

Project SafeCom News and Updates

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1. UN climate chief says the science is clear: there is no space for new coal
2. Climate change a UN-led ruse, says Tony Abbott's business adviser Maurice Newman
3. Greg Hunt promised UN climate envoy Australia's industrial emissions will drop
4. Standard Chartered faces pressure to cut links to Australian 'carbon bomb' project
5. Real Australians say welcome – from Alice Springs to Dandenong
6. Hundreds of Rohingya refugees rescued from boats off Indonesian coast
7. Antony Loewenstein: A punitive approach to refugees will lead Europe to unrest and corruption
8. Italian navy chief sceptical of Australian asylum seeker solution to Mediterranean migrant crisis
9. Abbott accused of using Mediterranean migrant crisis to score political points
10. Richard Ackland: Want to know about immigration detention? Then sue for negligence
11. Australia Is Trying to Get Refugees to Resettle in Cambodia and Unsurprisingly They Refuse to Go
12. Asylum seeker mental health data falling into black hole, former immigration detention psychiatrist says
13. Government asked for asylum mental health data to be cut, documents show
14. Allow independent groups into Nauru asylum seeker processing centre: UN
15. UN torture prevention team calls for greater transparency in Nauru immigration detention centre
16. Expert panel into child protection in detention announced as AFP heads to Nauru
17. Report to UN busts asylum seeker myths: Researcher
18. Refugee women in Australia speak on Mother's Day for the 'voiceless' in camps
19. Strip-searched 'Love Makes A Way' refugee rights protesters make complaint to CCC
20. Bill Shorten signals harder line from Labor on asylum policy and boat turn-backs
21. Bill Shorten: I live a little better each day backing policy that stops deaths at sea
22. Don't embrace Coalition's asylum boat turn-back policy, Labor MP Melissa Parke warns party
23. Facebook blocked on Nauru due to 'paranoia' about media scrutiny, says former president
24. Asylum seekers distressed as Facebook blocked in Nauru
25. Nauru cancelled visa of Digicel's general manager before blocking Facebook
26. Nauru Facebook ban came 'at request of Australian Government', refugee advocates say
27. Australia returned 46 asylum seekers to Vietnam, says immigration minister
28. Stopping boats and closing detention centres will save \$504m, says Tony Abbott
29. Tasmanian man jailed for assaulting 15yo Afghan asylum seeker

1. UN climate chief says the science is clear: there is no space for new coal

Christiana Figueres says Australia needs a national consensus to achieve maximum effort in fight to avoid dangerous climate change

The Guardian
Oliver Milman
Monday 4 May 2015 16.54 AEST

The UN climate chief, Christiana Figueres, has said there was “no space” for new coal developments and stressed the benefits of ambitious renewable energy targets after a meeting with representatives from seven Australian governments.

At the meeting in Adelaide, organised by the South Australian government, federal, state and territory administrations agreed to work more closely to drive an uptake in renewable energy, coordinate energy-efficiency schemes and help communities adapt to climate change.

Figueres, the executive secretary of the United Nations framework convention on climate change, urged the states and territories to work with the federal government to help deliver a “strong” global agreement at key climate talks in Paris in December.

The meeting was attended by the environment ministers of the Labor-run states and territories – Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and the ACT. The federal government, Tasmanian and New South Wales governments were represented at “senior official level”, and Western Australia and the Northern Territory were absent.

According to the meeting’s official communique, Figueres warned of the dangers of the world exceeding 2C of warming compared with pre-industrial times and “emphasised that the science is clear that there is no space for new coal or unmitigated coal”.

Afterwards, Figueres said Australia needed a national consensus to achieve a “maximum possible effort” in the battle to avoid dangerous climate change.

Asked about the federal government’s alleged reticence towards ambitious greenhouse gas reductions, Figueres said “like the oceans, there are ebbs and flows about everything”.

“We welcome that the federal government is turning in its national target by July and I’m confident it will encompass what the states and territories are doing,” she said. “I’m confident we will be pleasantly surprised.”

Figueres said the states and territories could “buttress the efforts of Australia more at the international level so Australia can actually stand up there with other industrialised countries in fair effort”.

“States and territories are a lot closer to citizens than the federal government and perhaps they are reflecting more the concerns about climate change and the opportunities that are there.”

Figueres would not comment directly on the lengthy political impasse over the federal renewable energy target (RET) but said: “In general, the higher the renewable energy target, it does attract investment. If there’s anything that’s growing in recent years in Australia, it’s renewable energy investment. It’s a positive factor to have an ambitious renewable energy target.”

The federal government has begun consulting over emissions reduction targets beyond 2020, which will be the focus of the Paris climate talks.

The state and territory ministers’ communique “noted recommendations by the Climate Change Authority for a minimum 2020 reduction target of 19%, rising to 30% by 2025 in order to meet international expectations”.

The Greens have said the authority’s recommendations would not be enough to help stave off 2C warming, although Greg Hunt, the federal environment minister, has called the proposed goals “onerous”.

South Australia’s climate change minister, Ian Hunter, said he hoped the federal government would “put aside partisanship” and “embrace” the Climate Change Authority’s proposed targets.

Lisa Neville, Victoria’s environment minister, said the Victorian government also backed the Climate Change Authority’s proposed targets.

“Victoria believes that the Commonwealth should accept the recommendations in the Climate Change Authority’s report, a report which the government itself commissioned,” she said. “The [Daniel] Andrews government has committed to reviewing a Victorian emissions target and I have started the important work on consulting with the experts to get it right.”

Queensland’s environment minister, Steve Miles, said the state was “re-engaging” on climate change after the defeat of a Campbell Newman-led government that reportedly banned a local council from mentioning sea level rises.

"We are ready to work with other states to reduce carbon pollution," he said. "I can tell you I'm personally committed to limiting global warming to under 2C, for the sake of the Great Barrier Reef, the jobs on the reef and our children's future."

Projections released by the CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology in January show that Australia is set to have an average annual temperature 1.3C higher in 2030 than the average experienced between 1986 and 2005. This will be accompanied by more extreme droughts and less rainfall in the southern portion of the country, according to the projections.

Beyond this, Australia could warm by more than 5C by 2090, compared with pre-industrial times, if little effort is made to cut the amount of greenhouse gases entering the atmosphere.

Australia, which experienced its warmest and third warmest years on record in 2013 and 2014 respectively, has already warmed by 0.9C since 1910.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/may/04/un-climate-chief-says-the-science-is-clear-there-is-no-space-for-new-coal>

2. Climate change a UN-led ruse, says Tony Abbott's business adviser Maurice Newman

Brisbane Times
May 8, 2015 - 1:48PM
Lisa Cox

Climate change is a hoax led by the United Nations so that it can end democracy and impose authoritarian rule, according to Prime Minister Tony Abbott's chief business adviser.

Maurice Newman, the chairman of the Prime Minister's business advisory council, has written in The Australian that scientific modelling showing the link between humans and climate change is wrong and the real agenda is a world takeover for the UN.

Environment Minister Greg Hunt said Mr Newman's position was not a view "I have or would express".

But he said "individuals are entitled to their views".

Mr Newman's column was written to coincide with an Australian visit by the head of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Christiana Figueres.

It follows a piece Mr Newman wrote last year in which he said governments had been hijacked by "green gesture politics" and the world was not prepared for the problem of "global cooling".

"It's a well-kept secret, but 95 per cent of the climate models we are told prove the link between human CO₂ emissions and catastrophic global warming have been found, after nearly two decades of temperature stasis, to be in error. It's not surprising," Mr Newman wrote on Friday.

"Why then, with such little evidence, does the UN insist the world spend hundreds of billions of dollars a year on futile climate change policies? Perhaps Christiana Figueres, executive secretary of the UN's framework on climate change, has the answer?"

Mr Newman continued that global warming was a "hook" to install a new world order.

"Figueres is on record saying democracy is a poor political system for fighting global warming. Communist China, she says, is the best model," he said.

"This is not about facts or logic. It's about a new world order under the control of the UN."

He then urges the Abbott government to oppose a regime that was against "capitalism and freedom" by resisting the next global climate treaty in Paris, which countries hope to reach in December.

Mr Newman adds that, like Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mr Abbott should resist the UN's calls for coal to stay in the ground.

The vast majority of the world's scientists, including most of the world's scientific academies, agree humans are causing climate change.

Among them, the Academy of Science, the Bureau of Meteorology and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change say greenhouse gas emissions from human activity are affecting the climate.

Ms Figueres said during her visit this week that Australia would ultimately have to move away from coal for both environmental and economic reasons.

Mr Newman is a former chairman of the ABC and the Australian Securities Exchange.

At a media conference on Australia's renewable energy target in Melbourne on Friday, Labor's environment spokesman Mark Butler was asked whether the opposition thought Mr Newman should stand down.

"I've never been particularly clear why Maurice Newman holds the position he does hold given how central climate change is to the future economic prosperity of Australia," Mr Butler said.

"As the senior business adviser what Maurice Newman said in The Australian newspaper this morning is no different to the sorts of things he's been saying for years about this incredibly important policy.

"That ultimately, though, is a matter for the Prime Minister."

Mr Hunt said the government's approach was to work constructively with all international parties.

"I met this week with Christiana Figueres. Our goal is to be part of a constructive post- 2020 agreement," Mr Hunt said.

"We want to address the problem, we're working with other countries and the international organisations.

"Individuals are entitled to their views. Our approach is to work constructively with all international parties."

Mr Newman's other thoughts on climate change:

"Man-made 'carbon pollution' has become the shorthand rallying cry that unites global warming believers. The notion is a figment. It is made up. It is rooted in anti-capitalist, anti-growth green ideology that, for too long, has been bullied into our consciousness as science." – The Australian, March 27, 2015

"Back in the real world, the poor are dying of the cold while the political elites and their friends bask in the warmth of cosy conferences, taxpayer subsidies and research grants. They seem indifferent to the hardship that their actions, based on dubious science, impose on the world's underprivileged." – The Australian, February 6, 2015

"The political left has seized on climate change as the new Marxism. It rejects empirical evidence which is inconvenient and promotes dubious and sometimes fabricated science as proven. In true totalitarian style it seeks to shut down debate and ruin the careers and reputations of those who dare to oppose the orthodoxy." – The Australian, January 20, 2015

"[Christine] Milne's prescription for a vibrant Australian economy includes 'keeping the renewable energy target at 41,000 gigawatt-hours', 'stopping new coalmines', 'no coal-seam gas' and 'no new ports'. 'Jobs will come from green energy,' Milne assures us. She could have added, there are fairies at the bottom of her garden." – The Australian, November 7, 2014

"At the same time, like primitive civilisations offering up sacrifices to appease the gods, many governments, including Australia's former Labor government, used the biased research to pursue 'green' gesture politics. If the world does indeed move into a cooling period, its citizens are ill-prepared." – The Australian, August 14 2014

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/climate-change-a-unled-ruse-says-tony-abbotts-business-adviser-maurice-newman-20150508-ggwuzt.html>

3. Greg Hunt promised UN climate envoy Australia's industrial emissions will drop

Christiana Figueres says the environment minister has assured her emissions from industry and power generation will be reduced, despite experts' scepticism

The Guardian
Lenore Taylor Political editor
Thursday 7 May 2015 15.16 AEST

The environment minister, Greg Hunt, has reassured the United Nations' top climate negotiator that the Coalition's existing policies will reduce greenhouse emissions from electricity generation and heavy industry, despite scepticism from local experts that this will occur.

