

Robert McClelland MP

Federal Member for Barton
Shadow Minister for Homeland Security

June 25 2004

Intelligence lacking on people smuggling

The key to fighting people smuggling and other illegal maritime activity, is an ability to detect and detain Suspect Illegal Entry Vessels (SIEV's).

Unfortunately not one Minister in the Howard Government can answer the very simple question of how the SIEV's that have arrived in Australian waters have been detected by Australian authorities.

We don't know how many were detected by the Navy, how many by Coastwatch surveillance flights or how many by community reports?

According to answers to questions on notice the Minister for Defence doesn't know, the Minister for Immigration doesn't know, and the Minister for Justice and Customs still hasn't answered - almost three months after being asked.

It is not surprising that these Ministers have been unable to answer this simple question when you consider that the Minister for Immigration and the Minister for Justice and Customs disagree about whether a customs vessel or Coastwatch plane first detected the 15 unlawful arrivals detected on Ashmore Reef in March this year.

How we detect suspect illegal entry vessels that are potentially involved in people smuggling or narcotics or gun running is a central to how we shape our response to this threat. The fact that not one Minister in the Howard Government can answer this simple question reveals a serious intelligence black hole.

It is vital information such as this that is constantly slipping through the cracks in the patchwork of part time ministers and competing government agencies currently responsible for protecting our borders.

Australia needs a Coastguard to close the maritime policing capability gap, and a full time Minister for Homeland Security to fill these intelligence cracks.

See Questions on Notice Number 3389, 3390 and 3386

Further information:

Lachlan Harris 0409 119 893