

BORDER DEATHS DATABASE

Scope and limitations of the data



BORDER CROSSING
OBSERVATORY
BORDERS, CRIME, JUSTICE

www.borderobservatory.org

- There is no official data on border-related deaths in Australia that is made available to the public. The Australian Border Deaths Database was established as part of the research for *Globalization and Borders: Death at the Global Frontier* (Weber and Pickering, Palgrave, 2011) in order to fill this gap.
- The Database is hosted at the Border Crossing Observatory at Monash University. The Observatory receives no external funds for this purpose, and the data is maintained voluntarily as part of our ongoing research effort.
- Every effort has been made to make the data as accurate as possible. However, the process of counting border-related deaths is greatly complicated by the circumstances of unregulated travel and the climate of secrecy which surrounds it. Most deaths occur at sea under circumstances where verification of information is extremely difficult. Other deaths that occur in countries of origin following removal or deportation from Australia may be equally difficult to trace, and deaths in countries of transit amongst those whose onward travel has been prevented by Australia's offshore border controls remain completely invisible. The data should therefore be considered to reflect *known* deaths, rather than all deaths that can be related in some way to Australian border controls.
- The information is obtained primarily from media reports, which are cross-referenced where possible with official reports from governments, verified information from non-governmental organizations and coronial inquiries. The data is updated as fatalities are reported, and other data sources are used from time to time to cross-check the list.
- The Database records deaths that occur while en route to Australia (both inside and outside Australia's border surveillance zone), while in onshore or offshore detention, during border enforcement operations, in community contexts where there is direct evidence of a link to border control (for example, suicides following receipt of rejection letters) and following return to countries of origin or transit (in the rare cases where this is reported).
- Categorisation of the fatalities sometimes requires inferences to be made from scant information. It is often difficult to discern from reports whether fatalities occurred within or beyond Australia's border surveillance zone. Information on the age, nationality and gender of particular individuals is often missing from reports, but can sometimes be pieced together from general narratives. Names are often missing, particularly where no body has been recovered and no coronial inquiry conducted.
- Deaths are classified by us as 'in custody' where they occur in custodial detention settings, during apprehension by police or immigration authorities on the mainland, or during interdiction at sea where border protection personnel have taken control of a vessel. This classification is for statistical purposes only and does not necessarily correspond to the official handling of these deaths as deaths in custody.