



Operation Sovereign Borders

TRANSCRIPT: PRESS CONFERENCE – OPERATION SOVEREIGN BORDERS UPDATE

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FRIDAY 20 DECEMBER 2013

SCOTT MORRISON: Welcome to the 14th briefing of Operation Sovereign Borders.

I'm pleased to advise that despite increasing pressures and prevailing good weather, the level of arrivals remains at the 80 per cent reduction levels I have referred to on numerous occasions at previous briefings, and that's around the 80 or 85 arrivals per week compared to the average between the announcement of the Regional Resettlement Arrangement and the commencement of Operation Sovereign Borders of around 460 per week.

The smugglers are continuing to try to get ventures away, but the Government continues to have the upper hand. And as we move forward, the Government's position will continue to strengthen as we move well beyond the operation establishment phase for Operation Sovereign Borders.

Last week, I reported the \$1.2 billion funding black hole for offshore processing left behind by the previous government. That black hole represents the infrastructure and services that were not going to be provided and were not going being provided by the former government at our offshore processing centres, which calls into real question whether there was any genuine commitment from the former government to those policies beyond the election.

Now, the Coalition has filled that funding black hole by committing the funds necessary to make the policy work and to make sure that policy is sustainable for offshore processing. I have no doubt there will continue to be criticism from those who oppose offshore processing and where that criticism can be sustained, we will continue to address issues that are raised, but removal of offshore processing is not an option this government will ever contemplate.

That is why we are putting in place the funding, the infrastructure, and services to support offshore processing in the way it was designed to operate. This includes more than doubling the capacity of these centres for both transferees and staff, enhancing security through the installation of security

fencing and CCTV cameras, upgrading medical facilities and support, reconfiguring and integrating contractual arrangements across the operations at both islands, which is still underway, and improving services and utilities infrastructure at both locations.

It also includes upgrading transfer facilities and equipment, including medical facilities at Christmas Island to support the Government's 48 hour rapid transfer policy. The upgrade plans are the product of three months of solid work to get offshore processing back on track. The job is not yet complete, but it has required a massive effort from the Operation Sovereign Borders detention task group, led by Ken Douglas, with tremendous support from my own department and our many contracting agencies, and I want to thank them very much for the considerable amount of work and effort and planning and implementation that has gone on over the last three months in very difficult circumstances.

We have been acting on deficiencies we inherited and we are making significant progress. Now, specifically on health, the funding that I have referred to provides \$500,000 per annum for additional maternity and paediatric specialist medical staff on Nauru, it includes an additional \$2 million per annum for additional psychiatry resources at OPCs, and an \$11 million per annum for a fully staffed in-patient facility with general surgical capability on both islands.

For children at Nauru, playground equipment arrived at Nauru last week and the ground works are currently underway, it'll be placed in a naturally shaded area, and we understand that will be due for completion on 2 January. The site more generally has appropriate equipment for children, including prams, capsules, dummies, toys, books, clothing, and I've been given an inventory of more than 40,000 units of more than 350 specific items which are in that category.

On education, in short, all child transferees on Nauru receive education. *Save the Children* provides individually tailored education programs that are delivered on site for the majority of children. A pilot program allowing child transferees to attend local schools has been undertaken. The pilot involved 20 children aged 12 and over. It is expected that this program will be expanded in the New Year. A range of educational and recreational activities are available to all transferees to support their physical and mental wellbeing.

Excursions and visits outside the centre have been established for all transferees who have met Nauru and PNG customs clearance processes, and these include for sporting and recreation, visits to cultural and historical sites, and participation in local church services. Service providers continue to work closely with local communities to expand activities and excursions for all transferees.

Save the Children Australia provide activities specifically for children and family groups, and these include an on-site school for all children providing individually assessed learning plans for each child with Australian registered and trained teachers; comprehensive after school and weekend activity programs, including a range of cultural and art activities, games, formal and informal sports activities, and movie nights; excursions outside of the centre, including to local beaches and schools and to attend cultural events. A parent forum is conducted each fortnight by the education team to

seek feedback and suggestions on the education program and a youth committee is conducted each Monday by the recreation team, where children have the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions on the recreational program.