Christiana Figueres, the executive secretary of the UN's Framework Convention on Climate Change, told Guardian Australia she had discussed Australia's emission reduction policies with Hunt during her current Australian trip. They included the emissions reduction fund through which the government conducts "reverse auctions" to buy greenhouse gas abatement, and the "safeguards mechanism" which is supposed to prevent those reductions from being undone by increases in industrial emissions.

"I met with minister Hunt ... and I learned about the recent successful first reverse auction, and I learned that future reverse auctions will go into industrial sectors and the power sector," she said.

"... My understanding from speaking to the minister is also that the safeguards mechanism will also reduce industrial and power sector emissions. That is the purpose of it."

But most submissions on the government's recent discussion paper setting out how the safeguards mechanism will work said it was unlikely to stop increased emissions from the power and industrial sectors.

A Grattan Institute response published this week said: "The safeguard mechanism described in the consultation paper will not achieve its stated objective of ensuring that emissions reductions purchased through the Emissions Reduction Fund are not displaced by a significant rise in emissions elsewhere in the economy. This is because it is not designed to achieve this goal.

"Instead, the mechanism is designed to allow emissions baselines to be adjusted to accommodate most foreseeable activities that could give rise to an increase in emissions. As a result, its impact on reducing emissions is likely to be zero."

The Climate Institute said the safeguards mechanism, as described, would not force big emitters to reduce their greenhouse pollution, and could mean high-carbon power stations increased their emissions substantially over the next five years.

In its submission about the safeguards, the Australian Industry Group said that it "meets the government's objective that the mechanism will not be a driver of abatement towards the 2020 target" and would need "substantial amendment" if it was ever to help reduce greenhouse emissions.

The independent senator Nick Xenophon, who provided one of the six votes the government needed to get its Direct Action policy through the Senate in July last year, told Guardian Australia the proposed safeguards mechanism "neuters the whole purpose of Direct Action".

"There is no point in the government spending \$2.55bn if there is no requirement to cap or reduce emissions from industry," he said.

Figueres was careful to emphasise that it was entirely up to the Australian government to decide what policies it used to reach its emission reduction target.

In setting Australia's post-2020 emissions reduction targets, the government has said it will take into account "the scope and nature of other countries' targets – so that our target represents Australia's fair share and does not put Australia at a competitive disadvantage to our key trading partners and the major economies".

Guardian Australia understands it has commissioned modelling from the leading economist Warwick McKibbin to look at the impact of other countries' emission reduction promises – for example reduction in coal exports – on Australia's economy.

Figueres said a declining global appetite for coal made it more important for Australia to look for diversified exports.

Hunt has also been publicly talking up the idea that the safeguards mechanism will force emissions reductions in the longer term.

In an interview last week he said "the safeguards mechanism is designed to have its real impact in the post-2020 period – and it's flexible, it is designed and legislated so as it can be adjusted and it can be tightened in such a way so as to allow for progressive emissions reductions.

"It is a two-part system. An emissions reduction fund ... [and] secondly, we have the safeguards mechanism which allows us to work with individual firms on a budget which can be adjusted and progressively tightened throughout the 2020s through to 2030 and 2040 and 2050."

If the "baselines" over which companies cannot increase their emissions are progressively tightened, as Hunt suggests, the government's policy allows the offending companies to make up for it by "purchasing credits created by other accredited emissions reduction projects". This would effectively create a baseline and credit emissions trading scheme.

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/may/07/uns-top-climate-negotiator-reassured-australias-industrial-emissions-will-drop>

4. Standard Chartered faces pressure to cut links to Australian 'carbon bomb' project

UK bank lent \$680m to the company building one of world's largest coal mines in Queensland, according to court testimony, despite publicly saying it is not funding the project

The Guardian
Jennifer Rankin
Tuesday 5 May 2015 23.39 AEST

One of the UK's largest banks, Standard Chartered, has lent \$680m (£448m) to a company building one of the biggest coal mines in the world, according to legal testimony that casts doubt over the bank's public stance that it is not funding the controversial 'carbon bomb' project.

Standard Chartered, which is headquartered in London but does most of its business abroad, is now under pressure to cut all links to the Carmichael mine and railway in Queensland, Australia, the A\$16.5bn (£8.5bn) mega project proposed by an offshoot of the Indian conglomerate Adani.

Questions about role of Standard Chartered – a bank that most British pension funds are invested in – grew after a senior executive at Adani's Australian mining subsidiary told a Queensland court recently that the company had received a \$680m loan from Standard Chartered.

Standard Chartered, whose corporate motto is 'Here for good', said it was advising the Adani group on the Carmichael mines and port expansion, but denied funding the project. The bank described the loan as "a pre-existing refinancing facility that was not part of the expansion of the port or construction of the mine".

At a shareholder meeting in London on Wednesday Greenpeace will call on Standard Chartered to end its involvement in a "financially very risky" project that would have "disastrous consequences for the environment".

Covering an expanse seven times larger than Sydney harbour, the Carmichael coal mine would be Australia's largest, producing up to 60m tonnes of fuel a year, mostly for export to India. A 300km railway line would transport the coal to an expanded port at Abbot Point on Australia's Great Barrier Reef – a plan that has alarmed Unesco and could lead to the reef being added to its list of world heritage sites in danger.

If the project goes ahead it could ease the way for at least eight more mega mines in the coal-rich Galilee basin in western Queensland. Together, the Galilee mines would be the second largest of 14 "carbon bombs" – massive fossil-fuel projects, which threaten to derail efforts to limit global temperature rises to 2C, the widely-agreed limit for dangerous climate change.

Sebastian Bock, investment campaigner at Greenpeace UK, said Standard Chartered's investors should be concerned about the bank's involvement: "Standard Chartered needs to pull the plug on its involvement in the Galilee Basin and follow the lead of many international banks that have already ruled out financing coal developments in that region."

Greenpeace is asking Standard Chartered's shareholders – pension funds and foundations – to put pressure on the bank to stay out of the Carmichael mine and give up its role advising the Adani Group on its Queensland coal business.

The rallying call comes in the wake of the Guardian's Keep it in the Ground campaign, which is calling on two huge medical charities – the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust – to move their investments from fossil fuel companies.

Full story at <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/may/05/standard-chartered-face-pressure-to-cut-links-to-australian-carbon-bomb-project>

5. Real Australians say welcome – from Alice Springs to Dandenong

It started with 1,000 posters, but Peter Drew's project has inspired thousands of Australians, artists and otherwise, to send their own messages to asylum seekers

The Guardian
Ashleigh Davis
Wednesday 6 May 2015 10.24 AEST

When the Adelaide street artist Peter Drew created the "Real Australians say welcome" poster campaign, he did not know the response would inspire thousands to create their own designs. Drew launched the project in early 2015 on a crowdfunding platform, Pozible, where he appealed for donations to print 1,000 posters and cover travel expenses to put them up on the streets of capital cities across Australia.

Inspired by the second verse of the Australian national anthem – "with courage let us all combine" – Drew wanted to challenge how the country thinks about asylum seekers and immigrants. "That line basically admits it takes courage to look at people who seem different and be welcoming to them," he said. "That's a very unusual and special thing to have in a national anthem; it's a seed for multiculturalism."

Speaking from Victoria Square, Adelaide, after a day putting up posters in Prospect and Norwood, he laments the government's approach to immigration. "The government treats asylum seekers as if they're all like criminals, even if they

have a valid claim to seek asylum in Australia," he said. "People essentially think they have to be cruel to be safe, and that's a compromise we don't need to make."

Drew has raised more than \$8,000 and gained support from Instagram and Facebook, and has travelled to Sydney, Melbourne and Darwin, via Alice Springs and Katherine, on the Ghan. After Adelaide, he will visit Perth and Brisbane before his journey ends in Canberra for National Refugee Week.

He said the response had been "overwhelming".

"I've been making street art on this topic for a while, but I think this particular project is motivated by wanting to be proud of being Australian," Drew said. "I think that's something most Australians want to be able to express, but for maybe the last 10 years or so, our national identity has been hijacked by bigots, basically, and that's why this project has gotten such a positive response by a large number of people."

Now, when he's putting up posters, people stop and say thank you: "It's becoming more difficult to do the work because of friendly interruptions."

One email he received included a photo of a young Hazara man, recently given citizenship in Australia, standing next to a poster. "It hadn't occurred to me that the best outcome of this project was to let asylum seekers themselves know they are welcome."

Although responses have been mostly positive, some posters have been torn, removed or defaced. Drew says that is to be expected. "It doesn't bother me. I've been putting street art up for about six years now and that's part of the territory. If I'm in the vicinity and I see one's been torn, I'll fix it up, but if it's been taken off completely, I'll leave it because the business owner might not have wanted it there," he said.

Drew is used to having problems with local councils, but one interaction in Dandenong, in Melbourne, was different. "I went there especially because they're famed as the country's most multicultural suburb. I went down, met a whole bunch of people, put up posters and I think it was the next day, or the day after, I received an email from the local council saying: 'Can you just tell us where the posters are, because we want to make sure our cleaning crews leave them alone.'"

Lucy Feagins, editor of the Australian design blog The Design Files, discovered the campaign through Melbourne's Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and spotted people getting behind Drew on social media. She encouraged her blog's Instagram followers to create and share their own interpretations, using the hashtag #realaustralianssaywelcome. "I just figured it had legs to go further than just what [Drew] was doing," Feagins said.

"I had it in my head that it would be a call-out to creative people – so, artists, designers, illustrators – to make something visual to respond to Peter's campaign. What happened was a lot of readers, just everyday people, had their own go and they were getting kids involved, doing things in their gardens, in their kitchens, with rolling pins.

"It felt like it became something a lot more broad that was engaging a large chunk of our community, not just the creative professionals."

An artist, Joost Bakker, and his family spelt the message with thousands of yellow ginkgo leaves at their property in Monbulk. "It goes to show this particular issue is a bit above politics. It's really more a humanitarian issue than a political issue," Feagins said. "To me, that shows you really hit a nerve."

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/06/real-australians-say-welcome-from-alice-springs-to-dandenong>

6. Hundreds of Rohingya refugees rescued from boats off Indonesian coast

Stranded boats carrying nearly 600 migrants from Burma towed to shore in Aceh province by fishermen after running out of fuel

The Guardian

Reuters

Monday 11 May 2015 04.19 AEST

Nearly 600 migrants thought to be Rohingya refugees from Burma have been rescued from two wooden boats stranded off the coast of northern Aceh province in Indonesia.

The overcrowded boats, which were carrying dozens of children among the refugees, were towed to shore by fishermen after running out of fuel, authorities said on Sunday.

"According to the information we have so far, the people on board are from Burma. They are Muslim, from the Rohingya community," said Mohammed Arif Mutaqin, spokesman for the Aceh search and rescue agency.

The migrants left Thailand about seven days ago and some died during the journey, authorities said.

