

# Project SafeCom News and Updates

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# 1. How political leadership, and social media, changed Australia's toxic refugee debate

Sydney Morning Herald  
September 12, 2015 - 9:00PM  
Kirsty Needham

The huge response on Mike Baird's Facebook page was pipped only by the 15,422 "likes" of his victory smooch with wife Kerryn on election night.

Baird's heartfelt plea last Saturday for Australia to do more to assist Syrian refugees, because "stopping the boats can't be where this ends", swiftly elicited 14,690 thumbs up.

It dwarfed voter reaction to the NSW Premier's regular posts on sport, sky trains, even sharks.

On The Sun-Herald's website, a report of Baird's call for Prime Minister Tony Abbott to lift the nation's humanitarian intake, and do it now, was shared by another 14,000 people.

Many thanked Baird for showing true leadership and courage. Baird's intervention into federal politics had tapped a nerve.

He later said the emotional Facebook message wasn't meant to criticise Abbott, but rather encourage him to shift policy. The leaders live in each other's electorates.

Baird agonised over the wording, and in a last minute revision, changed the line that it was "a good thing that we don't have children drowning at sea trying to get to our shores" – because of Abbott's signature policy – to "a great thing".

But his call to "do more" came as the Prime Minister appeared steadfast on a course of doing little.

The PM had missed that the public mood had changed.

As the Facebook post built momentum, Baird and Abbott exchanged text messages. The calls for action widened. Within five days came the stunning policy reversal.

Abbott's decision to accept 12,000 Syrian refugees for permanent resettlement, above the annual quota and eclipsing Labor's call for 10,000 refugees, was a surprise, even to Baird.

What just happened? A popular leader (Baird) was prepared to take a risk on a controversial issue because it was the right thing to do. He didn't so much bring the public with him - as it turns out, they were already there.

But something else happened.

The social media reaction to the Border Force fiasco had been dismissed a week earlier by the Abbott Government as hysterical. Fairfax and the ABC were scolded for following the "elites" on Twitter, and letting the tail wag the dog. The inference was politicians should ignore it.

Yet Baird deliberately chose to make his strong views on the refugee crisis known through social media.

There were clear advantages. He was taking a risk challenging Abbott's core border protection policy. On Facebook, people could read the statement in full, without the filter of the media. Prominent media reports drew attention to the post.

Most powerful was the response. The speed with which Baird's message was shared showed this was something that people cared deeply about.

The image of the drowned Syrian toddler Aylan Kurdi had disturbed many, like Baird, and they wanted politicians to do something about it.

This reaction couldn't be dismissed by an under-fire federal government as part of a media outlet's "jihad".

In 2012, when US President Barack Obama was re-elected for a second term, his tweeted message of thanks to 22 million followers, as he hugged his wife, became the most retweeted on record.

Baird is nowhere close. But last Saturday, on Facebook, he cracked it.

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/how-political-leadership-and-social-media-changed-australias-toxic-refugee-debate-20150911-gjkr5h.html>

## 2. The Saturday Paper: How Syria changed the refugee debate

The extraordinary crisis in Europe has thoroughly reshaped the language and terms of the refugee debate in Australia.

The Saturday Paper  
Sep 12, 2015  
Sophie Morris

For Prime Minister Tony Abbott this week was supposed to be all about war, as he prepared to announce that Australia would join air strikes over Syria.

Abbott was poised for a Churchill moment, ready to deploy more wartime rhetoric as Australian pilots rained down bombs on the “death cult”. Instead, compassion trumped conflict. Or at least secured equal billing.

After dithering for a few days about lifting Australia’s refugee intake, Abbott won praise from Labor and even the Greens for his government’s decision to welcome an extra 12,000 refugees who have fled the conflict in Syria and Iraq and are waiting in camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.

They are expected to begin arriving by year’s end, following health, security and character checks. Unlike the 4000 Kosovars whom the Howard government offered temporary haven in the 1990s, these Syrian refugees will be allowed to stay permanently.

The air strikes against Syria will go ahead, too, broadening the existing campaign of bombing targets in Iraq. Indeed, they may have already begun. Abbott was keen to see bombs dropped on terrorist strongholds in Syria within a week.

Politicians from both major parties expressed hope that this week marked a shift away from the toxic and divisive nature of the political debate about immigration since the Tampa affair in 2001.

“This week we have seen the politics of the immigration debate characterised by generosity,” Labor’s immigration spokesman Richard Marles told The Saturday Paper. “That is a wonderful development and a sea change in the way we have considered immigration in recent times.”

Liberal backbencher Craig Laundy, who had urged the government to accept more refugees, told a forum on Wednesday night that he hoped it was “the start of a conversation at a much more mature level that enables members of parliament to engage with the public in a way that transcends partisan politics and focuses on results”.

Make no mistake, though, if compassion is in fashion, it has its limits. It does not extend yet to those who arrive by boat, which includes some 30,000 people in Australia awaiting processing of their claims, and almost 1800 people still detained on Nauru and Manus Island. The Syrians among them will not be offered refuge. Those already in Australia can hope for a temporary visa at best. Those in offshore camps have little hope of anything.

On Thursday, Abbott described Australia as a country with “a big heart, as well as a strong arm”. He remained adamant that those who arrived by boat were not welcome. “We will never ever do anything that encourages the evil trade of people smuggling and all of those who have come to Australia by boat are here as a result of people smuggling,” he said.

### ***“Moral moment”***

Much has been made of Abbott misreading the mood and missing the “moral moment” to show leadership after pictures were published of a three-year-old Syrian boy, Aylan Kurdi, whose body washed up on a Turkish beach after he drowned trying to reach Greece.

Others were quicker to sense and respond to the community’s desire to help. As Labor leader Bill Shorten urged the government on Monday to accept 10,000 refugees from Syria, NSW Premier Mike Baird suggested more might be needed. “Stopping the boats can’t be where this ends,” Baird wrote on his Facebook page. “It is surely where humanitarianism begins.”

Full story at <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/immigration/2015/09/12/how-syria-changed-the-refugee-debate/14419800002372>

## 3. Paul Bongiorno: Abbott's borderline success on Syria refugees

The Saturday Paper  
Sep 12, 2015  
Paul Bongiorno

[....]

In an effort to be seen to be doing something, Abbott despatched Immigration Minister Peter Dutton to Europe to find out firsthand what the UN needed. Taxpayers could have been spared the airfare to find out what was needed was more countries such as Australia taking more refugees. The agency had already documented that it was running out of funds for the provision of services to the burgeoning refugee camps. By midweek Abbott went higher than Labor but fell short of the Greens with an emergency intake of 12,000. He fell well short of the \$100 million in aid, however, only putting an extra \$40 million on the table.

But this issue can never shake its racist and xenophobic undertones. Abbott is to be commended for taking no notice of those in his party room on the extreme right. Liberal senator Cory Bernardi sought to minimise the plight of the father whose family had been drowned. "They were in no danger in Turkey," Bernardi told the senate. He only wanted to go to Europe for dental care. As if proper healthcare isn't a human necessity. As if being able to legally work to provide for your family isn't a valid aspiration. Like thousands of others he had refuge there, sure, but with no work rights or settlement rights. Many who fled the onslaught in the past four years are giving up hope of ever being able to safely return home.

