

PEOPLE SMUGGLING TASKFORCE – HIGH LEVEL GROUP MEETING
3.15 p.m. TUESDAY, 23 OCTOBER 2001

Attendees: Andrew Metcalfe, Ed Killesteyn, Vince McMahon, Jenny Bedlington (DIMA); Shane Castles (AFP); Mark Zanker, Bill Campbell (A-Gs); Geoff Raby (DFAT); Mike Mrdak (DTRS); John Hawksworth (Customs); Ian Errington (Coastwatch); Warrick Gately (Defence); Jane Halton, Katrina Edwards, Jenny Bryant (PM&C).

Current State of Play

PNG

- [REDACTED] have now arrived at Manus –to be accommodated separately prior to their removal. **B**
- Talking points for Downer on disturbance circulated for comment (attached)
- DIMA considering using an Australian Iraqi community leader, Dr Al Salami, who is member of Detention Advisory Group and has been helpful in Woomera disturbances in the past, to assist on Manus.
- UNHCR has indicated they have not yet received a request from PNG to assist with processing
- Mixed reports on whether perimeter was breached. One asylum seeker may have psychiatric condition.

Christmas Island

- Engine of SIEV6 started but running rough. Weather has closed in, choppy with high seas forecast for 2 days.
- Defence going to Reith. CO on scene to make judgement about feasibility and safety of move in current conditions
- Life saving equipment to be on board.

SIEV7 at Ashmore

- Humanitarian assistance being provided. Restless and irate group of 8 demanding to know where they will be taken –told decision may be 5-7 days. Same script as for SIEV5
- NorCom moving Arunta to Ashmore – 2nd boarding party will be on board. Samson Explorer due at Ashmore on 25/10
- Still possibilities of 2 more boats at Ashmore and further boat at Christmas – risks of exposure at each location to be weighed.

Cocos

- DTRS working with EA. Clearance has been given to complete sewerage but if more than 100 people were to be accommodated, would need to either follow statutory processes under *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* or apply for exemption in the national interest. EA have briefed Hill.
- 40 Sri Lankans proposed to be removed Wednesday next week – AFP completing work and documents being finalised

Other possible sites

- DFAT document on status of discussions in South Pacific circulated (attached)

- Further [redacted] document circulated (attached)

B

Indonesia

- DIMA reported 2nd Immigration Working Group meeting last week went well. Progress on karantinas. Hoping they will come here in 2 weeks. Indonesian concerns relate to holding problem and resettlement rates.

- [redacted]
- [redacted]

B

- Information campaign moving well – comprehensive set of ideas engaging at all levels

- [redacted]

B

- APC first week of December

- [redacted]
- [redacted]

B

- DFAT to seek Rick Smith's views on making of assistance direct to Embassy here. AFP could send resources if required
- Detailed report from 19 yo Afghani male survivor - reports sunk vessel departed 0130 hours 18/10 with 421 on board, including 70 children. Stopped near Karakara group of Islands at 0900 where 24 left vessel. 397 still on board. At 1400 on 19/10 vessel was taking water out of sight of land. Sank very quickly but resurfaced. About 120 people on surface. 7000 litres of fuel escaped? Seas rough. Only 70 lifejackets – none worked. 19-20 hours in water from 1500 on Friday 19/10 till rescued by 2 fishing vessels around 1100 on Saturday, 20/10. One fishing vessel rescued 44 people; another rescued 5 – 4 deceased and 1 survivor. 41 adults and 3 children survived, 352 drowned. Survivors taken to Jakarta – being cared for by IOM at Bogor outside Jakarta. Vessel likely to have been in international waters south of Java.

Nauru

- No update on visit by 60 minutes crew – lawyer is migration agent in Fairfield
- UNHCR has responded to Amnesty approach saying their assistance is not needed and will not permit them to sit in on interviews

Other issues

- Attorney has instructed A-Gs to oppose expedition of appeal. Hearing now likely this week or next. Talked to Solicitor-General re affidavits on current status of group on Nauru. Reasons for opposing appeal have to be in S/I I.
- PI Law Officers meeting – paper being prepared (paper circulated – attached).
- Meeting with Australian Petroleum Exploration Association tomorrow – concerns re asylum seekers landing – platforms now excised areas.