

Cmdr Chatterton—I would have passed on in the early times of the SIEVs the significant changes in the increase in the level of violence, particularly if it involved any possible threat to RAN sailors or units.

Senator BARTLETT—How does the flow of information work? We heard earlier from Admiral Smith on the oversight of Operation Relex that the information would flow to him. How does information pass to you? What channels does it go through?

Cmdr Chatterton—It mainly comes through emails, signals and cablegrams from various sources—usually through Strategic Command Division or through Maritime Headquarters—to me, where I sift through all the information to find out if there is anything noteworthy to inform the Chief of Navy of.

Senator BARTLETT—So it would usually come to you after it had gone to people like Admiral Smith, rather than the other way round?

Cmdr Chatterton—Usually, yes. There would be a time delay in getting information from ships through the communications centres, Maritime Headquarters to Canberra. In Canberra, we work a basic eight to five day, so there may be information that comes in overnight that I would not see until the following morning. Maritime Headquarters runs on a 24-hour basis.

Senator BARTLETT—Would you only get information in relation to activities of the Navy? I am thinking of some of the Orion aircraft, for example, that were doing surveillance work that was part of Operation Relex but, as I understand it, they were not Navy personnel. Would you be informed about anything they were doing as well?

Cmdr Chatterton—I would get the broad results of their surveillance effort.

Senator BARTLETT—Would you be made aware then if there was anticipation of boats departing Indonesia to come to Australia?

Cmdr Chatterton—In addition to the emails and signals, I am also a user of intelligence that comes from various intelligence agencies, and that might contain information of a classified nature that would indicate possible departures of vessels.

Senator BARTLETT—Were you notified of instances like that?

Cmdr Chatterton—I would find out that information from the information that I had available to me, yes.

Senator BARTLETT—Were you notified in any way about the fate of the vessel that did not get a number because it sank before it was intercepted? You would be aware of that one which had significant loss of life.

Cmdr Chatterton—I only found out about that vessel after the Indonesian fishermen had picked up the few people that had survived and had returned to an Indonesian port. I did not hear that there was a vessel that had specifically sailed from a specific port at a specific time.

Senator BARTLETT—Where did that information come from?

Cmdr Chatterton—That the people had been picked up?

Senator BARTLETT—Yes.

Cmdr Chatterton—I think that the first time I saw that was in the media.

Senator BARTLETT—So you would not normally get information from Search and Rescue or Coastwatch?

Cmdr Chatterton—Not directly to me, no. There would be no reason for me to have that. I am in the strategic level and Search and Rescue matters would go more properly to the operational part of the organisation so that they can deal with it directly—on a 24-hour basis.

Senator BARTLETT—Are you aware of any reports that were done, after the event, into the particular incident of the vessel that sank?

Cmdr Chatterton—I remember that, after it, I was asked where the nearest Navy ship was and I knew that there was one ship in the vicinity of Christmas Island. I found out from Maritime Headquarters that—I cannot remember the exact figure—it was something along the lines of 164 miles at least from the position. Looking at the chart and the way the seabed is there, a grossly overloaded vessel would have gone out into the Sunda Strait and, as it reached the main water mass, as the water comes up from the Indian Ocean, it probably would have sunk around that area—being overloaded. That was well inside the Indonesian area, so I would not have expected one of our ships to be in that area anyway, and I knew that our ship was actually patrolling around the Christmas Island area. So it was just a matter of working out how far away it was.

Senator BARTLETT—And you are not aware of any specific report or investigation that was done by any Australian authorities into the circumstances surrounding that incident?

Cmdr Chatterton—No, there is no specific item that I know of.

Senator FAULKNER—Commander, in your opening statement you mentioned that there were two primary involvements that you had in the matters being examined by this committee. Is that right?

Cmdr Chatterton—That is correct.

Senator FAULKNER—The second of those was contact with an officer, I assume, seconded to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Could you just indicate to me what the background is there? I assume that there are Defence officers in the International Division of Prime Minister and Cabinet. I do not know whether you have this background, but could you indicate the nature of the contact you had with that officer and why you thought it appropriate to make contact with that officer on the matters that had come to your attention?