

Strictly Confidential



© The Hidden World Research Group

## Independent Report

# Misinformation and Exploitation of the White Powder Hoax

[www.expendable.tv](http://www.expendable.tv)  
The Expendable Project

# CONTENTS

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Background
- 1.2 White Powder Hoaxes

## 2. Exploitation & Impact

- 2.1 The Government's Reaction
- 2.2 Public Impact

## 3. Misinformation & Manipulation

- 3.1 The Picture
- 3.2 The Chronological Truth

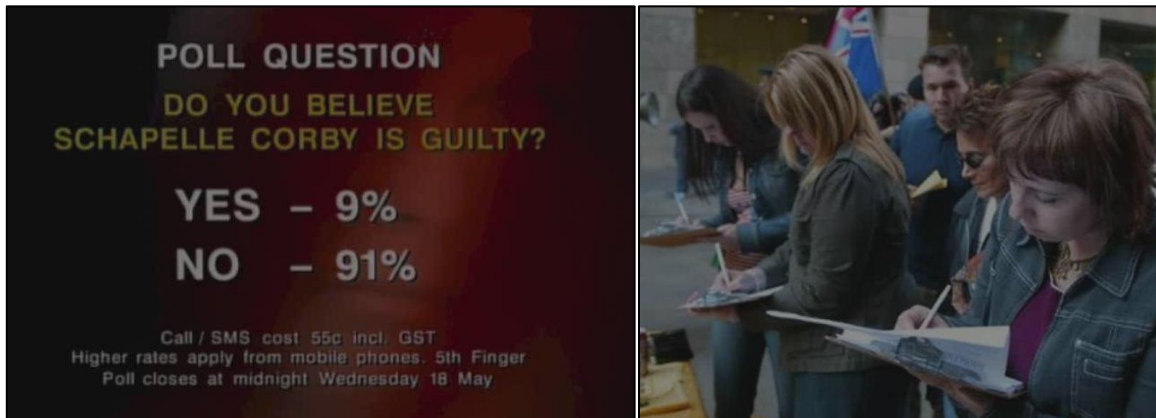
## 4. Summary

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 THE BACKGROUND

In June 2005, in the wake of the verdict and sentence in the Bali trial, public support for Schapelle Corby was at an unprecedented level.

The public were aware of a number of the fundamental facts of the case, and thus of Schapelle Corby's self evident innocence.



This placed the government in an extremely difficult position.

They were well aware of the many human rights abuses at the trial. They were also well aware of the systemic criminality at Australian airports, and within the AFP.

As documented throughout the *Expendable Project*, they had also adopted a policy which ultimately entailed the withholding of vital primary evidence, the misleading of parliament, and engagement in a series of other disturbing acts which spiralled them into an abyss.

The expectation of the Australian public, that their government would act to secure the prompt release of Schapelle Corby, therefore created intense pressure.

It was also clear that changing public opinion, through media management, would not be a short term process.

However, a situation *arose* which they were able to exploit, and manipulate, to make dramatic inroads into altering public perception.

## 1.2 WHITE POWDER HOAXES

Between 2001 and 2005 there were 360 white-powder hoaxes in Australia. On average, that is one envelope containing harmless powder every few days.

This commonplace type of incident attracts little or no comment from government, and little media interest.



On 1st June 2005, one such envelope arrived at the Indonesian embassy in Canberra:

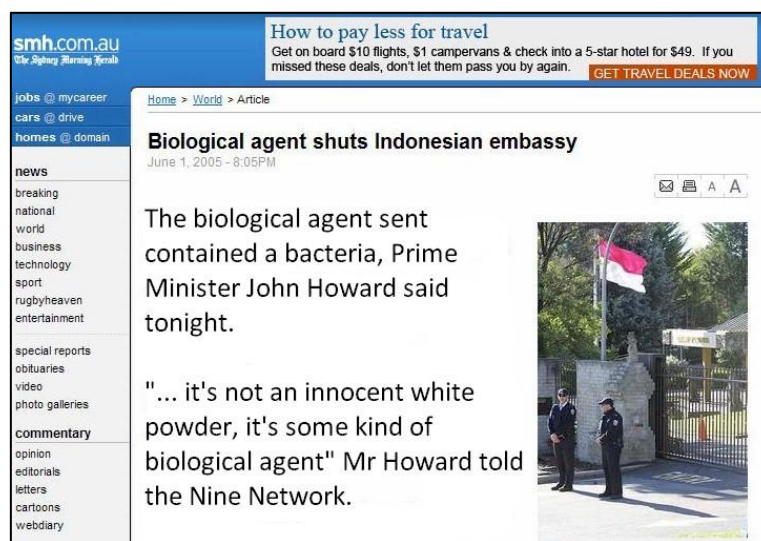
- The note in the envelope contained no reference at all to Schapelle Corby
- It was written in Bahasa, and not English.