Now, I also have a statement to make on - in relation to onshore protection visas, but I will deal with that after Lieutenant General Campbell has provided his weekly report, and I'll ask him to do that now and then he can respond to any questions you may have and then we can deal with the other issues that I have raised and any questions you might have.

Thank you.

ANGUS CAMPBELL: Thanks, Minister.

Welcome to the Operation Sovereign Borders briefing for the week including 9 o'clock this morning. During this reporting period, a total of 167 illegal maritime arrivals and four crew from two suspected illegal entry vessels were transferred to Department of Immigration and Border Protection authorities on Saturday 14 and Thursday 19 December respectively.

For the reporting period, 87 people were transferred to offshore processing centres, 43 to Manus and 44 to Nauru. And so as at 9 o'clock this morning, there are a total of 1234 people on Manus, 804 people on Nauru, and 2260 people in the Christmas Island facilities. Also during this reporting period, two illegal maritime arrival transferees were returned to Iraq after voluntarily electing to go home.

As we head into the Christmas and New Year period, our border security arrangements will remain unchanged. I have recorded a short video message to that effect in response to people smuggler lies that suggest otherwise. The message will be distributed to potential illegal immigrant communities overseas through our liaison network. The message warns those thinking of travelling illegally by boat to Australia not to be fooled into believing Operation Sovereign Borders shuts down over the Christmas and New Year period. This is untrue. All who arrive will be sent to Manus and Nauru, none will come to Australia.

A broadcast quality copy of the message is available from the Customs and Border Protection media group should you seek it.

Thank you. Any questions?

JOURNALIST: Yeah, I would like to ask in light of the revelations about 15 doctors there concerned [indistinct]...

SCOTT MORRISON: Just before we – questions to General Campbell first. Are there any questions to General Campbell?

JOURNALIST: General Campbell, is it your understanding that asylum seekers who are rescued by the Australian Navy are reported [indistinct] immigration detention network?

ANGUS CAMPBELL: I work in regard to...

JOURNALIST: Once they're on board ship.

ANGUS CAMPBELL: I'm sorry; could you give me the question again?

JOURNALIST: Once they're on board ship. Do they receive better medical provision on board ship [indistinct] inside immigration detention?

ANGUS CAMPBELL: Immigration detention in our onshore arrangements - in our offshore?

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

ANGUS CAMPBELL: I'll take that on notice and get back to you. It's not a question I'd given consideration to beforehand.

SCOTT MORRISON: What I can tell you though is the reason that on occasions people are even more speedily transferred to onshore health facilities is because the facilities onshore are better than those on the ship.

ANGUS CAMPBELL: We certainly do have those transfers occur and we also have doctors on board our ships.

SCOTT MORRISON: That's right. Any other questions for General Campbell?

Well, thank you, General Campbell.

I want to deal with the issue of the onshore protection visas then I'm happy to take further questions now. I notice we have some people from Canberra here today. They'll be aware that on 4 December I held a press conference where I announced a cap had been put in place under Section 85 of the Act in relation to the subclass 866 visas for onshore protection visas. Now, I said at the time that that had taken in also those who had arrived lawfully in Australia and made protection claims and that I'd be making further announcements about that and that is what I am doing today and had planned to do today.

What the Government has now done is that we have put in place - and this decision was taken on 5 December when I approved a further regulation change to restrict eligibility for the subclass 866 protection visa to onshore applicants who had entered Australia lawfully. Now, once that regulation is in place, the cap was no longer necessary and I took action this week to remove that cap. So the

situation remains that those who have come to Australia illegally by boat will not be getting a permanent visa from this government.

So that arrangement has now been put in place. On 14 December, the new regulation came into effect, and on 19 December, I lifted the cap. So that was the set of arrangements that we'd decided to embark upon on 5 December and now they've worked their way into practise.

General questions on that or other matters.

JOURNALIST: Minister Morrison, if I understand correctly, the way that [indistinct] people who were here already won't get permanent protection visas because you might [indistinct] the ministerial [indistinct]?

