

Project SafeCom News and Updates

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1. John Pilger: From Pol Pot to ISIS: The Blood Never Dried
2. Paola Totaro: Global opinion is against Australia. Do we know how far we've fallen?
3. APPS Policy Forum: The high price of Australia's refugee policy
4. Ongoing Release Of Refugees Poses Awkward Questions For ASIO
5. George Williams: Citizenship rights a casualty of terrorism
6. Love Animals? Hate Climate Change? You're The New Australian Terrorist
7. This Muslim TV Host Gave An Incredible Speech Following The Paris Terror Attacks
8. Paris attacks: father and son's talk about 'bad guys' shared around the world
9. Michael Ignatieff: The Refugees & the New War
10. Australian Muslim Party aims to contest federal and state elections
11. Jacqui Lambie questions refugee intake, recommends electronic tagging
12. Spare Muslim leaders 'pejorative demands', says Christopher Pyne
13. Screening for 'handpicked' Syrian refugees 'very intense', says Julie Bishop
14. MPs and community groups reaffirm support for Syrian refugees after Paris atrocity
15. Government set to focus Syrian refugee program on Christians in wake of Paris attacks: Scott Morrison
16. Turnbull tries to clear up confusion over refugee intake after church concerns
17. Terrorists could be among Syrian refugees, senator Cory Bernardi says
18. Outsourcing: the key weapon in the war against transparency
19. Antony Loewenstein: Now's the time to boycott companies that profit from detention
20. Indonesia offers island for Australia to hold asylum seekers
21. AAP: Jakarta floats 'refugee island' idea
22. Suggestion Indonesia may offer island to Australia for processing of asylum seekers
23. Indonesia denies offering Australia an island to house refugees
24. Suspected asylum seeker boat intercepted off Christmas Island
25. Apparent asylum seeker boat almost lands at Christmas Island, local sources say
26. Asylum seeker boat reported to have come within 200m of Christmas Island
27. MEDIA RELEASE: Navy tows Christmas Island asylum boat back to sea
28. MEDIA RELEASE: Nauru police ignore savage assault as asylum seeker flown to Australia
29. Schools hold 'Mojgan cup' football game to publicise asylum seeker's plight
30. Young Sydney siblings fear parents will be deported to Tonga after 25 years in the country
31. New Zealanders who failed Australia's 'character test' returned: Peter Dutton
32. First New Zealanders deported from Australia under tough new immigration rules

1. John Pilger: From Pol Pot to ISIS: The Blood Never Dried

New Matilda

By John Pilger

November 17, 2015

Following the ISIS outrages in Beirut and Paris, John Pilger updates this prescient essay on the root causes of terrorism and what we can do about it.

In transmitting President Richard Nixon's orders for a "massive" bombing of Cambodia in 1969, Henry Kissinger said, "Anything that flies on everything that moves". As Barack Obama wages his seventh war against the Muslim world since he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and Francois Hollande promises a "merciless" attack on that ruined country, the orchestrated hysteria and lies make one almost nostalgic for Kissinger's murderous honesty.

As a witness to the human consequences of aerial savagery – including the beheading of victims, their parts festooning trees and fields – I am not surprised by the disregard of memory and history, yet again. A telling example is the rise to power of Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge, who had much in common with today's Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). They, too, were ruthless medievalists who began as a small sect. They, too, were the product of an American-made apocalypse, this time in Asia.

According to Pol Pot, his movement had consisted of "fewer than 5,000 poorly armed guerrillas uncertain about their strategy, tactics, loyalty and leaders". Once Nixon's and Kissinger's B-52 bombers had gone to work as part of "Operation Menu", the west's ultimate demon could not believe his luck.

The Americans dropped the equivalent of five Hiroshimas on rural Cambodia during 1969-73. They leveled village after village, returning to bomb the rubble and corpses. The craters left giant necklaces of carnage, still visible from the air. The terror was unimaginable.

A former Khmer Rouge official described how the survivors "froze up and they would wander around mute for three or four days. Terrified and half-crazy, the people were ready to believe what they were told... That was what made it so easy for the Khmer Rouge to win the people over."

A Finnish Government Commission of Inquiry estimated that 600,000 Cambodians died in the ensuing civil war and described the bombing as the "first stage in a decade of genocide". What Nixon and Kissinger began, Pol Pot, their beneficiary, completed.

Under their bombs, the Khmer Rouge grew to a formidable army of 200,000.

ISIS has a similar past and present. By most scholarly measure, Bush and Blair's invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to the deaths of at least 700,000 people – in a country that had no history of jihadism.

Full story at <https://newmatilda.com/2015/11/17/from-pol-pot-to-isis-the-blood-never-dried/>

2. Paola Totaro: Global opinion is against Australia. Do we know how far we've fallen?

A change of leadership has calmed things down at home, but abroad Australia is still seen as the lucky, rich, cruel country. Perhaps it's time to revisit our history

The Guardian

Paola Totaro

Thursday 19 November 2015 15.28 AEDT

There was a time, not so long ago, when being Australian brought with it a frisson of pride and, dare I say it, quiet superiority.

Young, modern, proudly multicultural, we saw ourselves as a nation of free thinkers, open minded and open hearted about sexual orientation and race.

As travelers to Europe and the UK, there was a sense of great freedom and smugness being an Aussie: class differences? Pfft, not us. And have you seen the size of Sydney's Mardi Gras? Migrants brought the best food and coffee in the world – from Italy to Vietnam, Greece to Iran. You name it, we've got it. (OK, sport hasn't always been a source of national pride.)

If you were an immigrant kid growing up in Australia, life wasn't exactly a bed of roses but you could be sure that someone would quickly take your place as the underdog in the playground. First it was the Chinese then the Italians and Greeks, then came the Vietnamese and Cambodians who were followed by the Lebanese and Pacific Islanders who were followed by ... well, you get the picture.

A nation built on wave after wave of immigration, Australia was quick to acknowledge and respond to the roadblocks of systemic discrimination. It's easy to forget that in 1978, the New South Wales became the first state to launch a Commission of Inquiry (disclaimer – led by my dad) to root out built-in obstacles and replace them with policies to promote harmony and diversity.

By the end of the decade, every state and territory had a statutory body to nurture multiculturalism. Anti-discrimination laws followed, enshrining equality regardless of gender, race, sexual preference.

Equally, when the HIV/Aids epidemic exploded in the 1980s, Australia led the world with its swift and resolutely human response. The then-health minister, Dr Neal Blewett, ensured we were pioneers launching innovative and life-saving preventive public health campaigns that became templates for many other nations.

A decade on, Australia trail-blazed once again to become the third country in the world (after Switzerland and the Netherlands) to acknowledge young people were dying and new ways had to be found to keep them alive as they battled their demons. Parliament thumbed its nose at a cynical commentariat and legislated for a medically supervised injecting room.

These were decades when we Aussies roamed with pride and the world looked on enviously as scores of new national parks were created, the Great Barrier Reef was given World Heritage status, a gutsy conservative government outlawed automatic weapons in the wake of a civilian massacre in Tasmania and the very idea that hunting be allowed in wilderness areas would have been considered suicide by both political sides.

Today, Australia's stubborn defence of coal mining and denial of its effect on global warming – combined with the lack of cogent policy to encourage new, sustainable energy programs – conflicts with pretty much the rest of the globe.

Our deals with poorer countries to host refugees in exchange for aid while cutting the foreign aid budget has made international headlines, as did the recent, shocking treatment meted out to our most prominent Indigenous footballer, Adam Goodes.

The reality of being an expat Australian these days is that more often than not, it's about apology not pride.

At home, the change in political leadership seems to have brought a palpable sense of relief. But in the eyes of an EU agonising over the greatest migration crisis in a century, we remain the wealthy lucky country that boasts wide open spaces, a relatively small, ageing population, a robust economy, single digit unemployment – and sends back the boats of desperate refugees.

What better way to cement the suspicion that ours has become a nation driven by short-term interests over the common good.

Australia's human rights policies were last week singled out for criticism by no less than 100 countries, 61 of them focusing on Australia's treatment of people seeking asylum. Among them are key allies including the US, the UK, Germany and France.

The UN review, says Paul Power, CEO of the Refugee Council Of Australia, shines a light on how out of step Australia has become with the international community:

"Australia is alone in the world in having policies of mandatory indefinite detention for people seeking asylum, offshore processing and the forcible return of asylum seeker boats. The continued detention of children, in particular, is a source of international embarrassment.

"The opprobrium Australia has endured in its human rights performance review from our peers around the world shows how far Australia has slipped with our insular, unsustainable approach to vulnerable people who need our help."

Australians, I'm quite sure, remain a generous and tolerant bunch who would be deeply shocked by how we are now perceived in many parts of the world.

Perhaps it is time not only to remind ourselves of the stultifying effects of our geographic isolation but to demand an end to the kind of expedient foreign and immigration policy that allows both sides of politics to wreak such damage on society itself.

In 2015, the inescapable fact is that there are close to 60 million displaced men, women and children seeking a home. Of course as Australians, it matters how we are perceived by the rest of the world. But what we choose to do matters much, much more.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/19/global-opinion-is-against-australia-do-we-know-how-far-weve-fallen>

3. APPS Policy Forum: The high price of Australia's refugee policy

The cost of Australia's refugee policy was \$3.3 billion in 2013-2014, but it's the human cost that deserves more attention

APPS Policy Forum

Claire Higgins
Katherine Murray

Australian costs for detention are 10 times higher than the cost of allowing an asylum seeker to live in the community while their claim is processed, but are the economics enough to shift public opinion, ask Claire Higgins and Katherine Murray

In the last three months, the Australian government has spent \$280m detaining asylum seekers and settling refugees on Manus Island and Nauru. In that time, it has been alleged that some of these asylum seekers and refugees have been raped or suffered mental or physical ill health. These details – discussed at recent Senate Estimates hearings – are a reminder that the high price of Australia's refugee policy also comes at a high cost to human lives.

In 2014 the National Commission of Audit reported that the detention and processing of asylum seekers who arrived by boat was 'the fastest growing government programme over recent years', costing A\$3.3b each year. Most importantly, the Department of Immigration has previously noted that as the number of people placed in immigration detention increases, so too can the rate of serious incidents of self-harm or voluntary starvation among detainees.

The human cost of Australian policy has ramifications both to the individual detainees and to the society into which they will ultimately be resettled. Studies have indicated that the cost of health care over the course of one person's lifetime can increase considerably if that person has been held for a lengthy period in immigration detention.

Offshore, Australia has detained men, women and children in conditions that United Nations agencies have said may amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Their detention has cost the Australian government \$400,000 per person per year, which is around 10 times higher than the cost of allowing an asylum seeker to live in the Australian community while their claim is processed. A recent report on alternatives to detention revealed that Australia spends twice as much detaining an asylum seeker per day than the United States, Canada, or countries within Europe.

The Australian government is now looking to fund the resettlement of refugees from Manus Island and Nauru in third countries. Without interest from those refugees, however, prospective arrangements may suffer a similar fate to Australia's 2014 bilateral deal with Cambodia, in which it has cost \$55 million to resettle – thus far – a handful of refugees from Nauru, one of whom has now reportedly returned to their home country.

