

People smuggling charge sends strong warning

The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, said the arrest and charging by the Australian Federal Police of an Indonesian man on a charge of people smuggling would send a strong message to would-be organisers in the region that such activity would not be tolerated by the Australian Government.

The 35-year-old man is the captain of a vessel carrying 12 passengers that was intercepted by Border Protection Command near Ashmore Islands on September 29.

"The Australian Government will take all steps possible to ensure those people behind the practice of people-smuggling are brought to justice," Senator Evans said.

"People smuggling is an abhorrent crime. To exploit vulnerable people during times of desperation demonstrates a callous disregard for the law and

for humanity."

The maximum penalty for the offence of organising to bring a group of five or more noncitizens into Australia contrary to section 232A of the Migration Act 1958 is 20 years' imprisonment.

Senator Evans said the government's ongoing commitment to border security was firm and resolute and it would continue to take robust measures to protect Australia's borders.

"People smuggling undermines Australia's borders and the integrity of its immigration system and the Government will continue to deal resolutely with unauthorised boat arrivals,"

Senator Evans said.

"The government has maintained extensive patrolling of our borders by Border Protection Command and has consistently made clear its commitment to maintain a system of mandatory deten-

tion and excision."

"The government has also renewed efforts to work closely with regional countries including Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand to prevent and deter people from attempting to enter Australia unlawfully."

Department of Immigration officials on Christmas Island have now completed initial interviews with the 12 passengers who were on the intercepted vessel.

They will remain in detention on Christmas Island while immigration officials make a thorough assessment of any claims against Australia's international protection obligations.

The teenage crew member on the vessel will be transferred to Perth and arrangements made for his removal to Indonesia.

*Senator Chris Evans
Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship*

One third of Aussies risking blindness

Around 7 million Australians could be at risk of blindness or vision impairment because they don't know the basic facts about their eyes.

According to a national survey commissioned by Australia's peak eye health body, Vision 2020 Australia, and its 59 member organisations, almost one third of Australians incorrectly believe they should wait until they have symptoms before getting their eyes tested. Meanwhile, 66 per cent of Australians do not realise that there are no symptoms to indicate early eye diseases that could rob them of their sight.

As a result of these misconceptions, more than half a million Australians over the age of 40 are blind or vision impaired. Around 75 per cent of these people have conditions that were preventable or treatable if they were caught early with a simple eye test.[1]

CEO of Vision 2020 Australia, Jennifer Gersbeck, said: "The fact that hundreds of thousands of Australians will be blind or vision impaired because they skipped a simple eye test is truly alarming. Today (October 9) is World Sight Day and I want to encourage all Australians to get their eyes tested – don't put it off."

Ms Gersbeck said it was especially important for Australians over the age of 40 to have regular eye checks to help prevent permanent vision loss in later years.

"There is a direct link between ageing and vision impairment or blindness, regardless of where you live or what your environment is like," she said.

"The major eye conditions that cause over 80% of blindness and vision impairment in Australia are age-related macular degeneration, cataract, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and uncorrected refractive error.

"Most of these conditions can be treated if they are caught early. A regular eye test and being aware of the



health of your eyes can prevent permanent vision loss."

World Sight Day 2008 aims to raise awareness among people aged 40 and over that they need to take care of their eye health now.

"Early detection is the key. The earlier you detect and treat a condition the more likely you are to reduce further vision impairment or blindness in later years," said Ms Gersbeck.

"We need to encourage people who are 40 or older to be vigilant with any changes to their vision, see their eye health professional early and access support services as soon as it is necessary."

Ambassador for Ageing, Noeline Brown, said blindness and vision impairment had a significant impact on an individual's wellbeing and their contribution to the community.

"Older people who are blind or vision impaired are less likely to work than their peers, are more likely to be depressed, have falls and accidents, enter nursing homes earlier and die younger," Ms Brown said.

"Early intervention can prevent blindness. Equally important is access-

ing low vision services allowing people who are blind or vision impaired to maintain their independence. These services can have a dramatic impact on a person's quality of life, enabling people with low vision to lead full and active lives."

Have your eyes tested regularly if you are over 40, and see your eye health professional immediately if you notice any changes in your vision.

Have your eyes tested every two years if you:

- have diabetes
- have a family history of glaucoma or macular degeneration
- are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.

Protect your eyes:

- wear sunglasses and sun hats whenever you are in the sun
- quit smoking
- wear eye protection at home and at work.

Access low vision services if you require them. Contact your local low vision centre for advice on services, equipment and training. To raise awareness of the impacts of an ageing eye and eye health for people 40 and over, Vision 2020 Australia's members are holding events Australia-wide on World Sight Day.

Bucharest, Romania

Hellenic Foundation of Culture (HFC), inaugurated its first branch in the Balkans with an exhibition of Byzantine and post-Byzantine icons at the National Museum of Art in Bucharest.

The 65 icons in the exhibition come from the Byzantine and Christian Museum of Athens, the Museum of Byzantine Culture of Thessaloniki, the Museum of Veroia, the Museum of Kastoria and the Benaki Museum in Athens.

The HFC in Bucharest will soon begin hosting language classes for Modern Greek in Bucharest.

Fact: There are over 800 Greek businesses in Romania, employing nearly 4,000 Greeks.

New York City, New York, United States

A recently released Zagat rating of the best food in the borough of Queens (NYC), found four of the ten best restaurants located in Astoria. The one Greek restaurant that got top marks was Taverna Kyclades on Ditmars Blvd.

Paris, France

"A Tribute to the Greek Resistance, 1940-1944" is an exhibition that just opened at the Memorial Leclerc – Musee Jean Moulin in Paris in cooperation with the

Hellenic Foundation for Culture and the National Gallery. Curated by Zina Kaloudi, the exhibition features the art that international – mostly French – artists donated around 1945 to the Greek state to honor the Greeks' resistance against the Axis powers.