SCOTT MORRISON: No, no. Well, there's a range of things, Lenore. First of all, the 866 visa is only available to people who have entered Australia lawfully and made an application. There are some who are in the old process out of the 33,000 the previous government had left behind, some of those - in fact, the vast majority of those, haven't even got to the start of the assessment process because the previous government hadn't commenced that, and the 46A bar has not been yet lifted in relation to those.

For the balance, there were assessments that had commenced but hadn't been necessarily finalised. For those very small numbers where assessments have been finalised, we are right now looking at the alternative visa arrangements that we could put in place or, more importantly, the entitlements that we can put in place and attach to their existing visa arrangements, noting that they're on bridging visas, to enable them to have work rights and things of that nature, which would be consistent with the convention.

JOURNALIST: Sorry, I just wanted to clarify. If the High Court challenge to your ability to close that bar succeeds...

SCOTT MORRISON: That's not what the High Court challenge is about. It's not about the 46A bar.

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JOURNALIST: Is it not in [indistinct]...?

SCOTT MORRISON: No, it's - well, I'm not going to get into a running commentary on a case that's currently before the High Court, but the 46A bar, to my knowledge, is not the matter that's an issue.

JOURNALIST: But you're confident - at the end of the day, you're confident that whatever happens in the High Court you will be able to ensure that none of those [indistinct]...

SCOTT MORRISON: The court will consider the matters that are before the court and they'll make their decision, and then we'll go from there.

JOURNALIST: But is that - could that challenge your ability to [indistinct]...

SCOTT MORRISON: I'm not going to speculate, Lenore, on what the court may or may not do.

JOURNALIST: Minister, do you stick by your policy of sending new arrivals by boat to offshore within 48 hours given the problems identified by 15 doctors about the level of health care and [indistinct] proper assessments for these people?

SCOTT MORRISON: Well, I certainly do stick to the policy that we put in place, and let me just say in relation to the matter that has been reported today, the letter was written to the head of IHMS, to the IHMS organisation, that is a matter that has been - being interrogated by IHMS together with my department to determine the veracity of the claims that have been made in that letter, whether there are issues within that letter that require attention, then naturally they will receive that attention, but there is a considerable amount of dispute regarding the issues raised in that letter by IHMS and the department and they will report to me in due course about the matters that require attention.

But I should note that IHMS specifically has rejected a number of matters, and I will just refer you to their statement on those, I understand at least one of the media organisations reported – represented here today would be familiar with their response and that was in relation to the 48 hour transfer and placing people at risk and that is disputed, rejected by IHMS. So I'll leave it to IHMS to deal with that matter at present because the letter was to them. IHMS and the department are working to work through the issues raised.

And, as I said in my opening statement, we have been doing an enormous amount of work over the last three months because offshore processing under the previous government was under capacity and underfunded. I mean, to be putting in place, in particular the medical services, the psychiatric services, the general surgical capabilities, all of these resources, that's the funding holes we identified and they're the funding holes we've been filling. We've been in office for three months and we've made enormous amount of progress on all of those things. The policy remains in place.

JOURNALIST: The claim within the [indistinct] some asylum seekers are being [indistinct] offshore processing when they've only had five minutes worth of medical assessment, and that is deeply below the [indistinct]. Is that your understanding?

SCOTT MORRISON: Well, that's a claim that has been made which IHMS and the department...

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: That is a claim that has been made by the individual and that is a claim that...

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: Well, can you - if you'd let me answer the question. You've asked it. If you'd give me the courtesy of being able to answer it. As I said, these claims are being reviewed by IHMS and the department to determine their veracity. And once that's been done, they'll make some recommendations in terms of action.

JOURNALIST: Minister, these are doctors, 15 doctors on Christmas Island who have conducted these health assessments. They are doctors with Australian qualifications [indistinct] practise here, experienced doctors. Do you take seriously their account of medicine as mis-practised on Christmas Island? Are you taking seriously or are you, in fact, simply dismissing what they have to say about their experience on Christmas Island?