Bernardi's colleague, the Liberal National member for Dawson, based in Mackay, Queensland, George Christensen, went on Twitter to play very ugly politics: "Liberal National Plan, Job-creating free trade giving Aussies jobs first. Labor Plan, 20,000 plus refugees a year who can take Aussie jobs."

Government leaders in the days leading up to the announcement were sending a strong message that preference would be given to persecuted religious minorities. Some on the Liberal right chimed in, emphasising that the most persecuted are Christians. This sent alarm bells ringing in the Muslim community. The Grand Mufti, Dr Ibrahim Abu Mohammed, told Guardian Australia that it reinforces the message that Muslims "are always going to be vilified in the Australian community".

Abbott went some of the way to alleviate these concerns. He dropped reference to "religious" minorities when he stressed refuge would be given to women, children and families. When pushed about minorities, he was careful to accurately include Muslims: "There are Muslim minorities, Druze, Turkmen, Kurds, there are non-Muslim minorities, Christians, various sorts, Jews, Yazidis, Armenians."

No mention was made of single men or why they will not be included. Christensen filled in those blanks on Twitter, raising the old chestnut that "terrorists" are embedding in the refugee camps. Demonising refugees has worked a treat in the past; we can only hope the thousands who attended candlelight vigils in capital cities around the nation put paid to that as a useful political tactic.

[....]

Full story at <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/opinion/topic/2015/09/12/abbotts-borderline-success-syria-refugees/14419800002362>

#### **4. Lenore Taylor: Refugee response shows that when voters speak loudly, politicians listen**

Where will it end, this unleashing of compassion towards people previously characterised as immigrants whose flight had to be stopped at all costs?

The Guardian  
Lenore Taylor  
Wednesday 9 September 2015 16.27 AEST

There's a lesson here. When voters speak loudly enough, politicians listen. The Abbott government has come a long way since Sunday, when the prime minister suggested any additional intake of Syrian refugees would have to come from within the existing humanitarian intake.

Three days and thousands of Australian voices raised in protest later, he announced that we will welcome an additional 12,000 people fleeing the Syrian-Iraq conflict, offering them a permanent home and normal resettlement assistance. On top, we will provide \$44m in extra assistance to those facing a winter in refugee camps.

Suggestions that the haven we offer should be temporary were ignored. So was the idea, floated by some frontbenchers, that our compassion should somehow discriminate according to religion. This decision was not diminished by such meanness.

The backbenchers who warned the prime minister that the "heartbeat of the community" was shifting in response to the images flooding in from Europe are delighted.

Beyond this immediate change of heart, the longer term implications are interesting.

Where will it end, this unleashing of compassion towards refugees – previously characterised as people whose flight had to be stopped, at all costs, by secret military-style operations, people who should be "waiting" in a non-existent "queue"?

When the Howard government “stopped the boats” and the fears of “loss of control over our borders” subsided, the voices of moderate Liberals broke through and by 2005 people like Petro Georgiou and Judi Moylan forced a softening of the detention system, including allowing people on temporary visas to stay permanently.

In 2015 the 30,000 asylum seekers who have been waiting in limbo inside Australia have barely begun their processing and, at the moment, a temporary protection visa is all they can hope for, even if they are successful. Those on Manus Island and Nauru have even bleaker prospects.

The Lonergan Research poll reported by Guardian Australia shows a clear majority of Australians support the idea that we should show more generosity to Syrian asylum seekers but also that a clear majority continue to support Operation Sovereign Borders.

It was pictures – of mass human exodus, of tiny Alan Kurdi washed up on a beach like jetsam – that prompted the outpouring of compassion that seemed to change the Abbott government’s mind on the Syrian crisis. It was stories – of mental health impacts and unremitting despair – that forced the 2005 change on temporary protection visas. “Operational secrecy” means the pictures and stories of those caught up in Australia’s current border policies are difficult to provide.

But we have seen once again how human stories can move public opinion and prompt political action.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/sep/09/refugee-response-shows-that-when-voters-speak-loudly-politicians-listen>

## **5. Jason Wilson: The refugee crisis has opened an ugly fissure in Australia's rightwing politics**

A single image of a drowned boy half a world away has already split Australia’s ‘stop the boats’ consensus. Tony Abbott can only paper over it for so long

The Guardian  
Jason Wilson  
Thursday 10 September 2015 13.14 AEST

We’re used to refugees splitting the parliamentary left in Australia. For nearly 20 years, we’ve watched as Labor is torn between its vestigial principles and its existential dread of the Coalition’s right-populism, perennially unable to hold a consistent position.

This, among other failures, has seen them permanently cede a quarter of their primary vote to the Greens, who say the right things but haven’t been able to do much to change policy or its implementation.

As a result there’s been no effective institutional opposition to the general drift of refugee policy towards abject cruelty, undemocratic secrecy, and tinpot neocolonialism.

In Labor’s case, they’ve more than once hastened our journey down this path. Let’s never forget who started mandatory detention, who re-booted the Pacific Solution and who decided that no one arriving by boat would ever settle in Australia.

But in the last week, the same issue has seen chasms open up in the right. A single image of a drowned boy half a world away has made the “stop the boats” consensus among the Coalition and its fellow travellers appear complicated and fragile.

We can see the problems it’s causing them by considering the public positions of two LNP members of parliament from adjacent electorates in North Queensland.

The member for Herbert, Ewen Jones, has outdone even the Greens in his demands for generosity. He says that we should immediately accept up to 50,000 Syrians. He said his electorate, centred on Townsville, would be willing to do its part.

Jones indicated his stance was based on a change in community feeling around refugees, after images of the drowning of Alan Kurdi circulated around the world.

In Dawson, which begins in Townsville’s southern suburbs, George Christensen is doubling down on his hostility to refugees. He’s adopted the same disingenuous line peddled by Eric Abetz, Cory Bernardi, and the hard right’s media warriors: if we must accept refugees they should be Christians, who are the most persecuted group.

Yet if this concern to rescue their fellow Christians were sincere, it would surely have been a crisis before late 2015. At this late stage the erasure of Christian communities under areas of Islamic State (Isis) control has been virtually completed; in Mosul, the Christian centre of Northern Iraq, the faith has been all but extinguished, its adherents killed or driven away.

As someone who grew up on the border of these two Queensland electorates, I can tell you that there's no magical line separating two wholly different cultures with different political values. Christensen is not hardening his position because the citizens of Mackay share his obsessions, and Jones is not moving because Townsville is an oasis of liberal tolerance.

Rather, Jones is sticking his head up because, like people around the world, North Queenslanders have been affected by the human consequences of the Syrian civil war. He's reacting to, or has been emboldened by, a genuine surge in public comment on the issue.

This development has exposed views like Christensen's for what they are. For a long time, hardliners have been able to pretend that they represent the unspoken views of a silent majority. Now they increasingly look like an extremist rump.

In fact, the way in which the hard right has doubled down on its anti-refugee rhetoric in recent days has been useful, in a way. At last, they have begun to clarify their position on the kind of society they would like us to live in.

And, would you believe it, it bears little relation to what most Australians would accept is ordinary decency.

Along with the usual parliamentary suspects, conservative opinionistas like Paul Sheehan and Miranda Devine have reacted to the Syrian crisis by reiterating their opposition to Muslim immigration.

Devine warned against repeating the "moral vanity" that led to the settling of "[i]lliterate Lebanese Muslims from impoverished rural areas". According to Sheehan, "There is no chance the electorate wants to import the Sunni-Shia schism into Australia".