## 2. EXPLOITATION & IMPACT

### 2.1 THE GOVERNMENT'S REACTION

The government's reaction, however, was staggering. They seized upon it instantly.

Foreign Minister Alexander Downer referred to it during the same afternoon as “a *biological agent*”, and Prime Minister Howard broadly accused Schapelle Corby supporters of “*murderous criminality*”.



The Prime Minister's official doorstep interview transcript is copied below:

1 June 2005

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
DOORSTOP INTERVIEW,  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA**

*Subjects: Indonesian Embassy.*

**JOURNALIST:**

Prime Minister, a reaction to the incident, a scare at the Embassy this afternoon?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well it's a very serious criminal act. I want to say on behalf of the Australian Government how sorry we are that it's occurred, it's recklessly dangerous. It would be the first time, if the preliminary results are confirmed, that such a biological agent has been sent in Australia. It will do great damage in the eyes of many Indonesian people to the relationship between our countries, it certainly won't help Schapelle Corby, I want to make that very clear and I plead with people if that is the motivation to think again if they really care. The Foreign Minister has spoken to the Indonesian Foreign Minister in Tokyo to convey the concern of the Government and the Foreign Minister happened to be with President Yudhoyono so he was able to convey immediately our concern, he's appreciative of the expressions of concern and understands how aghast we are at this development. But this is a very serious development for our country and I can't overstate the sense of concern I feel that such a recklessly criminal act should have been committed.

**JOURNALIST:**

And you do believe that this is a result of the Corby conviction in Indonesia?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well it would be a remarkable coincidence if it were not. I mean I can't prove that. But if it is, can I say to those responsible you will not achieve your objective, quite apart from the murderous criminality of doing something like this and the indifference and contempt for human life that it displays it won't achieve the objective, it will have the opposite effect.

**JOURNALIST:**

Prime Minister, this definition – biological agent – I mean could this turn out to be a rather benign substance or does that definition...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No, the advice I have is that the definition does mean the, the reference biological agent, does not mean it's benign.



As a result of this, headlines screamed across the world that Schapelle Corby's supporters had launched a terrorist attack upon the Indonesian Embassy.



## 2.2 PUBLIC IMPACT

The effect of this on Australian support for Schapelle Corby was immediate and devastating, as the public were alarmed at the association with terrorism.

The tone of many supportive commentators also changed dramatically.

Never again would public support for Schapelle Corby approach the levels it had prior to this series of events.