SCOTT MORRISON: Well, I don't think anything I've said today, David, could lead you to your last conclusion. I don't think anything I have said could lead you to that conclusion. The claims that have been raised are being assessed by IHMS and my department and that's what's being done. They're being taken seriously, they're being reviewed, and to the extent that they require a response, then one will be provided, and that's what I would expect to take place.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: Well, one of the reasons that we have had to significantly increase the funding that has gone to medical practises in these places has been because of what we've gone and determined for ourselves and in the reports and the advice that we've received. That's why we've been taking action. We were left with an offshore processing policy the previous government didn't believe in. They had to be dragged kicking and screaming to restore it and they only acted when the political winds blew so hard against them that they decided to restore it, an act of political escapism, which came to nothing from their point of view.

The authors of these policies are now back in office and we're ensuring that the proper facilities arrangements are in place at both Nauru and Manus Island. Now, we've had three months to set this right. I think we've made an enormous amount of progress. As each group that goes through Nauru or Manus, and we've made those facilities very open to everybody from the Red Cross to Senator Hanson-Young, they can go, they can look, and they come back and they make their various observations. We've been doing the same thing.

That's why we have been acting on quite a large number of items and that's why I have acknowledged the work that has been done by my own department and the service providers because they have had to move very, very quickly to get things in place. And now that process is still not complete. It is still not as I would have it. But we are moving rapidly towards that outcome.

JOURNALIST: Minister, should a woman with level five cerebral palsy be in immigration detention?

SCOTT MORRISON: Well, David, again, I've given my answer to the issues raised by IHMS.

JOURNALIST: [Indistinct] Is your position today that you are going to discuss nothing that was raised by those doctors in that [indistinct]...

SCOTT MORRISON: Because it's being...

JOURNALIST: Is that your position?

SCOTT MORRISON: David, because it's being properly reviewed through an appropriate process, I'm going to wait for that process to conclude before I start venturing opinions on it.

JOURNALIST: When were you made aware of the report?

SCOTT MORRISON: I was made aware of it about the time when the department - it was brought to the department's attention.

JOURNALIST: That's roughly two weeks ago.

SCOTT MORRISON: That was on - it was around about 6 December.

JOURNALIST: Were you surprised...

SCOTT MORRISON: It was on or about 6 December. Well, people have regularly made claims and as I've said from this podium on many occasions, where there are claims, we'll investigate them, we'll determine their veracity, and if there's responses that need to be made, we'll make those responses.

JOURNALIST: Will you take no immediate action [indistinct]...

SCOTT MORRISON: No.

JOURNALIST: ...that documents a number, a catalogue of serious medical failings [indistinct]...

SCOTT MORRISON: What we have done is what I have said to you now on I think at least three occasions in response to your questions, and that is that we are appropriately assessing the claims that have been made.

JOURNALIST: When is your next press conference going to be?

SCOTT MORRISON: I'll come to that later.

JOURNALIST: Minister, can I ask you a question please? Are you aware the department policy of immigration and border protection is to confiscate all medication of asylum seekers when they arrive at Christmas Island? Are you aware that sometimes that medication is not replaced and there are people in detention without their, in this case, even one case at least in Perth Immigration

Detention Centre they've been taking their antipsychotic drugs away from them, and they are [indistinct]...

SCOTT MORRISON: Well, medical assessments are made in relation to each individual, and they receive the appropriate medication that those health officers believe that they are in need of based on a proper medical assessment by an Australian doctor. Now, that's the care that is provided, and I'm sure the doctors are applying the appropriate assessment and the appropriate care to each and every individual.

JOURNALIST: Well, there is a woman, a 35 year-old-woman in immigration detention in Perth who is not on her antipsychotic drugs, according to the [indistinct]...

SCOTT MORRISON: Well, I'm happy to look - if you want to refer the individual's case to us, I'm happy to have a look at it. But I'm very confident that the medical professionals that are providing her with care have the appropriate reasons for the care that they're providing.

JOURNALIST: Minister, were you aware of the case [indistinct]?