Andrew Bolt has become particularly florid. On Monday he accused Pope Francis of colluding in Europe's suicide by calling for parishes, monasteries, and sanctuaries to take in refugees. Taking in more refugees from Syria, he claimed, would "dilute Christianity" in post-Christian Europe, and "place Christians and Jews in more danger".

Putting aside Bolt's extraordinary arrogance in thinking he would know better than the Pope on what is good for the health of Christian Europe, it's worth noting that his concern for Christianity here all but tips over into anti-Catholic sectarianism.

He goes further, though, writing that Pope Francis is "the man predicted in Jean Raspail's brilliant and brutally confronting 1971 satire (or indictment), [The] Camp of the Saints".

Let's be very clear: The Camp of the Saints is an apocalyptic novel detailing the "invasion" of Europe by third world migrants, a favoured text of white supremacists. Anti-racism group the Southern Poverty Law Center calls it "a racist fantasy" which "characterises non-whites as ... monsters who will stop at nothing to greedily and violently seize what rightfully belongs to the white man".

Raspail cast tolerant, liberal Christians as the villains of his novel: "thousands of everyday priests, ready and willing to poison the minds of millions of idiots. Bleeding hearts puking out gospels galore."

In 1982, Raspail said that "the proliferation of other races dooms our race, my race, to extinction if we hold fast to our present moral principles".

It's an explicitly racist work that sees non-white immigrants as dangerous pollutants, and tolerance towards them as the harbinger of civilisational suicide. The Camp of the Saints is a wellspring of the kind of ideology that inspired Anders Breivik. So why is Andrew Bolt praising it on the Herald Sun's website in the context of a refugee crisis?

The steady drip of Bolt's nonsense has perhaps inured many of his colleagues to just how extreme his views really are. It bears saying that it's hard to imagine someone with these views, these connections, and these sources being employed on a mainstream newspaper in many other Western democracies.

It would be easy to overstate the compassionate turn in the Coalition's stance on immigration. In the global context of millions of displaced people, 12,000 refugees is vanishingly small. But even a tiny shift like this seems to have been enough to provoke figures like Bolt to reveal exactly what their deepest political beliefs are like.

With the illumination provided by this crisis, we can see that an influential group in Parliament and the media publicly espouse beliefs that are deeply reactionary and socially dangerous. They give succour to those for whom racial and cultural "purity" is an article of political faith, as we have witnessed in the emboldened hard right protest movement, Reclaim Australia.

Some of these people are supporters of the prime minister, Tony Abbott. They have in the past and may again induce him to implement policies that reflect their beliefs.

In implementing the most punitive refugee regime among advanced democracies, the Coalition claimed the mantle of common sense and "true" compassion. As it turns out, common sense turns out to be more protean, and more difficult to read, than the self-flattery of political professionals allows.

Tony Abbott may have papered over this fissure with an emergency intake and a few bombing runs, but the split in right wing opinion is gradually opening wider. Perhaps the refugee issue, which the Coalition have so adroitly manipulated for so long, will become an existential crisis for them too.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/10/the-refugee-crisis-has-opened-an-ugly-fissure-in-australias-rightwing-politics>

## 6. Barrie Cassidy: Has the tide turned on how we treat asylum seekers? Not quite

On the face of it the events in Syria and Australia's response to it suggest we're undergoing a transformation in the way we respond to asylum seekers. But while we did well this week, we're far from global leaders, writes Barrie Cassidy.

ABC The Drum  
By Barrie Cassidy  
Posted Fri 11 Sep 2015, 4:56am

Is Australia undergoing a transformation in the way we respond to the extraordinary movement of refugees around the world?

Have events in Syria - and the awful image of the drowned toddler - caused not just the Government and the media, but the community more generally to be more sympathetic and compassionate towards those forced from their homes?

On the face of it, that seems to be the case.

The candlelight vigils earlier this week; the outpouring of concern for the displaced Syrians; the fact that the Prime Minister, after a hesitant start, trumped the Opposition by embracing 12,000 Syrian refugees; the treatment of the story in the tabloids; all that suggests a significant shift in the public mood.

But not so fast.

Yesterday in Port Moresby, Tony Abbott insisted there was "a world of difference" between the Syrians and "people who have done a deal with people smugglers to go beyond the country of first asylum".

He went on:

"...and we will never do anything that encourages the evil trade of people smuggling, and all of those who have come to Australia by boat are here as a result of people smuggling and this is the self-same trade which resulted in the deaths of more than 1000 people at sea in the waters to our north and has currently resulted in the deaths of perhaps many, many more thousands in the Mediterranean."

And to underline the point, former minister for immigration, Scott Morrison, told the ABC's AM program that in its response to Syria, the Government hadn't changed its border protection policy.

He said:

"What we've decided to do is to respond to a genuine refugee and humanitarian crisis in the Middle East ... we'll be helping those who are in that zone ... those who have come here courtesy of people smugglers, there is a process in place for those individuals and those processes will be followed."

That is the Government's view, unequivocally. But will it resonate in quite the same way from now on? Can Tony Abbott in the future exploit the national security issue with the same effectiveness as he has in the past?

Maybe now, the distinction between the Syrian refugees and the rest will be harder to define. Those - in parts of the media - who wish to demonise asylum seekers, might not be listened to in quite the same way. And maybe, just maybe, even those who want tough action taken against those who arrive by boat, might nevertheless think again about the conditions asylum seekers are forced to endure on Manus Island and Nauru.

Significant events can change attitudes. The Border Force fiasco in Melbourne, for example, has created concerns in the minds of some about an uniformed paramilitary type organisation having responsibility for essentially immigration issues.

But whatever the wash-up, the Prime Minister will benefit from the decisions taken this week. It was, as he said, the right thing to do. It captured the community spirit. He would, of course, be given more credit if his initial instincts weren't so astray.

He not only mused about absorbing the Syrian numbers into the existing intake, but spoke quite openly about the "crisis" in Europe, and the comparison with Australia, where "we stopped the boats".

It remains, however, that this time Tony Abbott listened to those in the party who are not of the hard right. He gave a voice to those who are closer to the critical centre.

Without question, the Government this week landed in the right place.

What a pity though that along the way the public had to be so misled about the reality of Australia's contribution to the worldwide refugee crisis.

As recently as Thursday morning Scott Morrison repeated what others have said so often: that Australia is "the single biggest resettler of refugees per capita in the world".

Rubbish. We don't even come close.

Australia has 35,000 refugees. By far the greatest burden falls on the developing countries near to the crisis zones. Turkey, for example, according to the UNHCR, has close to 1.6 million refugees; Pakistan has 1.5 million. A quarter of Lebanon's population are refugees.

Had Morrison said that per capita - under the UNHCR's refugee program - Australia is the most generous in the world, he would have been accurate.

Australia - per capita - does take more refugees than any other country under that program. In fact, since Australia signed up in 1977, Australia has been top three, along with the United States and Canada. But that's because those three countries account for 90 per cent of global re-settlements under that specific scheme. Those three countries are in effect, the only serious signatories. If it's a competition, then Australia is excelling in a very small field.

And more to the point, the UNHCR program accounts for less than 1 per cent of the movement of refugees around the globe. That is such a small share that comparisons - against overall movement - is virtually meaningless.