Paying tens of millions of dollars to Cambodia was not necessarily what the Australian government planned. Instead, failing the capacity of Nauru or Papua New Guinea to provide settlement places, asylum seekers have been encouraged to return home. The UNHCR has identified 'an overt emphasis on return' within offshore detention centres, and the Australian Minister for Immigration has personally explained to detainees that 'they will not be getting what they came for'. A former manager of offshore detention facilities has described a strategy to break down asylum seekers' abilities to make daily decisions, their will to live and their hope for the future.

Yet amidst this pressure to return, a relatively high number of those who have been detained offshore have been found to be refugees. This is similar to the rate of successful applications by asylum seekers who arrived by boat in Australia in recent years.

The fact that so many of these asylum seekers do have a well-founded fear of persecution seems to have been lost amid arguments about expenditure between Australia's two major political parties. During his time as opposition leader, Tony Abbott claimed there had been a 'budget blowout' by Labor in this policy area. Under the Abbott and Turnbull governments, Labor has chosen to label the Cambodia deal an 'expensive joke', claiming a cost to-date of \$10 million per resettled refugee. Yet there remains bi-partisan support for the current approach, regardless of price, and little discussion of the fact that Australia is obliged to provide refugees with rights, legal protections, and the opportunity 'to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity'.

Despite the headline-grabbing expenditure, it is unclear whether economic arguments actually shift public opinion on Australia's refugee policy. It is overwhelmingly evident, however, that the human cost is the measure that deserves our attention.

<http://www.policyforum.net/the-high-price-of-australias-refugee-policy/>

4. Ongoing Release Of Refugees Poses Awkward Questions For ASIO

One by one, refugees initially assessed by ASIO as a security risk are being released. Advocates and lawyers are now demanding a simple question be answered – why were they held so long? Max Chalmers reports.

New Matilda
By Max Chalmers
November 21, 2015

One of Australia's most opaque and internationally criticised immigration detention policies appears to be running down, with advocates saying only a small number of people indefinitely detained on the basis of a negative ASIO assessment remain in detention, and calling on the government to compensate those who have been held and released.

The policy has seen a small group of people, around 50 by late 2013, detained in mysterious circumstances after they were found to be refugees but handed an 'adverse security assessment' by Australia's spy agency ASIO.

Lawyers and supporters have long argued the group, mostly members of Sri Lanka's minority Tamil community, pose no risk of harm to the community, and are pointing to the fact many have been quietly released from detention as proof that ASIO now acknowledges that is the case.

The Department of Immigration has declined to confirm the exact number who remain held, passing inquiries from New Matilda on to the Minister for Immigration Peter Dutton's office which, so far, has ignored them. But advocates in regular contact with those detained say their number could now be less than ten.

Just nine days ago one of the most well-known among the was released.

Tamil refugee Ranjini was handed an adverse ASIO assessment in 2012 and returned to detention. Like others in this situation she had been found to have a genuine and well-founded fear of persecution. It didn't matter: the adverse assessment she received trumped all else.

Full story at <https://newmatilda.com/2015/11/21/ongoing-release-of-refugees-poses-awkward-questions-for-asio/>

5. George Williams: Citizenship rights a casualty of terrorism

The Age
November 16, 2015
George Williams

The horrific events in Paris will no doubt fuel the call for more and even tougher laws to combat terrorism.

This is understandable. At times such as this, when thoughts turn to the safety of our family and community, people want to know that their leaders are doing everything possible to prevent a further attack.

Unfortunately, now is the worst time for making new laws.

An overwhelming sense of fear and grief can leave no room for clear assessments of the threat, or an understanding of how far we should go.

We run the risk of taking action that undermines the very freedoms we are seeking to preserve from terrorism. In doing so, we may hand those who would harm us and our freedoms an undeserved victory.

Australia's next anti-terrorism law will soon be enacted. It will introduce one of the most important changes to Australian citizenship since the concept was introduced in 1948.

This will entrench two classes of citizenship, breaching the notion that every Australian should be treated equally under the law. Those people who hold only the citizenship of Australia will be entitled to remain here, whatever their actions.

By contrast, the five million or so Australians who are also the nationals of another country will be subject to a new set of rules.

Their actions could mean they are deported after having their Australian citizenship stripped.

Australia is following the United Kingdom in creating a new form of citizenship that is conditional on the actions of the holder. That nation responded to the threat of terrorism by permitting the Home Secretary to strip citizenship from a person where this is 'conducive to the public good'.

The citizenship bill first drafted by the Abbott government was one of the most poorly drafted and ill-conceived pieces of legislation ever introduced into the Federal Parliament.

It contained inconsistencies and apparent typographical errors, while at the same time giving unknown members of government departments extraordinary powers to bypass the courts and determine for themselves that someone should be exiled.

These could have been applied not only to terrorists, but also to humanitarian workers and even children convicted of vandalism.

Many of the worst features of the original bill have been removed by amendments introduced by the Turnbull government. The bill is now more focused on removing the citizenship of dual nationals who pose a danger to Australians or the international community.

The re-drafted bill extends to people who commit a terrorist act or support terrorism, such as through financing, training or recruitment. It applies to these people without discriminating between a terrorist and a freedom fighter.

This means that citizenship could be revoked from dual nationals who support something like Nelson Mandela's fight against apartheid in South Africa, or the independence movement in East Timor.

Attorney-General George Brandis has stated that the bill "only provides for loss of citizenship for dual nationals engaged in or supporting terrorist activities".

Unfortunately, this claim is not borne out by the detail of the law. Citizenship will be stripped from those who engage in hostile activity overseas, including people who travel to take up arms against terrorist organisations such as IS.

The law will also apply to people who have been convicted of nothing more than entering an area declared by the government to be a no-go zone. The person may not have harmed anyone, and indeed may have entered the area against the wishes of the government merely to visit friends or to conduct business.

Governments will target these people by exercising new and extraordinary powers. A minister will be able to strip citizenship from a dual national after they have been convicted of a specified, serious criminal offence, including where the conviction predates the new law.

In other cases, the government will be able to act unilaterally, without a prior court decision or even giving the affected person a chance to be heard.

Deep flaws such as these may mean that the citizenship law is struck down in the High Court.

Such problems also reflect how a sound case for the law has yet to be made. It is not clear why we need to expel dual citizens from our midst where their connection to terrorism is minor, or even non-existent.

It is also not clear how further dividing the community by creating two classes of citizenship will build the social cohesion needed to combat terrorism.

It need not have ended this way. Rather than following the path of the United Kingdom, Australia might have looked instead to Canada.

New Liberal Party Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has been elected with a promise to repeal a Canadian law that creates "two classes of citizenship" and gives "a politician the right to revoke your citizenship without a trial".

As Trudeau has said in rejecting such the law, "citizenship isn't a gift to be granted or taken away at the whim of a politician".

George Williams is the Anthony Mason Professor of law at the University of New South Wales Twitter: @ProfGWilliams

<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/george-williams-citizenship-rights-a-casualty-of-terrorism-20151114-gkz9gv.html>

6. Love Animals? Hate Climate Change? You're The New Australian Terrorist

New Matilda

By Jordan Sosnowski

November 19, 2015

With the Turnbull Government poised to push forward on the Abbott Government's threats to hide mining projects from legal challenge, Jordan Sosnowski notes it's not just environmentalists being branded terrorists and vigilantes.

Aussies have a knack for calling a spade a spade but our politicians have gotten into the bad habit recently of calling a spade a pitchfork.

It seems my enthusiastic tree-hugging is inadvertently risking thousands of jobs, keeping hundreds of millions of people in energy poverty and my animal loving ways are posing a biosafety hazard of epic proportions.

I'm basically King Midas, except everyone I touch gets sacked and then contracts foot and mouth disease.

These dire proclamations would be almost laughable, were they not so dangerous.

By labeling those who seek to protect the environment and animals as "vigilantes" and "terrorists", politicians are effectively demonising legitimate activism.

Perhaps what is most scary, is this Abigail Williams' approach is working remarkably well.

You see, spades have a rather wholesome aura. They're solid and dig up dirt. But pitchforks have a "lift and pitch" angry mob quality, and it doesn't help that they're the devil's tool of choice.

As US journalist Will Potter points out, activists used to be viewed as heroes, but are now labeled as terrorists in order to incite fear and discredit their cause.

Take the recent attack on the Mackay Conservation Group as an example.

In order to challenge Greg Hunt's approval of the Adani coal mine, the group used legitimate environmental law mechanisms, put in place to ensure that decision makers are kept in check.

And, they were right to do so, because Hunt did get it wrong.

Thanks to the group's challenge, the federal court found Hunt had failed to take into account two threatened species when he approved the mine, which will produce up to 60 million tonnes of coal per year (creating an estimated 128 million tonnes per year of carbon dioxide).

But Hunt didn't see a major problem and simply labelled the error as a "technical administrative matter". Australia's chief legal officer described the legal challenge "vigilante litigation" and the court decision "appalling".

A little over two months later, the project was re-approved and our Attorney-General is now trying to amend the law so environmental groups are barred from mounting exactly these sort of court actions in the future.

Full story at <https://newmatilda.com/2015/11/19/love-animals-hate-climate-change-youre-the-new-australian-terrorist/>

7. This Muslim TV Host Gave An Incredible Speech Following The Paris Terror Attacks

"I'm pretty sure that right now none of us wants to help these bastards."

BuzzFeed
Nov. 16, 2015, at 6:36 p.m.
Shami Sivasubramanian
BuzzFeed Fellow

The Project host Waleed Aly produced a powerful editorial for the Australian TV show's first episode following the Paris terror attacks, saying ISIS is much weaker than it wants the public to believe.

Aly said that in ISIS's monthly magazine, Dabiq, the group has admitted to taking credit for terrorist attacks it's never funded in order to appear more powerful than it is.

He said that through a false image of omnipotent terror, ISIS aims to create a divide between Muslims and non-Muslims worldwide, leading to a "great war".

"There is a reason ISIL still want to appear so powerful," he said, "why they don't want to acknowledge that the land they control has been taken from weak enemies, that they are pinned down by airstrikes, or that just last weekend they lost a significant part of their territory.

"ISIL don't want you to know they would quickly be crushed if they ever faced a proper army on a battlefield.

"They want you to fear them. They want you to get angry. They want all of us to become hostile, and here is why – ISIL's strategy is to split the world into two camps. It is that black and white. Again, we know this because they told us."

Aly concluded the segment with a message of hope, saying "we all need to come together".

"If you're a Muslim leader telling your community they have no place here, or a non-Muslim basically saying the same thing, you're helping ISIL," he said. "They have told us that...and I'm pretty sure that right now none of us wants to help these bastards."

The speech was an instant viral smash, racking up more than 60,000 Facebook shares and thousands of positive comments in just a few hours. (UPDATE: The post now has more than 300,000 shares and 10 million views)

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/shamisivasubramanian/waleed-aly-powerful-speech-following-the-paris-attacks-is-a>

8. Paris attacks: father and son's talk about 'bad guys' shared around the world

Sydney Morning Herald
November 19, 2015 - 12:52AM
Megan Levy

A young French boy's moving conversation with his father about the "bad guys" who carried out the terrorist attacks in Paris has resonated around the world.

The little boy, Brandon, and his father, Angel Le, were visiting a memorial outside the Bataclan concert hall to pay their respects to the victims when they were interviewed by French TV show Le Petit Journal.

<https://www.facebook.com/PetitJournalYannBarthes/videos/1013093998733798/>

The reporter crouched down beside the boy, who is about five, and asked if he understood what had happened in Paris, and why the the gunmen had carried out their attacks.

Brandon replied: "Yes, because they're really, really mean. Bad guys are not very nice. And we have to be really careful because we have to change houses."