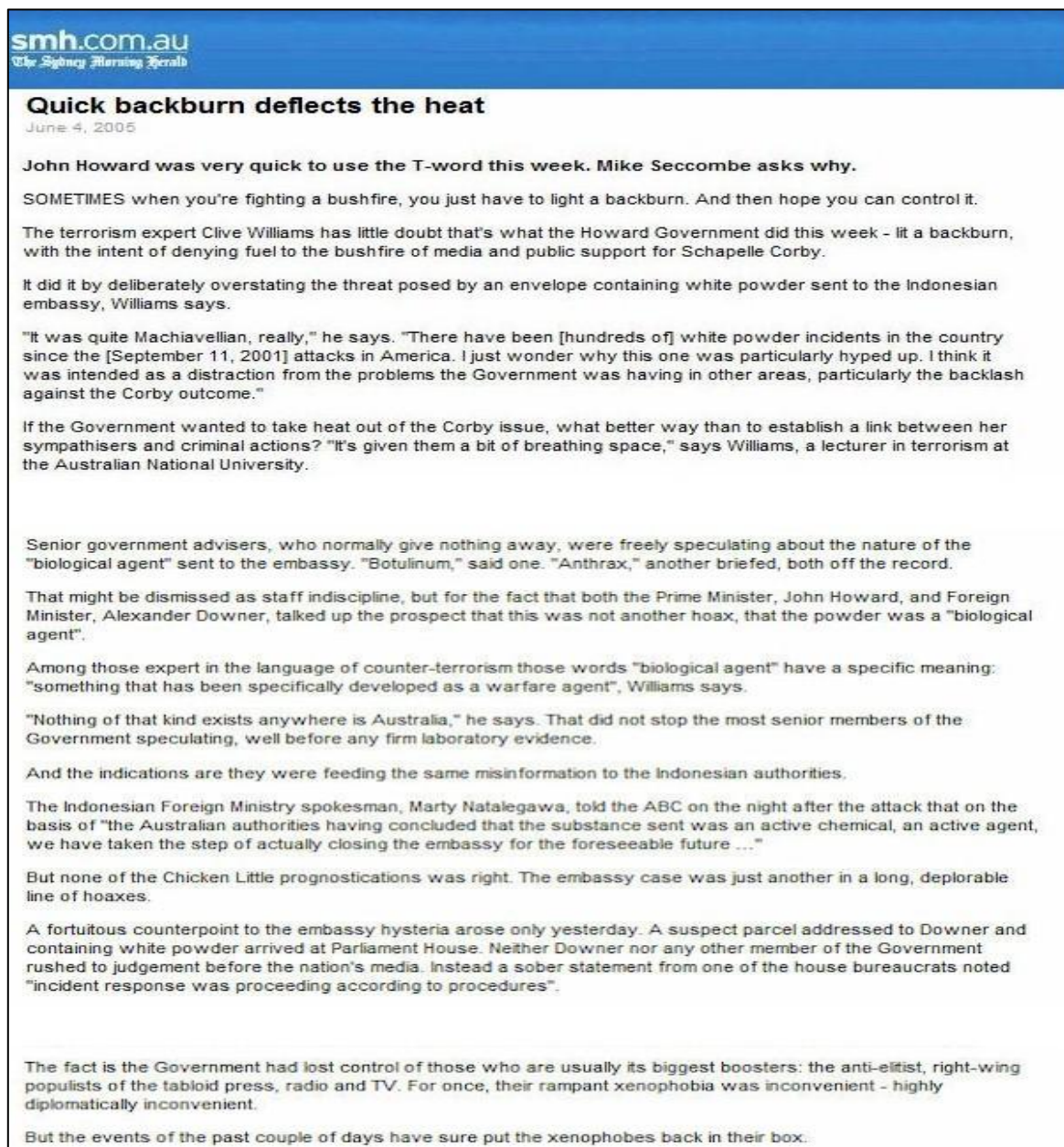
Subsequently, however, it emerged that there was a far greater degree of government pre-meditation than was clear at the time.

## 3. Misinformation & Manipulation

### 3.1 THE PICTURE

The biological attack story was false. Not only was there no evidence whatsoever to link the incident to Schapelle Corby's supporters, but the powder itself was flour.

The picture, that its exploitation had been a cynical abuse of office by the Howard government, was seen clearly by observers and media commentators alike:



**smh.com.au**  
The Sydney Morning Herald

### Quick backburn deflects the heat

June 4, 2005

**John Howard was very quick to use the T-word this week. Mike Secombe asks why.**

SOMETIMES when you're fighting a bushfire, you just have to light a backburn. And then hope you can control it.

The terrorism expert Clive Williams has little doubt that's what the Howard Government did this week - lit a backburn, with the intent of denying fuel to the bushfire of media and public support for Schapelle Corby.

It did it by deliberately overstating the threat posed by an envelope containing white powder sent to the Indonesian embassy, Williams says.

"It was quite Machiavellian, really," he says. "There have been [hundreds of] white powder incidents in the country since the [September 11, 2001] attacks in America. I just wonder why this one was particularly hyped up. I think it was intended as a distraction from the problems the Government was having in other areas, particularly the backlash against the Corby outcome."

If the Government wanted to take heat out of the Corby issue, what better way than to establish a link between her sympathisers and criminal actions? "It's given them a bit of breathing space," says Williams, a lecturer in terrorism at the Australian National University.

Senior government advisers, who normally give nothing away, were freely speculating about the nature of the "biological agent" sent to the embassy. "Botulinum," said one. "Anthrax," another briefed, both off the record.

That might be dismissed as staff indiscipline, but for the fact that both the Prime Minister, John Howard, and Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, talked up the prospect that this was not another hoax, that the powder was a "biological agent".

Among those expert in the language of counter-terrorism those words "biological agent" have a specific meaning: "something that has been specifically developed as a warfare agent", Williams says.

