfully, help from the federal government.

Not only do the authorities say they do not know anything about the missing boat, they are also not looking for it.

Customs and Border Protection Command said they had not received any calls about it.

Sydney lawyer George Newhouse hopes to raise the issue at the inquest into last year's tragic shipwreck off Christmas Island, which begins in Perth tomorrow.

Mr Newhouse is representing survivors and the next of kin of those who died in the shipwreck on December 15 last year. It is believed up to 50 asylum seekers perished. Some bodies were not recovered.

"I am greatly disheartened by the lack of interest the government has shown for people apparently lost at sea," said Mr Newhouse.

"If this was an Englishman on a yacht on a jaunt on the high seas, we would have sent out a frigate. But because they are people of different colour on this boat, the concern for them seems to be sadly lacking."

Opposition immigration spokesman Scott Morrison said yesterday the Coalition's strong stand on asylum seeker policies was to prevent such tragedies. "We have no idea how many boats go missing," he said.

"We want to stop it so people don't die on the boats coming here."

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/the-97-who-vanished-20110507-1ed75.html#ixzz1RxIIAtqB>