Mr Le then attempted to reassure his son, as the camera continued rolling to capture their simple and moving conversation.

Mr Le said they would not move because "France is our home."

Brandon: But there's bad guys, daddy?

Mr Le: Yes, but there are bad guys everywhere.

Brandon: They have guns. They can shoot us because they're really, really mean daddy.

Mr Le: They might have guns, but we have flowers.

Mr Le told his son the flowers and candles that had been laid outside the concert hall were to protect them, and to remember the victims.

Brandon then broke into a small smile before telling the reporter: "I feel better."

Le Petit Journal posted the footage on its Facebook page, and it was shared 380,000 times in less than a day.

Mr Le posted a message on the media organisation's Facebook page, thanking people for their response.

"When I see all this support, it tells me one thing: I'm proud to be French and proud of my fellow countrymen!!! My family and I kiss you," he wrote.

<http://www.smh.com.au/world/paris-attacks-father-and-sons-talk-about-bad-guys-shared-around-the-world-20151117-gl1ezk.html>

9. Michael Ignatieff: The Refugees & the New War

The Refugees & the New War

Michael Ignatieff
The New York Review of Books
December 17, 2015 Issue

1. Strategists will tell you that it is a mistake to fight the battle your enemies want you to fight. You should impose your strategy on them, not let them impose theirs on you. These lessons apply to the struggle with the leaders of ISIS. We have applied pressure upon them in Syria; they have replied with atrocious attacks in Ankara, Beirut, and now Paris. They are trying to provoke an apocalyptic confrontation with the Crusader infidels. We should deny them this opportunity.

ISIS wants to convince the world of the West's indifference to the suffering of Muslims; so we should demonstrate the opposite. ISIS wants to drag Syria ever further into the inferno; so ending the Syrian war should become the first priority of the Obama administration's final year in office. Already Secretary of State John Kerry has brought together the Russians, Iranians, and Saudis to develop the outlines of a transition in Syria. Sooner rather than later, no matter how difficult this may prove, the meetings in Vienna will have to include representatives of the Syrian regime and non-ISIS Syrian fighters. The goal would be to establish a ceasefire between the regime and its opponents, so that the fight against ISIS can be waged to a

conclusion and displaced Syrians can return home. Destroying the ISIS project to establish a caliphate will not put an end to jihadi nihilism, but it will decisively erode ISIS's ideological allure.

A successful campaign against nihilism will have to resist nihilism itself. If, as Gilles Kepel, a French specialist on Islam, has argued, ISIS is trying to provoke civil war in France, then the French state must not deploy tactics that will lose it the loyalty of its most vulnerable and susceptible citizens.¹ Detention without trial, mass deportations, harsh physical interrogations, sealing borders, ending free circulation of people in Europe: all these tactics—proposed by the right-wing demagogue Marine Le Pen—will tempt French and other European authorities, but they are disastrous as a strategy. A successful campaign against Islamic extremism should deepen, not undermine, allegiance toward *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, especially among Muslim citizens.

Full story at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2015/dec/17/refugees-and-new-war/>

10. Australian Muslim Party aims to contest federal and state elections

The Age
November 16, 2015 - 9:06PM
Heath Aston

Australia's first Islamic faith political party intends to field Senate candidates in all states and territories at next year's federal election and also contest upper house seats at state level.

The party, to be announced Tuesday, will be known as the Australian Muslim Party, Fairfax Media can reveal.

Founder Diah Mohamed defended the timing of the announcement days after the Paris terrorist atrocities, insisting there had never been a more critical time for the Muslim community to have a political voice in Australia.

As a devout Muslim, he said he would never condone the killing of innocents as seen on the streets of Paris and Beirut in the past week but said the Australian Muslim Party would also never support military action in a Muslim country in response to terrorism.

"I don't think Islam is at war with the West but Islamic countries have been at war for many, many years," he said

"Let's look at how well [military intervention] has worked in the past. We invaded Afghanistan. That didn't work out so well. We invaded Iraq and we're in the mess we're in there.

"Would I support something that has never worked in the past? No. It's just never worked. Not for the Soviets in Afghanistan, not for the United States in Iraq. There's a solution and it's not invading someone else's land."

He said the killings in Paris were "inexcusable" but drew a direct link between past foreign invasions in the Middle East and the spread of radical Islam, most recently by the Islamic State.

"From these guys' perspective they have had foreign fighters in their lands, their sons and daughters being killed. It could send a few people to change their views and use religion as a justification," he said.

Mr Mohamed, a 34 year-old businessman from western Sydney, founded a group called "MyPeace" aimed at improving relations between Muslims and mainstream Australia. He was also behind controversial billboards erected in Sydney in 2011 that claimed "Jesus: a prophet of Islam".

An unmarried father of a nine year-old son, he formerly worshipped at Lakemba Mosque but now attends the Parramatta Mosque.

He said the establishment of the AMP was in part a reaction to the six anti-Islamic parties intending to stand for election, including the Australian Liberty Alliance, launched recently by controversial Dutch politician Geert Wilders, Rise Up and Nick Folkes' Party for Freedom.

About 20 Party for Freedom supporters protested outside the Parramatta Mosque after the murder of NSW Police accountant Curtis Cheng last month.

Mr Mohamed said he had never met Mr Cheng's 15 year-old killer Farhad Jabar Khalil Mohammad and had never heard any radical sentiment expressed at the mosque, which he described as a small "in and out" mosque used by professionals working in Parramatta.

He has taken office space in Parramatta where he and 20 volunteers will seek to gain the 500 members needed to register a political party in time for the next federal election. He said an Australian Muslim Party website would go live on Tuesday.

The party has already reached out to political experts for advice on a preference strategy, crucial to the election chances of minor parties.

Mr Mohamed said he had consulted both Imams and Christian bishops and priests on his intentions to form the party, saying non-Muslims were welcome as members.

But he said senior Islamic clerics had advised him to "tread cautiously" in seeking representation for Muslims in politics.

Dr Jamal Rifi, a respected voice on moderate Islam, said he would encourage young Muslims to get involved with established parties like Labor Party, the Liberal Party and the Greens but understood the compulsion to directly organise on behalf of Muslims.

"We live in a democratic society and people are entitled to form anti-Muslim parties just as people are entitled to form the Muslim Party," he said.

Labor's Ed Husic was the first Muslim MP elected to the federal parliament in 2010.

Mr Mohamed said some Muslim commentators used regularly by the media showed too much "appeasement" of the mainstream community.

He described as "stupid" comments by Tasmanian senator Jacqui Lambie in support of banning sharia law, halal certification and the wearing of the burqa – although face coverings should not be allowed in police matters, banks and driver's licence issues, he said.

He said he was "living" sharia by not drinking, not eating pork and trying to pray five times a day but said fears about the imposition of any official sharia in a country with a Muslim population of 1.6 per cent was a "non issue".

"People should be free to wear as little as they want but also free to wear as much as they want," he said.

The party supports Australia accepting 12,000 Syrian refugees as the "most humane thing to do" in response to the crisis in that country.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/australian-muslim-party-aims-to-contest-federal-and-state-elections-20151116-gl0app.html>

11. Jacqui Lambie questions refugee intake, recommends electronic tagging

The Age
November 18, 2015 - 11:42AM
Lisa Cox

Tasmanian senator Jacqui Lambie has questioned whether Australia should rethink its decision to accept 12,000 refugees from Syria and Iraq after last week's deadly attacks in Paris.

In a post on her Facebook page that has attracted more than 11,000 comments in 24 hours, the independent senator asked her followers to "vote yes or no" to whether Australia should be accommodating people fleeing the crisis torn region.

And in a Radio National interview on Wednesday morning, Senator Lambie appeared to suggest that refugees settled in Australia should be forced to wear electronic monitoring bracelets.

She also said Western forces should be establishing "safe zones" in Syria to prevent people from fleeing the country at all.

It comes as the first arrivals from Syria – a family of five from the devastated city of Homs – described Australians as "very fair and very kind" after they arrived in Perth on Monday night.

In a written statement, the father thanked "the Australian government for opening their doors and providing a better future for me and my children" and "everybody for giving us a chance at happiness".

He said his hopes for his family were to "educate my kids well, to find safety, to get a job, and live in peace."

People responding to Senator Lambie's post were divided, with some sharing her sentiments that Australia should take an even tougher stance on refugees than it already has.

"One of those responsible for the Paris massacre was a supposed refugee. How do we know what we are letting into our country?" wrote one commenter, although the links between the Paris attacks and refugees remain unclear, with Germany's interior minister suggesting overnight that the refugee passport found in Paris may have been planted.

Another respondent to Senator Lambie's post lashed her for "starting a thread that spreads division and hate" and another warned her not to "become Pauline" with views akin to those held by Pauline Hanson.

Senator Lambie told Radio National on Wednesday: "We haven't tackled this very well. Why don't we have safe zones in Syria?"

"They talk about putting peacekeepers in, OK, why are these refugees fleeing? The worst thing we can do is let the refugees flee from their country," she said.

She said that incoming refugees should also be asked whether or not they support Sharia law.

When broadcaster Fran Kelly suggested that was not a rigorous method of screening, Lambie replied: "I think that question certainly needs to be asked, there's no doubt about that."

"No one's talked about putting security, electronic bracelets on them or anything like that, nobody's gone that far," she said.

"I think it's about time we put our foot down here.

"So maybe the first person who should have an electronic device put on them is the bloody Grand Mufti."

Senator Lambie's comments follow a number of calls this week for humanitarian arrivals from the Middle East to be barred.

NSW Nationals state MP Andrew Fraser called for Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to "close our borders" and Queensland Nationals MP George Christensen told News Corp the decision to accept 12,000 people should be revisited.

The government said this week that the 12,000 refugees would be "hand-picked" and subject to security strict security screening.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton on Monday said the influx of refugees to Australia was entirely different to the situation confronting Europe.

Social Services Minister Christian Porter on Tuesday called on Australians to give the first arriving refugees "time and space to adjust to their new circumstances".

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/jacqui-lambie-questions-refugee-intake-recommends-electronic-tagging-20151117-gl1tb.html>

12. Spare Muslim leaders 'pejorative demands', says Christopher Pyne

Coalition frontbencher says commentators should stop pressuring Muslim leaders to condemn terrorist attacks as if they have to explain their horror

The Guardian

Daniel Hurst Political correspondent

Tuesday 17 November 2015 09.21 AEDT

Commentators should stop issuing "pejorative demands" to Muslim leaders to condemn terrorism each time it occurs, the government frontbencher Christopher Pyne said during a Q&A program dominated by discussion of the Paris attacks.

Pyne was responding to a question from a young Australian Muslim and former Iraqi refugee, Mohammad Al-Khafaji, who said that every time there was an attack he and his community were called upon to condemn it and explain themselves.

The industry minister and leader of the house told the ABC program that Muslim communities condemned such acts but "they shouldn't be called on to do so because it suggests that they didn't want to do it".

"I've never known one of these things to happen where Muslim leaders in Australia didn't come out and condemn them, but by the very act of demanding they come out you suggest that they didn't want to, and that is something that we must stop happening in Australia," Pyne said on Monday evening.

"Whoever is doing that must stop it, because it is pejorative demand. I don't know any Muslims in my community who would think that the acts in Paris or in Lebanon or anywhere else were reasonable, and their leadership should react exactly the same way as everyone else's leadership, which is to be horrified and aghast by it."