Yet the Government clings to that figure as a measure of Australia's role as a global citizen. We did well this week. But we are not world leaders.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-11/cassidy-has-the-tide-turned-on-how-we-treat-asylum-seekers/6766926>

## **7. John-Paul Sanggaran: Asylum seekers are being abused on our watch. It's time to put detention under surveillance**

The image of Alan Kurdi on a Turkish beach galvanised the globe into action. In Australia, some have instead used it as an excuse for our barbarous border policies

The Guardian  
John-Paul Sanggaran  
Saturday 12 September 2015 09.00 AEST

Australia has become an international pariah. Our policies and treatment of people fleeing persecution, war and torture are infamous for their cruelty and selfishness.

The number of refugees that Australia takes is trifling and shameful when compared with the rest of the world.

Australia hosts 0.3% of the world's refugees and places 70th when ranked by wealth (2014 figures).

The largest migration of people since the end of the second world war is happening right now. The number of displaced persons has reached 50 million.

Australians will have a lot of explaining to do to future generations on why we stood by idly watching yet another humanitarian tragedy play out.

The paltry offer of 12,000 places for Syrian refugees leaves me incredulous. Commentators praise the government in an attempt to encourage this sudden about-face. They add phrases like "it's a good start", like some form of positive reinforcement for a badly behaved child. What a sad reflection of the state of affairs, especially when considered in conjunction with the eager rush to join a bombing campaign. We have all seen, after all, how successful previous bombing campaigns have been in resolving humanitarian crises.

The current crisis has become symbolised by the image of a drowned three-year-old boy, Alan Kurdi, washed up on a Turkish beach: an image that has galvanised the western world to acknowledge more must be done.

To this effect, the people of Iceland, by the thousands, are offering to take Syrians into their homes. Germans have thrown the borders open and people are welcoming refugees with cheering on the streets and train stations, with food, and with song. The Pope is calling for Catholics to shelter refugees.

It is a moving spectacle of how humanity should be.

In Australia, there are those that have looked at that same image and used it as an excuse for our barbarous border policies. The repugnant irony is that there could be no stronger counter argument to the “stop the boats” dogma than that image. All our draconian boats policy has succeeded in is having people drown in other oceans, conveniently out of sight of Christmas Island.

But it is worse than that.

People are fleeing what Tony Abbott has repeatedly referred to as a “death cult”. Those that do make it to our shores are horribly mistreated. We persist in demonising these most vulnerable of human beings and placing them in unsafe, uncertain and inhumane conditions.

Australia’s mistreatment of asylum seekers is now a fact. We have over a decade of inquiries, reports, documents, testimony, whistleblowers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, guards and humanitarian workers crying out to prove it.

We spend billions locking up men, women and children that have exercised their human right to seek asylum.

We have being found in breach of the convention against torture. We have seen allegations of a sitting Senator spied on. We have seen an attempt to silence whistleblowers speaking up with threats of imprisonment. We have seen the reporting of child abuse successfully voted down.

The Senate inquiry into Nauru has also heard accusations of torture, including waterboarding.

This is happening on our watch. This is our responsibility.

Everyday I wake daring to be hopeful that maybe today the rhetoric will change, maybe today there will be a shift away from the politics of divisiveness, fear, selfishness and bigotry.

Maybe that day is soon.

I have spent this year working to gather the concern that exists in the healthcare sector about the lack of transparency in detention. This has centred on the endorsement of a joint statement calling for the government to uphold a bipartisan commitment to the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (Opcat).

The joint standing committee on treaties in 2009 signed Australia up to the Opcat, which parliament has since failed to ratify. The Opcat is a United Nations treaty that would allow for monitoring of detention centres by national and international bodies. Its effect is broader than immigration detention, giving protection to prisons, police lockups, juvenile detention centres, locked psychiatric facilities, and secure disability and aged care facilities.

It is a lot harder to abuse people when you are being watched.

There is no argument of any substance against the Opcat. It is a mechanism put in place by 78 other countries including the UK and New Zealand. At its heart is transparency. The Opcat is a robust way to ensure that the human rights of people in detention are respected in Australia.

Personally, I would like to see an end to mandatory immigration detention. However, if it is going to happen, it must be open and everything done to minimise its harm.

This joint statement I have been working on already has broad representation from across the health sector calling for the Opcat to be ratified. Never, to my knowledge, have so many peak health bodies endorsed a single statement. It is a credit to all the organisations and those they represent that they have chosen to take this stand.

We need the Opcat, we need it now.

Until we learn to act decently in the face of human suffering – perhaps by watching the example of our European brothers and sisters – this is the least that we can do.

This might be a small step on the path to reclaiming what Australia could be and should be; if we are brave enough to let go of fear and border hysteries; if we embrace compassion as we have successfully done in the past, resulting in great enrichment to ourselves, our culture and our nation.

If you would like to give your personal support to Australia’s ratification of the Opcat, sign this petition\*\* and join the thousands calling for ratification.

\*\* <https://www.communityrun.org/p/Ratifyopcat>

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/12/asylum-seekers-are-being-abused-on-our-watch-its-time-to-put-detention-under-surveillance>

## 8. Refugee crisis: east and west split as leaders resent Germany for waiving rules

Central European nations pin blame on the EU – but their unilateral actions are a hindrance to a solution

The Guardian

Ian Traynor in Brussels

Sunday 6 September 2015 05.12 AEST

Europe's meltdown in the face of its biggest post-1945 immigration emergency is generating the worst east-west split since the Iraq war, when Donald Rumsfeld divided it into "new Europe and old Europe" – his supporters and opponents.

On Thursday Germany and France ordered the European commission to come up with a new "permanent" and binding regime for spreading the refugee load around all of the 28 countries in the union. David Cameron and home secretary Theresa May want nothing to do with the scheme and have absented themselves from the policymaking, carping from the sidelines.

On Friday the prime ministers of Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic told Paris and Berlin to get stuffed, arguing that west European-style multiculturalism is nothing but trouble and that they have no intention of repeating the same mistakes.

The commission has already done what Berlin is demanding. On Wednesday its president, Jean-Claude Juncker, will unveil proposals obliging at least 22 countries with a combined population of almost 400 million to absorb 160,000 people from Italy, Greece and Hungary, which are struggling with influxes from the Middle East and Africa.

The seven countries of central Europe and the Baltic are being asked to take fewer than 30,000. It should not be a problem for big international cities such as Warsaw, Prague and Budapest. But the east Europeans are retreating into parochialism, digging into their national bunkers while nursing resentment at what they perceive to be German bullying.

Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, is the cheerleader of the "Europe is useless" chorus, but Robert Fico, the Slovakian premier, and President Milos Zeman in Prague are not far behind. Ewa Kopacz, the prime minister of Poland, sounds more moderate, but she looks likely to lose an election next month to the nationalist right. Her hands are tied.

When Europe's leaders last met to grapple with the crisis, in June, they argued until 3.30am and dispersed without agreement, bringing Matteo Renzi, the Italian prime minister, to lament: "If this is Europe, you can keep it."

Entirely predictably, things have worsened considerably since then. Governments are floundering, pirouetting on policy in response to front-page pictures of tragedy on a Turkish beach, engaging in a blame game which, coming on top of five years of division over Greece and the euro, is exposing major divisions.

If the euro proved to be a fair-weather currency whose structures and rules buckled and nearly collapsed in a storm, the same is now evident on immigration. The system is flimsy, not fit for purpose in an emergency.