SCOTT MORRISON: We've had about I think half a dozen questions from *The Guardian* today, we might take a few...

JOURNALIST: [indistinct]

SCOTT MORRISON: Calm down, I'll take a few others, and then I'll come back to you.

JOURNALIST: Just to bring up some of the experts in Australia. There've been claims by obstetrics and gynaecology Professor Caroline de Costa. The expectant mothers in asylums and in detention aren't receiving proper anti-natal care, and two asylum seekers say they've lost their babies as a result. Will you respond to their calls for more doctors and nurses at Darwin's detention centres?

SCOTT MORRISON: Well, the services that are provided in Darwin are actually provided by the Royal Darwin Hospital when it comes to care for people, and particularly when it comes to delivery of babies, and so that is a, you know, the care and standard that is provided to any Australian in that situation, and that is the policy of the Government, that in those circumstances they would receive the same care and treatment that any Australian would.

JOURNALIST: Minister, the fifteen doctors were told that the reason the woman who was assessed on Christmas Island to be pregnant with twins was sent to Nauru was, at the direction of your Department to set an example. Do you agree with that?

SCOTT MORRISON: David, I've given you my response to the issue of the IHMS letter. And that...

JOURNALIST: I'll ask it in a more general term, then.

SCOTT MORRISON: David, you can try and ask it any way you'd like. That's...

JOURNALIST: I'm asking you for information, sir.

SCOTT MORRISON: That - well, that's fine, David, and I've told you how we're responding to the issues raised in the IHMS letter, which I think is an appropriate response.

JOURNALIST: Which is not to reply to the inquiries in this letter.

SCOTT MORRISON: Because, David, we are working through the issues of that letter. There are serious issues raised in the letter. IHMS have outright rejected quite a - at least four specific claims made in those letters, and I'm not going to get into a commentary on individual items until I can have confidence that the matters that have been raised have been substantiated and the response that is going to be provided. Now, this Government will tell you what it's done, and when...

JOURNALIST: What has it done? Has any immediate action been taken?

SCOTT MORRISON: Well I've told you what we've done.

JOURNALIST: No, no, Minister. Has any immediate action been taken as a result of this letter of concerns which you have had several weeks [indistinct]...

SCOTT MORRISON: We're seeking to verify the claims that have been made in the letter, but as I said in my opening statement, David, I ran through millions and millions in funding dealing with psychiatric, general surgical, and paediatric care in offshore processing centres. This Government has filled a funding black hole for medical services at offshore processing centres left behind by the previous government, who had a commitment to offshore processing and the care of those there in name only.

JOURNALIST: Minister, I [indistinct]...

SCOTT MORRISON: That's the action we've taken, David. And I think we've addressed the issue of the IHMS letter, look...

JOURNALIST: [indistinct]

SCOTT MORRISON: Sure.

JOURNALIST: Minister, under this new code people in [indistinct] can be sent offshore or back into detention if they make a [indistinct]. Can you tell us what circumstances people will be sent back to detention? What kind of offences they have to be to go back to detention? What kind of offences they have to commit to be sent offshore?

SCOTT MORRISON: Well, currently the practice is that if someone is being charged with an offence then they're immediately taken back into detention until that matter has been resolved.

If there are serial breaches of other matters of the code of a more antisocial nature, the reason that the antisocial provisions are in the code is it gives the opportunity for the Department and those managing people in the community the opportunity to act early. And it gives also the opportunity to take action where people are behaving in a way which is upsetting others in the community.

Now, at present, there are no powers to do that and this code gives those tools to the people who are seeking to manage those in the community and the work we've done with state and territory police forces provides a broader level of cover and support to ensure we can act on those issues.

Now, I simply noted in the statement I issued today that it is available to the Government to not only take people back into detention, but to send people to offshore processing if that is what we choose to do. Now, I'm just noting that is a power we have available to us. Circumstances in which we might apply it would depend very much on the individual circumstances.

JOURNALIST: [Indistinct] apart from actual criminal activity [indistinct] what examples were you aware of [indistinct] community [indistinct] a social [indistinct]?