Pyne declined to comment on the appropriateness of the comment in February by the former prime minister, Tony Abbott, that more Muslim leaders should describe Islam as a religion of peace "more often, and mean it".

"I'm not going to be partisan and political," Pyne said.

The Q&A program focused on the challenge of clamping down on terrorism after Islamic State (Isis) claimed responsibility for coordinated attacks in the French capital that killed more than 130 people on Friday.

The French ambassador to Australia, Christophe Lecourtier, joined the Q&A panel and said his country would not be intimidated by the attacks.

“We share the same values,” he said of France and Australia.

“It means that we want to be able to go out with anybody, to dress as we want, to be in love with any people we want, we love. So that’s the kind of things these people do not accept, and until the very last moment you can be sure that France will resist that, and we shall never retreat one millimetre from our values.”

Andrew MacLeod, a former United Nations official, said it was not a time for slogans and he believed the prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, was displaying “thoughtful leadership”.

“But what we need from our national leadership now is to determine who is the ‘them’ and who is the ‘us’,” MacLeod said.

“There are two broad choices. Is it us westerners, against them, all of Islam, or is it us, moderates of all religions, against them, radicals of all religions?”

“We have organisations in this country, like Reclaim Australia, who really are falling into the trap of Islamic State, who are trying to create the us westerners against them, all of Islam. If we fall into that trap, we are saying we want to fight with 1.6 billion people, whereas if we define the us as all moderates of all religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam – against radicals of all religions, it’s a much smaller number to fight, and a much more effective number to fight.”

Pyne agreed that Isis must not succeed in “turning Australian against Australian or European against European”.

“We mustn’t allow extremist militant Islamists to represent the Islamic faith,” the minister said. “Moderate Muslims need to be embraced in Australia or elsewhere, moderate Muslim governments need to be embraced wherever they might be, because they have as much at stake as we do in defeating the extremists.”

The Labor frontbencher Kate Ellis said moderate Muslims were “our closest ally in this fight” and it was a time for cool and calm heads.

“That means that our leaders need to all step up and be putting forward messages of unity and the importance of it,” she said. “I don’t just talk about political leaders. I think all leaders across our community. I, for one, cannot for a moment comprehend why Pauline Hanson was on our television over the weekend speaking about these events and about Muslim Australians.”

The independent senator Nick Xenophon said the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was “a bloody mess” and spawned sectarian violence. “We must acknowledge that we cannot bomb our way out of this,” he said.

The entrepreneur Holly Ransom called for community leadership, saying “each and every single one of us” can play a role in supporting social cohesion.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/17/qa-spare-muslim-leaders-of-pejorative-demands-says-christopher-pyne>

13. Screening for 'handpicked' Syrian refugees 'very intense', says Julie Bishop

The Australian foreign affairs minister says checks on incoming refugees will be exhaustive as on Tuesday a family of five becomes first of 12,000 to arrive

The Guardian
Australian Associated Press
Tuesday 17 November 2015 08.42 AEDT

Australia has “handpicked” the Syrian refugees who are coming to Australia and the security screening they face is intense, the foreign affairs minister, Julie Bishop, has said.

On Tuesday a family of five will become the first of 12,000 Syrian refugees to arrive in Australia.

Bishop said reports that some of the terrorists in the Paris attacks posed as Syrian refugees have yet to be confirmed, and Australians should be assured that checks on incoming refugees will be exhaustive.

“These are people who are handpicked by Australian authorities in the Middle East,” she told the Seven Network.

“We are focusing on people who have been persecuted in Syria and Iraq, people who are fleeing from terrorism, from persecution. Our screening and testing is very intense.”

The family of five arriving in Perth were from Homs, in western Syria. The parents and their three children have been living in a camp for several years, and their arrival was brought forward as the mother is seven months pregnant.

The Western Australian premier, Colin Barnett, said they would be welcomed into the community, and would get the help they needed to settle into a new life.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/17/screening-for-handpicked-syrian-refugees-very-intense-says-julie-bishop>

14. MPs and community groups reaffirm support for Syrian refugees after Paris atrocity

The Age
November 17, 2015 - 2:49PM
Nicole Hasham

The first Syrian refugee family granted sanctuary in Australia under an emergency intake says the nation's people are "very fair and very kind", following calls for humanitarian arrivals from the Middle East to be barred.

Social Services Minister Christian Porter confirmed the family of five, including three children, arrived in Perth on Monday night. More of the 12,000-strong intake is expected before Christmas.

The family were originally from the city of Homs, which has been devastated by the Syrian civil war. They are arriving earlier than expected because the mother is seven months pregnant.

The family was met by staff from Western Australia's Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre. In a written statement, the father thanked those who had welcomed his family.

"Thank you to the Australian government for opening their doors and providing a better future for me and my children," he said.

"Thank you to the Australian embassy in Jordan for helping us and providing their services.

"From what I've seen just from the Australian embassy in Jordan, Australians are very fair and very kind, and I'm sure that I'll find the same treatment here as well."

The man said he aspired to "educate my kids well, to find safety, to get a job, and live in peace."

"We would just like to thank everybody for giving us a chance at happiness," he added.

Mr Porter said the family had undergone "the usual checks and processes" and they should now be given "time and space to adjust to their new circumstances".

News Corp has reported that Queensland Nationals MP George Christensen said the decision to accept 12,000 Syrian refugees should be "revisited" and the humanitarian refugee intake from the Middle East should be suspended following the Paris terrorist attacks.

One Paris attacker is believed to have been a Syrian who posed as a refugee and entered Europe via Greece.

South Australian Liberal senator Cory Bernardi also used the Paris attacks to call for persecuted Christians to be given priority in Australia's Syrian refugee admission.

It follows calls by NSW Nationals state MP Andrew Fraser, who said Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull should "close our borders" to refugees from the Middle East in response to the attacks.

But a number of government MPs who have previously expressed caution over the Syrian refugee intake on Tuesday said given proper screening, the arrivals did not pose a security threat.

WA MP Luke Simpkins said there was "a world of difference" between Australia's controlled process for accepting refugees and the flood of refugees across Europe.

"I'm confident that the processes in place will provide the protections we need," he said.

WA Liberal senator Ian Macdonald said the government was being "very, very careful on who we select as part of [those] 12,000 people".

"We would hope at the end the people who do come to Australia from a war-torn country ... will be people who can easily assimilate and integrate into Australian society," he said.

Nationals Riverina MP Michael McCormack has consistently supported the intake of Syrian refugees and says despite some "pockets of resistance", his community's welcoming attitude has not waned after the Paris attacks.

Mr McCormack said Wagga Wagga had the capacity to accept 300 refugees and towns such as Leeton and Griffith would also open their doors.

He said new arrivals would be well-screened, and could be employed in the region as fruit pickers and abattoir workers – jobs that "some of our local people don't always want to fill".

"The Riverina has been a multicultural region and has always shown the milk of human kindness when it comes to helping out those in need and stands ready to do it again," Mr McCormack said.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/were-very-very-careful-mps-and-community-groups-reaffirm-support-for-syrian-refugees-after-paris-atrocity-20151117-gl0u99.html>

15. Government set to focus Syrian refugee program on Christians in wake of Paris attacks: Scott Morrison

ABC Radio CAF - PM

By Middle East correspondent Sophie McNeill

First posted Wed 18 Nov 2015, 6:29pm

Updated Wed 18 Nov 2015, 6:50pm

In the wake of the attacks in Paris, Federal Cabinet Minister Scott Morrison says he expects Christians will be the focus of the Australian government's Syrian refugee program.

When former prime minister Tony Abbott first announced Australia would take in 12,000 extra refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria, some members of his party called on him to give Christian refugees priority.

But the Department of Immigration was quick to clarify this would not be the case.

The head of the government's Syrian Refugee Resettlement Task Force, Peter Vardos, told the ABC that Christians would not be given priority to be resettled in Australia.

"There is no selection based purely on religion, as has been suggested in some quarters," Mr Vardos said recently while on a trip to a Syrian refugee camp in Jordan.

"It is a non-discriminatory program across the board. And I am confident that by the end of this process when you look at the make-up of the 12,000 people they will come from a range of ethnicities and religions."

However, Mr Morrison told Macquarie Radio yesterday: "We are focusing on those persecuted minorities and that obviously includes a very large Christian component. In fact the majority, I would expect."

A spokesperson for Immigration Minister Peter Dutton did not distance themselves from Mr Morrison's comments, telling the ABC the Treasurer's comments "are in line with the Government's focus".

The spokesperson went on to say: "The Government has announced its priorities and made it clear that we are going to focus on those who are most vulnerable, i.e. women, children and families with the least prospect of ever returning safely to their homes."

UNHCR perplexed by governments' demands for Christian refugees

Mr Morrison's comments came after up to 25 states in America said they would refuse to take in Syrian refugees, but some governors said they might make exceptions for Christians.

Officials with the UN refugee agency, the UNHCR, said they were perplexed by politicians around the world requesting Christian refugees from Syria.

Australian UNHCR country director Andrew Harper — who looks after 600,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan — said most of those fleeing to Jordan were not Christian.

"In regards to Jordan, 99 per cent of the refugees fleeing to Jordan are actually Sunni Muslim," Mr Harper said.

Mr Harper said when people were talking about focusing only on minorities, that was not necessarily a true reflection of the people probably most at risk.

"If people start pushing the minority card, or the religious card, we are going to be pushing that back and saying this is not the most important element for us," he said.

"Particularly as I was mentioning that 99 per cent of the people fleeing to Jordan are Sunni Muslim."

Mr Harper said the UN would not be swayed by any pressure when it came to referring Syrian refugee cases to Australia or any other country.

"We do not take too much notice of what politicians anywhere in the world have to say," he said.

"Some are being very forthright in their positions, but what we will do is remain objective and focus on the criteria which we have which is vulnerability.

"And if other people want to bring subjective values which are to necessarily key criteria, we will ignore those."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-18/morrison-expects-christians-to-be-focus-of-refugee-program/6952854>

16. Turnbull tries to clear up confusion over refugee intake after church concerns

Prime minister says persecuted minorities, including Christians, still the focus of Australia's intake of 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees

The Guardian
Daniel Hurst and Katharine Murphy
Sunday 22 November 2015 16.53 AEDT

Malcolm Turnbull has moved to assert that "nothing has changed" in the government's approach to resettling 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees in Australia, after calls from some church leaders and ministers for a significant focus on Christians.

The prime minister indicated on Sunday that Christians would be among the refugees resettled by Australia, but this would be as a consequence of the government's overarching focus on persecuted minorities, women and children.

And he revealed he was talking almost every day to the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, to ensure the smooth implementation of the government's decision.

A report in the Weekend Australian newspaper took some senior government players by surprise because they thought the policy was being implemented in line with the decision the cabinet made shortly before Tony Abbott was ousted in September. There was a clear cabinet determination under Abbott that the focus would be on women, children and persecuted minorities.

But Saturday's article suggested the resettlement plans were "in danger of being derailed" and Christian leaders – including the Catholic archbishop of Sydney, Anthony Fisher – had complained of confusion over the immigration department's selection process.

Guardian Australia understands there had been no red flags within the government that the policy was having difficulties with implementation. It is understood Turnbull, in the lead-up to the cabinet decision on the 12,000 refugees, sought additional information about the groups experiencing the most difficulties in the region.