Of those rescued, about 50 were taken to the hospital. "In general, they were suffering from starvation and many were very thin," said north Aceh police chief Achmadi.

An estimated 25,000 Rohingyas and Bangladeshis boarded people-smugglers' boats in the first three months of this year, twice as many in the same period of 2014, the UN refugee agency UNHCR said on Friday.

An agency official estimated that about 300 people had died at sea in the first quarter of this year as a result of starvation, dehydration and abuse by boat crews.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/10/hundreds-of-rohingya-refugees-rescued-from-boats-off-indonesian-coast>

7. Antony Loewenstein: A punitive approach to refugees will lead Europe to unrest and corruption

The EU is showing every indication of wanting to push the refugee 'problem' off its soil. It will have difficulty doing so without blowback – just look at Australia

The Guardian
Antony Loewenstein
Monday 4 May 2015 18.12 AEST

Calls for tough action, like Gentiloni's, are growing in response to refugees drowning during the treacherous journey across the Mediterranean Ocean. Last year nearly 5,000 men, women and children perished at sea. This year at least 1,600 people have already died.

The desire to shut the door to Europe entirely is perhaps understandable, but it's the wrong decision. It dishonestly uses the fantasy of small and ordered queues of asylum seekers to sell Europe as a safe haven.

And yet the modern, international system of protecting asylum seekers, set up in the wake of the Holocaust, has never looked more incapable of dealing with some of the worst humanitarian crises since the Second World War.

Over 4 million Syrians have fled their country since 2011. Aside from the refugees pouring into Italy, around 100 Syrians arrive every day by boat on Greece's Dodecanese islands.

The country is logistically incapable of managing the influx and struggles with some of the most unaccepting attitudes to refugees in Europe (though a new, left-wing Syriza government is already releasing thousands of immigrants housed in horrible detention centres, sites I witnessed in Corinth in 2014). Some in Europe are more open. A recent poll found that 50% of Germans were in favour of taking more refugees.

The UN is practically begging Western nations to shelter Syrian refugees but the response from America, Britain, Australia and Canada has been desultory. The Saudi-led campaign against Yemen is likely to cause more people to flee a country that was already struggling before the current bombing. African leaders, from where many migrants are coming due to repression, are largely mute.

In Europe, anti-immigrant sentiment is electorally popular. It's not a tough sell. Economic uncertainty, questions around migrant integration, Al-Qaeda or Isis-inspired violence against civilians and questions around European identity end up expressing themselves in a fear of Islam and terrorism, which are doubts politicians exploit.

And the sheer scale of refugee arrivals in Italy is even causing some asylum seekers themselves to wonder with whom they have been travelling. There are often no checks or registration on arrival and some told Foreign Policy recently that it was entirely possible that members of Isis or other militant groups were travelling among them as a way to enter Europe.

European state identity is morphing into a less homogenous collection of nations. It's undeniably becoming more socially conservative, Muslim and unfamiliar to traditional, Christian sensibilities.

The EU's possible solution to these changes, mimicking Australia's offshore detention network, is to establish processing camps in non-EU nations such as Niger, Egypt, Lebanon and Turkey – as a way to keep the problem away from Europe.

To implement such a system in states that already have huge asylum burdens guarantees poor conditions and corruption. This has been Australia's experience with awful Pacific island detention camps which have done next to nothing to alter the increasingly desperate nature of 21st century migration flows, except to keep them from settling safely in Australia.

Canberra finds itself making deals with repressive states like Cambodia and Vietnam, and tiny Island nations like Nauru, but is mistaken if it believes resettling refugees there will deter a family leaving war-torn Syria, Libya or Iraq trying to reach somewhere secure.

After all, the west's participation in Middle Eastern wars is what's accelerating this huge population transfer. Libya, where Gentiloni wants to drop his bombs, was meant to be peaceful after the 2011 overthrow of the Gaddafi regime. But Libya is broken, with French oil producer Total SA cutting and running this month.

The result of Europe's lack of investment in Libya after the end of the dictator has borne results: political chaos, violence and a wave of refugees fleeing. Not that this has stopped Libya's broke, ruling government still having money for a Washington-based lobbyist – though it's unclear who is paying the bill.

The EU is showing every indication of wanting to push the refugee "problem" off its soil, a sign of its unwillingness to deal with the fruits of its foreign policy. Adequate search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean are not happening due to the spurious argument that saving people will only encourage more to come.

The result is many more deaths at sea; because of their brown and black skin, governments don't fear a public outcry to save them. The compassionate and correct response is to not allow people to drown. Instead, European nations are pushing for drones to monitor the Mediterranean (with Israeli government and corporate assistance, since they're global leaders in the technology) and warships on the Libyan coast.

Europe, like Australia, views this issue as a security threat and not a humanitarian crisis. The response follows this logic. People smugglers are framed as the ultimate enemy. Rarely are Western policies acknowledged as being part of the problem.

One solution is to ease the path for migrants to enter the EU in a safe and responsible way. It is increasingly difficult for refugees to claim asylum in overseas embassies, forcing them to take alternative paths. Last year nearly half of migrants rescued in the Mediterranean came from Syria, Eritrea and Somalia – and yet the EU does little to find solutions in those states.

The EU hosts few of the world's refugees, the UNHCR has found that 86% of the world's total reside in developing nations, so rhetoric about a supposed migrant "invasion" is false. Australia argues similarly, though its intake could be far higher, too.

Europe is mimicking an Australian immigration architecture that profits from surveillance and detention. Greek journalist Apostolis Fotiadis, author of the just released book *Border Merchants*, wrote after the recent Mediterranean drownings that, "promoting reactionary policies dressed up with words of grief seems to have become a habit [for the EU]."

Europe is learning, as Australia surely will, that constructing a fortress around their privileged nations while politicising human tragedies is a road to further unrest.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/04/a-punitive-approach-to-refugees-will-lead-europe-to-unrest-and-corruption>

8. Italian navy chief sceptical of Australian asylum seeker solution to Mediterranean migrant crisis

ABC News Online / AFP

First posted Wed 6 May 2015, 4:34am

Updated Wed 6 May 2015, 5:16am

An Italian navy chief has poured cold water on suggestions Europe should adopt Australia's policy of turning back migrant boats to end the current crisis in the Mediterranean.

A surge in both the numbers of migrants reaching Europe from north Africa and deaths at sea led to calls for the European Union to consider a similar approach, with the aim of deterring people from contemplating the journey in the first place.

Last month Prime Minister Tony Abbott called on European leaders to stop the "terrible problem".

"The only way you can stop the deaths is to stop the people-smuggling trade. The only way you can stop the deaths is in fact to stop the boats," he said.

"That's why it is so urgent that the countries of Europe adopt very strong policies that will end the people smuggling trade across the Mediterranean."

But Admiral Donato Marzano, who will host a seminar of navy supremos from 26 European countries on Friday, said it would not be morally or practically feasible to start escorting barely seaworthy migrant boats back to conflict-racked Libya.

"There are several countries that apply a policy of expulsion, even by force of arms, others apply the international right to rescue," he said when asked if Italy could learn from Australia's experience.

"I am a sailor who has spent 20 years on boats. If I find a boat adrift, I'm sorry, but I don't turn away."

"I intervene to help people at sea. I don't know if this reflects my Italian culture but I do know it is international law.

"A vessel in difficulty, whether it is a boat full of migrants or a merchant ship, has to be assisted."

Australia has advised the EU to follow its lead and Mr Abbott said this week that his officials were in touch with their European counterparts on the issue.

EU officials in Brussels have denied any such contact, suggesting there is little appetite for a move that would inevitably cause an outcry from rights groups.

Some right-wing leaders, including France's Marine Le Pen, backed the Australian model as a solution to migratory pressures which have resulted in about 5,000 people drowning in waters between Libya and Italy since the start of 2014.

'Australian experience one that can be discussed'

Mr Marzano said navy chiefs would do what their political masters asked them, but said he did not detect any enthusiasm for moving away from search-and-rescue operations aimed at minimising the loss of life while trying to find other ways of stemming the migrant flows.

"If there is a political decision to do other activities like expulsions, then we will have to find the appropriate solution for the situation but at this moment that doesn't seem to me to be the situation," he said.

Friday's talks on the security environment off Europe's southern coasts are expected to be dominated by the issue of illegal immigration, but will also touch on questions of the movement of terrorists and piracy.

"Australia is not involved in these discussions but obviously it is involved in other international forums and the Australian experience is one that can be discussed and compared," Mr Marzano said.

"But the problem of clandestine immigration is so incredibly complex, I don't think any magic formula exists — otherwise we would already have found it.

"We have a crisis situation that has many different aspects and which from a European perspective is without precedent.

"There are so many people fleeing war, so many people fleeing not only in search of work but also to save their lives.

"There are so many different aspects to the problem I don't think anyone has a magic solution, be they Australian, Italian, European or French.

"All we can do is share our experiences and try to resolve a problem which is getting ever more urgent."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-06/italy-navy-chief-sceptical-australian-solution-to-migrant-issue/6447708>

9. Abbott accused of using Mediterranean migrant crisis to score political points

'It's the low-rent act of a snake-oil merchant and he should be called out as such,' Labor's immigration minister Richard Marles says

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Wednesday 6 May 2015 12.37 AEST

Tony Abbott is behaving like a "snake-oil merchant" by using the crisis in the Mediterranean Sea to score political points in Australia, Labor's immigration spokesman has said.

On Monday the prime minister said there had been discussions with European officials when asked whether Europe had sought any advice on how to respond to the migration flows across the Mediterranean.

But on Tuesday a European Commission spokeswoman, Natasha Bertaud, denied there had been any official contact and said the "Australian model can never be a model for us", because the policy involved the refoulement of people who could be genuine refugees.

After the comments, Labor's immigration spokesman, Richard Marles, said Abbott was using the boat crisis for political point scoring in Australia. He told Sky News on Wednesday: "It's the low-rent act of a snake-oil merchant and he should be called out as such."

On Tuesday the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, acknowledged that Australia had worked with the Vietnamese government to return 46 asylum seekers intercepted at sea. The federal government had assessed the asylum seekers on board the Australian vessel that intercepted them, he said.

The comments follow a report in the Australian on Wednesday that said a number of EU member states' representatives had asked for information on the workings of Operation Sovereign Borders.

An Italian admiral was also reported as saying Australia's policy of turning back boats was not a practical solution in the Mediterranean.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/06/abbott-accused-of-using-mediterranean-migrant-crisis-to-score-political-points>

10. Richard Ackland: Want to know about immigration detention? Then sue for negligence

In the absence of administrative law remedies civil law actions for negligence may, unfortunately, be asylum seekers' best bet for redress

The Guardian
Richard Ackland
Tuesday 5 May 2015 13.27 AEST

There are numerous individual common lawsuits alleging mistreatment and negligence of asylum seekers on the part of the government and its agents. However, public interest lawyer at Maurice Blackburn, Lizzie O'Shea, says there's no "silver bullet" in the armoury of remedies available to asylum seekers and refugees.

O'Shea is concentrating on a class action on behalf of people held on Christmas Island over the previous three years, alleging the Commonwealth government breached its duty of care in relation to a range of issues, including its failure to provide for the adequate education of detained children prior to December last year, and health care generally.

