

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 27-28 May 2013

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(BE13/0079) PROGRAM – 4.3: Offshore Asylum Seeker Management

Senator Rhiannon (L&CA 18) asked:

Senator RHIANNON: Are you aware that there are 14 Tamil men on Christmas Island who have asked on repeated occasions to be reunited with their wives and children who are also on Christmas Island?

Mr Bowles: I am not personally aware of it.

Senator RHIANNON: Is there anyone else here who would be aware of it? I am just wondering whether they have an the opportunity to speak with their family members.

Mr Bowles: That is the normal policy arrangement. We try and make it as comfortable as possible. We can take it on notice to find out anything we know about that.

Mr Cahill: I am unaware of any specific instances. They are able to do 'I'm alive calls' and contact family back home. If they have got family in the detention facilities, we look to try and join them with their family, subject to security matters.

Senator RHIANNON: You can take it on notice to find out whether any of the Tamils who are family units have been able to talk to each other on Christmas Island and, if there has been a delay in that occurring, why.

Mr Cahill: I will take it on notice. If they have got family on the island, they would be allowed to talk to them.

Senator RHIANNON: As I have received information to the contrary, it would be appreciated if you could take it on notice.

Mr Cahill: I will.

Answer:

On 1 April 2013, a boat with 93 Sri Lankan nationals on board, predominantly adult females and children, arrived at Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Some of the people from this boat claimed that they had become separated from their husbands by people smugglers.

Enquires made by Australian Government authorities could not confirm the whereabouts of the clients' family members. As a standard step in the arrival and induction process, these clients were provided with access to telephones to advise family and friends of their safe arrival at Christmas Island (ALIVE call).

On 18 April 2013, a boat with 112 Sri Lankan nationals on board, predominately adult males, arrived at Cocos (Keeling) Islands and some of the people from this boat claimed that their wives and children were due to arrive by boat after having been separated from them by people smugglers.

While the Department was aware of the clients' claims, it was obliged to formally and legally confirm the claimed familial relationships through its standard arrival and induction processes. In addition, the standard public health screening process required the males to remain segregated from the general client population pending full medical clearance. This is done to ensure the protection and welfare of other clients on Christmas Island.

All processing was fast-tracked and undertaken as soon as possible. All clients were provided with the opportunity to contact their family members throughout the process.

Once all necessary interviews and medical clearances were conducted and the familial links were confirmed, the clients were immediately reunited.