The deputy Liberal leader, Julie Bishop, had prepared a paper for cabinet which confirmed that the groups facing the most difficulties were the groups ultimately reflected in the announcement.

When the government announced the decision to accept 12,000 refugees, Abbott said: "If you look at the persecuted minorities of the region there are Muslim minorities, Druze, Turkmen, Kurds, there are non-Muslim minorities, Christians, various sorts, Jews, Yazidis, Armenians, so there are persecuted minorities that are Muslim, there are persecuted minorities that are non-Muslim and our focus is on the persecuted minorities who have been displaced and are very unlikely ever to be able to go back to their original homes."

Turnbull was asked to respond to concerns about the focus of the program when he addressed the media on Sunday on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Malaysia. The prime minister insisted the government had not shifted from its original decision and he was in regular contact with Dutton about the details.

"I've been concerned for some time and have been very vocal about my concern for the persecuted minorities in the Middle East, prominent among whom of course are the Christian communities," Turnbull told reporters.

"Regrettably, the likely consequence of these wars in the Middle East will be a reset order in which there will be a much less welcoming environment for Christians. The regimes in Iraq and Syria, tyrannies though they were, were secular tyrannies – that is to say Christians were not persecuted by reason of being Christians as a general rule.

"The tenor of the times in the Middle East is much less welcoming to minorities like Christians and that is why the focus of the 12,000 intake is on persecuted minorities and women and children. It remains exactly [the same]; nothing has changed. That is exactly what it is, and I discuss it regularly, indeed not every day but most days with the immigration minister, Mr Dutton."

Some ministers have been more vocal than others in asserting the significant focus on Christians.

Scott Morrison, the treasurer and former immigration minister, said last week he expected the majority of the 12,000 refugees would be Christians "because it is those communities who are at most long-term risk in the Middle East".

Abbott's former leader in the Senate, Eric Abetz, said in September that Christians should be "pretty high up on the priority list for resettlement" because they were "the most persecuted group in the world and especially in the Middle East".

Dutton said last week the government had consistently stated it wanted to prioritise "women and children in particular, but persecuted minorities otherwise – that can include people of Christian faith or Muslim faith, or others who are stuck in a very difficult scenario".

The immigration minister said the government wanted to identify people who were most at risk and in some cases that would include Christians who were living outside of refugee camps where they did not feel safe.

The questions about the refugee intake come as Abbott forces within the government seek to assert themselves on national security issues in the wake of the terrorist attacks in Paris.

Abbott backed calls by the Liberal MP Andrew Nikolic for Dutton to be reinstated as a permanent member of the Turnbull cabinet's national security committee.

Turnbull rebuffed the push on Sunday, saying the committee comprised "a relatively small number of ministers who attend every meeting" but other ministers were invited to attend when required. "The immigration minister is frequently co-opted to the NSC," he said.

Turnbull pointedly added that he had modelled the cabinet arrangements on those adopted by "on the practices of the government led so successfully by John Howard".

The prime minister confirmed the committee would meet on Monday, coinciding with the resumption of parliament, but while overseas he had remained in close contact with defence and agency chiefs about the security situation.

He foreshadowed greater regional cooperation and intelligence sharing on terrorism issues after attending the Asean and East Asia summits in Kuala Lumpur which heavily focused on countering violent extremism.

Turnbull praised the prime minister of Malaysia, Najib Razak, and the president of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, for projecting "a message of authentic, moderate Islam as a counter message to the violent extremism of Daesh and other similar extremist groups".

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/22/turnbull-tries-to-clear-up-confusion-over-refugee-intake-after-church-concerns>

17. Terrorists could be among Syrian refugees, senator Cory Bernardi says

ABC News Online

By political reporter Dan Conifer

First posted Mon 23 Nov 2015, 9:31am

Updated Mon 23 Nov 2015, 9:36am

Terrorists could be among the 12,000 Syrian refugees Australia is set to resettle, and Cabinet should seriously consider cancelling the intake, according to Government senator Cory Bernardi.

"We have extremist elements at work in this country," Senator Bernardi said during an interview on ABC News 24's Capital Hill.

"Why would we risk bringing in more to add to their ranks, even potentially, and bear the financial and social burden that comes with that?"

The first five refugees arrived in Perth last week after being processed by the United Nations.

Senator Bernardi said proving the back story of those being selected by the UNHCR was near impossible, and the Government needed to reconsider its decision.

"In our previous refugee intake, we've had examples where people who've been accepted as refugees have gone on to commit terrorist acts or plan terror attacks in this country," he said.

"Now why do we think that suddenly this is going to be any different?"

"There is a plethora of fraudulent and falsified documents and you can't exactly go into Syria to prove up the backstory.

"And in the absence of being able to determine who comes to this country and prove their back story effectively, I think we've got to put a stop to it."

Senator Bernardi said he initially supported the Government's decision because it was targeted at persecuted minorities.

But he said Christians were avoiding UNHCR refugee camps because they feared being attacked by Muslims.

Questions have been raised about Syrian migrants entering Western nations following the Paris terrorist attacks, with a Syrian passport found near the body of one of the Stade de France suicide bombers.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-23/terrorists-could-be-among-syrian-refugees-bernardi-says/6963608>

18. Outsourcing: the key weapon in the war against transparency

Crikey
Bernard Keane
Crikey politics editor
Nov 18, 2015 12:59PM

What's the common theme to these incidents in the Immigration and "Border Force" portfolio in the last two years? Each reflects a consistent pattern: the worst cases of maladministration possible within government have been hidden by the obscurity that comes with outsourcing.

Example One

After the revelation of repeated incidents of sexual assault and child abuse at Australia's asylum seeker detention facility on Nauru, the Department of Immigration admits it has long known about over 50 cases of assault and done nothing about them, saying that they are entirely a matter for the Nauruan government and the contractors who operate the facility. Later, the department admits that its contract with Nauru facility operator Transfield is so poorly worded that, despite sexual assaults of women and children and other security breaches, Transfield has met all its contractual service obligations and no penalties have been triggered. Indeed, the chair of Transfield, Diane Smith-Gander, declares that she is "proud" of what Transfield has done on Nauru.

Example Two

After riots break out on Christmas Island a fortnight ago, it is revealed staff of Serco, which is contracted to operate the Christmas Island immigration detention facility, fled their positions, allowing detainees to run amok, while other staff were so poorly trained they didn't recognise an alarm indicating that a detainee, later found dead, had escaped the facility. Serco insists "Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre is appropriately staffed for the detainees at the facility" but is conducting its own in-house investigation.

Example Three

In the course of her Senate committee work, Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young travels to Nauru. While there, she is stalked and surveilled by personnel of Wilson Security, which is subcontracted to provide security at the Nauru detention facility. When found out, Wilson says it was only for 12 hours and involved a rogue staff member. Later, multiple sources reveal the surveillance was for the duration of the Senator's three-day stay and involved up to eight staff, with Hanson-Young photographed and notes made on whom she met with.

While Wilson apologises to Hanson-Young, the question of who ordered the surveillance, its duration and why it was ordered remains unanswered. A Senate committee calls a Wilson employee at the centre of the surveillance to give evidence, but he declines to appear.

Example Four

Expatriate contractors working for security provider G4S are identified as having participated in the assault on asylum seeker Reza Barati that led to his death in Australia's Manus Island asylum seeker detention facility in February 2014, but only PNG nationals face court for his murder. The exact circumstances in which Barati was murdered, which staff were involved in his murder and why the government initially tried to blame Barati for his own death by insisting he had escaped remain unclear.

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People under our duty of care murdered, sexually and physically abused and allowed to escape to their deaths, and a Senator engaging in her legislative duties was stalked and surveiled by those affected by her committee work. But outsourcing places a veil of secrecy over these activities that simply would not exist if the activities were carried out by public servants.

The traditional rationale for outsourcing is that private companies can provide services more cheaply than public servants, and have skills that the public service lacks. Over time, this becomes self-fulfilling -- whatever sector-specific skills were once held within the public service atrophy with outsourcing, with skilled public servants often leaving to establish their own companies offering the same services they once provided for a multiple of the salaries they earned in the public service, taking advantage of their knowledge of internal processes and connections within the public sector hierarchy.

But increasingly, the single greatest advantage governments obtain from outsourcing isn't cheaper services but the massive reduction in accountability that outsourcing enables. Consider the contrast between the public sector and contractors like Serco, Transfield and Wilson:

* Public sector documents are subject to freedom of information laws, enabling outside parties to gain an insight into government decision-making and awareness otherwise out of public view. Internal documents produced by contractors providing the same services as the public sector are beyond the scope of FOI;

* Public servants must appear regularly before Senate estimates committees to face scrutiny over their behaviour and how they spent public money. Contractors must be specifically requested to appear before references committees and, as the case of the stalking of Hanson-Young shows, may decline to do so; and

* Public servants are subject to an APS Code of Conduct governing their behaviour in how they perform their roles, as well as a jungle of procedural, expenditure and record-keeping restrictions that limit their capacity to evade accountability. Private contractors face no such requirements; indeed, unlike public servants, contractor staff do not even have to be Australian citizens -- companies like Serco rely heavily on imported staff via 457 visas, who can return to their home countries and beyond the reach of Australian jurisdiction if necessary.

Outsourcing thus enables the expenditure of public money, and the implementation of public policy, without any of the established restraints and scrutiny that normally limit public sector behaviour. Murder, rape and harassment of elected officials can be dismissed as an issue for contractors or other governments, despite occurring within Australian-funded facilities or being carried out by Australian-funded staff.

It doesn't need to be this way. How do we know? Because the Immigration Department has shown us. As Crikey reported earlier this month, Immigration obtained legal advice that it could impose an extensive range of restrictions on contractors and sub-contractors, in effect turning them into de facto and de jure public servants for the department's purposes. While Immigration has used such powers, bizarrely, to impose drug tests on contractors, its primary goal is to ensure it can prevent anyone involved, however indirectly, in the provision of services involving asylum seekers, from revealing abuse and criminal conduct using the powers of the Australian Border Force Act.

That is, when it comes to undermining accountability, outsourcing is in effect abandoned and private providers are insourced into the secrecy requirements of governments. But the same stringent requirements could easily and legally be used to insource accountability for outsourced services, and the companies that provide them, to provide the same levels of scrutiny as public servants face. If contractors want taxpayer-funded contracts, they could be subject to FOI, they could be required to appear regularly before Senate committees, they could be subject to the same record-keeping, conduct and procedural requirements as the public service.

However, that would wreck the primary advantage governments get from outsourcing, the ability to wish away responsibility for even the most serious abuses and negligence.

<http://www.crikey.com.au/2015/11/18/outsourcing-the-key-weapon-in-the-war-against-transparency/>

19. Antony Loewenstein: Now's the time to boycott companies that profit from detention

Serco and Broadspectrum (once Transfield) are vulnerable to shareholder pressure thanks to their indefensible complicity in offshore detention

The Guardian
Antony Loewenstein
Wednesday 18 November 2015 15.59 AEDT

The Australian maintenance, construction and detention centre company Transfield Services officially changed its name last month, to Broadspectrum. The firm claimed it was "a better representation of the company's business". Clearly there was an element of necessity too: the corporation's founding members withdrew permission to use the Transfield name and logo over ongoing allegations of abuse at its facilities on Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea.

A name change isn't likely to improve its public image, battered by never-ending stories of asylum seekers abused while in limbo.