The class action is still at the directions stage and is unlikely to come to trial in the supreme court of Victoria before the end of the year. However, last month Justice Stephen Kaye ordered the Commonwealth to delay the planned demolition of Aqua and Lilac compounds on Christmas Island.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs' said they wanted access to the compounds to inspect conditions in which people were being detained.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection insisted that inspection only be permitted with conditions that photographs and video are taken by department staff.

Maurice Blackburn has also brought proceedings against the Commonwealth and service provider G4S on behalf of a detainee who lost an eye in last year's Manus Island riots.

Slater & Gordon is running a class action too: against the Commonwealth, Transfield, and former contractor G4S, in relation to the alleged negligent treatment of asylum seekers on Manus island.

The lead plaintiff is Majid Karami Kamasae, an Iranian national, who at age 15 was badly burned in a heater fire. He entered Australia in August 2013, and was taken into custody by the Commonwealth.

He alleges that he was intentionally denied medical treatment and as a result his injuries worsened.

The plaintiffs plead that the supply of food and water on Manus is below a standard that would prevent the spread of infectious disease. Similarly, shelter and medical care are not of a level to prevent distressing physical discomfort and deterioration of physical or mental health.

Also, there is insufficient protection against physical violence, intimidation, discrimination and bullying.

Transfield has already unsuccessfully sought to have the case struck out, but Slater & Gordon will have to plead again for aspects of the claim against the service provider.

The Manus Island case presents certain advantages from the plaintiffs' point of view, because conditions there have been documented by Amnesty International, the UNHCR, the Commonwealth Ombudsman and even reports by Guardian Australia.

Slater & Gordon's head of class actions, Ben Phi, says "Independent reports have consistently found that the Manus centre is squalid and overcrowded, that food and water is often limited or contaminated, that there is little relief from the oppressive heat and humidity, and that the medical facilities are inadequate.

“If successful, the case will establish that the Commonwealth, having chosen an offshore detention regime, is nevertheless required to ensure that asylum seekers are detained in conditions that accord with Australian standards.

“We are looking to establish legal principles in relation Australia’s obligations to detainees.”

The plaintiffs will have to get past the Commonwealth’s argument that the management of the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre is not its responsibility – it is in the control of the government of Papua New Guinea.

This, on its face, is a rather unsophisticated fiction, as responsibility for the management of the centre has been delegated by the Australian government to Transfield, and before that to G4S. The terms and conditions of how Transfield runs the centre and manages the detainees are determined by the Department of Immigration. And, of course, Australia pays the bill.

It’s a long bow for the government to say that what is alleged is not its doing or responsibility, yet ultimately that threshold issue will have to be decided by the Victorian Supreme Court, and that may not be till the middle of next year.

The remedy for these civil actions lies in awards of damages, not in findings as to the legality of detaining people in forbidding environments. The emphasis in refugee litigation has moved away from seeking administrative law remedies, instead to whatever the common law of negligence may offer.

Administrative law oversight has been screwed so tightly by successive governments, and especially by last December’s amendments to the Migration Act and the Maritime Powers Act.

That said, nothing is beyond the inventiveness of lawyers versed in the area, but for now, administrative remedies are looking less and less within reach of detainees.

While damages for negligence are one thing, they do not overturn the policy of internment and deprivation of liberty.

Litigation requires discovery of large amounts of documents that generally are not publicly available. This is one way of casting light on hitherto hidden process, management practices and policies.

However, it is the discovery of disturbing material that invariably sees the Commonwealth rush to settle with immigration plaintiffs. This was the case with earlier individual claims alleging mistreatment at the Baxter and Woomera detention centres.

It is only if cases come to trial that there is a prospect of seeing what the Commonwealth and the service providers are really doing in the name of the Australian people and that legal principles can be established.

The media has been denied access and so has difficulty reporting consistently on conditions, while Transfield’s case officers and other staff are required to sign confidentiality agreements, with threats of legal action if they discuss how the Manus centre is managed and detainees treated.

The result is that one of the grim chapters in Australia’s history is only revealed to the public in fragments.

Claims based on seeking awards of damages have the prospect of publicly shaming the government, although so far normal impulses of shame seem elusive. Instead, the government makes a meal of shooting the messenger.

There are other ways in which unyielding details come to the surface – the Human Rights Commission’s inquiry and Forgotten Children report on Nauru and the follow-up Moss review and now a Senate inquiry. They provide illuminations, but not enforceable solutions.

Nor can a silver bullet be found in international law. Australia has obligations under the Refugee Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and gives lip service to the requirement of “best interest assessment”.

Canada and the UK have enshrined the requirement in their domestic law, we haven’t. Consequently, Australia pays lip service to the obligation, but the administrative process falls a long way short. There is no simple legal way around the system of off-shore processing. Most of the loopholes are gone and it’s now a case of arguing about the conditions of detention.

Without human rights obligations enshrined in our domestic law, the remedies for those held indefinitely in distress without charge are of limited utility. Yet it is a standard mantra of conservative pundits that the common law is all we need to save our soul from government excess.

If we keep proceeding down that path, where people in our care can be psychologically, and sometimes physically tortured, with only limited legal remedies available to them, then Australia will end up in a very dark place.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/05/want-to-know-about-immigration-detention-then-sue-for-negligence>

11. Australia Is Trying to Get Refugees to Resettle in Cambodia and Unsurprisingly They Refuse to Go

Many refugees have fled poor countries with a record of human-rights abuses, and have no interest in being resettled in another one

TIME Magazine
(no date) 5:05 AM ET
Helen Regan

Some 750 asylum seekers living in Australian government detention on the tiny Pacific island nation of Nauru face an impossible choice. They can stay on Nauru in squalid conditions. Or they can be resettled, of all places, in impoverished Cambodia — a country with a long record of human-rights abuses, where refugees are discriminated against and the chances of finding work are slim.

At first glance, it would appear that anybody would give anything to leave Nauru. About 200 refugees whose asylum claims have been processed live in small clusters of houses dotted around the island. But those awaiting a decision on their claims are kept in two detention centers, one for single men and another that houses families. There, people who've fled war and persecution in countries like Syria, Somalia, Burma, Sri Lanka and Iran sleep in sweltering and cramped plastic tents with little ventilation. They have limited communication with the outside world and many spend their days in fear and despair.

Pamela Curr, a refugee-rights advocate for over a decade, is the campaign coordinator for the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, a Melbourne-based organization that provides health, food, aid, legal and counseling programs to asylum seekers in Australia. Curr was told by a female inmate in Nauru of an 8-year-old boy living in the detention center, who had become withdrawn and refused to leave his mother's side, even to go to school. When his mother asked him to "draw something for me, anything you like," he burst into tears and drew a Nauruan guard with an erect penis.

Women are also reportedly preyed upon in the camp, too afraid to even visit the toilets. "We wet ourselves because the guards stand around the toilets at night and we're terrified we'll get raped," one woman told Curr.

To add to their distress, just last week the Nauruan government blocked access to Facebook on the island, in what it said was an attempt to crack down on Internet pornography. Now, the refugees and asylum seekers who used the social-media site as a lifeline to contact loved ones must rely on expensive and unreliable pay phones.

Resettlement in Australia is not an option for any of the inmates on Nauru. Canberra has repeatedly vowed that no asylum seeker attempting to reach its shores by sea will settle there.

"You will not under any circumstances be settling in Australia. This is not an option that the Australian government will ever present to you," Australia's Minister for Immigration and Border Affairs Peter Dutton said in a video address, obtained by the Guardian two weeks ago.

With all of that being the case, the Australian government probably thought, when it made a resettlement pact with Cambodia last September, that the detainees on Nauru would jump at the chance of an onward journey. Under the deal, Cambodia would resettle an unlimited number of asylum seekers from Nauru in exchange for \$31 million and the assurance that Australia would fund the resettlement process for at least one year.

Those who sign up to go are promised long-term support in the areas of work, education and health care. But immigration officials are struggling to find volunteers among the island's refugees to be on the first Cambodia-bound plane, which could depart this week.

Last Friday, about 200 refugees demonstrated in the eastern Ijuw camp on Nauru against relocation to Cambodia. They held up banners with slogans calling for justice and chanted "Cambodia, never ever."

Australian officials are reportedly offering incentives of nearly \$12,000 to any asylum seeker that will step aboard, and are offering to fast-track asylum claims for refugees who agree to go, according to Ian Rintoul, coordinator for a Sydney-based refugee-campaign group, Refugee Action Coalition.

"An Iranian couple, the latest to agree to be transferred, have almost certainly had their refugee determination fast-tracked. They were determined to be refugees only five days ago," he said in a statement last Wednesday.

Refugees have been warned that if they are not among the first to be resettled, they may not be guaranteed the same financial help if they decide to go at a later date, a caution repeated by Dutton in his video address.

"Our concern is without advice, people may be lured into accepting the offer because it may seem to them the only way to get a refugee visa is to accept the money," Rintoul tells TIME.

In the video, reportedly shown to Nauru asylum seekers two weeks ago, Dutton implored those in detention to take up the resettlement offer, saying: “Cambodia provides a wealth of opportunity for new settlers, it is a fast-paced and vibrant country with a stable economy and varied employment opportunities.”

However, international and local advocacy groups, as well as opposition lawmakers in Australia and Cambodia, have slammed the resettlement plan as a violation of refugee rights and condemn the government for sending vulnerable people to a country that struggles to take care of its own citizens.

“While the Australian government tries to market the Cambodia deal as being about constructive burden-sharing, it’s really about destructive burden-shifting,” Daniel Webb, director of legal advocacy for the Human Rights Law Centre in Melbourne, tells TIME.

Phil Robertson, deputy director for Human Rights Watch in Asia, says, “Far from a tropical democratic paradise, the reality is that Cambodia is a struggling economy with ineffective law enforcement where its own citizens face corruption, repression and violence on a regular basis.”

In what appear to be fact sheets, reportedly distributed by Australian officials among some of the asylum seekers on Nauru last month, the Australian government states that Khmer citizens enjoy the “freedoms of a democratic society including freedom of religion and freedom of speech.” Canberra also promises that refugees will start a new life “free from persecution and violence” and says Cambodia offers “jobs for migrants and strong support networks for newly settled refugees.”

But in reality, Cambodia is extremely poor, with 17% of its population living in poverty and thousands of its citizens forced to seek work in neighboring Thailand as migrant laborers. Though the country has undergone rapid development in the past decade, services like health care are woefully lacking and not up to international standards.

Cambodia also has a grim record of human-rights abuses of its own citizens and the government has been known to stifle peaceful protests and detain opposition activists. In November 2014, 10 women were jailed merely for protesting against flooding in their community.

The existing 75 registered refugees already living in Cambodia have also struggled to find work. They face extortion and discrimination and “live below the poverty line, below the fringes of society,” says Graeme McGregor, refugee-campaign coordinator for Amnesty International in Australia.

Among the refugees in Cambodia are people from nearby Burma, Sri Lanka and neighboring Vietnam. According to Human Rights Watch, though they have refugee documentation enabling them to stay in the country, their papers are not recognized by many employers and they face legal barriers when opening bank accounts.