There is no "European" immigration policy or regime. There is a mish-mash of national policies, a patchwork of systems and criteria which are contradictory, incoherent, fragmented. Italy is very far way from Finland, not only geographically, but when it comes to immigration and asylum. France and Germany have quite different historical approaches to integrating newcomers. Sweden and Denmark are neighbours with a close shared history, but their immigration policies are chalk and cheese.

National governments guard these prerogatives jealously. "Europe" in the form of the EU authorities in Brussels has minimal say over policymaking. Almost all power here lies with heads of national governments and interior ministries.

Yet, in this crisis, Brussels-bashing has become routine, the cheap and easy option for shameless national leaders acting unilaterally, blocking every suggestion that comes out of Brussels and then blaming it for the ensuing chaos.

Orbán proved the point in Brussels last week. "Europe" had failed, its leaders had irresponsibly created this mess, their response was "madness". He has put up a razor-wire fence on the border with Serbia and announced he was fasttracking legislation to establish a zero-immigration regime within 10 days, with the army deployed on the border.

Brussels cannot stop him because these powers are national. If need be, he said, he would put up another fence on the border with Croatia, a barrier between two EU countries. On Friday Brussels shrugged and said it did not like this, but couldn't do anything about it.

The all-powerful busybodies of Brussels are relatively impotent when it comes to immigration. For months the Italians, French, Austrians and Germans have been quietly re-establishing controls on the internal national borders of the open Schengen travel zone, which are supposed to be proscribed. Brussels cannot stop them. A commission spokeswoman said Italian police controls on the border with Austria were not border controls.

The commission is charged with policing the regime governing Schengen, but Germany unilaterally waived the rules regulating how immigrants entering the EU are handled. It did not tell Brussels, nor neighbouring governments.

Berlin is winning plaudits everywhere for its exemplary generosity and its open-door policy towards Syrians fleeing war, but Syrians can only get to Germany through other EU countries who were not told about the policy flip-flop. That contributed to the wretched scenes in Hungary and Austria.

Uniquely in Europe, Angela Merkel has seized the moral high ground on Syrian refugees. But this is the same leader who, a few years ago, declared that "multikulti has absolutely failed". She is known to be acutely risk-averse, with a close eye on the polls which have shown her ratings slip over recent weeks.

For more than a year the Germans have been complaining bitterly that people entering Italy and Greece were deliberately not being registered by the national authorities, but simply encouraged to board trains and buses for Germany. Then they shifted and declared unilaterally that Syrians could come anyway.

The commission can propose a panoply of measures aimed at creating more joined-up policies. It did so in May and will extend the effort this week. But they are instantly shot down by national police ministries. As its vice-president, Frans Timmermans, said on Friday, "asylum policies in Europe are not aligned".

The European parliament, as ever, has plenty to say about immigration, but absolutely nothing to do because it has no remit over policymaking, which remains overwhelmingly national. The countries of Europe prefer it that way, while blaming Brussels for the ever-worsening state of the union.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/05/migration-crisis-europe-leaders-blame-brussels-hungary-germany>

## **9. Germany pledges 6 billion euros for asylum seekers; France vows to take 24,000 ahead of EU quota announcement**

ABC News Online / AFP  
Posted Mon 7 Sep 2015, 7:49pm

Germany has pledged an extra six billion euros to help the record numbers of desperate refugees crossing its borders as France vows to take in 24,000 over the next two years.

The move comes after 20,000 asylum seekers crossed the border into Germany over the weekend.

Chancellor Angela Merkel said the scenes of spontaneous solidarity from hundreds of Germans who greeted families fleeing wars in Syria and beyond at railway stations with gifts and welcome signs were moving and "breathtaking".

"What we are experiencing now is something that will occupy and change our country in coming years," she said as French president Francois Hollande vowed his country would take a larger share.

Under pressure from Paris and Berlin, the European Union (EU) is readying fresh quotas that would see the two top EU economies take nearly half of the 120,000 refugees to be relocated under a plan by European Commission chief Jean-Claude Juncker.

According to Mr Juncker's proposal for mandatory quotas for EU states, which is set to be unveiled Wednesday, Germany would take 31,443 and France 24,031, to relieve the burden on Greece, Italy and Hungary, a European source told news agency AFP.

Spain would take 14,931 under the plan, the source said.

Migrant numbers have spiked since Friday, when Austria and Germany threw open their borders and eased travel restrictions to allow in thousands who had made it to Hungary, which has balked at the influx.

Chancellor Merkel's government — which expects to accept 800,000 asylum seekers or four times the amount it took last year — earmarked the additional six billion euros (\$9.6 billion) to house and feed the newcomers for the next year.

"In these weeks and months, Germany is the destination for an unprecedented number of refugees who are seeking protection from war, persecution and distress," the ruling coalition said after overnight talks.

Hundreds of refugees and their children again sat on blankets and suitcases early on Monday outside Berlin's refugee registration centre in scenes repeated across the country.

But the government said the country's economic strength would enable it to meet the challenge.

As Europe's biggest economy, Germany has taken in by far the EU's largest number of refugees, but it has also spearheaded a push for fairer burden sharing across the 28-country community.

But with Europe deeply divided on how to deal with the crisis, the UN's refugee chief said the crisis could be "manageable" if European countries all pulled their weight and agreed on a common approach.

"The European asylum system is deeply dysfunctional, it works badly," UN refugee chief Antonio Guterres told French broadcasters.

"Some countries make the necessary effort, and the effort of many others is nearly non-existent."

He said the situation could be tackled "if everyone agrees on a joint action plan".

## **Europe's share of refugees 'ridiculously small', Turkey says**

Turkey, which has borne the largest burden of refugees fleeing neighbouring Syria, lashed out at the "ridiculously small" share EU countries were accepting.

In a local German newspaper, Turkish prime minister Ahmed Davutoglu hit out at "Christian fortress Europe", pointing out that Turkey had already taken in more than two million people from war-torn Syria and Iraq.

His remarks came just days after Hungary, which is building a fence to keep out migrants after some 50,000 new arrivals in August alone, raised the alarm over the impact of mainly Muslim refugees on Europe's "Christian culture".

Pope Francis urged a different approach in a Sunday sermon, urging "every parish, every religious community, every monastery [and] every sanctuary in Europe" to take in a family.

"Faced with the tragedy of tens of thousands of asylum-seekers fleeing death [as] victims of war and hunger who are hoping to start a new life, the gospel calls on us to be the neighbour of the smallest and the most abandoned," he said.

The Vatican's two parishes will take in two refugee families "in the coming days", he said, setting an example for more than 50,000 other parishes across the continent.

In Italy, prime minister Matteo Renzi referred to the death of Syrian toddler Aylan Kurdi, who was found dead on a Turkish beach last week, to make a passionate speech to members of his Christian Democratic party in Milan.

He pointed to a picture of the drowned Syrian child and said there were "thousands like him".

"We need rules, we cannot take in everyone," said Mr Renzi.

"But nothing will ever stop us trying to save a life whenever possible. This is our challenge."

## ***France to prepare air strikes against IS in Syria: Hollande***

Meanwhile, France will launch surveillance flights over Syria from Tuesday with a view to conducting airstrikes on Islamic State positions, Mr Hollande said on Monday.