One of the first rules of public relations is to take heat off a target by attempting to change the focus of controversy. Recall American private security firm Blackwater, embroiled in numerous scandals of employees killing innocent civilians in Iraq and elsewhere, first changing its name to Xe Services, then Academi. Blackwater founder Erik Prince left the US, moved to Abu Dhabi and today works with Chinese companies that financially benefit from the African resources boom.

In 2014, Academi became a division of Constellis Holdings, along with another private contractor, Triple Canopy. These descendants of Blackwater rake in cash from US government contracts, the years of scandals against its multiple owners and employees seemingly forgotten.

Broadspectrum will be hoping for similar success. Although profits were down 8% this year, a number of key shareholders were publicly opposed to its involvement in detention services. Some protested its recent AGM in Sydney.

The company looks set to continue a billion-dollar contract to run facilities on Nauru and Manus Island. As was the case for Blackwater and its descendants, it's hard to imagine what would have to transpire for the federal government to sever its contract with the company.

Nonetheless, the growing push for divestment against Broadspectrum is an encouraging sign that companies profiting from offshore misery could suffer serious harm. Shen Narayanasamy, executive director of No Business in Abuse, rightly argues that, "you don't deal with abuse by changing your name, you deal with abuse by stopping the abuse. No amount of spin changes Transfield's complicity in abuse. Transfield/Broadspectrum doesn't have to sign a five-year contract to continue profiting from the abuse of vulnerable people. That's their decision."

There's no reason, apart from corporate Stockholm Syndrome, to defend the actions of Transfield. A recent op-ed by PhD candidate Carly Gordyn, published in SBS Online, made embarrassing excuses for the firm ("The contractors are doing only what they are being asked to do.") and insisted that refugee activists should principally target the government, which implements the detention policy.

Surely a strategy of highlighting official and corporate complicity is the most logical idea. During my years of investigating the role of British multinational Serco, both on the Australian mainland and Christmas Island, leaked internal documents proved that company management was price gouging, under-training staff and instructing regional managers not to report problems to avoid government fines.

And IHMS, the company that provides healthcare for Australia's asylum seekers in detention, admitted in documents published earlier this year by Guardian Australia that "inevitable" fraud would be committed as it tried to meet government standards.

Of course, one company can be replaced with another with relative ease if the authorities are determined to outsource their responsibilities.

The time is ripe for a vociferous divestment campaign against Serco in Australia for its past and present activities. The firm is having financial troubles and is economically vulnerable to shareholder pressure. Broadspectrum will face a growing public backlash as long as it's involved in the privatised detention business, although it's unlikely to collapse from that alone.

Lessons from other states prove that this is only half the battle (for example, European detention firms are making money from the current refugee crisis) and that uncovering the financial and ideological ties that have led to the modern trend of outsourcing asylum seekers to corporations is the far larger and more difficult battle. It means challenging an economic model that places a monetary value on every human being.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/nov/18/news-the-time-to-boycott-companies-that-profit-from-detention>

20. Indonesia offers island for Australia to hold asylum seekers

Indonesia has offered Australia an island as a temporary camp to shelter refugees and asylum seekers en route to Australia, according to minister Luhut Pandjaitan.

Channel News Asia

By Saifulbahri Ismail

POSTED: 20 Nov 2015 10:46

UPDATED: 20 Nov 2015 11:12

JAKARTA: Indonesia has offered Australia an island as a temporary camp to shelter refugees and asylum seekers en route to Australia.

Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Luhut Pandjaitan told the Jakarta Post that Indonesia's offer would come with strict requirements, which includes financing to limit the period of use of the island.

Mr Luhut said Australia is required to entirely finance the camp.

Thousands of asylum seekers and refugees travel from Indonesia to Australia, only to be stranded in Indonesia or, as Jakarta claims, turned back by the Australian Navy.

In recent years, those apprehended by Australian authorities have been processed in offshore camps in Nauru or Papua New Guinea and told they will never be settled in Australia, a policy that has largely stemmed the numbers attempting an often perilous sea journey.

Indonesia is concerned that asylum seekers in the country have the potential to create conflict with local residents who are already living in poverty.

Mr Luhut added that there are also security concerns related to potential terrorism.

In the past, Indonesia had a similar camp on Galang Island near Batam that accommodated about 170,000 Vietnamese refugees.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there were 7,666 asylum seekers and 5,739 refugees in Indonesia as of September this year.

Mr Luhut's offer to Australia came after his recent visit to Canberra to reinvigorate diplomatic ties.

He said talks about the undesignated island are still preliminary, and a delegation of Australian officials is expected to be in Jakarta next month to further discuss the issue.

Special advisor for legal affairs at the Office of Presidential Chief of Staff Lambock V Nahattands told the Jakarta Post that the island proposal should be carefully planned and would need Australia's guarantee that they would be quickly accepted by third countries.

<http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/indonesia-offers-island/2277736.html>

21. AAP: Jakarta floats 'refugee island' idea

news.com.au

November 20, 2015 7:24pm

By Gabrielle Dunlevy, AAP Southeast Asia Correspondent, AAP

An Indonesian government spokesman has confirmed preliminary talks have been held on plans to house asylum seekers on an island funded by the Australian government.

Thousands of asylum seekers and refugees are awaiting resettlement in Indonesia, deterred from making the remainder of the journey to Australia by Canberra's boat turnback policy.

Co-ordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs Luhut Panjaitan, who visited Sydney this week, told The Jakarta Post and Straits Times newspapers he had early talks with Australia on an island shelter.

Ministry spokesman Agus Barnas confirmed to AAP the plan was "still under discussion" and was first floated under previous president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

"In the talks, there was such an idea," he said.

"It was one of the discussion topics among others like intelligence co-operation, combating terrorism, trade, things like that."

Mr Agus said among many conditions that needed to be resolved were funding and the period refugees would wait for resettlement.

"Christmas Island is still chaotic now, right? I pity them," he said.

"So, maybe that's one of the considerations. Let's just wait."

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network likened the plan to other controversial refugee deals with Cambodia and Malaysia.

The group's Julia Mayerhofer says Indonesia has not signed the UN refugee convention, so asylum seekers already struggle to access basic services, are subject to immigration detention, and do not have the right to work.

"Instead of bilateral discussions, the Australian and Indonesian governments should rather focus their efforts on advancing regional co-operation and responsibility sharing," she told AAP.

"This includes improving the conditions in host countries such as Indonesia and exploring local integration, instead of sending them to an isolated island."

Mr Panjaitan was in Malaysia on Friday and could not be contacted.

He told The Jakarta Post the island should not become another Galang Island, a troubled place that housed Vietnamese refugees between 1979 and 1996, many of whom were later resettled in Australia.

The minister said worries about community conflict and terrorism were behind the plan to isolate the asylum seekers, and it should also put an end to boat turnbacks.

"I told them such actions are wrong and against humanitarian principles," he told the newspaper.

"They are still unsure of how to respond, but they are hoping relations between the two countries will be at an all-time high."

Indonesia hosts regional talks on asylum seekers next week.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton visited Jakarta this week, but wouldn't say whether he'd discussed boat turnbacks, revealing only that talks had focused on the economy and security.

<http://www.news.com.au/national/breaking-news/jakarta-offers-aust-refugee-island-report/news-story/7d87a90a2f0436a6f9c9d4866582fecd>

22. Suggestion Indonesia may offer island to Australia for processing of asylum seekers

ABC Radio CAF - PM

Adam Harvey

Friday, November 20, 2015 18:15:41

DAVID MARK: One of Indonesia's major newspapers says the nation is prepared to offer one of its islands for Australia to build a processing centre for asylum seekers.

The report's based on an interview with a senior cabinet member who late yesterday denied saying anything of the sort.

Indonesia correspondent Adam Harvey has the details.

ADAM HARVEY: Asylum seekers stranded in Indonesia by Australia's border policies are creating problems here. Senior minister Luhut Pandjaitan says there's resentment brewing in areas like Aceh.

Today, in an interview with the Jakarta Post newspaper he's proposed a solution: an island camp and processing centre paid for by Australia. He told the Post: "We can discuss the possibility of allocating an island. But Australia is required to entirely finance it."

He said talks about the island are preliminary but a delegation of Australian officials is slated to be in Jakarta in late December to discuss the issue.

Luhut Pandjaitan is a powerful member of Joko Widodo's cabinet with a knack for making headlines.

Yesterday he confirmed that Indonesia will stop executing death row prisoners while it concentrates on fixing the economy.

The island detention centre report was the lead story in today's Jakarta Post newspaper.

But late yesterday Australia time Luhut contacted the ABC to deny the report and his apparent quotes. He said there is no plan for an Australia-funded island detention centre.

Whatever the plan is, it's caught Indonesia's foreign ministry on the hop. Its spokesman is Arrmanatha Nasir.

ARRMANATHA NASIR: I can't comment on that because I have to see what exactly he has said and I have to discuss with his office what he meant by that.

ADAM HARVEY: He says Indonesia is considering an island camp for asylum seekers.

ARRMANATHA NASIR: It's one of the options. We also have other options, for example in building a more provident shelter in Aceh, renovating the current shelter so that there are other options.

ADAM HARVEY: Around 12,000 asylum seekers are stuck in Indonesia, many in remote areas like Aceh. Luhut says there's a potential for conflict with locals.

He says the asylum seekers there can live sufficiently because of the UNHCR aid. But the people living nearby are left without financial help. This has created envy that may someday become a problem.

Indonesia's foreign ministry says an Australian-funded asylum seeker camp could work here.

ARRMANATHA NASIR: You are doing it with other countries, so I don't know how that goes but for us at this stage we are firm in stating that addressing the issue cannot be just by - at the destination country, but it has to be inclusive, addressing it in both the aspect of a humanitarian, looking at humanitarian aspect as well as the criminal aspect.

ADAM HARVEY: Sorry what does that mean?

ARRMANATHA NASIR: It means you can't just put in a blockage at the sea. It's not the best way to do it because it's often against the humanitarian law.

ADAM HARVEY: Indonesian asylum seeker activist Feby Yonesta says an island detention centre is a bad idea.

FEBY YONESTA: (translated) I don't understand why officials under Jokowi's government can have this cruel way of thinking, putting the asylum seekers and refugees in the same level as recidivist, major criminals that need to be placed in Nusa Kambangan island, while these asylum seekers and refugees are actually victims. We need to focus on this: they are victims - victims of prosecution, victims of war in their countries of origin.

ADAM HARVEY: Feby Yonesta says his country should avoid the Australian way of dealing with asylum seekers.

This is Adam Harvey reporting for PM from Jakarta.

<http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2015/s4356613.htm>

23. Indonesia denies offering Australia an island to house refugees

Sydney Morning Herald
November 21, 2015 - 12:47AM
Jewel Topsfield and Nicole Hasham
With Karuni Rompies

One of Indonesia's most senior cabinet ministers has denied offering Australia an island to temporarily house refugees and asylum seekers.

The Jakarta Post on Friday reported on its front page that Coordinating Minister for political, legal and security affairs, Luhut Panjaitan, had suggested offering an island as a temporary refugee camp.

The newspaper reported Mr Panjaitan had said Indonesia's "kind offer" would come with strict requirements, ranging from requiring Australia to entirely finance the camp to limiting the period of use of the island.

But Mr Panjaitan told Fairfax Media he had never made the offer of the island and to ignore the newspaper report.

He said he had told The Jakarta Post the Indonesian government didn't want to repeat the experience of a refugee camp on the island of Galang between 1979 and 1996.