Without a grasp of the Khmer language, the refugees have struggled to enter the job market and many live hand-to-mouth, relying on organizations like the U.N. refugee agency (UNHCR) and other nonprofits for school supplies, tuition fees and health insurance.

“This is a corrupt country. You will not find jobs. We have been here more than two years and we have no money and not enough to eat. It’s better to wait in Nauru,” one refugee told Human Rights Watch.

Cambodia also has a track record of sending refugees back to the places from which they have fled. In 2009, 20 Uighur asylum seekers were deported to China, where they were arrested and jailed. And in the past four months, Cambodia has forcibly deported 54 ethnic Jarai and E De people (also known as Montagnards) back to Vietnam.

Incredulously, Australia’s own guidance to its citizens on Cambodia, published by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, contradicts much of what the government is saying to refugees on Nauru.

Despite this, the government blames “troublemakers within the asylum-seeker community” on Nauru for turning others against going. That’s according to an interview conducted by Dutton with the U.K.’s Sky News on April 26.

When asked by TIME to comment on the issues raised in this article, the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection issued a generic statement saying: “The Australian Government remains committed to that agreement [with Cambodia] and the first group of volunteers is anticipated to depart for Cambodia in the near future.”

At Cambodia’s request, the International Organization of Migration (IOM) will help with the resettlement process alongside other aid agencies in the country, providing the refugees with temporary accommodation and long-term help with finding work and learning the language. The IOM agreed to assist after Phnom Penh promised to grant all existing and arriving refugees the right to live and work anywhere in the country, the right to family reunions, long-term funding for the program and fair treatment for all refugees.

While the conditions offer some assurance that life for refugees may improve in Cambodia, it is understandable that those people on Nauru, who have fled persecution and war, and who have endured smuggling and perilous boat journeys, are fearful of being dropped in an unknown country to start anew, especially when they sense they are not being given the full picture about what awaits them.

“Australia is once again violating obligations under international law as the refugee convention requires asylum seekers to be processed and resettled in Australia,” says McGregor, adding, “Their safety isn’t guaranteed right now in Cambodia.”

So far, just four people from Nauru have signed up to the offer, including an Iranian couple, an ethnic Rohingya man from Burma, and another Iranian man. Australia hopes that once they settle into their new life in Cambodia, they will encourage others to join them. But right now, Cambodia is looking even less attractive than a crushingly monotonous life in a bunch of flyblown tents somewhere in the Pacific.

<http://time.com/3829148/australia-nauru-refugees-asylum-seekers-resettle-cambodia-bribes/>

12. Asylum seeker mental health data falling into black hole, former immigration detention psychiatrist says

ABC News Online

First posted Thu 7 May 2015, 4:40am

Updated Thu 7 May 2015, 4:50am

A former mental health director who worked in Australia's immigration detention centres has said data on the mental health of asylum seekers is falling "into a black hole".

Psychiatrist Peter Young was a director with International Health and Mental Services, a company contracted to provide mental health services to detention centres.

He has raised concerns about the mental health of detainees since he left his post.

Dr Young said statistics were being collected, but are not being used or analysed.

"This data is being collected but it's essentially going into a bit of a black hole," he said.

"It's not being reported systematically or analysed any more, unfortunately."

Dr Young said the anonymous data on the mental health of detainees should be available for public scrutiny, in the same way as statistics are recorded in the broader population.

"We should treat mental health services in detention exactly the same as mental health services in the rest of community, with the same reporting practices and the same degree of transparency," he said.

The Department of Immigration said the data it received on the mental health of migrants was analysed and used to monitor the mental health and wellbeing of people in detention.

In a statement, a spokeswoman for the department said it was "committed to ensuring that it has the best available information and expertise to manage the health of those in detention".

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-07/asylum-seeker-mental-health-falling-into-black-hole-psychiatrist/6450772>

13. Government asked for asylum mental health data to be cut, documents show

Documents released under freedom of information show immigration department requested damning data on adults and children be removed

The Guardian

Paul Farrell

Friday 8 May 2015 06.11 AEST

• Read the documents: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2073368-report-4-september-2014-redacted.html>

Damning mental health data on asylum seekers was withdrawn from reporting at the request of the immigration department, newly released documents reveal.

In July 2014 Dr Peter Young, then the medical director for mental health at International Health and Medical Services (IHMS), told the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) the immigration department “reacted with alarm” to a set of data that showed significant deterioration in the mental health of children in detention.

He said the department asked IHMS to withdraw the figures from reporting in quarterly data sets, after the department saw the preliminary results in a meeting that month.

At the time the secretary of the immigration department, Martin Bowles, said he was unaware of the request to withdraw the figures.

But documents released under freedom of information laws to Young reveal that the department conceded in an internal investigation it had asked IHMS to withdraw the figures.

IHMS began collecting new data in early 2014 based on more robust screening procedures than had previously been applied. The measure used is known as health of the nation outcome scales for child and adolescent mental health (Honosca) data.

Stephen Wood, who now heads a new accountability task force within the department, said in his findings: "DIBP [the department] did ask IHMS on 21 July 2014 to withhold Honos and Honosca data from the quarterly dataset pending further consideration by DIBP and discussion with IHMS."

But Wood's report said the department "did not ask IHMS to cease collecting data nor did it ask IHMS to cease using Honos or Honosca screening instruments".

"The allegation that DIBP covered up health data is false," the report said.

It said the data had been withheld because IHMS had not obtained approval under its contract with the department to change the screening methods.

The department further revised its screening procedures last month, a spokeswoman confirmed.

The department has not previously acknowledged the role it played in removing the data.

Wood's report discussed a meeting between IHMS and immigration staff at which the preliminary findings of the data were presented.

Young is quoted as saying in the report that the immigration department participants appeared more hostile than they had previously.

Two of the immigration doctors present were "critical and dismissive of data presented, and that one doctor had directed that the conclusions and recommendations in the presentation be redacted".

But Wood said the tone of the meeting was "not germane to the allegation that DIBP sought data to be withheld". He did note that the evidence suggested the meeting was generally less cordial than previous meetings.

A week after the meeting, DIBP asked IHMS to withhold the data "pending further consideration". Wood said the decision was "entirely consistent with requirements under the contract".

"While IHMS were given approval at DIBP officer level to include Honos in the quarterly data set from the end of January 2014 and, by implication, Honosca, IHMS recognised by 13 March 2014 at the latest that it had no authority under the contract to do so."

But Young said the review did not explain why the screening data was not still being used. At a conference on Tuesday he said that while the data was still being collected by IHMS, the procedures and analysis had not been developed. Young told Guardian Australia: "If it wasn't a cover-up, why don't they just release the data? And what's the problem with it being included in reporting?"

A spokeswoman for the department said health screening tools had been reviewed by the department's independent health adviser, Dr Paul Alexander, which resulted in the changes to procedures in April. She said Alexander's review also indicated there had been no cover-up of the data.

"The review shows that both the department and the service provider were working through the governance process set out in the contract to ensure appropriate screening instrument and assessment tools were being used."

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/08/government-asked-for-asylum-mental-health-data-to-be-cut-documents-show>

14. Allow independent groups into Nauru asylum seeker processing centre: UN

The Age
May 7, 2015 - 6:15PM
Sarah Whyte

A United Nations inspection team have called for greater transparency of the asylum seeker processing centre in Nauru, saying it is clear Australia has a "very strong input" into the running of the facility.

The UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture finished their three-day visit to Nauru this week where they inspected the processing centre of Australian-bound asylum seekers and local detention facilities on the small Pacific island.

The chair of the committee, Malcolm Evans said it appeared the processing centre on Nauru was being run by the Australian government, despite being based on the Pacific island.

"Well clearly as is perfectly obvious, there is a very strong Australian input into its operation and management," he said.

"Doubtless it is under Nauruan direction and the processing is determined by Nauru but I have never quite understood, and I hope to get some clarification on this ... if people have been initially received into Australia and are seeking asylum to Australia how it is that they can be converted into persons seeking asylum in Nauru?"

The team went to the three compounds within the processing centre and were able to speak with the single men, women and families being held there.

"We were able to spend a lot of time talking in great detail to them," he said. "We spoke in individual one-to-one settings or with groups and spoke to a very considerable majority of people there and how they perceived their situation."

The report is expected to be handed to the Nauruan government in the next four months. However it would not be given to Australian authorities, Mr Evans said. He also called for a national "open centre" model that allows independent bodies access to the processing centre and to be able to report on the conditions.

It comes as the Senate has launched an inquiry into the abuse of women and children inside the Nauruan detention centre, following serious allegations of sexual abuse and rape within the centre.

The special Labor and Greens-led committee is expected to meet next week to review the inquiry and discuss when the public hearings may take place.

The UN inspection was allowed by the Nauruan government as it is a signatory to the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture.

Only last year a team of UN investigators were denied access to the processing centre in Nauru. At the time the Nauruan government said the UN had not been "invited" to the island.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/allow-independent-groups-into-nauru-asylum-seeker-processing-centre-un-20150507-ggwldk.html>

15. UN torture prevention team calls for greater transparency in Nauru immigration detention centre

ABC News Online

First posted Fri 8 May 2015, 6:26pm

Updated Fri 8 May 2015, 6:35pm

A United Nations torture prevention team has called for greater transparency on conditions and systems governing the immigration detention centre in Nauru following a visit to the island nation.

UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture chair Malcolm Evans, one of three senior UN rights experts who visited Nauru, was unable to discuss the team's findings for confidentiality reasons.

Speaking exclusively to Pacific Beat, however, Mr Evans said there were "grave concerns around the entire set-up" for asylum seekers on Nauru.

"The idea of holding all of those seeking asylum in closed institutions ... of this nature — with no real understanding of what their long-term future is likely to be — is bound to be a cause of great distress," he said.

As a signatory to the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, Nauru had no option but to allow the UN experts full access to its police station and prison, as well as the Australian-run Regional Processing Centre for asylum seekers.

Asylum seekers 'cut off' from outside world

Mr Evans said the team had unfettered access to the facilities they visited.

"We do have this extremely broad power of access. One of the reasons is that we are bound by an obligation of confidentiality about what we see when we go into these places," he said.

"Clearly, when people are not able to know what's going on in such places, or hurdles appear and it's difficult, it can only raise questions about why people don't want to know.

"This is why we think independent monitoring is so important — transparency is one of the greatest protections here. Where there's a lack of transparency, naturally there will be concerns things are not as they ought."

There is a lack of information available about conditions for asylum seekers on Nauru and a ban on access for journalists.

Facebook, a major method of communication on the island, has also been recently banned, according to reports.

"In principle, those seeking asylum — they haven't committed any crime. They have a legal right to be in the country in which they are present," he said.

"They are seeking asylum and they ought to be able to function in as open a fashion as possible. Any restrictions that may be in place — I don't know the details, I know what's been alleged but I don't know whether they're true or not — that clearly would be another erosion of what they would be entitled to expect."

UN praises cooperation of Nauru officials

Mr Evans said the team looked at the treatment of children in detention on Nauru.

"The point of such a body as this is that it would be able to go into any place and see how everybody is treated," he said.

"The treatment of children is a very major element of that, not only where asylum seekers are held, but generally where there are children in detention, in prisons, in police stations."

