



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**  
**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:**  
**TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS**

**Immigration**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 17 October 2006**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 17 October 2006  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Brandis, Sen George

**Source** Senate  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Senator BRANDIS** (Queensland) (3.10 pm)—That rather contemptible speech by Senator Hurley shows how low the Labor Party has gone in this debate about 457 visas. And it is of a piece—as we heard from Senator Vanstone in her answer to Senator Johnston’s question—with the disgusting and dishonest remarks that were made at a doorstep interview this morning by Mr Tony Burke, the Labor Party’s shadow minister for immigration. Remember that Thursday two days hence is the fifth anniversary of the tragedy of SIEVX. On 19 October 2001, a refugee boat sank in international waters south of Java. It contained 397 passengers, of whom 352 were drowned, many of them children. It was one of the saddest episodes in this part of the world in recent history. This is what Mr Tony Burke had to say about it at a doorstep interview this morning: ‘The problem for me with temporary protection visas ... is that in terms of having an impact on people-smuggling it actually works the opposite way.’

**Senator Ferguson**—Rubbish.

**Senator BRANDIS**—Thank you, Senator Ferguson, and I will come to you in a moment. Mr Burke continued: ‘Once it was introduced, more boats came—the boat that we remember being sunk five years ago this week, filled with 146 children—for one simple reason: the reason there were so many children there was that overwhelmingly they had dads in Australia who were not allowed to sponsor their infant children to join them.’ Wrong, wrong, wrong! Senator Ferguson, who sat with me on the Senate Select Committee into a Certain Maritime Incident in 2002, which exhaustively canvassed the circumstances of the sinking of SIEVX, well knows that each of those propositions is absolutely false.

As the minister pointed out in her answer to Senator Johnston, there was not a skerrick of evidence given to that committee, nor has it ever been asserted, that the overwhelming majority of the children who drowned as a result of the SIEVX tragedy were seeking to join their parents in Australia. That callous, ignorant and untruthful statement by Mr Tony Burke just goes to show how free the Australian Labor Party are with the truth and how they have even been prepared to sink so low as to play fast and loose with the truth about a personal tragedy.

**Senator Ferguson**—It is absolutely wrong.

**Senator BRANDIS**—What Tony Burke said, as you interjected, Senator Ferguson, was absolutely wrong. It is also absolutely wrong, as Mr Burke and now Senator Hurley have suggested, that the 457 visa policy has in fact encouraged unlawful boat arrivals. The truth is the opposite. Since the Howard government adopted in the second half of 2001 the border protection policy administered by the joint task force of ADF personnel known as Operation Relex, what we saw—as Senator Ferguson knows better than anybody else in this chamber—was the sudden surge in unlawful boat arrivals abate. After December 2001, at the end of a six-month period during which there had been approximately a dozen attempted illegal entries into Australian waters by these people at great personal peril, there were none—not one.

Every one of the people who sought to make the Australian shoreline in those suspected illegal entry vessels put themselves and their children in the peril which, tragically, those who embarked on SIEVX suffered. The boats were run by people smugglers. They were leaky fishing boats that were filled beyond capacity and they sailed through choppy seas. They were always a danger to their occupants. The tragedy of SIEVX was bound to happen as long as the people smugglers got the encouragement to believe that they could make it to Australia. What SIEVX tells us is how timely and necessary the Australian government’s policy was. (*Time expired*)