The UNHCR ran the camp on Galang, an Indonesian island south of Singapore, for Vietnamese asylum seekers while their claims for refugee status were processed.

Many were subsequently resettled in Australia.

"In my conversation with (The Jakarta Post) I told them about Indonesia's experience with Galang and we don't want to repeat that again. In the end it was us that was dealing with the problems."

Fairfax Media understands The Jakarta Post stands by their report and has a recording of the interview.

Attorney-General George Brandis met Mr Panjaitan in Sydney this week but a spokesman would not say if the island proposal was raised.

Mr Brandis told the Today Show that the pair "discussed and agreed on enhanced intelligence sharing arrangements between Australia and Indonesia".

The office of Immigration Minister Peter Dutton did not respond to requests for comment and Labor's immigration spokesman Richard Marles declined to comment.

The Jakarta Post had reported that the motivation for the offer was that there was potential for conflict between the approximately 13,000 asylum seekers and refugees stranded in Aceh, East Nusa Tenggara and West Nusa Tenggara and local residents living in extreme poverty.

The asylum seekers receive assistance from the International Organisation of Migration. "But the people living nearby are left without financial help. This has created envy that may someday become a problem," the newspaper quoted Mr Panjaitan saying.

Indonesia is not a signatory to the UN convention on refugees, and asylum seekers and refugees who are stranded in the archipelago are not permitted to work or send their children to local schools.

Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young said if Australia was willing to resettle people found to be refugees, the proposal "could be a step towards a genuine regional solution".

"We need to establish a fair and efficient system where people's claims are assessed before they're forced to get on a boat in order to reach Australia," she said.

"For this to work, Australia must be willing to take the people who are found to be in need of protection in Indonesia."

Refugee Council of Australia chief executive Paul Power said refugees and asylum seekers need "durable solutions to their predicaments".

"Foisting more people who are in urgent need of permanent safety and protection onto another island, away from scrutiny and accountability is foolhardy at best," he said.

"Australia should be providing the opportunity for people to begin to rebuild their lives instead of perpetuating the problems that already beset Australia's detention system and is harming many thousands of people's lives."

<http://www.smh.com.au/world/migrant-crisis/indonesia-offers-australia-an-island-for-refugees-20151120-gl47jz.html>

24. Suspected asylum seeker boat intercepted off Christmas Island

ABC News Online

By Jade Macmillan, political reporter Jane Norman and defence reporter Andrew Greene

First posted Fri 20 Nov 2015, 8:59am

Updated Fri 20 Nov 2015, 11:28am

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has refused to confirm that a suspected asylum seeker boat has been intercepted just off Christmas Island.

A border protection source has told the ABC a boat was intercepted by the Navy in the early hours of this morning.

Several Christmas Island residents said they spotted the wooden boat, carrying about eight people, in Flying Fish Cove about 6:00am (local time).

They said it was intercepted by the Navy a short time later and escorted to Smith Point, where the group was then offloaded onto another Navy ship. It is unclear where those on board were taken.

Mr Turnbull was asked about the eyewitness reports at a media event in Darwin, but refused to provide any further information. "As you know, we don't comment on operational matters," he said. "I can't help you other than to say that we do not comment on operational matters."

A spokeswoman for Immigration Minister Peter Dutton also refused to provide any details in relation to the reports. Labor's immigration spokesman Richard Marles said the Government must immediately confirm if the Navy intercepted the boat.

Customs boat dwarfing small fishing boat

Photos supplied by Christmas Island residents showed a long, narrow green and white fishing boat, dwarfed by a Customs and Border Protection vessel.

"I saw it being towed out to sea by RAN patrol boat, at four to five kilometres distance around 6:45am Christmas Island time," said Gordon Thomson, the president of the Christmas Island Shire.

"I saw a photograph of an Indonesian fishing boat that shows the boat at Smith Point in the port of [Christmas Island] waters."

Greens immigration spokeswoman Sarah Hanson-Young called for those on board to be taken to Christmas Island.

"If the Government really does care about saving lives at sea, they wouldn't tow this boat away from Xmas Island, they would let it land safely," Senator Hanson-Young said in a statement on Twitter.

Minister for International Development and the Pacific Steve Ciobo was unable to confirm whether it was an asylum seeker boat, but stressed the Federal Government's policies remain unchanged.

"Suffice to say that I think that Australians and, importantly those that are engaged in people smuggling, know the absolute resolute way Australia now deals with this matter," Mr Ciobo told ABC News 24.

"We will not tolerate those people that seek to come to Australia by boat, they will be processed offshore and they will not find a home here in Australia."

In a report published in August, Australian Border Force (ABF) said only one asylum seeker vessel had arrived in Australian waters since the start of Operation Sovereign Borders in December 2013.

The 157 people from that vessel spent a month on a Customs ship before being transferred to the Curtin Detention Centre and then Nauru in mid-2014.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-20/asylum-seeker-boat-spotted-near-christmas-island-residents-say/6957998>

25. Apparent asylum seeker boat almost lands at Christmas Island, local sources say

Sydney Morning Herald
November 20, 2015 - 2:29PM
Nicole Hasham

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton must reveal the fate of a boatload of suspected asylum seekers that reportedly came close to landing at Christmas Island early on Friday morning, Labor says.

The small wooden boat pulled up close to shore at Christmas Island before being intercepted by the navy, local sources say.

It is believed to have come within a few hundred metres of the jetty at Flying Fish Cove before being towed to Smith's Point.

The federal government has been determined to "stop the boats" and the near-arrival raises questions over how the vessel penetrated the border protection regime.

A spokeswoman for Mr Dutton would not confirm the arrival, saying "we do not comment on operational matters". Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull also refused to comment.

Labor's immigration spokesman Richard Marles said Mr Dutton must immediately detail the events surrounding the boat's arrival, including what refugee assessment process is being undertaken and whether Australia is "complying with its international obligations in respect of refugees".

"It is unacceptable for this Liberal government to refuse to answer questions about this reported vessel and instead continue to peddle the phrase 'operational matters' - this is nothing more than a tired, lazy slogan for suppressing facts from the Australian community," Mr Marles said in a statement.

One local was out walking about 5.45am local time and saw a boat in the distance, carrying about 12 people.

"There are quite a few fishing boats out at the moment because the weather is so nice. But you could tell by the very large bow that it was not a local fishing boat," the local said.

"I watched it for a little while and it was heading straight for the cove."

The source believed the boat contained asylum seekers, rather than illegal fishermen, because the latter "usually ... avoid the authorities, not make a beeline for them."

The local believed the boat was later escorted out to sea because it was "nowhere in sight".

Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young said the boat should be allowed to land and unload its passengers.

"The safest thing to do now is to let these people land on Christmas Island and find out who they are," she said.

"The government needs to be up front with the Australian people and explain how many people are on board this boat and what condition they are in."

The government should also reveal if women and children were on board, she said.

SBS has reported the navy apparently boarded the boat and gave occupants life jackets.

In August Mr Dutton said boats carrying more than 630 asylum seekers had been turned back under the Abbott government.

The last boat containing 157 Tamil asylum seekers who had fled Sri Lanka arrived in Australia June last year. It was intercepted near Christmas Island and the passengers were detained on a Customs boat for a month, before being transferred to the Curtin detention centre, then Nauru.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/apparent-asylum-seeker-boat-almost-lands-at-christmas-island-local-sources-say-20151120-gl3q93.html>

26. Asylum seeker boat reported to have come within 200m of Christmas Island

The boat appears to have approached Flying Fish Cove in the early hours of the morning before being intercepted by Australian officials

The Guardian
Michael Safi, Ben Doherty and agencies
Friday 20 November 2015 17.47 AEDT

A boat carrying asylum seekers was intercepted close to Christmas Island on Friday, the first to reach Australian waters since June 2014.

The boat made it within 200m of Flying Fish Cove before it was boarded by Australian officials, sources on the island told Guardian Australia.

It is unclear whether the boat was intercepted by Australian navy or Border Force staff.

Those on board were given life jackets. The boat was moved further away from the island and covered in a tarpaulin so the arrivals cannot be counted or identified, the sources said.

Christmas Island shire president Gordon Thomson said locals spotted the fishing boat early on Friday morning about 100 to 200 metres from Smith Point, the entry to the island's harbour.

By the time he arrived to join onlookers at Smith Point before 7am, the boat was being towed by an Australian navy patrol boat and was about 3km to 5km out to sea.

"I saw the navy patrol boat towing the Indonesian fishing boat out to sea away from Christmas Island," he told AAP. "It's a wicked thing to do."

Thomson said the federal government had not notified him about approaching boats since 2009. He questioned whether officials checked the boat's seaworthiness before towing it out to sea.

Given it arrived into the harbour, Customs would have needed to issue a port clearance which can only be done if the boat is seaworthy, he said.

It is believed the boat came from Indonesia, but sources said it is not known from which country the asylum seekers came originally.

Historically, the boat journey from south-west Java to Christmas Island - a distance of a little more than 350km - has been a popular route for people seeking protection in Australia.

It is the first boat to reach Australian waters since June last year, when 157 Sri Lankan Tamils were intercepted about 300km from the island. They were held on board for a month and, after negotiations to send them back to India broke down, transferred to immigration detention in Nauru.

Australia claims to have "turned back" 20 boats since Operation Sovereign Borders began in late 2013. Boats have been forcibly sent back to Indonesia and Sri Lanka, some crashing on reefs and requiring rescue.

In May at least one boat returned to Indonesia after the crew was paid by Australian government officials, according to an investigation by Amnesty International. The immigration department has not denied paying the people smugglers, but maintained it had acted within international law at all times.

The prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull refused to comment on the boat's arrival on Friday..

Addressing media in Darwin, he reiterated that the government did not comment on operational matters, and would not answer whether those on board - including any children - would be detained in offshore processing centres.

"I can't help you other than to say we do not comment on operational matters," he said.

Steven Ciobo, the minister for international development and the Pacific, told the ABC: "I think Australians and, importantly, those engaged in people smuggling know the absolute resolute way Australia now deals with this matter and that is to say we will not tolerate those people that seek to come to Australia by boat.

"They will be processed offshore and they will not find a home here in Australia," he said.

Labor called on the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, to immediately detail what has taken place off Christmas Island and provide an assurance that Australia was complying with its international obligations.

"It is unacceptable for this Liberal government to refuse to answer questions about this reported vessel and instead continue to peddle the phrase 'operational matters'," the opposition's immigration spokesman, Richard Marles, said in a statement.

"This is nothing more than a tired, lazy slogan for suppressing facts from the Australian community."

The Greens immigration spokeswoman, senator Sarah Hanson-Young, called on the government to let the boat land safely and unload its passengers.

"The safest thing to do now is to let these people land on Christmas Island and find out who they are," she said.

"It's clear that, despite the government's repeated claims, the boats haven't stopped."

An immigration detention centre has operated on the Australian territory since 2001. Its population has changed in the past months to include fewer asylum seekers and more "501s" – migrants whose visas have been cancelled and who face imminent deportation.

At 14 November, the detention facility on the island was home to 199 detainees, 113 of whom, according to the Australian government, had criminal convictions.

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, confirmed on Friday that 12 New Zealanders had been deported from the facility after riots broke out earlier this month, following the death of an Iranian asylum seeker.

The department of immigration has been contacted for comment on the latest asylum boat.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/20/asylum-seeker-boat-reported-approached-christmas-island>

27. MEDIA RELEASE: Navy tows Christmas Island asylum boat back to sea

Friday November 20, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

A boat of asylum seekers which arrived at Christmas Island early this morning has been towed back to sea by the navy.