"I have asked the defence ministry that from tomorrow surveillance flights can be launched over Syria, allowing us to plan airstrikes against Daesh," Mr Hollande told a press conference in Paris.

"What we want is to know what is being prepared against us and what is being done against the Syrian population," he added.

He also confirmed that France would not send ground troops into the country, saying it would be "inconsequential and unrealistic".

He said it was unrealistic "because we would be the only ones" and it also risked being "transformed into an occupation force".

"So we won't do it ... it's for regional forces to take their responsibilities. France, however, will work to find political solutions," he said.

He said that finding a political transition that sidelined Syrian president Bashar al-Assad was "essential".

"The transition is an essential point. Nothing must be done that can consolidate or maintain Bashar al-Assad," he said.

France has so far only carried out airstrikes against IS in neighbouring Iraq. Mr Hollande said the French military had so far carried out 200 strikes in Iraq.

Britain is also thought to be considering military strikes in Syria, with prime minister David Cameron trying to organise a new parliamentary vote on the issue in the coming weeks.

British MPs rejected such action two years ago, in a decision that embarrassed Mr Cameron and drew criticism from the United States.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-07/germany-pledges-6-billion-euros-for-refugees/6756508>

## 10. Young asylum seekers could be solution to Germany's economic challenges

ABC News Online

By freelance contributor Andrew McCathie in Berlin

First posted Wed 9 Sep 2015, 11:31am

Updated Wed 9 Sep 2015, 12:48pm

Angela Merkel has never been described as a political visionary.

But with asylum seekers continuing to arrive in Germany by the train and busloads, the German chancellor may have found the answer to one of the most intractable and long-running problems facing Europe's biggest economy — the greying of the population.

"What we are experiencing now, is going to change our country," Ms Merkel declared this week.

For Ms Merkel, opportunity has collided with her 2013 election promise to tackle Germany's demographic crisis during her current term in office.

Ms Merkel insists that Germany has an international obligation to take in refugees fleeing the horrors of wars in countries such as Afghanistan, Syria and Eritrea.

But there could be other calculations in Berlin's readiness to help.

Germany has one of the world's lowest birth rates, resulting in a shrinking population and a contracting labour force, raising concerns about the sustainability of its vast and generous welfare state.

Humanitarian groups have praised Ms Merkel for opening Germany's borders to the refugees.

The country has set aside an additional 6 billion euros (\$9.6 billion) next year to provide them with shelter and aid.

Germany said this week it now expects 500,000 asylum seekers to arrive annually in the coming years after taking in 800,000 this year — that last figure almost 1 per cent of the total population.

The current strength of the economy means Germany "can and must cope with this considerable task", finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble said this week.

Data released last week by the nation's labour office also underlined the sizeable shortages in the workforce, with almost 600,000 job vacancies in the country in August — an increase of 15.8 per cent over the same month last year.

### ***Merkel's chance to demonstrate credentials***

In addition, German industry has been complaining for years that it has been unable to find enough young people to fill vacant training positions for a range of jobs.

Currently 123,000 training positions stand empty.

"We are ready to provide all legitimate asylum seekers the chance for rapid ... access to education and jobs," Ulrich Grillo, who heads the powerful Federation of German Industry, said.

Trying to register or establish a picture of who are the asylum seekers and where they come from has been a source of enormous tensions between EU member states.

But from the media interviews with the incoming refugees — many shouting "Germany, Germany" or clutching photos of Ms Merkel — a large number of them appear well-educated, keen to work and ready for further study.

Many also appear young with children, which is a key migrant target group for any nation because they spend money on building up their lives in their new homeland.

The new wave of migrants to Germany comes just as a more stable economic environment in debt-hit parts of the eurozone helps to stem the exodus from nations such as Greece and Spain to northern Europe.

While the refugee drama has once again given Ms Merkel the chance to demonstrate her credentials as a crisis manager after the Greek and Ukraine turmoil, analysts say it is too early to say what impact it will have on her long-term political standing.

At the moment, polls show that a large majority of German voters agree that the country has to take in the asylum seekers.

Initially, the chancellor didn't declare her political hand until she had sized up the mood of the nation to the crisis.

### ***'We can do it'***

Germans are always generous when it comes to donating to humanitarian causes.

Only this time, the recent economic prosperity has helped to create a new sense of wellbeing in the country that has underpinned the acceptance of the asylum seekers.

Analysts also say the warm welcome for the newcomers is partly a response to the recent series of anti-foreigner attacks on refugee shelters.

"We can do it," has become Ms Merkel's catchcry as she attempts to head off criticism from arch conservatives in her ruling coalition over her decision to throw open the gates to Germany.

"It's a big promise," ING chief economist Carsten Brzeski said.

"In theory, we can do it. But I think it requires an unprecedented and lasting flexibility on the part of the German bureaucracy and the nation's political leaders."

Up until now, Germany and the Europeans have tended to cast off Iraq and more recently Syria as Washington's problems, after Berlin joined France and Russia in 2003 in opposing the US-led war in Iraq.

In a few years, it could easily be seen as one of those ironies of modern history that Germany was a winner of the conflict in the Middle East, having taken in a big chunk of the region's middle class.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-09/europe-refugee-crisis-could-be-germany-economic-silver-lining/6760756>

## **11. Australia ready to take more refugees from Syria, Tony Abbott says**

The Age

September 6, 2015 - 11:08PM

Stephanie Peatling and Gareth Hutchens

Australia will take more refugees from Syria in response to the growing international crisis, but will not increase the total number of asylum seekers it accepts, Prime Minister Tony Abbott announced on Sunday.

His comments came as Austria and Germany threw open their borders to thousands of exhausted migrants from the east, and Hungary warned that the number could grow to millions.

Mr Abbott declined to give a specific figure but said it would be "significant", and indicated it would be more than the 4400 people from Syria and northern Iraq Australia took last year.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton will fly to Geneva on Sunday night to hold urgent discussions with the United Nations refugee agency, the UNHCR, about what further contribution Australia can make to the refugee crisis.

"Like every other Australian I was moved by the horrific imagery of that little boy [Aylan Kurdi] washed up on a beach in Turkey," Mr Abbott said at a press conference in Canberra.

"We have always been a good global citizen. Always have been, always will be ... this is doing that right thing by Australia, and it's doing the right thing by the world."

The announcement comes as international attention is focused on the Syrian refugee crisis, which was tragically highlighted by the photograph of Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy who drowned last week as his family tried to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

After days of confrontation and chaos, Hungary deployed more than 100 buses overnight to take thousands of the migrants who had streamed there from southeast Europe to the Austrian border. Austria said it had agreed with Germany to allow the migrants access, waiving asylum rules.

Wrapped in blankets and sleeping bags, long lines of weary people, many carrying small, sleeping children, got off buses on the Hungarian side of the border and walked through the rain into Austria, receiving fruit and water from aid workers. Waiting Austrians held signs that read "Refugees welcome".

Hungary, the main entry point into Europe's borderless Schengen zone for migrants, has taken a hard line, vowing to seal its southern frontier with a new, high fence by September 15.

In particular, Hungary has lashed out at Germany, which expects to receive 800,000 refugees and migrants this year, for declaring it would accept Syrians' requests regardless of where they entered the EU.

Prime Minister Viktor Orban said Hungary would deploy police and troops along its border with Serbia after September 15 if parliament approved a government proposal.

