

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

Question No. 62

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked the following question at the hearing on 19 October 2009:

In relation to Customs' current campaign on people smuggling, recent reports suggest the campaign is specifically targeting the Catholic community. Can Customs provide further detail surrounding these suggestions?

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

The Sri Lankan counter-people smuggling communications campaign does not exclusively target the Catholic community. The campaign aims to dissuade all potential irregular immigrants (PIIs) from attempting an irregular maritime journey to Australia. Sri Lanka comprises at least seven distinguishable ethnic groups who practice at least four major religions including Buddhism, Catholicism, Hinduism and Islam. The campaign therefore aims to influence a variety of these groups, through a range of media and channels.

One method of delivery involves utilising local clergy, particularly Catholic priests, to deliver important messages to their congregations. The International Organization for Migration has advised the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service that clergy are an influential voice in Sri Lankan communities from which people smuggling ventures may be launched. The Catholic Church in Sri Lanka is also very concerned about the risks that PIIs face on such journeys and is a willing partner in delivering information and messages.