

ASYLUM SEEKERS — ARRIVALS BY BOAT

419. Mr J.M. FRANCIS to the Premier:

Like many Western Australians, I am very concerned by the fact that there has been, and continues to be, a flood of illegal boats coming into this country —

Mr A.J. Waddell: Have you even met one?

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: I have met more than you, and I have been at sea doing it.

The SPEAKER: Take a seat, member for Jandakot. Only one member has asked the question, member for Forrestfield, and I will give you an opportunity any time. I formally call you for the first time. Member for Jandakot.

Opposition members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I formally call the members for Joondalup and Albany. If members want question time to go ahead, they might deceased with the banter.

Mr J.N. Hyde: Desist.

The SPEAKER: “Desist”. I thank you, member for Perth. I do not need your assistance. If members want question time to go ahead, they might show some respect to the member asking the question, even though they do not like the question being asked. Member for Jandakot.

Mr M.P. Whitely interjected.

The SPEAKER: I formally call the member for Bassendean for the first time.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Just last night another boat arrived with 50 illegal immigrants. What assurance has the Western Australian government been given by the current federal government that it will stop the boats?

Mr F.M. Logan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Cockburn, if you ask a question in this place I expect that you want it to be treated with some respect; no matter what the question might be, you want an answer to it. I formally call you for the first time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT replied:

I thank the member for Jandakot for the question. As members would be aware, he has firsthand knowledge as a naval officer in dealing with the situation of illegal entry. He would know more about the situation than almost anyone in this chamber.

Mr P. Papalia: He’s never been in command of anything bigger than his cabin!

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Warnbro, I appreciate that you might have some insight into this and I do not have a dispute about that but this is not the time or the place for it. I formally call you for the first time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: In terms of asylum seekers arriving by boat, Western Australia is the front line. It is of great concern to the people of this state and I am surprised that members opposite just laugh about the issue. To me, that reflects a state of denial by the Labor Party both in Western Australia and Australia generally.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members, I repeat what I said the other day in this place: many of you want more questions asked. Many of you want more questions asked, but many of you continue to demonstrate an inability to listen to answers or to enable people to ask questions, so more questions do not get asked. Member for Mindarie, I formally call you for the first time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Members opposite and members of the Labor government in Canberra are in a state of denial and I will give the house the figures to remind everyone. Since the Labor Party came to power in Canberra, more than 7 000 people have arrived in Australia illegally by boat—153 boats. Since 1 January this year—that is, January 2010—more than 80 boats have arrived carrying more than 4 000 people. Since the election was called, six boats have arrived carrying 305 people. Members opposite continue to be in a state of denial. An average of three boats a week is arriving; it is almost like a ferry service that is taking place off our north west coast! That is the reality.

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It is outrageous! Members opposite are in denial. They are absolutely in denial about a serious issue—the security of our borders and the integrity of our immigration program.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Twelve minutes, two questions and the second question not yet answered. Member for Perth, I formally call you for the first time.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The Labor Party's state of denial came home to me very clearly in early 2009 when there was a tragedy at Ashmore Reef; an asylum boat blew up and I think four people lost their lives. At the time I made the comment to the media and the public that people on the boat had deliberately spread petrol around the boat. I was castigated and ridiculed by members opposite and also by Senator Chris Evans, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. We now know from the inquiry held in Darwin that not only was fuel spread, it was deliberately lit.

Point of Order

Mr M. McGOWAN: The question was about communication between the state and the commonwealth. The Premier has now spent four or five minutes trudging through his version of the history of events over the past few years —

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order, member for Rockingham?

Mr M. McGOWAN: My point of order is about standing order 78—an answer must be relevant to the question. The Premier has not even touched on it.

The SPEAKER: I imagine that the Premier will touch on it.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mr C.J. BARNETT: One of the severely injured asylum seekers at Ashmore Reef was heard to remark as he went into surgery that there must be an easier way to get to Australia. That may represent desperation but it is the reality.

Communications between the commonwealth and the state have been lacking. This state has been cooperative in dealing with this issue. However, we now have such a brazen situation that people are not even trying, to my knowledge, to get to the Australian mainland. I will read out a couple of short excerpts from the media over recent times because the Labor Party needs to get out of its state of denial. An item in the *Herald Sun* on 2 April 2010 stated —

Here's the facts, as reported by the *West Australian*: "A boatload of asylum seekers claiming to be near Christmas Island has made contact with Australian authorities after making a triple zero emergency call.

"Police said the call was received in Perth just before 5pm Wednesday asking for help and stating the vessel was close to Christmas Island."

I have another example, a different boat, in an article from *The Australian*, which stated —

The Australian has been told authorities became aware of the vessel only after Australian Federal Police duty officers on the island received two phone calls from a heavily accented person, apparently an asylum-seeker using a mobile phone.

The Australian has been told that, in one of the calls, a male caller told the officer: "You need to come, you need to come."

When asked where the caller was, the voice replied: "At Christmas Island. We arrived today."

Another example of the brazen attitude that is going on was in an article in *The West Australian* on 9 April, which stated —

An Indonesian boat carrying 45 asylum seekers has sneaked through Australia's multi-billion-dollar border protection "ring of steel", casually docking at Christmas Island's jetty early yesterday morning.

If they miss Christmas Island they call on mobile phones and say, "Come and pick us up and guide us into Christmas Island" or they come straight to Christmas Island and dock. This situation is totally out of control!

To get back to the actual point of the question —

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Yes; because members opposite are in denial and they continue to laugh and snigger!

Senator Chris Evans assured me when the Leonora facility was opened that there would be 70 families with young children and maybe another 30 people. At this point there are 170 people, including about 60 or

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Mr Joe Francis; Speaker; Mr Colin Barnett; Mr Mark McGowan

70 children, at Leonora. Reports from townspeople to the government indicate plans for 400 people at Leonora. At Curtin Air Base there are currently 552 people and expansion plans for 900. Christmas Island is overflowing. The point is that this situation is clearly out of control. Members opposite with their sniggering and humour, just like their colleagues in Canberra, are in denial. They are absolutely in denial! That is why Western Australian voters who may have voted Labor will not do so this time because the Labor Party has failed to acknowledge the problem. If members opposite cannot acknowledge the problem, they have no hope of dealing with it. That is a sharp point of difference between the Liberal Party and the Labor Party.