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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Asylum Seekers

SPEECH

Wednesday, 20 November 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Speaker Morrison, Scott, MP	Question No.

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (15:32): I welcome the opportunity to debate this topic today, because it gives me the chance to once again provide further updates on the progress that the government are making on the commitment we made to the Australian people, which was to do one thing—that is, to stop the boats. We gave that commitment. We set out the arrangements we would put in place to do that, and we are progressing with implementing our measures to stop the boats.

There is one thing that there is no secret about and it is this: in the first eight weeks of Operation Sovereign Borders, the number of people arriving illegally by boat compared to the eight weeks before the introduction of Operation Sovereign Borders has declined by 75 per cent. It is actually more than 75 per cent; it is almost 80 per cent.

I know that the shadow minister wants to claim two weeks out of more than 300 as evidence of the previous government's record. What the shadow minister needs to understand is that the previous government are responsible for their entire record in government. Their entire record of government is one on this issue of cost with a record budget blow-out of more than \$11.5 billion. You want to talk about paying for boats: the Australian people were paying for the boats that came to Australia under the previous government with a blow-out of more than \$11.5 billion.

We went from \$85 million a year with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship—as it was then—prior to the previous government abolishing the measures that worked, and that went to an annual cost of more than \$3 billion a year. That was the cost.

There is the chaos of more than 50,000 people that turned up on over 800 boats that illegally entered Australia—the chaos that we saw in our detention network: the riots, the fires, people standing on roofs, immigration officials being forced to stand up on boxes in the middle of roof cavities talking to rioting and protesting detainees, and ministers refusing to take them down. They were embarrassed into action when the New South Wales police just turned up one day when protesters went and stood on the then minister's roof and they were down within hours. The chaos that the Australian people had to endure under the previous government's failures was absolutely galling to them, and they tossed them out because of it.

There is the tragedy that occurred as a result of the previous government's failures. That tragedy existed in two specific areas—and I referred to one of them yesterday: the fact that under the previous government's policies, which thankfully are no longer policies, every single person who arrived illegally in Australia by boat and was given a visa by that government got a permanent visa. That is bad enough. That was the reward and the incentive that that government ran for their entire term.

Above that, every single visa—and there were more than 15,000 of them, by the way, which that they handed out; more than 15,000 invitations for others to follow—took the place of someone waiting in a camp or an even more desperate place somewhere else. More than 15,000. That has changed. But then there is the tragedy of the more than 1,100 people who are dead. I know that no-one in this House does not believe that that is a tragedy and no-one on this side of the House, whether they sit here now or when we sat on the other side, draws a direct line between those two events. But it did occur and that is why this government is getting on with the business of implementing the measures we know are necessary to do exactly what we promised—that is, to stop those boats coming.

I can report on progress. The joint agency task force brings together more than 15 different agencies to ensure a single-minded application of all the government's will, resources and programs to focus on the issue of putting an end to this madness that occurred under the previous government's administration. Those opposite like to mock

Operation Sovereign Borders. That means they have failed to learn the lessons of their failures in government and they still just do not get it—that you need to apply the full will and resolve of a government to solve this problem.

There has already been extensive ministerial-level engagement within the region to put in place a regional deterrence framework. This government understands that you do not make your own borders stronger by encouraging others into the region; you need to make the region's borders stronger. You do not run a regional cooperation approach that invites people into Indonesia that says: if you make a secondary move beyond your country of first asylum and if you get to Indonesia, we will create more places for you so more of you can come. I can assure you that the Indonesian government are not excited about the idea of being an asylum magnet courtesy of Australian policies. They already know too bitterly the experience of that because the previous government got rid of the policies that worked.

The communications messaging that goes up into source and transit countries has been increased, and we have given it the budget to do that. The maritime operations of this government are different to those under the previous government. Those members opposite and all members in this place, based on the statements of Lieutenant General Campbell, will know why I can go no further into that. We are doing things differently on water, and people who are trying to get to Australia know it.

The tempo of deterrence and disruption activities that are taking place throughout the region, not just in Indonesia—and we are incredibly grateful to the Indonesian government—has been increased. We are ensuring that those who are out there, particularly our Australian Federal Police, who are working cooperatively with governments throughout the region, no longer have to borrow from Peter to pay Paul to ensure they can do their job. The previous government drew down the resources available to those working offshore to disrupt and deter people smugglers where they are transiting. That has been changed. They are supported and they are getting the resources they need to do that job. That is why we are now stopping more than double the number of people getting here by boat. So our disruption and deterrence activities and the additional support that we have given are ensuring that every week more people are being stopped from coming here than those actually getting here.

The offshore-processing arrangements have been put in place to work, not to fail. The previous government were dragged kicking and screaming to offshore processing. They do not believe in it. They never did. That is okay. They do not think it is a policy. They never did. They had to be dragged kicking and screaming. They used to come into this place and stand at this dispatch box and say why Nauru would not work, why Manus Island would not work, why offshore processing was inhumane, and all of these things. They refused to do it and they abolished it. But they were dragged kicking and screaming to do it and, when they brought it in, they did it under protest. But they did not back it up. Fewer than one in 20 people in that first implementation of offshore processing actually went to offshore processing. That is not how it was designed to work. We have changed that. We have made sure there are no exemptions to offshore processing, absolutely none. That was not the case under the previous government. There is a 48-hour rapid transfer process so that people do not get to settle in here, as was occurring under the previous government. They go straight to offshore processing. That is how you run offshore processing.

The capacity of our offshore processing centres in the first 100 days will be double what we inherited from the previous government. That is what a government does when it believes in its bones about these policies. The border protection policies that are being implemented by this government are the ones we believe in. The Australian people sent the previous government a very important message about the policies they implemented—that is, the Australian people did not trust them in their hands.

The Australian people know that we believe in border protection. The Australian people know that, when it comes to border protection, those measures will always be more effective in the hands of a coalition government than they could ever be in the hands of the Labor Party and their good friends the Greens. They know the coalition stand for strong borders. They know that to have a strong and important immigration program the Australian people have to have confidence that our borders are secure. That is what we are introducing. That is what we are delivering. Arrivals illegally by boat are down more than 75 per cent, and that is the message that this opposition does not want to hear. (*Time expired*)