Mr Evans praised Nauru for the way officials cooperated with the UN experts and said it was a hopeful sign for the future.

"It suggests that Nauru is serious about its obligations under the protocol, which is why we are hopeful that with the advice and assistance it would be very willing to see the mechanisms that we suggest put in place, as well, of course, the recommendations that we will be making in our confidential report."

Mr Evans said he hoped Nauru would make public the report, which should be complete by the end of August.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-08/un-team-wants-greater-transparency-on-nauru/6456634>

16. Expert panel into child protection in detention announced as AFP heads to Nauru

Sydney Morning Herald
May 9, 2015
Heath Aston

The Abbott government has established a three-member expert panel to provide advice on child protection inside Australian mainland and offshore detention centres.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton will also announce on Saturday that six Australian Federal Police officers will also be sent to Nauru to advise local police on investigating sexual abuse cases.

Both developments are part of the government's response to the damning findings of the Moss Review into allegations of sexual abuse inside the Nauru detention centre, which was released in March.

The review, conducted by former integrity commissioner Philip Moss, found evidence of rape, sexual assault of minors and guards trading marijuana for sexual favours from female detainees. It also cleared Save the Children staff of claims they had coached detainees to embarrass the Abbott government.

The three-member panel is made up of John Lawler, the former chief executive of the Australian Crime Commission, Margaret Allison, a former director-general of the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services in Queensland and Dominic Downie, a public servant of 35 years' experience.

Although the government dismissed a Human Rights Commission report into children in detention as politically motivated, Mr Dutton said the panel had been created and AFP sent to Nauru as a result of the Moss findings.

"As I indicated at the time, prior to the release of the Moss Review I directed the [department] secretary to take an even more active role in responding to allegations than was recommended by Mr Moss," he said.

"The department is progressing all of the recommendations of the Moss Review and I'm pleased that I can announce it is undertaking this additional work to examine the adequacy and appropriateness of the responses of the department and its service providers to allegations of abuse involving a child."

Some of the AFP officers will provide advice to the Nauru Police Force on sexual assault investigations and others will provide advice in relation to the allegations of unrest in February and March 2.

Mr Dutton said the child protection panel will work to strengthen policies and procedures relating to the safety and welfare of children in detention, reporting to the secretary of the Immigration Department.

The panel will also reviewing allegations dating back to 2008 to ensure they have been handled appropriately by the department and service providers.

"I am confident that departmental and service provider staff members always have the best interests of children at heart but, there are always opportunities to strengthen the tools and processes in place to adequately record, monitor and follow up these sorts of allegations," said Mr Dutton.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/expert-panel-into-child-protection-in-detention-announced-as-afp-heads-to-auru-20150508-ggxeo8.html>

17. Report to UN busts asylum seeker myths: Researcher

Brisbane Times
May 9, 2015 - 12:00AM
Jorge Branco

A comprehensive report to the United Nations busts common myths about people smuggling, according to its Queensland-based author.

The Migrant Smuggling in Asia: Current Trends and Related Challenges report lays out the state of play in the illegal trade.

The University of Queensland's Migrant Smuggling Working Group produced it for the UN Office on Drugs and Crime Southeast Asia and the Pacific.

Group coordinator Dr Andreas Schloenhardt said it showed "many myths and common perceptions about the smuggling of migrants" were not supported by evidence.

The report found migrants used smugglers "when accessing legal channels for migration proves unsuccessful or remains difficult".

Professor Schloenhardt, who has previously criticised the Australian government's boat turn-back policy for shifting the problem to other countries, said "the only meaningful way to control the problem was to create more legal avenues for migration".

"We can't control and stop the demand and the migration to that," he said.

"What we can do perhaps is manage it and the only way to really ensure that these very dangerous and exploitative means of migration aren't used, is to provide some realistic avenue of migration."

The UQ criminal law professor said the report had challenged popular perceptions.

Migrants are flooding to Australia in disproportionate numbers

In 2013 the Australian government reported that 300 boats with more than 20,500 asylum seekers on board arrived. None were recorded in 2014. But even at the height of these arrivals the report found the majority of smuggling happened between Asian countries and Professor Schloenhardt said the numbers reaching Australian shores were "insignificantly small".

"If we talk about 10 to 20,000 irregular arrivals in Australia, compare that to a country like Pakistan that might have four and a half million known irregular migrants and probably many more that are undocumented," he said. "And probably several hundreds of thousands of workers in places like Malaysia and Thailand, just to put this a little bit in perspective."

People smuggling rings are big, "mafia-style" operations

Despite regular talk of wanting to "smash the people smugglers' business model", Professor Schloenhardt's report found smuggling of migrants was mostly carried out by "loosely connected networks", generally operating without "formal, transnational hierarchies".

"This idea of people smugglers' business model, or the mafia-style organisation of this trade that generates billions of dollars is not really sustainable," he said.

"By and large this is organised in very simplistic and ad hoc ways, also at the local level rather than transnational style.

"By and large people move from one country to another and take whatever offer they can get to move further onwards."

People smugglers are all callous criminals

In 2009, Kevin Rudd labelled people smugglers "scum of the earth" and they have frequently been the target of political rhetoric ever since.

According to the Australian Border deaths database, 1970 asylum seekers have died at sea since records began in January 2000.

But the report found there was no evidence to suggest the average smuggler was a "routine criminal".

In fact, it found many smugglers had been clandestinely transported through themselves and often did not regard themselves as migrant smugglers.

Professor Schloenhardt said there was no basis for the image of the "Al Capone-style smuggler".

"I would just be cautious labelling them in that way because their circumstances are very complex and criminal as their activity may be, we need to understand how did they come to that and what drove them into this sort of situation," he said.

"In turn then (we need to) ask about how do we criminalise this, what kind of penalties are adequate towards that and also what do we do to prevent that?"

Many asylum seekers are really "economic refugees"

Politicians on both sides of the aisle have both stated they believe a growing number of asylum seekers coming to Australia were actually "economic refugees".

This one is a bit less clear-cut because the report did find family reunification or escaping persecution were motivating factors but "the majority of migrants are in pursuit of better economic opportunities".

But Professor Schloenhardt said this wasn't the case in Australia.

"Over 90 per cent of the people that come here, even within our very tough domestic laws, are recognised as refugees," he said.

"That is very different to Europe, where you have recognition rates of about 30-35 per cent.

"So Australia is really the target, first and foremost by people who are genuinely in fear of persecution someplace else."

Politicians have previously called for tougher assessments for asylum seeker claims, which could bring down the amount of successful applicants, with ASIO security assessments strengthened earlier this year.

Professor Schloenhardt will present his research findings to a conference at the United Nations Headquarters in New York later this month.

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/report-to-un-busts-asylum-seeker-myths-researcher-20150508-ggvo2n.html>

18. Refugee women in Australia speak on Mother's Day for the 'voiceless' in camps

Yarrie Bangura, who fled civil war in Sierra Leone and lived in a refugee camp in Guinea, will speak at Australia for UNHCR Mother's Day event

The Guardian

Paul Farrell

Friday 8 May 2015 10.52 AEST

Yarrie Bangura doesn't like to go camping. The idea of spending even an evening in a tent brings back many difficult memories of her time in a refugee camp in a dark, dangerous part of Guinea.

"This is where we stayed and it was horrible. It's not something anybody wished to see. You see the worst side of humanity, and people struggling to survive," she said.

Such camps exist all around the world: on the borders of African nations, in the slums of Indonesia and on the fringes of Europe.

About 80% of the displaced people in the camps are women and children. Many have experienced violence and threats, and have a strong fear of persecution.

Bangura came to Australia as a refugee in 2004 with her five siblings, mother and father. Her family fled civil war in Sierra Leone, only to find themselves in a refugee camp in Guinea.

They slept in a tent. Snakes would sometimes crawl in. People Bangura knew died, even inside the camps.

"I thought even when I was in the plane that it was a trick. It was too good to be true. But when I felt my feet at Sydney airport I was assured that freedom and peace was finally mine," she said.

Speaking ahead of the Australia for UNHCR Mother's Day lunch on Friday, which aims to support women and children who are vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, Bangura said she began talking about her experiences to help others understand what refugee camps were like.

"I came to a point that I need to speak, I need to talk about those people that have been killed in those camps," she said. "I am fortunate to be in Australia. Those people who are still back there, they are voiceless. Nobody knows their story, nobody knows they are there."

The event was set up to recognise the significant number of female refugees and to acknowledge the work of women in the field.

"My mother is very proud and I'm very proud of my mother for just being a great mum and a hero to me," Bangura said. "If it wasn't because of my mum I don't think I would have all these big ideas, and I don't think I could have survived the war. She stood. She sacrificed herself for us to survive."

Naomi Steer, the regional director of Australia for UNHCR, said the organisation aimed to provide frontline support to displaced people.

"It's an opportunity to really celebrate the resilience and courage of refugee women. Although as we know there are many challenges for all women globally, that's particularly so for refugee women who are without the protection of their own country and can often be without the protection of the country they seek refuge in," she said.

While the level of support varies, core elements include medical services and education, as well as shelter and safety. A basic but important aid service can often be as simple as a "safe delivery kit" for expecting mothers.

"It's a simple kit that is made up of a plastic sheet to give birth on, a pair of rubber gloves, and one of the most important things in the kit is a piece of soap. So both the mum and birth carer can cut down on infection, and a piece of string and razor blade to cut the umbilical cord," Steer said.

She said despite the many challenges for women in Australia, they could fall back on a strong government and civil society.

"Refugee women have none of that support, and that's part of why we're holding this event."

The Refugee Council of Australia has renewed calls for an increase to the national refugee and humanitarian intake from 13,750 places to 30,000.

Its chief executive, Paul Power, said the world faced "the worst crisis in global displacement since [the second world war]", with more than 51m people displaced across the globe. "For every resettlement place offered by the international community, there are 11 refugees who are in urgent need of resettlement. This year less than 1% of the world's refugees will get the opportunity to be safely resettled, and Australia is not doing its fair share," Power said.

"While we welcome the Australian government's medium-term plan to increase the number of people it resettles, it is clear that Australia must do much more in assisting the global community deal with the growing challenge of displaced people and refugees." Bangura said she hoped she could continue to tell her story in Australia, to give a voice to refugees still in camps.

"If we are human beings, if we can listen to one another and we can find a way to solve whatever problems ... we can make progress."

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/08/refugee-women-in-australia-speak-on-mothers-day-for-the-voiceless-in-camps>

19. Strip-searched 'Love Makes A Way' refugee rights protesters make complaint to CCC

ABC News Online

By David Weber

Posted Fri 8 May 2015, 6:20am

A group of religious protesters who were strip-searched by Perth police have made a complaint to the WA Corruption and Crime Commission (CCC).

The eight protesters from various churches had staged a sit-in demonstration at Foreign Minister Julie Bishop's electorate office in December.

Westcity Church Pastor Jarrod McKenna said police took them to the watch house, where they were strip-searched.

"It was explained to us they were concerned about our own safety," he said.

"We tried to make the case, that given that we're church leaders, and know each other well, and have just spent eight hours peacefully sitting together, that we're not a threat to each other.

