

Additional Comments

Senator Hanson-Young

Introduction

1.1 On December 15 2010, a terrible tragedy occurred off the coast of Christmas Island, which saw more than 50 asylum seekers lose their lives.

1.2 This tragic loss of life is a stark reminder of the desperation of vulnerable asylum seekers who are trying to reach protection for themselves and their families.

1.3 The Australian Greens wish to acknowledge the bravery and courage of all the service personnel, and the local Christmas Island community involved in undertaking this rescue operation.

Surveillance and monitoring of SIEVs

1.4 During the course of the inquiry, it became evident that the current surveillance and monitoring protocols for detecting and intercepting Suspected Illegal Entry Vessels (SIEVs) is not fool proof. Questions were raised within many submissions about the ability for technology to work effectively in severe weather conditions, and the resourcing of the various levels of surveillance currently in operation.

Recommendation

The Australian Greens recommend that as matter of urgency an independent review into Australia's border protection surveillance is established.

Christmas Island Community

1.5 Despite spending millions of dollars establishing the Immigration Detention Centre on Christmas Island, no additional resources have been provided to assist the community with dealing with an increased population, or potential emergency situations. It became clear during the committee's hearings on the Island, that due to the lack of emergency personnel, community volunteers were required to assist in the rescue operation, and in the aftermath of the tragedy, with limited resources at their disposal.

1.6

Recommendation

The Australian Greens recommend that Commonwealth funding be directed to establish a full-time emergency services volunteer coordinator on Christmas Island.

Recommendation

The Australian Greens recommend that a permanent mental health team, funded through the Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, is established on Christmas Island, as part of the Christmas Island health service, to provide services for all members of the community.

Recommendation

The Australian Greens recommend that the Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, implement all recommendations from the Christmas Island emergency management report.

Recommendation

The Australian Greens further recommend that the Department of Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, conduct an infrastructure audit on the standards and conditions of facilities on Christmas Island.

Department of Immigration and Citizenship

1.7 In the aftermath of the tragedy, debate was focussed on the decision not to transfer all survivors to the mainland. While there were differing assessments from mental health professionals, both on and off Christmas Island, the Australian Greens are of the view that all survivors should have been immediately transferred to the mainland, ensuring appropriate support was easily accessible.

1.8 Evidence from key health professionals, such as Professor Louise Newman, at the time of the tragedy, suggest that detaining survivors in a remote location for weeks before transferring them to the mainland would have impacted on their ability to recover from such a traumatic experience.

Recommendation

The Australian Greens recommend that as a matter of urgency, a review into the protocols by which decisions are made to transfer asylum seekers with special needs to the mainland, is established.

Recommendation

The Australian Greens recommend that the role of community liaison officer, funded through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, continue to be funded.

Senator Sarah Hanson-Young

Australian Greens Spokesperson on Immigration