SCOTT MORRISON: Well, I should stress that the vast majority of people who've been released into the community, it's not like a regular immigration program where there is some sort of prior familiarisation with Australian societal standards and codes of behaviour. And I think it's actually quite helpful to be quite specific with people who are given the opportunity to live in the community, be told what those expectations are. And to assume they just know I think is frankly naïve. And this government isn't being naïve and so we're being very clear about what those standards are and those values are and I think that is a helpful thing to do. There have been complaints that people have received about anti-social behaviour in terms of overcrowding in particular accommodation and things like that, that have caused a nuisance to nearby residents and have distressed elderly residents as well.

Now currently there is no provision to really manage that behaviour and what I would prefer to do is to be in a position to try and manage behaviour early on in the piece before it leads to the far more serious incidents we have seen one of which involved a domestic incident actually between asylum seekers where one was actually killed. Now that is obviously a scenario everybody wants to avoid and sometimes that behaviour can exhibit itself in far less extreme ways earlier on in the piece. And I think we do this in detention, we do it in community detention, why the previous government didn't think it was a good idea to do it for people on bridging visas is for them to explain. But this government disagrees.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: No, you're assuming I was referring to their accommodation arrangements. This would mean large numbers of people turning up in particular places - places that've been rented and that's not where they were living sort of very informal arrangements. Now it's just I think common sense measures to help manage people's behaviour in the community. In many cases the individuals themselves would be unaware that that sort of behaviour was not acceptable.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: I think the two are not mutually exclusive and that's largely what we're trying to do here. It was a clear election commitment, I know there was quite a bit of reaction at the time I announced it. We've fulfilled on that election commitment. I always said we would and we have. Lenore.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: Well, that already happens now, Lenore. The same way it already is now. There is already an existing monitoring arrangement in place. There is just no ability for people to take any action and the code assists by both making people aware of what's expected of them, where complaints or other things are brought to the service provider's attention, then they have an opportunity to remind people of the code, if there's persistent non-compliance, then they can elevate that through the department and departments can then make recommendations for the withdrawal of bridging visas if that's considered appropriate. But it's a case by case arrangement, there are service providers in place who manage the cases and they will have the sort of the line role of managing that.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: Oh, look I have a lot of confidence in their ability to manage these cases.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: And as time goes on, I think these things become clearer in how they're managed. It's a new program and I'm sure that the professionals and those involved, the service providers as well as my own department will ensure that these things are exercised appropriately. Up the back.

JOURNALIST: [inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: Yes.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: I'd have to come back to you on that David, but I don't necessarily agree with the presumption in the start of your question.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: Well there are a lot of 'ifs' in that question. And this rumour first circulated last Friday, and it's been a week and the High Commission has received no video or anything to support the claim that is being made. Now if the claim is substantiated, then of course that would be a serious issue. But as such right now, it's been a week and no video has been produced. So I can't really comment on something that's simply a rumour that hasn't been substantiated.

JOURNALIST: [inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: When I was Shadow Minister for Immigration I used to tour many centres. And on occasions staff at those centres would advise when it was a good idea to go into centres and when it wasn't. And I remember one particular occasion when I was at Christmas Island, and it wasn't an easy place to get to when you're in opposition, and they advised me not to go into particular areas of the centre, because of the potential impact that might have.

And I was happy to comply with the requests of the immigration officials at that time. Now, Senator Hanson-Young came to see me a few weeks ago. She said she would like to visit, I said I would be happy to facilitate that and she's welcome to visit. Senator Hanson-Young's visit was over several days, and that had excited a number of the people who were in the centre. Those officials on the ground at the time had advised the Foreign Minister's group that it wasn't the best time for them also to be going in the centre at the same time, because it would make it more difficult to manage people within the centres particularly both the single adult male compound as well as the family compound.

Now, I'm the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection and I've visited those facilities. I'll be visiting them again in the New Year, that's how the Government informs itself of what's going on. The Foreign Minister was part of a Pacific tour - bipartisan Pacific tour that wasn't just taking in Nauru. It was taking in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, I understand, and a number of other places. So the purpose of the visit to Nauru wasn't specifically to visit the centres. The purpose of the visit was to engage with the government of Nauru.