"And yet we were stripped naked, including things like being asked to lift our testicles, and when asked why that was necessary, were told to make sure we weren't concealing weapons."

The protesters were participating in the Love Makes A Way campaign, drawing attention to asylum seekers in detention.

Mr McKenna, who also works for World Vision, said police did not enforce a strip search after an earlier demonstration.

"It just raises the question, with literally some of the same church leaders in the action, why this time such an humiliating and what is quite a just awful experience, why was that deemed necessary?" he said.

Police Minister Liza Harvey this week told Parliament that WA Police had conducted an internal inquiry which determined the actions of the shift supervisor were appropriate.

Mr McKenna said he was disappointed in the outcome and he wanted the CCC to investigate.

"We have made statements, all the church leaders involved," he said.

"We feel that there's a responsibility to make sure this kind of stuff doesn't happen to others.

"We're all tertiary educated, most of us are from the side of town where this doesn't usually happen.

"I guess that's the importance of the Corruption and Crime Commission to actually follow these things through.

"That as a society, we're living up to the standards that we hold.

"No one should be made to [be] put through those humiliating situations."

He said there had been more than 180 church leaders involved in sit-ins nationally.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-08/strip-searched-refugee-protesters-make-ccc-complaint/6453894>

20. Bill Shorten signals harder line from Labor on asylum policy and boat turn-backs

The Age

May 4, 2015 - 3:47PM

James Massola

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten has signalled a harder line on asylum seeker policy under a future Labor government, while also declaring Labor remained "pro-refugees".

But at a press conference after his speech on Monday, the Opposition Leader twice refused to say if, in government, Labor would continue the turn-backs policy introduced by the Abbott government.

Asylum seeker policy will be one most hotly debated issues at national conference in July, with sections of the party's Left faction vocally opposed to offshore processing and boat turn-backs.

In a speech at the progressive McKell Institute think-tank on Monday Mr Shorten, responding to hecklers, said he could not live in an "intellectually dishonest world" and ignore the problem of asylum seekers dying at sea.

While the Labor Party was pro-immigration and pro-refugee, Mr Shorten said there was room for debate about where and how refugees came to Australia.

"I have no disagreement with some of the reports, which are shocking, about the way people are being treated at Manus and being treated at Nauru," he said.

"But I cannot also lie to myself, and I will not live in an intellectually dishonest world where I say that if we have policies which drag people here to hop on unsafe boats and drown at sea, well I'm not going to be party to that either."

"How do I ask people to fish people out of the sea, and not be prepared to deal with the policy consequences of it?"

Labor immigration spokesman Richard Marles is leading the formulation of the party platform at present, in concert with Labor MPs including Gai Brodtmann, Matt Thistlethwaite, Lisa Singh and Lisa Chesters.

One Right faction MP, who asked not to be named, said there was "no way we can dismantle the policies that have stopped the boats" and vowed to resist any push from the Left to wind back sections of the party's platform at national conference, such as the provision which was inserted in 2011 that allows turn-backs.

Another Right faction MP said that "gay marriage and Palestine [two other contentious policy issues] are interesting but they won't stop us winning an election" whereas a softening of the Coalition's hardline boats policy could.

"It [turning back boats] will never be in the party platform, but the platform needs to be broad enough for it to be able to happen. Hopefully, we never have to do it."

A senior figure in the Left faction expressed surprise at Mr Shorten's comments and described them as marked shift from October last year.

At the time, Mr Marles said the Labor "might" continue the Coalition's policy of turning back boats if returned to government - drawing a sharp rebuke from Mr Shorten who declared "Labor's policy on boat turn-backs has not changed. It remains the same."

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton criticised the Opposition Leader for not clearly stating whether he would keep the tow-back policy.

"If Bill Shorten is really Labor's leader he needs to clearly state that he will maintain Operation Sovereign Borders," he said.

"Today he was unable and unwilling to do that."

The government also claimed on Monday a \$500 million saving in the 2015-16 budget from its success in stopping the flow of asylum seeker boats to Australia.

It attributed that saving to the success of its hardline policies, which had "halted the flood of Illegal Maritime Arrivals that were continually filling detention centres across Australia under Labor".

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/bill-shorten-signals-harder-line-from-labor-on-asylum-policy-and-boat-turnbacks-20150504-1na6d0.html>

21. Bill Shorten: I live a little better each day backing policy that stops deaths at sea

The opposition leader was heckled during speech at Sydney university as he defended Labor's stand on asylum seekers

The Guardian
Shalailah Medhora
Monday 4 May 2015 18.16 AEST

Bill Shorten has rejected criticism of his party's stand on asylum seekers, saying he could "live a little better each day" by supporting policies that stopped deaths at sea.

The Labor leader was heckled on Labor's record on asylum policy during a pre-budget speech at Sydney University on Monday.

He said that although Labor supports resettling refugees in Australia, he “would not be party” to policies that “drag people here to hop on unsafe boats to drown at sea”.

Shorten pointed to the recurring tragedies in the Mediterranean, where more than 1,750 asylum seekers have drowned this year alone, as a reason to have strong border protection measures.

“Just as we saw at [the Italian island of] Lampedusa, where 700 refugees died by boat, I cannot turn my mind and ignore that truth too,” he said. “How do I ask people to fish people out of the sea, and not be prepared to deal with the policy consequences of it?”

“I will not live in an intellectually dishonest world where I say if we have policies which drag people here to hop on unsafe boats and drown at sea, I’m not going to be party to that either.

“That answer might not satisfy you, but it makes me live a little better each day.”

But Shorten refused to be drawn during questioning by journalists after his address on whether Labor would keep elements of the government’s border protection policy, which has seen only one boat arrive on Australia’s mainland since the Coalition was elected.

“Bill Shorten is being told what to do and doesn’t have the fortitude to maintain tough policies which work,” said Peter Dutton, the immigration minister. “Labor under Shorten will flip and flop like [former the Labor prime minister] Kevin Rudd and the result will be a restart of hundreds of boats carrying thousands of people.

“If Bill Shorten is really Labor’s leader he needs to clearly state that he will maintain Operation Sovereign Borders. Today he was unable and unwilling to do that.”

On Monday Abbott claimed stopping asylum seeker boats and closing immigration detention centres would net the federal government \$504m in the financial year. Abbott claimed European officials dealing with an influx of asylum boats crossing the Mediterranean have contacted their Australian counterparts about border protection.

“My understanding is that there has been some contact at official level between Australian people and Europeans,” Abbott said.

It is understood that nearly a dozen European countries have sought confidential briefings from Australia on its asylum policies.

Nigel Farage, the leader of Britain’s rightwing Ukip party, has backed Australia’s hardline approach to border protection.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/04/bill-shorten-lives-a-little-better-each-day-backing-policy-that-stops-deaths-at-sea>

22. Don't embrace Coalition's asylum boat turn-back policy, Labor MP Melissa Parke warns party

ABC-TV - Lateline

By political reporter Tom Iggulden

First posted Wed 6 May 2015, 7:57pm

Updated Wed 6 May 2015, 8:46pm

A prominent Labor backbencher has warned the party's leadership and policy makers not to embrace the Coalition's turn-back policy on asylum seekers.

West Australian MP Melissa Parke told the ABC there would be "enormous ramifications" if the party reversed its opposition to turn-backs at July's ALP National Conference.

A draft copy of the party's National Platform contains no references to the policy.

That is despite years of Labor criticisms of it, including a claim by former prime minister Kevin Rudd that it could spark military conflict with Indonesia.

Labor's left faction had been pushing hard for a softening of the party's asylum policy.

But there has been virtually no change to the draft platform.

Other Labor positions on Coalition asylum policy have been included in the draft document.

"Labor rejects the practice of referring to asylum seekers as "illegals", it says, a reference to the Government's term — which Labor has opposed for years — for those who arrive aboard asylum boats.

In another minor concession to the Left, the draft has added the words "Labor believes that as a country Australia must not harm people" to its asylum seeker section.

The Left had been pushing for a strong position about the treatment of asylum seekers in detention, following a series of reports of dismal conditions in offshore detention centres, reportedly rife with instances sexual abuse, self-harm and mental illness.

There has also been a push for a more effective resettlement policy, with just one asylum seeker on Manus Island so far released into the community in Papua New Guinea.

Pro-refugee protestors confronted Opposition Leader Bill Shorten at a speech earlier this week asking him "how he slept at night" and accusing him of "complicity" in abuse at detention centres.

Mr Shorten acknowledged the harm being done in detention centres, but added: "If we have policies which drag people here, to hop on unsafe boats and drown at sea, I'm not going [to be a] party to that either."

He also pointed to recent tragedies on the Mediterranean Sea involving African asylum seekers making their way to Europe.

"Just as we saw at Lampedusa, where 700 refugees died by boat, I cannot turn my mind and ignore that truth too," the Opposition Leader said.

The Government has this week indicated some European officials have been seeking information about the Coalition's asylum strategy, including boat turn-backs.

A divisive, public debate at the ALP conference on asylum policy could potentially tarnish Mr Shorten's leadership.

A united Labor, after years of public brawling when in government, has been one of the Opposition Leader's strongest assets in his quest to win power back from the Coalition.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-06/dont-embrace-coalition-asylum-boat-turnback-policy-labor-mp-says/6450650>

23. Facebook blocked on Nauru due to 'paranoia' about media scrutiny, says former president

The government says restricting sites was necessary to crack down on pornography, although it did not directly mention the block on Facebook

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Monday 4 May 2015 12.11 AEST

A former Nauruan president says the country's government is paranoid about media scrutiny after access to Facebook on the island was blocked.

Last week opposition MPs reported that Nauru's internet provider, Digicel, blocked access to the social media site. Residents on Nauru confirmed they were unable to use it.

The government said blocking internet sites was necessary to crack down on pornography.

The justice minister, David Adeang, said in a release Nauru was a small country with limited resources "and we do not have the capability to monitor the internet like larger nations, so this move and our new laws are both significant measures".

Adeang said Digicel had been asked to block a number of websites, but did not specifically mention Facebook.

Former president, Sprent Dabwido, who was in office from 2011 to 2013, said Adeang and the president, Baron Waqa, had ordered Digicel to ban Facebook on the island "so that the Nauruan people couldn't criticise them".

The ban showed Waqa and Adeang's "paranoia was openly on display", he said.

Dabwido accused Adeang of trying to extend control over local media to outside bodies.

"We've seen what he's done to our local media by taking away its independence and turning it into his personal mouthpiece," he said. "When he finds he can't do that with outside media, he refuses them entry, or simply won't respond to their telephone inquiries."

The block has made it difficult for asylum seekers and refugees on Nauru to contact people in Australia.

The Nauruan government recently introduced an \$8,000 application fee for journalists seeking to gain a press visa on Nauru.

"You can't blame any media organisation for not wanting to risk that sort of money knowing they'll probably get knocked back anyway," Dabwido said. "So they have to rely on third party accounts which are sometimes not as reliable as they should be."

The Nauruan government did not respond to a request for comment.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/04/facebook-blocked-on-nauru-due-to-paranoia-about-media-scrutiny-says-former-president>

24. Asylum seekers distressed as Facebook blocked in Nauru

The Age
May 3, 2015 - 6:10PM
Melanie Kembrey

The Nauru government has blocked access to Facebook under the guise of a crackdown on online pornography, an opposition MP says.