The small boat which arrived unescorted at Christmas Island this morning had earlier been covered by a tarpaulin to prevent any contact between the asylum seekers and people on the shore.

The boat has now been towed out to sea by the navy.

"We are extremely concerned that the navy is attempting to turn this boat back to Indonesia," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, "Australian officials may well be, once again, trying to bribe the crew to return to Indonesia.

"Turning boats back and bribing the crew both constitute international crimes and violate the rights of asylum seekers.

"We know many boats are still attempting to reach Australia to gain the protection they cannot get in Indonesia. These asylum seekers may well be fleeing the same dangers as the 12,000 Syrians Australia says it will accept.

"But the Coalition government has banned the resettlement of any UNHCR refugees from Indonesia. The government's policy means they have no alternative but to try to reach protection by boat.

"We are calling on the government to allow this boat to land and to process their claims in Australia. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull is in Darwin today, ideally placed to prevent more human rights abuses of these asylum seekers."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

28. MEDIA RELEASE: Nauru police ignore savage assault as asylum seeker flown to Australia

Wednesday November 18, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Riza, an Iranian asylum seeker on Nauru, has been flown to Australia for urgent medical treatment for a broken jaw and facial injuries after a savage assault by a local bus driver.

The assault took place on Sunday, 15 November. Reza was medivaced to Australia on Monday, 16 November.

The assault took place following a routine bus ride from the single men's camp. A group of around six asylum seekers began a sing-a-long in the bus, when the bus driver took offence and demanded that they stop the singing and clapping.

When the asylum seekers refused and argued with the driver, he drove to the central police station. The driver demanded that the police intervene. But the police refused after asking whether any of the passengers had any complaints. The asylum seekers on the bus insisted they were just 'sharing the love'.

The Nauruan driver then drove a short distance from the police station, pulled Reza off the bus and delivered two punches, smashing his jaw, and eye, leaving him unconscious.

Reza was taken to the Nauru hospital and then to the IHMS clinic in the old detention centre.

On Monday morning, 16 November, Reza was flown to Australia for emergency treatment.

No action has been taken by the Nauruan police against the bus driver.

"The bus driver is readily identifiable; there is no shortage of witnesses, but so far the Nauruan police have done nothing to bring the attacker to account," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"Just like the un-investigated sexual assaults, this is another instance of locals carrying out acts of violence against asylum seekers and refugees with impunity. The local police are completely unwilling to investigate or lay charges against local Nauruans.

"Rather than being protected, offshore processing has left refugees vulnerable to more acts of violence and abuse. Nauru must be closed."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

29. Schools hold 'Mojgan cup' football game to publicise asylum seeker's plight

Former Brisbane classmates of Mojgan Shamsalipoor, 21, a detained Iranian asylum seeker, organised the match as part of campaign to support her

The Guardian
Joshua Robertson
Wednesday 18 November 2015 15.03 AEDT

Brisbane schools have sought to highlight the plight of a detained Iranian asylum seeker by holding a football match in her honour.

The Mojgan cup, which took place in Brisbane on Wednesday, was an inaugural match between St Peter's Lutheran college and Yeronga state high school, where former classmates of Mojgan Shamsalipoor make up one of the city's most diverse and successful schoolboy football teams.

The contest was the brainchild of a St Peter's coach who learned of the predicament of Shamsalipoor, who was taken from her schooling at Yeronga in August and placed in detention in Darwin after immigration authorities rejected her claim for asylum.

It is part of a community campaign to support Shamsalipoor, whose bid to stay in Australia after fleeing a forced marriage to an older man and alleged sexual assaults in Iran has been denied on the grounds it cannot be verified.

Three of her classmates in a Yeronga team made up of 11 nationalities – and which was ranked Brisbane's second best state high school football team – spoke out in her name before the game.

Odyicious, a Liberian-born winger, said it was "a privilege to participate in this football match to honour and pay our respect to her during her current unfortunate and troublesome situation, which we all believe to be unjust and cruel".

Donne, a defender from Ghana, said he had become close friends in drama classes with Shamsalipoor, who attended school under Australian federal police guard after being initially taken into detention in Brisbane.

"Mojgan is always kind and helpful to anyone who needs help, despite her own mood, and her presence often puts a smile on your face," he said.

Mermothe, also a defender, who hails from Burundi, described her as "a kind and friendly person who always helps those who need assistance in our maths class".

Shamsalipoor's supporters also include Yeronga teaching staff who, with the school principal, held a strike this week to protest against her detention, the first known case of industrial action by Queensland teachers on humanitarian grounds.

Her supporters have urged the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, to grant Shamsalipoor a partner visa in light of her marriage to Milad Jafari, a former classmate, also from Iran, who has been granted asylum.

Despite her detention, Shamsalipoor, 21, was set to graduate on Thursday, with help from Yeronga teachers who flew to Darwin to provide her with study materials.

The South Brisbane Rotary club was due to present Shamsalipoor in her absence an award on Wednesday night recognising her "perseverance with studies and a successful integration into the regular school classroom".

The Yeronga open boys' football team overcame larger schools with more established programs to reach this year's Brisbane metropolitan final, where they lost narrowly.

On Wednesday they prevailed 6-3 against St Peter's in a match that Yeronga's football coordinator, Kenton Presland, said was "played in the right spirit".

Yeronga's 19 players, who include some asylum seekers, hail from 11 countries including Somalia, Rwanda, Eritrea, Sudan, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tahiti and Bangladesh.

"To many the plight of refugees fleeing from terror does little to raise a smile, but these players show how despite facing adversity they are a team, united by their school, their passion for soccer and a desire to integrate and live productive lives in Australia," Presland said.

"The global reach of football means that champion teams from Europe are the teams of choice for fans all over the world and, like the game itself, supporting a team brings people from different backgrounds together such that strangers can immediately bond if they discover they support the same team.

"In a team from 11 different nations we have six Chelsea supporters; three Arsenal, Real Madrid and Barcelona; two Manchester United and lone Manchester City and Bayern Munich supporters. Football clearly helps integration."

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/nov/18/schools-hold-mojgan-cup-football-game-to-publicise-asylum-seekers-plight>

30. Young Sydney siblings fear parents will be deported to Tonga after 25 years in the country

ABC Radio CAF - PM

By Bridget Brennan

Posted Fri 20 Nov 2015, 3:24pm

Human Rights Commission president Gillian Triggs is investigating the case of three young Sydney siblings who fear their parents are about to be deported to Tonga.

Siofillisi and Ilisapesi Misinale arrived in Australia almost 25 years ago and subsequently overstayed their tourist and student visas.

Since then, the Immigration Department has refused the couple's requests to obtain permanent visas and the family claims the department has threatened to send them back to Tonga.

The couple have three children who are all Australian citizens, including a 17-year-old daughter who is still in high school.

The family have been living in Hillsdale, in Sydney's south, since 1992.

Youngest daughter Melenaita Misinale said her family had tried to convince the Immigration Minister Peter Dutton to intervene in their case but had been unsuccessful, and former Labor ministers had also refused.

She said her father worked six days a week as a storeman and a forklift driver to support his children through school and university.

"My siblings and I are going to have to seek other ways to support ourselves if our parents are given the final conclusion that they aren't able to remain in Australia," Ms Misinale said.

"We're a family. We'd like our parents to be with us to keep our family united."

Her mother, Ilisapesi, said she and her husband have been told they have exhausted all options to obtain permanent residency in Australia.

"It's very unfair because I have three Australian children here. I just want to see if they have mercy to give me a chance to stay together with my family," she said.

Eldest children advised to support younger sister

The Misinale parents are now on bridging visas, awaiting another meeting with the Immigration Department.

A spokesman for Mr Dutton said the family's case was still under review and the department had to consider several factors when deciding whether people could stay in Australia.

Twenty-year-old eldest daughter Daffofil said she and her brother were advised they would have to support their younger sister.

"It doesn't look right. Nowadays things are expensive," she said.

Immigration lawyer for the family Christopher Levingston said he was disappointed with the department's dealings with the Misinales.

"The attitude of the Immigration Department really has been 'this is your problem, we don't care, go back to Tonga'," Mr Levingston said.

He conceded the Government could not approve every application, but said he thought the Minister would take a closer look at the case.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-20/immigration-department-threatens-to-deport-parents-of-three/6959406>

31. New Zealanders who failed Australia's 'character test' returned: Peter Dutton

Sydney Morning Herald
November 19, 2015 - 3:25PM
Nicole Hasham

Twelve New Zealanders have left Australia after failing a "character test" as the federal government cracks down on foreign criminals.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton confirmed the New Zealanders had been flown out and "are off our soil". It is understood they had been detained at Christmas Island, where riots broke out earlier this month, and returned voluntarily.

As of August 31, 184 New Zealanders were being held in Australian detention centres. Up to 1000 are believed to be in line for deportation. Some have lived in Australia most of their lives.

It follows recent laws allowing for the mandatory cancellation of visas for foreigners sentenced to at least one year's jail, or convicted of sexual offences against children.

The detention prompted consternation from the New Zealand government and Prime Minister John Key confronted Malcolm Turnbull over the issue last month during a visit to that country.

New Zealand's Minister of Internal Affairs Peter Dunne wrote this month that Australia's leaders say their Trans-Tasman neighbours are "family" but were treating New Zealanders awaiting deportation "in a way that is appalling".

He described Mr Dutton and others in the Australian government as "villains" for promoting savage immigration policies.

Mr Dutton told 2GB radio's Ray Hadley on Thursday that 12 New Zealanders had their visas cancelled.

"We've done a lot of work with the Key government and we have put in place an arrangement where we can return them," he said.

Asked about reports that national security officials recently detected "chatter" about a potential terrorist attack at Canberra's Parliament House, Mr Dutton said the building was "safe".

"The federal police have stepped up their presence at Parliament House because literally hundreds of thousands of Australians come and visit, school kids visit every day to Parliament House, so we need to make sure that it's secure," he said.

"The security upgrades that have taken place at Parliament House have been pretty significant over the course of the last couple of years so I think it's as safe as any place can be in the circumstances.

"It's a pretty tough situation that everyone is facing and the police are working flat out to make sure they can neutralise these threats."

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/kiwis-who-failed-the-character-test-returned-peter-dutton-20151119-gl2vfy.html>

32. First New Zealanders deported from Australia under tough new immigration rules

ABC News Online

By political reporter Francis Keany

First posted Thu 19 Nov 2015, 9:24am

Updated Thu 19 Nov 2015, 9:34am

The Federal Government has confirmed 12 New Zealanders who had their Australian visas cancelled have been deported.

The group were flown on a chartered flight from Melbourne and landed at Auckland Airport this morning.

Police are interviewing the individuals before they are released into the community under supervision.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton told Macquarie Radio they were the first New Zealanders deported under tough new immigration laws.

"The first 12 people that have had their visas cancelled under Section 501 of the [Migration] Act, so they've failed the character test, they've gone back to New Zealand," he said.

"We've done a lot of work with the [John] Key government and we have put in place an arrangement where we can return them.

"So, they're off our soil and they're back in New Zealand."

New Zealand parliament passed legislation this week that would ensure offenders who are deported back home are put under similar supervision conditions as those on parole from New Zealand prisons.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-19/first-new-zealanders-deported-under-new-immigration-rules/6954574>