I understand that was a very successful visit. I understand that the Opposition members expressed no objection about not being able to tour those facilities, and they were happy to comply with the requirements of the officials.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: No I didn't concede that. I said I'd been advised that the letter existed.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: No, what you were told last night is that we hadn't received the letter. And we had not received the letter. The Minister's office was not provided with a copy of the letter because...

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: Well you can do that. I'll leave that to you and my media advisor to discuss.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: Again this is a matter related to the IHMS report which I have already provided my response to. If you're not happy with that response then I can't help you any further with it. Once the matters have been interrogated fully then...

JOURNALIST: [Indistinct]

SCOTT MORRISON: Because the matters are being investigated.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: There are serious matters that are raised with that. And you would want us to be sure of the veracity of those claims. And that's exactly - and that is exactly what the Government is doing. Exactly what the Government is doing.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: The department received the letter on the 6th of December.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: Well I've already responded to that.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: Well those things have been done by the department, together with IHMS. And I understand there's been a high level of engagement, particularly between IHMS and those individuals who'd signed the letter. So that's what's been taking place. Now a lot has also happened since, I think, these claims were first raised in terms of the changes to practices and the improvement of facilities and the funding that its being provided, and I've noted that over the last few months. While commentary has been offered on the standard of the facilities and the process in facilities, the processing centres have been in a state of constant improvement over the last three

months. And I mean, for example, it was brought to my attention some months ago about the need to get proper playground facilities and shade and these sorts of things in place for the family facilities at Nauru.

So I authorised for that to be done and I ensured the funding was in place, and on the 2nd of January the playground will appear. The earthworks - I received updates on that as late as yesterday afternoon. So things have been identified. And there are reasons things were identified, and that was because the previous government did not fund offshore processing.

JOURNALIST: Minsiter are you aware of the phrase 'wilful

SCOTT MORRISON: Sorry?

JOURNALIST: Are you aware of the phrase wilful [inaudible].

SCOTT MORRISON: Keep going.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: What - how does that relate to Operation Sovereign Borders?

JOURNALIST: Because you have been aware of this report for three weeks and you have said that...

SCOTT MORRISON: 6th of December is when the department received the letter.

JOURNALIST: [Indistinct]

SCOTT MORRISON: Okay, we're going to have to wrap it up.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible]

SCOTT MORRISON: Well the Immigration Health Advisory Group, it was a group that is formed to assist the Department Secretary. It is not a ministerial advisory group. It was not disbanded by me, it was disbanded by the Secretary and it was done with the full concurrence of the chair of that committee.

Now what is being put in the place of the Immigration Health Advisory Group is a panel of independent medical experts and they will be established. And that is in the process of being formed. And advice is being sought from the chairs of the IHAG sub-committees to comprise its membership.

The view of the Department Secretary and the chair of the committee is that a different model was required to deal with the complexity of issues that are being raised with offshore processing in

particular. I should also stress that we also have the Ministerial Advisory Group on Detention, which is chaired by Paris Aristotle. I would describe Paris as my closest external advisor on issues relating to offshore processing. And he raises issues with me on a regular basis and I'm always pleased to receive the benefit of Paris' counsel.

These matters we receive much advice on, and some of that is external, some of that is internal. The secretary formed the view that there was a need to change the way we're doing that, which is his prerogative. He advised me of his decision and then he got on with it.

Now as we conclude, as it comes up to Christmas, this will be our last briefing for this year. What will occur in the weeks ahead is that a written statement will be issued updating arrivals and transfers and things of that nature, which are the regular process of these briefings.

As has always been our practice, and God forbid this occur, but if there is a serious incident we would issue appropriate statements and we would call a media conference wherever it was necessary to provide further information. That is how we've conducted ourselves to date and that's how we'll continue to conduct ourselves in the future.

So with that, thank you for your attendance and Merry Christmas.

ENDS

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