

OPENING STATEMENT TO SENATE ESTIMATES – 19 NOVEMBER 2013**LIEUTENANT GENERAL ANGUS J CAMPBELL****COMMANDER JOINT AGENCY TASKFORCE****OPERATION SOVEREIGN BORDERS**

Chair, members of the Committee, the whole of government efforts to counter maritime people smuggling have not previously reported to the Committee in this format. For that reason and with your permission, I wish to make an opening statement in relation to the Joint Agency Task Force and Operation Sovereign Borders.

Establishment and Structure

Operational Sovereign Borders commenced on 18 September 2013. My Deputy, Deputy Secretary Allan McKinnon and I were appointed the following day.

I report directly to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. However, the Joint Agency Task Force exists within the portfolio of responsibilities for which Mr Bowles has oversight and the JATF is located within the premises and supported by the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service.

The role of the JATF is to coordinate the counter people smuggling efforts of sixteen different departments and agencies of government. Initiatives that fall within the remit of the JATF span source countries for people smuggling, through regional transit countries, to offshore processing centres. Working with international partners we seek to improve regional counter people smuggling outcomes and stop the transit of illegal maritime arrivals to Australia.

Our mandate does not extend to onshore immigration issues, including detention, returns and removals. These are matters for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

The Task Force comprises four elements:

- A headquarters, responsible for development, implementation and coordination of strategy, policies and initiatives to counter maritime people smuggling into Australia,
- A Disruption and Deterrence Task Group, led by Australian Federal Police Assistant Commissioner Steve Lancaster,
- A Detection, Interception and Transfer Task Group, led by the Commander of Border Protection Command Rear Admiral David Johnston, and an
- Offshore Detention and Returns Task Group, temporarily led by Assistant Secretary Neil Skill in the absence of First Assistant Secretary Mr Ken Douglas of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

I am also assisted by the Ambassador for People Smuggling Issues, First Assistant Secretary Mr Craig Chittick, and the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for People Smuggling, Major General Jim Molan (retired).

Today, along with Mr Bowles and myself, also present are Assistant Commissioner Steve Lancaster, Rear Admiral David Johnston, Mr Neil Skill, Ambassador Craig Chittick and Mr John Young of the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, to assist should they be required during the Committee's consideration of the JATF and Operation Sovereign Borders.

The headquarters comprises 68 officials from ten departments and agencies, each of which bears the cost of its secondees. No additional permanent recruitment into government employment was required. I am greatly appreciative of the professionalism, commitment and energy of the team that has formed. A budget of \$10m over three years has been identified for initial allocation to the headquarters and is expected to be appropriated shortly. To date, around \$1.1 million has been expended to establish the workspace and IT systems in which we operate and \$20 000 has been used for domestic and international travel.

The three Task Groups operate from their parent agencies, AFP, Customs and Border Protection and Immigration respectively.

The JATF brings together skills and expertise from across government. I am the single point of advice to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection on OSB matters and I am responsible for the Operation's implementation. My exercise of that responsibility as it relates to routine matters is through my Task Group heads, and as it relates to substantive policy or operational adjustments through liaison with the relevant Departmental and Agency heads. I do not, nor do I think it appropriate to, command the elements of the JATF, in the military legal authority sense of the term.

People Smuggling: On-Water

While the JATF does not comment publically on current or possible future operations, there is a general routine to the transit of Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel attempting to reach Australia that those new to the Committee or this subject may find a useful frame of reference.

Assuming a boat has departed for Australia, its crew and passengers can expect to be intercepted by an Australian Border Protection Command vessel in our Contiguous Zone, between 12 and 24 nautical miles from our territory. Any other assumption on behalf of smugglers and crew is a considerable risk. As you know, the voyage is dangerous, the conditions squalid and the boats and crew of variable quality.

On occasions, vessels attempt to make telephone contact with organisers, facilitators or government agencies in either the country from which the vessel departed or Australia. Sometimes these calls claim - real, false or self-induced - a safety of life at sea incident, and request assistance. Australia's Maritime Safety Authority will be informed and may liaise with its Indonesian counterpart, BASARNAS, as both a matter of courtesy and to ensure coordination of effort within an area that, by bilateral and International Maritime Organisation agreement, is the Indonesian Search and Rescue Region.

If assets are available and information correct, an aerial confirmation of location will vector on-water assets to provide assistance as may be required. I emphasise that word '*if*'. The ocean is large, the boats small and our assets limited. Nevertheless safety of life at sea is and will always remain the first priority for Australia and the JATF.

Depending on location and circumstances we do on occasions ask if Indonesia authorities wish to receive those people recovered. In recent times Indonesia has done so on two occasions, on 26 September 2013 and 27 September 2013, otherwise those people enter our offshore processing system.

This voyage towards the Australian Contiguous Zone may take anywhere from two days to more than a month, depending on the point of departure, vessel condition, crew and weather, to name a few of many factors.

This general model is an uncontentious, standard sequence of events that has been observed for some years. Despite this, each individual SIEV has unique characteristics in terms of location, time, weather, seaworthiness of vessel, numbers and condition of passengers, and competence of crew. These variations generate the risks and dangers that our Customs and Border Protection and Navy personnel manage so well.

~~The general model I have described is a quite uncontentious, standard sequence of events that has been in play for some years.~~

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Under Operation Sovereign Borders, I will however employ the full range of measures available to vary this general model on any occasion in which an opportunity to deter people smuggling presents.

Looking forward, I would also note that the arrival of the monsoon season, which generally commences in December, will bring a deterioration in sea conditions, introduce additional complexities for on-water operations, and increase the risk of loss of life at sea.