"It's not 150,000, that some [in the EU] want to divide according to quotas, it's not 500,000, a figure that I heard in Brussels; it's millions, then tens of millions, because the supply of immigrants is endless," he said.

In Australia, pressure has been growing on the federal government to act, with NSW Premier Mike Baird and Tasmanian Premier Will Hodgman offering to help with any increased efforts.

Liberal backbenchers Craig Laundy and Russell Broadbent also called on the government to do more.

"I am begging for a response that goes beyond what we currently have in place," said Western Sydney MP Mr Laundy, who applauded Mr Abbott for sending the immigration minister to Geneva.

Mr Broadbent said he was sure many of his colleagues were looking for a response to the unfolding tragedy that extended beyond the existing humanitarian intake.

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten also joined calls for an increase in the number of Syrian refugees.

"Labor believes that we can take more refugees in Australia. We should also be providing greater resources to the United Nations Commission for Refugees," Mr Shorten said.

Labor supports an increase in the overall number of refugees taken by Australia to 27,000 people a year by 2025, but has not put a specific figure on the number of people who should come from Syria.

The Greens want Australia to immediately accept an additional 20,000 Syrian refugees.

Greens immigration spokesperson, Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, said the announcement amounted to "virtually nothing" because the government had given "no real commitment" to increase Australia's overall refugee intake.

"We need to be taking more refugees, we need to be putting more funding towards the United Nations, and we need to stop with the callous talk of turning back boats," Ms Hanson-Young said in Canberra.

"It is crucial that we give an emergency intake above and beyond the current numbers of 20,000, to help re-settle those ... children and families fleeing the war zone in Syria.

"[That would be] a small, modest, but meaningful number for Australia and anything less, anything within the current intake, simply isn't good enough. This is a humanitarian crisis."

Mr Abbott said "no other country on earth takes more refugees on a per capita basis" than Australia.

A press release from Mr Abbott's office said Australia was "the UNHCR's leading nation for the permanent resettlement of refugees".

The government is increasing the humanitarian program from 13,750 places a year to 18,750 places a year by 2018/19.

Mr Abbott said priority would be given to families and women and children, especially those from persecuted minorities who have taken refuge in camps neighbouring Syria and Iraq.

Australia took 4400 people from Syria and northern Iraq last financial year, which represents about 30 per cent of the 13,750 places in the humanitarian program.

Mr Abbott said the Coalition's success in stopping boat arrivals meant the government, not people smugglers, was now in charge of which asylum seekers came to Australia.

"As a result of the government's success in stopping illegal boat arrivals to Australia, we are now in a position to take more refugees from offshore refugee camps," Mr Abbott said.

Mr Dutton will also discuss with the UNHCR increasing government funding to help the agency with the cost of the millions of people who have been displaced by the conflict in Syria.

The national security committee of cabinet is expected this week to sign off on a plan that would expand the RAAF's mission beyond the Iraqi border into Syria.

Mr Abbott repeated his support for the plan on Sunday, saying the measure was necessary to combat "the rise of a new barbarism inside this country".

Earlier in the day Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop suggested that an alternative option to taking more refugees would be the creation of so-called safe havens within Syria and along the border.

However Mr Abbott downplayed that idea, saying people wanted to leave Syria.

"It's a dire situation inside Syria," Mr Abbott said.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/australia-ready-to-take-more-refugees-from-syria-tony-abbott-says-20150906-gjg6ud.html>

## **12. Fact and fiction with Prime Minister Tony Abbott's refugee intake numbers**

The Age  
September 7, 2015 - 7:23AM  
Gareth Hutchens

Prime Minister Tony Abbott says Australia will take more refugees from Syria in response to the growing international crisis but it will not increase the total number of asylum seekers it accepts.

He says Australia is already doing a lot when it comes to accepting asylum seekers, and that "we take more refugees than any other through the UNHCR on a per capita basis."

But is that statement correct?

No.

According to the Refugee Council of Australia, Australia is not the world's most generous country when it comes to accepting refugees. It does not even rank in the top 20 countries.

What Mr Abbott means when he says Australia takes more refugees on a per capita basis is that Australia takes more refugees on a per capita basis through its re-settlement program.

'Resettlement' refers to the act of transferring refugees from the country in which they sought refuge to a third country that has agreed to accept them.

It is a protection mechanism that provides protection to refugees whose lives or liberty are at risk in the country in which they sought refuge first.

So, if a North Korean refugee and his family in China are facing imminent return to the country from which they fled (North Korea) they may urgently require resettlement to a resettlement country (such as USA, Canada or New Zealand) to avoid being forcibly returned to persecution.

Resettlement programs only provide places for a miniscule proportion of the global population of refugees. According to the UNHCR, in 2012 less than one per cent of the world's refugees were officially 're-settled'.

However, when considering the world's re-settlement programs, Australia's is one of the most generous.

According to the UNHCR Global Trends 2014 report, there were 105,200 refugees re-settled last year and the United States admitted the largest number (73,000), followed by Canada (12,300), and Australia (11,600).

Sweden (2,000), Norway (1,300) and Finland (1,100) then followed.

That is what Mr Abbott means when he says Australia takes more refugees than any other through the UNHCR on a per capita basis.

Australia takes one of the highest number of refugees on a per capita basis through its re-settlement program than most other countries.

Shadow Treasurer Chris Bowen used the same argument in 2013: "We do take more refugees per head of Australian population than any other nation in the world. We take either the second or third most in absolute terms, depending on how you calibrate your calculation."

According to the Refugee Council of Australia, Australia ranked second in 2012 for resettlement of refugees per capita, while in absolute terms it came second behind the US and Canada.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/fact-and-fiction-with-prime-minister-tony-abbotts-refugee-intake-numbers-20150906-gjgc7q.html>

### **13. Michael Gordon: Abbott response puts a handbrake on compassion**

The Age  
September 7, 2015 - 7:22AM  
Michael Gordon

Tony Abbott has moved too slowly and too cautiously, but he has at least offered a down payment on a credible response to the unfolding refugee catastrophe in Europe.

It was Craig Laundy, one of Abbott's own MPs, who articulated the public response to those harrowing images of a dead toddler washed up on a Turkish beach in a single phrase: "Can we please do more?"

Laundy's emphatic view is that the Australian response should extend above and beyond the existing refugee intake. It is shared by many others in the Coalition, including New South Wales Premier Mike Baird.

More importantly, it resonates with the broader community reaction to the largest forced movement of people since World War II.

The statement issued by Abbott on Sunday left this prospect open, suggesting Immigration Minister Peter Dutton would canvas options with the United Nations refugee agency and other partners in Geneva this week.

One such option could include offering Syrian refugees safe haven visas to come temporarily to Australia, similar to the program adopted for refugees from Kosovo in 1999.

"The Government is considering what further significant contribution we can make through our humanitarian programme to resettle those affected by the conflict in Syria and Iraq," the statement said.

There was also commitment to consider "further funding for humanitarian assistance to those seeking refuge in refugee camps".

But Abbott stressed during his subsequent media conference that any increase in the number of refugees from Syria would come from within the existing humanitarian program, which is due to increase from 13,750 places per annum to 18,750 by 2018/19.

This puts an unnecessary handbrake on compassion, almost as if Abbott is concerned that generosity will encourage awkward questions about Australia's treatment of those who fled conflicts but arrived uninvited. Among them are many Syrians and Iraqis.

