



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Asylum Seekers

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Perrett, Graham, MP

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Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (16:30): With great pride, I rise to speak on this matter of public importance and thank the member for Durack for what I guess we would call a contribution. Firstly, I want to point out how complex this problem is. Border protection is a very complicated issue. We know that we are a large continent. We know that our borders are quite significant. The member for Durack has a large electorate, and the previous one was an even larger electorate, and he would know how difficult it is cover a large area. In terms of border protection, Australia has to patrol an area equivalent to 11 per cent of the world's oceans. Australia does not have 11 per cent of the world's population, but we have to patrol 11 per cent of the world's oceans to make our borders safe—1.54 million square nautical miles.

I would like to commend Rear Admiral Tim Barrett and all the ADF personnel, the Customs personnel, the Federal Police and all the people involved in the Border Protection Command. They do a fantastic job. As the member for Chifley stated the other day, we have been involved in the inquiry into the Christmas Island boat tragedy. Not only have members of the Border Protection Command appeared before the inquiry; they assisted the committee when we visited Christmas Island, where we met high-ranking officers as well as those doing the work on the ground and out on the ocean. They are all incredibly professional. I want to commend them for what they do, and I want to take issue with the suggestion in the MPI that somehow they are falling down. The reality is that, since the Gillard and Rudd governments have been in office, approximately one per cent of illegal vessels are arriving, whereas previously approximately 10 per cent arrived. We have gone up to 99 per cent protection, you could say. With the reality of patrolling 11 per cent of the world's oceans, we will never get it perfect. The radars in Hollywood movies just do not exist. The reality is that small, wooden boats are almost impossible to detect with radar from any great distances, even if the ocean is flat and calm. When there are hurricanes, cyclones and the like, it is even more difficult. Unfortunately, we saw that outcome with the boat tragedy.

Once upon a time, there was a season when people smugglers put people into boats. Before we made the Malaysia announcement, there was a rush of people coming down here in all types of weather and we saw the tragedies that unfolded there. As I said, I commend Rear Admiral Tim Barrett and all the ADF personnel for what they are doing. Also, I read in the paper the other day about the endeavours of some other Australian agencies that operate beyond our borders that have had success in intercepting people before they pay the people smugglers and get onto boats and make those dangerous journeys. The efforts of those agencies are great to see.

I am proud to be part of a government that has more assets patrolling our borders than any other governments in our history. Now up to 99 per cent of boats are being stopped, whereas previously it was about 10 per cent. The Gillard government invested \$1.2 billion in the 2010-11 budget to bolster our border security. This is building on the \$654 million border protection and anti-people-smuggling package announced in the previous budget. We have eight new Bay class patrol vessels. We met some of the Navy personnel working with those. We have 18 vessels and 17 aircraft, which operate out of South Australia and Darwin, doing some great patrol work. It is boring and monotonous work but work that keeps us safe in our beds at night.

We also gave extra resources to our regional partners. We are going beyond our borders to wreck the people smugglers' business model. We announced \$24.8 million in extra funding to law enforcement agencies in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan and Sri Lanka for funding extra patrol boats, surveillance aircraft and communications equipment, helping the Indonesian National Police detect and disrupt people—as we saw the other day—and new land based policing surveillance and investigative equipment for partner law enforcement agencies in the region. We are working with our neighbours, understanding that we are connected to the rest of Asia and this part of the world. We gave \$5 million to develop new computer forensic capabilities with the Indonesian National Police. These are great initiatives that are good for our nation as a whole and obviously making our borders more secure. In November last year, Minister O'Connor announced a \$2 million package for the new maritime radio communication system to help Indonesia combat maritime threats. These are the practical solutions and practical realities that show that the Gillard Labor government are working to protect our

borders. We are being transparent about this. All of these announcements are in media releases and in the budget packages. There is nothing secretive at all about this.

The reality is that those opposite are taking a punt on a stunt. We saw that in Nauru, which was a total waste of money. We see that in the foreshadowed visit to Malaysia. Nauru never did break the people smugglers' business model. Where did 90 per cent of the people who ended up in Nauru finally put down their roots? They are either in Australia or New Zealand. There is something there that people smugglers can sell. Obviously we need to break that business model. As the member for Chifley stated—he is on the same inquiry—we should do so not only because it is good common sense for Australia but also, and more importantly, because it will save lives.

We saw a few months back a big story in the *Age* and *Daily Telegraph* about a missing boat with perhaps up to 100 people gone. That is horrible, but what is even more horrible is watching people drown, which is what the Australian Navy personnel have had to do, as well as the people on the parliamentary inquiry looking into the SIEV221 and the 50 deaths that are associated with it. The reality is that we need to do whatever we can to save lives.

I will be the first to admit—or the second to admit, because I think Minister Bowen said the same thing—that Malaysia is tough. It does not have the same justice system as Australia. It has the same roots but it has evolved slightly differently. It has provinces that have sharia law. Malaysia is a country of contrasts; we know that. It has a proud history. Some say that, if the Macassans had had flags, maybe they would have claimed Australia when they came here in the 1500s and 1600s to trade with Aborigines. It has a proud history, but it is a country of contrasts. I would suggest that the Petronas Towers are the most beautiful buildings in the world. I know that is a big call for people who have been to Paris and New York and other places, but for me they are the most beautiful buildings in the world. Then you can go to other provinces in Malaysia where there is strict, harsh sharia law embedded in the justice system. So Malaysia is a country of contrasts and it will be hard to protect every single person who goes there. I hope the member for Cook gets out of there safely; I am sure he will. The reality is that Malaysia does have a slightly different system to Australia, but I go back to the member for Chifley's point: if we can save lives with this exchange of 4,000 for 800 and also give those people who have been sitting patiently in the Malaysian refugee camps a chance to have another life, that will be a good thing. When you weigh it up, if we can save lives and stop those horrific tragedies occurring again, that will be a good thing.

We have got maybe 800 days left until the election day. No doubt every day for the next 800 days will have the Leader of the Opposition coming in here and doing a stunt or going out in the media doing a stunt. Every day for the next 800 days he will trot something out. Maybe he will look to the past, especially today when we are looking at events of a year ago, but we will look at the future.

Mrs Griggs: You keep going back to Work Choices.

Mr PERRETT: No, we are not going to back to Work Choices. That is your embryonic policy. I will take that interjection. The reality is that we are not interested in Work Choices. The first things we did were to ratify Kyoto and get rid of Work Choices because we believe in working for the future.

I will go back to the past a little bit and look at the member for Cook's suggestion of having a Malaysian solution, except it was not in Malaysia; it was in Iran. I do not know the President of Iran as well as the member for Cook — (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott): Order! The time for this discussion has concluded.