



Speech by

# Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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Hansard 27 May 1999

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### State of Origin; Coastal Surveillance

**Hon. P. D. BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (9.35 a.m.), by leave: This morning I want to make a ministerial statement in relation to coastal surveillance, but before I do so I am sure that I have the support of all members of this House in congratulating the Maroons on their 9-8 win last night. I notice that yesterday in the Parliament in New South Wales the Premier of New South Wales, Bob Carr, had the audacity to say in relation to Queensland, "Beautiful one day, humbled the next." Let me just say to my good mate Bob—and "mate" is a term that they use in the New South Wales Labor Party on a regular basis; I am not quite sure whether that means friend or foe—it is not a case of beautiful one day, humbled the next; it is a case of beautiful one day, brilliant the next.

I look forward to the Queensland flag flying over the Sydney Harbour Bridge. I have some seamsters working on it now. This flag will be so big that people will be able to see it from Auckland.

I turn now to the issue of surveillance. The need for increased surveillance and protection of Australia's coastline has been demonstrated dramatically in recent months. First, we had the spectacle of a boatload of illegal immigrants scurrying ashore at Holloways Beach just north of the Cairns CBD. All honourable members will recall the audacity of these illegal immigrants in fronting up at the local newsagent and asking him to call them a taxi.

I well remember raising this as an issue of national importance only to be told by the Federal Government that I was overreacting; that everything that could be done was being done. As the residents of a northern New South Wales coastal town can tell people, that was the not the case. Just weeks after the Holloways Beach incident, another boatload of illegal immigrants landed at Scotts Head near Coffs Harbour without being detected. In fact, media reports say that the first alert of this breach of coastal security came from a greenkeeper on his way to work. Some national defence system! We should not have to rely on newsagents and greenkeepers as our first line of defence.

As honourable members would be aware, there have been two subsequent incidents—one in which a boatload of illegal immigrants was intercepted off Port Kembla and another in which three boats have been under surveillance in far-northern waters for some days. I congratulate the defence forces, customs officers and Queensland police, who have played a role in detecting and preventing these latest attempts to breach our coastline. I also note and applaud the establishment by the Prime Minister of a task force on coastal surveillance.

Since returning from the United States this week, I have signed off on Queensland's official submission to the task force. I table the submission for the benefit of all honourable members. Among Queensland's recommendations is a call for the establishment of an intelligence-gathering body with a specific role in coastal surveillance. This body could provide for a much more comprehensive gathering of intelligence data and the maintenance of a large-scale database for coastal surveillance activities. The Queensland submission also acknowledges that there is a huge cost in increasing coastal surveillance resources, such as patrol boats. But Queensland does believe that a more strategic approach needs to be taken in relation to the upgrading and long-term resourcing of surveillance aircraft and facilities.

There is also a pressing need to increase the number of boats such as the Wauri operated by customs to create a deterrent to ships that want to gain illegal access to our coastline. In line with this thinking, Queensland also recommends greater interface between Coastwatch and defence intelligence

capabilities. Quite simply, Queensland has a number of agencies involved in coast-watch activities and we stand ready to cooperate even more closely with Federal and defence authorities. In fact, we strongly recommend that a high level Commonwealth/State mechanism be established to consider risk assessment, best practice operational activities in coastal surveillance and the adequacies of existing resources to cope with the known threat. There are other recommendations in our submission that I believe will result in improved coastal surveillance.

We need to get a very clear message to China that we will not accept illegal immigrants. I trust that the Federal Government will adopt Queensland's recommendations, which we believe are in the best interests of Australia's security.

I refer to a couple of aspects of our submission that I think are worth drawing to the attention of the House. Page 3 of the report states—

"There is a clear need to establish guidelines for intelligence gathering and analysis which will drive the basis of client requests for surveillance activity. The OPAC process involves both formal and informal intelligence data that does not include any comprehensive intelligence input at higher levels, eg: from Defence. It is strongly recommended that consideration be given to the development of an intelligence gathering body with a specific role in coastal surveillance throughout Australia. This body could provide for much more comprehensive gathering of intelligence data and the maintenance of a large scale database for coastal surveillance activities.

The gathering of intelligence needs to be considered from a broader perspective. It is understood that intelligence is currently gathered on a formal basis by those agencies authorised to carry out surveillance related activities. Minimum use is made of other agencies or facilities such as coastal shipping, commercial fishing fleets, commercial aircraft or communities in remote areas where incursion is more likely to occur."

On pages 4, 5 and 6 of the report I have highlighted the need for us to take a more comprehensive strategy to protect the coastline of this State and this nation. I urge the Prime Minister to act on the submission that the Queensland Government has put forward so that we can stem the tide of illegal immigrants into this country.

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