

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 The committee considers that this report complements the findings and recommendations of the Customs internal review of actions relating to SIEV 221, and the work undertaken by the Christmas Island Emergency Management Committee, as outlined in Chapter 2. The committee supports the findings and recommendations made in these reports and congratulates the Government on the prompt implementation of the recommendations. In all instances, where areas for improvement were identified, measures were quickly taken to implement changes.

5.2 It is the committee's view that the response to the horrific tragedy that took place on 15 December 2010 was professional, courageous and as effective as it could possibly be under the prevailing weather conditions.

5.3 Responding vessels moved as quickly as they were able to assist SIEV 221, whose location and situation was unclear and very difficult to accurately ascertain. When they reached the wreckage, the crew of the ACV *Triton* and HMAS *Pirie* did all they could in terrible conditions to save as many lives as possible, and all but one of the survivors owe their lives to these brave men and women.

5.4 The SIEV's position near the rocks and prevailing weather conditions meant that no rescue boats of any kind could have been safely launched from the island. The inflatable boats launched from the *Triton* and *Pirie* were successful in their endeavours notwithstanding being operated well beyond their specification.

5.5 Similarly heroic were those on shore, relaying information to authorities, acting as spotters for the *Triton* and *Pirie* crew, and trying to assist survivors with life jackets and other buoyancy devices. Their sense of helplessness is understandable but they should feel proud of the important contribution they were able to make.

5.6 The committee is of the view that appropriate care and support has been offered to the survivors, the community, and to officers of responding agencies. Acute medical care was of a high order, as was immediate psychological support for all concerned. Christmas Island is remote, however within hours arrangements were made to charter flights and bring in extra personnel, including psychologists, counsellors, relief staff, Serco officers and DIAC case managers.

5.7 Professional medical advice was sought when it was needed, and has informed the care provided to the survivors. Advice about the assistance available was widely disseminated. Commonwealth agencies provided counselling and practical support to affected personnel, and many implemented follow-up programs to check on the recovery of officers. Where it is still required, that assistance is still being provided, and the committee has recommended that this continue.

5.8 The committee also recommends that the relevant Commonwealth agencies liaise with the Christmas Island community to explore options for a permanent memorial to be erected on the island, at a site of the residents' choosing, for the victims of the tragedy. The committee considers such a memorial would help the island community to continue the healing process, and mitigate the pain still being felt.

5.9 The committee once again thanks all those who submitted to the inquiry, the committee recognises that this process of participation was painful for many.