"Nothing of that kind exists anywhere in Australia," he says. That did not stop the most senior members of the Government speculating, well before any firm laboratory evidence.

And the indications are they were feeding the same misinformation to the Indonesian authorities.

The Indonesian Foreign Ministry spokesman, Marty Natalegawa, told the ABC on the night after the attack that on the basis of "the Australian authorities having concluded that the substance sent was an active chemical, an active agent, we have taken the step of actually closing the embassy for the foreseeable future ..."

But none of the Chicken Little prognostications was right. The embassy case was just another in a long, deplorable line of hoaxes.

A fortuitous counterpoint to the embassy hysteria arose only yesterday. A suspect parcel addressed to Downer and containing white powder arrived at Parliament House. Neither Downer nor any other member of the Government rushed to judgement before the nation's media. Instead a sober statement from one of the house bureaucrats noted "incident response was proceeding according to procedures".

The fact is the Government had lost control of those who are usually its biggest boosters: the anti-elitist, right-wing populists of the tabloid press, radio and TV. For once, their rampant xenophobia was inconvenient - highly diplomatically inconvenient.


But the events of the past couple of days have sure put the xenophobes back in their box.



### 3.2 THE CHRONOLOGICAL TRUTH

More details emerged later, including the central involvement of Justice & Customs Minister Christopher Ellison in yet another disturbing incident.

The following report represents an item of investigative journalism, verified as accurate by our own researchers:



Scary powder was just flour

Matthew Moore  
December 7, 2006  
Page 1 of 2 | Single page

THE Prime Minister and the Minister for Foreign Affairs sparked Australia's biggest biological terror scare last year when they distorted test results to claim white powder sent to the Indonesian embassy was a "biological agent".

Documents from ACT Pathology and the federal police, obtained under freedom of information laws, show the microbiologist who examined the powder on June 1 last year and the federal police never called it a "biological agent", and described it as a commonly occurring bacteria.

The documents also reveal that some days after testing began, the powder was shown to be flour.

Among the documents is an email sent by the federal police's national manager intelligence, Grant Wardlaw, to the Justice Minister, Chris Ellison, at 6.35pm on the day of the attack advising the Government the powder had tested positive to "gram bacilli", but that did not mean it posed a threat.

"Gram bacilli is a commonly occurring bacteria," Mr Wardlaw said in the email. "If spores of this bacteria are found to be growing in the substance, this raises the level of potential risk. Information to date indicates that no spores have been identified by pathology."

Despite that advice, the Government did not tell the media that no threat had been identified. The following day newspapers and other media gave prominence to the Government's claims, running headlines saying the country had experienced a bio-terror attack.

Alexander Downer announced in question time on June 1 that a suspicious package had been sent to the embassy. Soon after question time he revealed "the initial analysis of the powder has tested positive as a biological agent, though further testing will need to be carried out to determine what the substance actually is".

John Howard then told reporters that sending the powder to the embassy was an act of "murderous criminality". He rejected a suggestion from a reporter the substance could turn out to be "rather benign".

"No ... the reference biological agent does not mean it's benign," he said.

The description of the powder as a biological agent torpedoed a wave of public anger directed at the Indonesian Government and its justice system that had been building for five days after a Bali court convicted Schapelle Corby of drug smuggling on May 27.

Before announcing the powder had tested positive as a biological agent, Mr Downer warned Parliament the public attacks on Indonesia would cause "a good deal of anti-Australian sentiment in Indonesia" and make it difficult to conclude agreements with Indonesia.

The Government's revelations that a biological agent had threatened the safety of Indonesians at the embassy sent shock waves through Corby's defence team. Her lawyers condemned it for damaging her chances of winning an appeal. After the public outcry over the biological agent, Corby never again enjoyed the public support she had previously received.

More than 50 pages of documents released by the federal police described how police and the fire brigade were called to the embassy at 10.30am after white powder fell from an envelope containing a letter written in Indonesian.

Constable Helena Cox took the powder to ACT Pathology at Canberra Hospital at 12.35pm, where it was analysed by an unidentified microbiologist. After checking it under a microscope, she told Constable Cox it contained a live organism called "gram positive bacilli" and would take 48 hours to identify. Constable Cox said in her note she rang her superior to pass on this result, some time after 1.18pm, and before question time.

The documents do not show who advised Mr Downer and Mr Howard of the results, or what information was given to them. The Government has refused to say.

