



OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
THE HON DR BRENDAN NELSON MP

Ms Marg Hutton
PO Box 1108
THORNBURY VIC 3071

27 NOV 2006

Dear Ms Hutton

Thank you for your e-mail message of 8 March 2006 to the Minister for Defence, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson MP, concerning Operation RELEX and border protection surveillance. The Minister has asked me to respond on his behalf.

The delay in responding is regretted.

In relation to Mr Andrew Wilkie's observations on Operation RELEX, he noted that the Prime Minister announced 'an enhanced surveillance patrol and response operation in international waters between the Indonesian archipelago and Australia,' and that 'the enhanced operation will be reviewed after three weeks.' In accordance with this decision, Defence reviewed the operation after the three weeks and with a better understanding of the operating environment, and in line with the Prime Minister's statement, the force commitment was reviewed and realigned to the task.

Research into the matters you raised has now been completed. Nothing further has been revealed beyond the information already provided to the *Senate Inquiry into a Certain Maritime Incident*, which has been placed on the public record. With regard to the number of surveillance flights being conducted per day in Search Area 'Charlie' by the P-3C Orion aircraft and helicopters, such information remains classified and is not currently available to the general public. However, I can advise you that based on the information researched, there would appear to be no discernable reduction in the surveillance effort being conducted by P-3C Orion aircraft and helicopters in area 'Charlie' from early September to mid-October 2001.

I trust this information will be of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aldo Borgu'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'A' and 'B'.

Aldo Borgu
Principal Adviser