

# Boat arrival opportunity for Howard redemption in 3 days

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"The arrival of 16 boatpeople, including ten children, off the WA Coast, is today an opportunity for the prime minister to redeem himself, but he has to be very, very fast in his actions," WA Human Rights group Project SafeCom said this morning, after news broke of what may well be another asylum boat intercepted by the Australian NAVY.

"Here is an opportunity for the Howard government to change the perception of his control of the Australian Press for starters," spokesman Jack H Smit said.

"By immediately allowing the media access to the people, by relaying instant information to the press about the nationality, and the 16 people's intent on face value, John Howard can start ensuring that the next Annual Press Freedom Report of Reporters Without Borders improves its abysmal ranking that started plummeting to low depths in several ways directly as a result of the treatment of the press in relation to detained asylum seekers - such as the arrest of ABC Reporter Natalie Larkins in 2002 - and by immediately briefing the Labor Immigration spokesman Tony Burke in accordance with the caretaker provisions, John Howard can ensure relative bipartisan peace with the Opposition," Mr Smit continued.

"Mr Howard has just three days to show that he wants to seek redemption with the Australian electorate, not just on his handling of Indigenous issues, as he showed a few weeks ago, but also on the treatment of unexpected boat arrivals. Let it be known around the country, whether John Howard is a decent man in the dying days of his current term of government or not, and let it be known very, very loudly!", Mr Smit concluded.

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