Mr Howard, Mr Downer, the Attorney-General, Philip Ruddock, and Senator Ellison have all failed to answer written questions on who came up with the term biological agent, generally used to describe diseases like anthrax, used in biological weapons to cause mass loss of life.

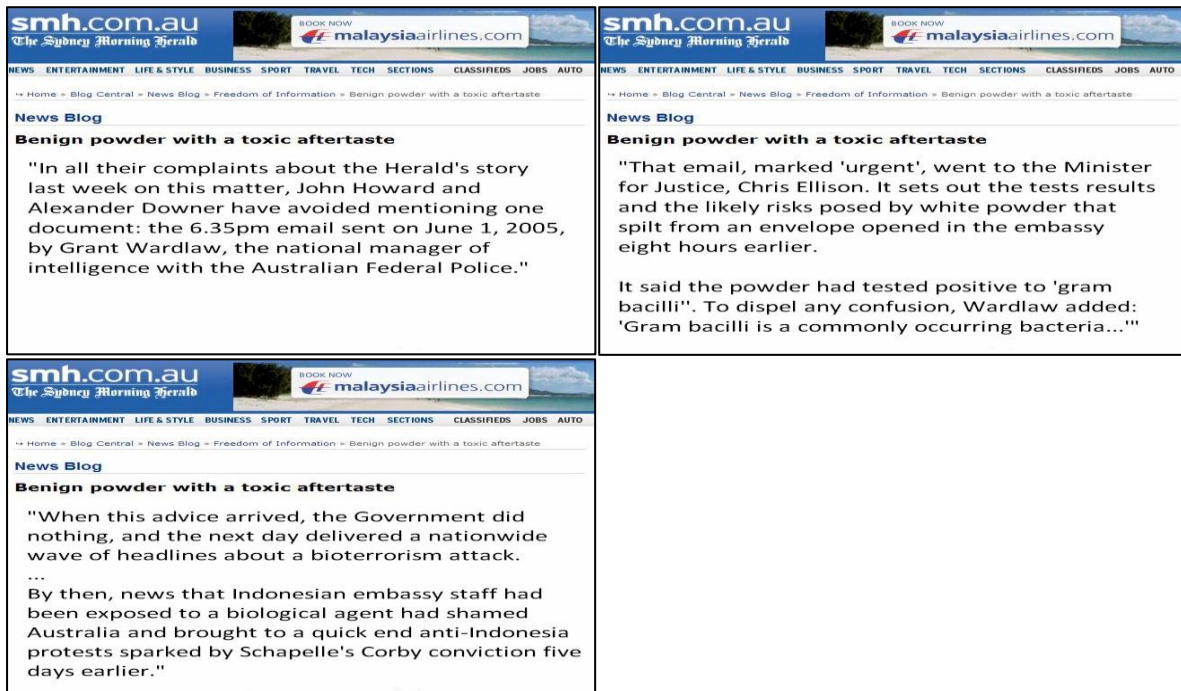
Senator Ellison's spokesman said tests showed the material was "biological", but would not say who added the word agent. "The use of the term 'biological agent' was not inappropriate," he said.

The president of the Australian Society of Infectious Diseases, Lindsay Grayson, disagreed. He said it was quite possible that ordinary flour bought in a shop would contain gram positive bacilli, and that until tests were done showing otherwise the material should only have been described as biological. The problem was adding the word agent. "At the end of the day that's a simple, easily understood way to describe it that everyone can recognise," Professor Grayson said.

