



Australian Government
Australian Customs and
Border Protection Service

Ministerial No: 107953

Customs House
5 Constitution Avenue
Canberra ACT 2601

Ms M Hutton

Dear Ms Hutton

The Minister for Home Affairs has asked me to respond on his behalf to your correspondence of 14 June 2013 regarding Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reports that since January 2013, an estimated 500 people have died at sea trying to reach Australia.

I do not know the basis of the figures quoted by the ABC, but note that you have sought clarification from the ABC.

As you point out in your correspondence of 14 June 2013, it is impossible for the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (Customs and Border Protection) to provide precise figures on the number of asylum seeker drownings that may have occurred in any period.

Customs and Border Protection concurs with your estimates of lives lost in the maritime incidents of 25 January, 28 January, 25 March, 10 April, 5 May and 5-7 June 2013, noting that these estimates may change for a variety of reasons, including receipt of additional information.

You asked for information on any other maritime incidents since 1 January 2013, in which people may have died en-route to Australia. Customs and Border Protection is aware of the following incidents:

- The Sri Lankan navy rescued 32 people as their vessel foundered approximately 500 km off the east coast of Sri Lanka. Survivors reported that 98 people died during the 65 day voyage.
- A vessel was sighted heading towards Cocos Island, but could not be relocated despite an extensive search effort. The incident occurred in June 2013, approximately 260 nautical miles north-west of Cocos Island. It is estimated that at least 34 people are deceased.
- Two passengers and one crew member reportedly left a people smuggling vessel on a raft to get help after their vessel had drifted for 10 days. These people have not been sighted since. The other passengers were spotted two days later by an Australian Maritime Safety Authority aircraft and rescued by a commercial vessel, which took them back to Indonesia in May 2013.
- One person was reported as being swept overboard during a voyage to Australia in June 2013.
- One person was found deceased on an asylum seeker vessel after it was intercepted near Christmas Island around 16 June 2013.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Don Smith', written in a cursive style.

Don Smith
National Manager Counter People Smuggling Taskforce
Australian Customs and Border Protection Service