The government of the tiny Pacific island has directed the country's only internet service provider "to start blocking applicable websites" as part of a new ban on "internet sites that show pornography, particularly those featuring children".

Nauruan opposition MP Mathew Batsiua told the ABC's Pacific Beat that Nauruans had this week been unable to access Facebook and the government's real intention was to prevent criticism and free speech. He described the move as an act of dictatorship.

"The real agenda here is curbing the rights of people to access social media," he said.

"This is all about [justice minister David] Adeang and his cronies being worried about the ever increasing number of people who have taken to social media to criticise his dictatorial style, which even the president is either unwilling – or too scared – to rein in."

Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul said asylum seekers in the offshore detention centre on Nauru and refugees resettled in the country were distressed by the ban. Asylum seekers are usually given access to the internet every three days, he said.

"For many of them it is a lifeline to their family, to their community, to the outside world. There is quite a deal of dismay and anxiety at Facebook being cutting off," he said.

"The Australian government has been only too willing to collaborate with the Nauru government with the increasingly dictatorial measures it has taken."

A Department of Immigration spokesperson said that any internet restrictions in Nauru were a matter for the Nauruan government.

In a press release this week, Nauru's justice minister David Adeang said pornography was not consistent with the country's faith or values.

"Nauru is a small country with limited resources, and we do not have the capability to monitor the internet like larger nations, so this move and our new laws are both significant measures," he was quoted as saying. "As a nation, we have the right and the ability to promote the values that helped build our country, and these include values that are based on scripture."

The release said some websites had already been blocked and the government was evaluating others.

Fairfax Media has attempted to contact the Nauru government. Mr Adeang said foreigners may disagree with the move because "many outside of Nauru do not understand Pacific or Nauruan culture". He also said the government had received "tremendous support from the Nauruan people".

Earlier in the week, the government denied shutting down access to Facebook but said it was possible some social media sites had been blocked since it started the ban on pornography websites. Facebook is also banned in China, North Korea and Iran.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/asylum-seekers-distressed-as-facebook-blocked-in-nauru-20150503-1myopr.html>

25. Nauru cancelled visa of Digicel's general manager before blocking Facebook

Lorna Roge reportedly replaced by telco provider after a dispute with Nauruan government over payment

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Tuesday 5 May 2015 15.16 AEST

The Nauruan government revoked the visa of the general manager of Digicel just weeks before the provider began blocking Facebook and other websites.

Sources on the island say Digicel was forced to replace its general manager on the island, Lorna Roge, after a dispute over payment with the Nauruan government.

In recent weeks Digicel has blocked a number of websites, including Facebook, sparking criticism about press freedom on the island.

The company would not comment on the cancellation of Roge's visa. But in a statement released last week it noted the appointment of the new general manager.

"Today, Digicel announced the appointment of Ben Kealy as the new general manager of Digicel Nauru. This appointment means there is new vigour to deliver new and improved services to the people of Nauru."

Kealy said: "I am thrilled to be joining the Digicel Nauru team and lead the way as we continue to evolve the telecom's landscape by bringing world-class connectivity to the people of Nauru. We know there is currently some work to be done, but rest assured my first objective is to deliver the best customer experience on best quality network to all of our valued customers in Nauru."

An opposition MP, Roland Kun, who was suspended from parliament and has not been permitted to take his seat again since May 2014, said the affair raised more concerns about the Nauruan government's direction.

"We've asked for the government to state their reasons and make public what they've done but they just don't seem to care," he said.

"The current government has deported a number of people and haven't provided any explanation."

In 2014 an Australian magistrate who worked in the Nauruan justice system, Peter Law, was deported. The former chief justice, Geoffrey Eames, was prevented from re-entering the country.

Eames said at the time he believed the decision to deport Law was politically motivated, and amounted to an abuse of the rule of law.

The Nauruan government has not responded to requests for information about the deportations or the website blocking.

Guardian Australia has been unable to reach Roge for comment.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/05/nauru-deported-digicels-general-manager-before-blocking-facebook>

26. Nauru Facebook ban came 'at request of Australian Government', refugee advocates say

ABC News Online
By Suzie Raines, staff
First posted Mon 4 May 2015, 10:59pm
Updated Tue 5 May 2015, 12:14am

A ban on Facebook in Nauru was implemented at the request of the Australian Government to assist its Cambodian resettlement policy, a refugee advocacy group says, citing an anonymous source.

Nauru opposition MP Matthew Batsiua said Facebook users in Nauru discovered on Thursday they had been denied access to the social media site.

He said it was an attempt by the Nauru government to prevent free speech and curb any criticism it faces.

Pamela Curr from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre said that one of her contacts within the Nauruan community told her the Australian Government was behind the ban.

"My contacts are telling me that this was done at the request of the Australian Government," Ms Curr told Radio Australia's Pacific Beat program.

"They said that the Australian Government is anxious to get a group of people going to Cambodia and they are concerned that the people on Nauru are in contact with advocates in Australia who they believe are talking them out of the Cambodian option."

She said she was in no doubt about the claim and said she believed Facebook would stay blocked there until refugees were flown to Cambodia.

"I was very surprised to hear this but I have no doubt, and we have been assured that once the plane leaves for Cambodia that the Facebook blocking will be lifted," she said.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection told the ABC that "any internet restrictions in Nauru are a matter for the government of Nauru".

The Nauru government last week said it was restricting internet access to block pornography, especially child pornography.

In a statement issued to explain the ban, the government said "pornography is not consistent with the faith and values" of the people of Nauru.

The country's only internet service provider, Digicel said in a statement the Nauru government "instructed the blocking of certain internet sites".

The company said some sites had already been blocked while the government was "evaluating their suitability".

A spokeswoman for Facebook said the site was aware of reports that people in Nauru could not access Facebook.

"We believe that restricting access to a free and open internet deprives people of important economic and social opportunities and choices and hope that access will be restored soon," she said.

The ABC has attempted to contact the Nauru government.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-05/refugee-advocates-claim-nauru-facebook-ban-requested-australia/6444506>

27. Australia returned 46 asylum seekers to Vietnam, says immigration minister

Australian government has a policy of returning asylum seeker vessels directly, and has previously done so with Sri Lankans

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Tuesday 5 May 2015 15.42 AEST

Australia acted with the Vietnamese government to return 46 asylum seekers who were intercepted at sea, the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, has revealed.

The Australian government has adopted a policy of returning asylum seeker vessels directly, and has previously done so with Sri Lankans. The policy is implemented in secrecy, and the government has refused to discuss "on water" matters relating to its asylum policy.

Dutton confirmed for the first time the operation that was reported in April to turn back an asylum seeker vessel directly to Vietnam.

In the monthly Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) statement, Dutton said: "The 46 people were able to be safely returned to Vietnam after we were assured that they did not have a claim to protection and that we had met our international obligations.

"This would have not been possible without the assistance of the Vietnamese government."

It is not clear what procedure was used to assess the asylum seekers. Previously the government has used a controversial form of fast-track processing known as "enhanced screening" to quickly decide whether people are likely to engage Australia's obligations under international law.

But the process has been heavily criticised. A former immigration department official, Greg Lake, has called it a dangerous method that could have seen legitimate refugees returned to persecution.

The OSB update also revealed no further people had been transferred back to Manus Island or Nauru.

Lawyers are preparing to take action if asylum seekers with medical conditions who have been brought to the mainland from offshore detention centres are returned to the regional processing centres.

There are 971 asylum seekers on Manus Island and 677 on Nauru.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/05/australia-returned-46-asylum-seekers-to-vietnam-says-immigration-minister>

28. Stopping boats and closing detention centres will save \$504m, says Tony Abbott

The prime minister says shutting 13 immigration detention centres and having fewer charter flights for asylum seekers alone will reap \$392m

The Guardian
Shalailah Medhora
Monday 4 May 2015 11.44 AEST

Stopping asylum seeker boats and closing immigration detention centres would net the federal government half a billion dollars in the forward estimates, Tony Abbott has announced.

Closing 13 detention centres would save \$326m in the coming years, and reducing the number of charter flights taking asylum seekers and staff between the centres would save \$66m, the prime minister said.

A further \$112m would be saved in logistical and service changes, taking the total savings in the portfolio to \$504m.

Abbott and the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, made the announcement during a visit to the Australian Maritime Security Operations Centre in Canberra on Monday.

"We have closed down something like 13 detention centres," Abbott said. "We don't have all of these charter flights taking illegal boat arrivals all around the country and the region.

"That's a half a billion dollars in savings in the coming financial year on top of the savings that were announced in last year's budget from the success of Operation Sovereign Borders and stopping the boats."

Operation Sovereign Borders involves turning asylum boats around, ensuring that asylum seekers who have been granted refugee status will be processed and resettled overseas, and reintroducing temporary protection visas (TPVs).

Slowing the flow of boats and closing onshore detention centres had delivered a saving of \$2.5bn in last year's budget, with a further \$283m in savings expected over the forward estimates period.

"On top of the human dividend of being able to take the kids out of detention and stopping people drowning at sea, we have been able to return money back to the budget so we can spend it in other areas which are important to Australians," Dutton said.

At least 15 boats containing 429 asylum seekers have been turned back since Operation Sovereign Borders was implemented after the September 2013 federal election. Only one asylum seeker boat made it to the mainland in 2014.

A new agency that merges immigration and customs functions, the Australian Border Force, will begin operating in the coming months.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/04/stopping-boats-and-closing-detention-centres-will-save-504m-says-tony-abbott>

29. Tasmanian man jailed for assaulting 15yo Afghan asylum seeker

ABC News Online
By Fiona Blackwood
Posted Thu 7 May 2015, 12:18pm

A 35-year-old man has been sentenced to 12 months' jail after pleading guilty to assaulting a 15-year-old asylum seeker on a Hobart bus. Raymond Michael Horton, of Gagebrook, appeared in the Hobart Magistrates Court this morning facing charges of stealing as well as assault.

The court heard Horton and his girlfriend repeatedly punched, slapped and kned the Afghan asylum seeker to the head and the body in 2013.

The teenager had only been in Australia for a short period of time and was speaking in Persian with friends on the bus when Horton and his girlfriend swore at him and ordered him to speak English before attacking him.

Magistrate Michael Hill said the attack had been prolonged and degrading with the complainant not in a position to defend himself.

Magistrate Hill told the court the psychological and physical injuries on the victim were significant.

Horton had initially pleaded not guilty to the charge and told police that he agreed it was him in CCTV footage of the incident but that he had no memory of the incident because he was intoxicated.

Defence lawyer Andrei Slicer said Horton came from a disadvantaged background and had a history of depression, anxiety and substance abuse.

At a contest mention hearing this morning Horton changed his plea to guilty.

Magistrate Hill sentenced him to 12 months' imprisonment for the assault charge with a non-parole period of eight months.

Horton's girlfriend Theresa Maree Hillier has already served a jail term for her role in the bashing.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-07/tasmanian-man-jailed-for-assaulting-15yo-afghan-asylum-seeker/6452458>