

Dr Raby—Yes. As I said, Senator, the main period, or the only period, really, when I can recall us doing talking points specifically for posts was in the context of *Tampa*. That reflected the intergovernmental aspect of that issue, and that therefore was an important role for the department to address.

CHAIR—You have mentioned your discussions with Mike Smith, the chief of staff—

Dr Raby—Former.

CHAIR—The former chief of staff. When you pass information to him do you assume that it gets passed to the minister?

Dr Raby—Yes.

CHAIR—That is interesting. Are you aware of what we have come to know today as SIEVX, the vessel that capsized with 350-odd people drowning?

Dr Raby—Yes.

CHAIR—There was publicity about this in Indonesia. Have any talking points been prepared about that item?

Dr Raby—No.

CHAIR—Has Mr Downer been briefed in any way by the department about that issue?

Dr Raby—I would have to take that on notice, I think. The sit rep seems to be the only brief that we provided on that.

CHAIR—It is argued that the concern about that loss of life on the Indonesian side gave rise to the Indonesians being willing to come to a conference in, I think, Denpasar, was it not?

Dr Raby—In Bali, yes. That is a big connection. We could talk about that—

CHAIR—I am saying it is argued.

Dr Raby—I just want to be clear on this. Because it was such a terrible and dramatic event, there was a lot of cable traffic. When you ask, ‘Was the minister briefed?’ he would have been receiving reports from Jakarta, and the embassy was very assiduous in following this up. There is a lot more on an issue like this than just the sit rep commenting on it—not commenting; reporting facts is the case with the sit rep.

CHAIR—What I am asking is: was there any briefing of other posts outside of Jakarta or Canberra on this issue?

Dr Raby—No formal briefings—

CHAIR—None at all?

Dr Raby—as far as I am aware, no.

CHAIR—They would read the cable traffic, of course.

Dr Raby—Yes.

CHAIR—Have there been any discussions about trying to tie down the actual circumstances of SIEVX: where it may have foundered; how many people were involved?

Dr Raby—The post in Jakarta has been very active in trying to establish all the facts and circumstances, and that is a big post with defence, police and others attached to it.

CHAIR—Are you aware of the advice the defence minister has given the Leader of the Opposition in a letter about that? The advice was tendered in evidence today.

Dr Raby—No, I am not.

CHAIR—No, okay. What I will do is see that you do get a copy of that. It is part of the record of this hearing, and I will put on notice now the question that follows from you seeing that advice as to whether or not that matches your understanding of the circumstances. There is some concern about where this vessel may have actually gone down. I have no further questions.

Senator FAULKNER—This is a very brief issue for AusAID. This is a matter that I certainly know very little about, so I quickly acknowledge my ignorance on this. I have just seen this press release from Pacific Petroleum—and I do not know whether you have seen it or not—headed ‘Australia’s refugee crisis creates financial hardship for Pacific company’. Have you had that press release drawn to your attention?

Ms O’Keeffe—Yes, I have, Senator.

Senator FAULKNER—I have literally only in the last half-hour had a very brief look at it. The gist of it appears to be, as I understand it, that Pacific Petroleum have announced that they have taken Nauru to court over \$US1 million of unpaid fuel bills. If I can just sum it up in a sentence, I think that is right, isn’t it, Ms O’Keeffe?

Ms O’Keeffe—It would seem that Pacific Petroleum is unhappy with the way in which Nauru has responded to its debts to the company, yes.

Senator FAULKNER—Do you have any more understanding of Pacific Petroleum’s argument that the government’s funding has undercut them?

Ms O’Keeffe—Senator, this is an issue that has been brought to our attention on a couple of occasions by Pacific Petroleum, and it goes back several months. Basically, Pacific Petroleum, we understand, has in past years provided Nauru’s petrol needs. Clearly, the commercial arrangements between Nauru and Pacific Petroleum are not things that we are privy to. When it was agreed—as a result of the agreement between Australia and Nauru under the first administrative arrangement—that we would support Nauru in its provisions of fuel, of course

Senator FAULKNER—I am not sure if this is a question for AusAID or DFAT: as we speak, does this situation mean that Australia has had to take some responsibility beyond what ordinarily would be the case for some of these smaller Pacific islands mentioned in the press release and described—and I am not putting anything stronger than that; I do not pretend to be an expert, as I said—as having been left in the lurch because of this supply crisis? Could the appropriate officer at the table comment?

Ms O’Keeffe—As I said before, only Pacific Petroleum can comment on its particular operations and how it can or cannot provide fuel to other smaller countries. Other shipping lines operate in the Pacific, and it is not to say that they, too, can or cannot provide fuel.

Senator FAULKNER—We will hear more about it. As I had this drawn to my attention recently and you were at the table, I thought I would ask. It does have some bearing, as I am sure you appreciate, on the terms of reference of this committee. The link is drawn, at least, by Pacific Petroleum. Whether you do or do not acknowledge the validity of that is another issue. Thank you for your responses.

CHAIR—Have you put some questions on notice, Senator Faulkner?

Senator FAULKNER—I have, but not about this. I will leave it to others to address this particular issue.

CHAIR—I will look at your questions and, if I need to, I will put some additional questions about this issue on notice. Are there any further questions?

Senator JACINTA COLLINS—There is just one issue. Dr Raby, there was one matter I wanted to go back to. Ordinarily, in a committee of this nature, we would have a submission from you and would ask questions on that, but I have just been reminded that we have little information about what may have occurred in Indonesia post the SIEVX incident. You indicated to Senator Cook that our post in Indonesia had been active in seeking to investigate that matter. If you cannot do it now, could you take it on notice to provide the committee with up-to-date information about how matters have progressed post that incident in Indonesia? By that I mean the pursuit of the people smugglers, the two people—according to Tony Kevin’s evidence—that were picked up by Indonesian authorities and whatever else may have occurred in relation to that incident in Indonesia.

Dr Raby—I am happy to do so, Senator. You ask a very big question. There has been a tremendous amount of activity, so to compile all of that will take a little while, I should imagine.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS—I wonder also if you could provide us with any information on those asylum seekers who were returned to Indonesia and their fate upon return.

Dr Raby—I will take that on notice. That is, I think, a DIMIA responsibility, not ours.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS—So the ships that were towed or escorted back to the Indonesian coast remain a DIMIA responsibility, do they?

Dr Raby—Sorry. There were no ships returned to the Indonesian coast; they were returned to just outside the Indonesian contiguous zone.