OSB Public Information Protocols

There has been considerable public comment and debate in recent days regarding the amount of detail that I provide at the weekly press conferences. With the Chair's indulgence, I would like to read into Hansard selected remarks I made on this issue at the 15 November 2013 OSB press conference.

Command carries with it a responsibility to my people and our mission. It is with this responsibility in mind that I have established protocols around the release of certain information to the public. These protocols are designed to preserve the integrity of our operations and, in that respect, are consistent

with what would be expected in any complex operation, particularly one that involves diplomatic, law enforcement and security aspects.

Specifically, these protocols are in place so as not to:

- 1) give advantage to people smugglers,
- 2) provide people smugglers with material that may be used to manipulate or confuse their customers,
- 3) undermine the regional relationships necessary to deal with this problem, or
- 4) endanger our people.

As was outlined on 15 November, people smugglers use information about vessel arrivals to market ventures to prospective passengers. They use official announcements of vessel interceptions to persuade people that the way to Australia remains open.

People smugglers use such announcements to claim credit for any intercepted vessel, to bolster their reputation and gain market share. They do so irrespective of whether they were the organisers of those vessels.

Information about arrivals also leads to the release of final payments to people smugglers. Information protocols that disrupt cash flow, even briefly, cause difficulties for people smugglers, particularly in an increasingly tight market where business is very competitive.

Public release of information about interception location undermines the tactical advantage that our surveillance and response assets have over people smugglers; especially those who seek to avoid detection.

People smugglers have used knowledge of where our vessels are operating to make dangerous assumptions about the posture of our maritime assets. In some cases, this had led them to make ill-informed judgements about voyage planning, including the selection of the crew and route, and vessels to undertake their journey. For example, we know that passengers have been told on occasions, by people smugglers, not to be concerned by the poor state of their vessel, or the inexperience of their crew, or the lack of provisions on board, because their voyage will be short and they will very quickly marry up

with an Australian vessel nearby. These false assurances place people's lives in considerable risk.

We also know that people smugglers would use information about on-water procedures to instruct crew and passengers on how to limit the effectiveness of such procedures, for example, by disrupting lawful boardings, or destroying information that might otherwise be useful in a prosecution. In some cases this has led people to sabotage their own vessel.

People smugglers use passenger demographic information to obtain insights into potential new markets. Our efforts are undermined if we provide pointers to communities that may be more open to exploitation; releasing demographic information also risks encouraging the chain migration of those in similar circumstances.

Consistent with long established protocols in relation to international communications, information about the details of official bilateral dialogue or communications between operational agencies undertaken under the auspices of Operation Sovereign Border is also not disclosed. Such details may undermine the regional and operational relationships essential for implementation of counter people smuggling measures. And reporting events mid-incident may risk both the cooperation of partners and potentially the lives of those involved.

These considerations go to the heart of my responsibility to care for my people, and our mission.

As you would expect of me, I take this responsibility very seriously but I do not believe in secrecy for secrecy's sake.

The protocols I have established, for the release of official information related to Operation Sovereign Borders, seek to balance the public's right to know, which I respect, the safety of all involved, which I am responsible for, and the mission I have been given, which I am determined to achieve.

These protocols provide for the operational integrity necessary to underpin success and for that reason, I consider them to be in the public interest.

With regard to publically releasable information, since the commencement of OSB until 0900 Friday 15 Nov 2013:

- 1) There have been 13 boats arrive, carrying a total of 25 crew and 707 Illegal Maritime Arrivals, who have entered into offshore processing or enhanced screening arrangements.
- 2) There are 1157 people on Manus, 629 people on Nauru and 2217 people in detention facilities on Christmas Island.
- 3) From Offshore Processing Centres there have been 106 people voluntarily return to their country of origin.
- 4) In close cooperation with partner authorities, there have been a total of 32 disruptions, affecting approximately 1300 potential illegal immigrants.
- 5) There have also been 44 arrests, and 5 warrants issued arising from involvement in people smuggling.
- 6) The JATF has not been directly involved in incidents in which the death or serious injury of people has occurred, but we were aware of and sought to assist with surveillance assets, an incident close to the Indonesian coast on 27 Sep 2013 in which 44 people died. That incident was the subject of a contemporaneous media release.

Outcomes since OSB Commenced

Mr Chair, I would like to close with a short summary of the key outcomes achieved since the commencement of Operation Sovereign Border.

- 1) The JATF and its central whole-of-government coordination arrangements have now been established.
- 2) Extensive Ministerial level and senior official level international engagement to discuss improved regional cooperation on countering people smuggling has commenced.

- 3) Strategic Communications messages targeting Source and Transit Countries have been strengthened around OSB and border security policies and measures.
- 4) The tempo of deterrence and disruption activities has increased to put pressure on people smugglers.
- 5) The 48 hour 'rapid transfer' process for illegal maritime arrivals to offshore processing countries has been introduced.
- 6) 'No exemptions' arrangements relating to eligibility for transfer to Offshore Processing Centres have been establishment and implemented.
- 7) Capacity in existing offshore processing countries has been increased, and this work is ongoing.
- 8) The security and resilience of offshore facilities has been reviewed and is now being progressively improved where needed.
- 9) The presence of IOM at offshore processing centres has increased, to help facilitate those who elect to undertake a voluntary return to their country of origin.
- 10) Finally, the JATF has prepared confidential advice on a wide range of the other policy elements of Operation Sovereign Borders and the Regional Deterrence Framework, which remain subject to Government consideration.

Mr Chair, Committee, thank you for your patience that concludes my opening remarks.

Do you have any questions?