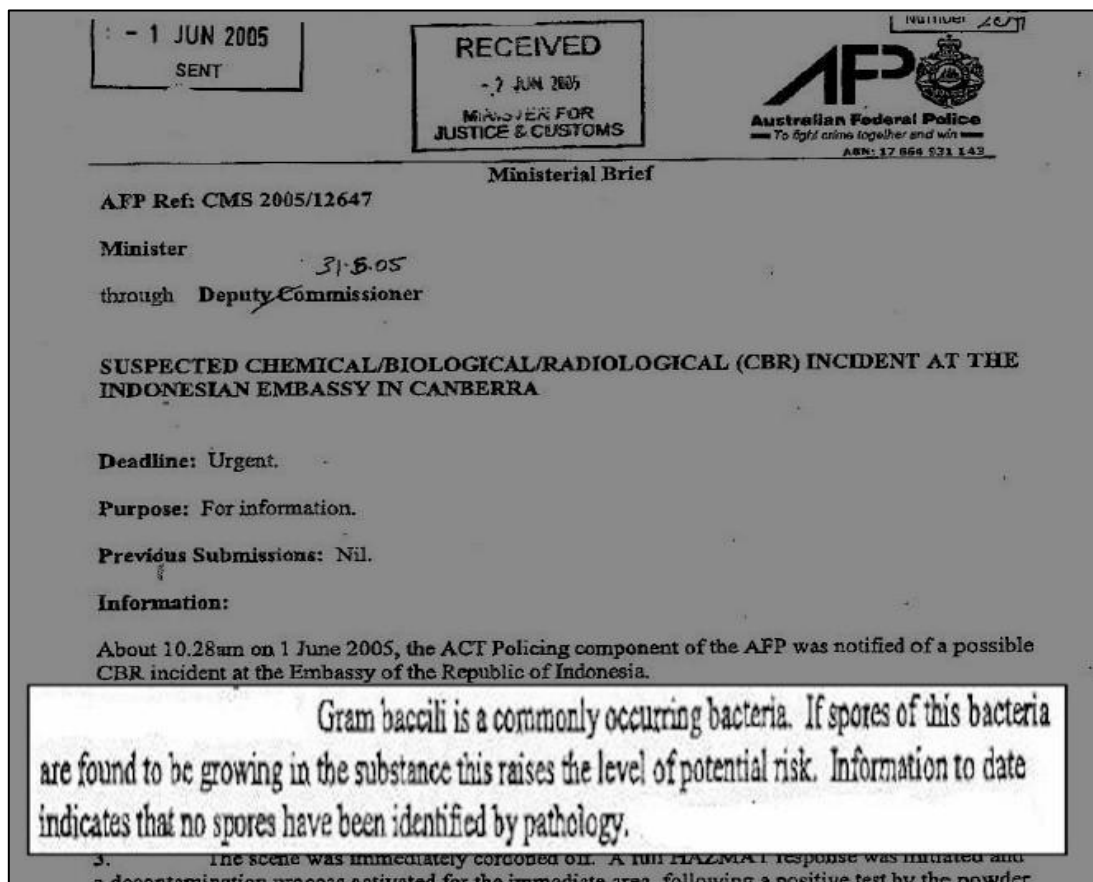
Staff at ACT Health and ACT Emergency Services were stunned when the Government called the powder a biological agent.

Mr Moore summarized his report, on his blog:

## [Misinformation & Manipulation]



The actual document, sent by email to Ellison at 6:35pm on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2005, still exists:



Despite this originally being reported in December 2006, in the Sydney Morning Herald, no subsequent action was ever taken against Howard, Downer, Ellison or any other party.



## 4. Summary

The previous section demonstrates that, not only did the Howard administration fuel and create an entirely false story, which undermined the Schapelle Corby's support movement, but they were actually in possession of written documentation which dismissed it prior to allowing it to roll around the world's media.

They also knew that the accompanying note had made no reference to Schapelle Corby, and that it was written in Bahasa.

Perhaps even more disturbingly, the Australian regime persistently linked Schapelle Corby with Australian hostility in messages to Indonesia. The following cable was sent on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2005, the day before the *PowderGate* incident:



N° MRB 22/05

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade presents its compliments to the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia and has the honour to refer to its Note No. 462/PEN/V/05 concerning recent offensive public comments about Indonesia.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade notes the concern of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia about the public commentary attached to its Note critical of President Yudhoyono, the Indonesian Government and legal system.

In Parliament on 30 May 2005, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Alexander Downer MP again stated the Australian Government's opposition to offensive public comments about Indonesia in reaction to the Schapelle Corby verdict. Mr Downer said nothing was to be gained on behalf of Schapelle Corby or anybody else by constant berating and abuse of Indonesia, the Indonesian government and the Indonesian legal system. He noted that supporters of Schapelle Corby should be aware that abuse of Indonesia would not promote support in Indonesia for their cause.

The Department attaches the copy of comments made by Mr Downer in Parliament.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia the assurances of its highest consideration.

CANBERRA  
31 May 2005



## [Summary]

---

This politically motivated abuse of position was extremely successful. Pressure on the Australian government receded significantly, with immediate effect. Support for Schapelle Corby has never recovered to its prior levels.



© The Hidden World Research Group

**[www.hiddenworldresearch.com](http://www.hiddenworldresearch.com)**

The Expendable Project  
[www.expendable.tv](http://www.expendable.tv)