More importantly, it falls short of the commitment Laundy and others in the Coalition, including Victorian Russell Broadbent, believe the public demands.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/abbott-response-puts-a-handbrake-on-compassion-20150906-gjgbht.html>

### **14. Tony Abbott on Syrian crisis: We can and will do more**

The Age  
September 8, 2015 - 7:13AM  
Mark Kenny

Prime Minister Tony Abbott has indicated Australia is now likely to take in more refugees from Syria than the current humanitarian cap would allow while also stepping up its military commitment via bombing raids on Islamic State targets and supply lines within that war-torn country.

Among the options is a one-off increase and/or a quicker transition from the current 13,750 annual humanitarian places to the higher 18,750 cap set for the end of the decade.

Neither the military nor the humanitarian decision has been finalised, with the National Security Committee of cabinet set to sign off on Tuesday on the US-requested mission expansion, and the scale of the refugee response dependent on feedback from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Mr Abbott said that when dealing with the terror threat of Islamic State, Australia would act with "decency and force", and that it would not hesitate in protecting Iraqis and Syrians, and in protecting its own national security.

The prospect of the Abbott government lifting its aggregate refugee intake had been ruled out in previous days, but the colossal extent of the Syrian crisis, coupled with growing pressure from within the Liberal Party, has seen Mr Abbott shift to a more activist stance.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton was due to meet with UNHCR officials in Geneva overnight and is expected to report back on Tuesday, clearing the way for the announcement of a potentially dramatic one-off hike in Australia's 13,750 annual intake under its humanitarian program.

Labor has called for that hike to be a 10,000-person increase, and wants a \$100 million injection of aid to go with it.

On the two-year anniversary of his election as Prime Minister, Mr Abbott struck an uncommonly bipartisan tone in response, telling the House of Representatives it had a "good spirit and a good heart" and declaring that Australia would not hesitate to meet its international responsibilities.

This would include additional funds for the UNHCR to undertake its growing workload.

He described the four-year civil war in which as many as 7 million Syrians have been displaced internally and another 4 million have fled, as "an absolute humanitarian catastrophe".

"We always want to do the right thing by people in trouble and we are not going to let people in trouble down now — we never have and we never will," he said.

"I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that there is an unprecedented crisis. It is, as he said earlier this afternoon, probably the most serious humanitarian crisis that we have seen, the greatest mass movement of people that we have seen since the end of the Second World War and the partition of India.

"I can inform the House that it is the government's firm intention to take a significant number of people from Syria this year. We will give people refuge; that is the firm intention of this government."

Those comments, which have been widely interpreted as signalling an increase above the current cap, came within minutes of Opposition Leader Bill Shorten calling for the extra 10,000.

"Labor believes it isn't good enough for the government or Mr Abbott to simply say that they will take more refugees, but from within the existing level of refugees scheduled to be taken by this country. We are proposing a significant increase because this is a significant crisis," he said.

Government MPs said they were increasingly confident that cabinet would be bold in addressing the situation, although it was not clear on Monday if the extra places would be permanent residencies or some form of temporary protection or safe-haven visa class.

There were also concerns that the government may look to favour some religious groups, such as Christians, above others such as Muslims.

Mr Abbott said: "The women and children in camps, in particular, the women and children from persecuted minorities in camps, they deserve a compassionate response from Australia and that is exactly what they will get from this government."

Several influential Liberals have expressed support for a greater intake in recent days ranging from NSW Premier Mike Baird and Victorian Opposition Leader Matthew Guy to a raft of ministers and backbenchers at the federal level.

One of those, Sydney MP Craig Laundry has been urging his party to do more, arguing, his multicultural western Sydney electorate of Reid would back the plan.

Public support also appears to be high amid appalling scenes of suffering and deaths at sea among the hundreds of thousands of displaced Syrians attempting to reach safe, stable countries in northern Europe. Germany has provided the high-water mark of assistance, accepting as many as 800,000 refugees.

The international online social policy and action network Avaaz says it recently launched a campaign regarding the global refugee crisis and had signed up "over 25,000 Australians" in the past 48 hours in favour of a petition to have Canberra accept an emergency intake of 20,000.

That's the same number as is being advocated by the Greens.

Three humanitarian agencies have also combined to press Canberra for immediate and ambitious action to help as many people as possible.

Oxfam, World Vision and Save the Children believe the country's overall humanitarian intake of refugees should be lifted to 30,000 "in response to the global refugee crisis".

Oxfam Australia acting executive director Pam Anders described it as heartening that the Syrian crisis had evoked such significant responses, but warned it was only part of a bigger picture of global suffering.

"The Australian government's compassion towards Syrian refugees must not come at the expense of refugees fleeing violence and persecution in other countries," Ms Anders said.

"Australia can, and must, do more. No single country can solve the global refugee crisis, but as one of the world's richest countries, Australia has a moral obligation to act, and to act now."

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/tony-abbott-on-syrian-crisis-we-can-and-will-do-more-20150907-gjh0k9.html>

## **15. Tony Abbott's plan for Syrian refugees pits world's neediest against each other, advocates say**

The Age  
September 7, 2015 - 10:30PM  
Nicole Hasham

Persecuted people fleeing troubled nations including Iraq, Burma and Afghanistan would be denied sanctuary in Australia if the Abbott government increases its Syrian intake without raising overall humanitarian numbers, the Refugee Council of Australia says.

Concern is growing that the government measures will pit groups of desperate people against each other, while failing to substantially help stem the refugee influx crippling Europe.

The government has pledged to take more Syrian refugees but has so far refused to increase the total number of refugees Australia accepts, which will number about 13,750 this financial year.

It raises the prospect that thousands of non-Syrian refugees would miss out on resettlement in Australia.

A report by the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, on global resettlement needs in 2016 said aside from war-torn Syria, new and unresolved conflicts in South Sudan, Mali, Nigeria, the Central African Republic and Ukraine had caused mass displacement.

The plight of Iraqi refugees would continue to be a global priority, and refugees of Somali, Sudanese, Eritrean and Palestinian origin would also need resettlement.

Refugee Council of Australia chief executive Paul Power said this nation should commit to a one-off intake of 20,000 additional Syrian refugees – a position also advocated by the Greens.

The Abbott government pledge amounted to "shuffling ... and taking places away from others in need of protection. Unfortunately this is setting up one group of desperately needy people against another," Mr Power said.

People potentially shut out of the refugee intake included Iraqis, Burmese, Afghans, Bhutanese, Congolese and Ethiopians, he said.

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre chief executive Kon Karapanagiotidis said the government's refusal to raise the overall refugee intake was "pathetic".

It's a miserly response to what is a global crisis ... this is a time for opening our hearts and doing our fair share," he said.

On Sunday Prime Minister Tony Abbott declined to put a specific figure on the increase in Syrian refugees, but said it would be "significant".

Figures show the government's promised increase follows a relatively low base in recent years.

In the year to June 2014, about 19,000 Syrians sought a refugee or humanitarian visa but just 1007 were granted.

They represented just 9 per cent of the total offshore humanitarian intake.

This rose last year when Australia took about 4400 people from Syria and northern Iraq, representing about 30 per cent of the humanitarian program. Fairfax Media has sought a breakdown on visas granted to Syrians alone.

Labor on Monday called for the government to make a one-off commitment to taking 10,000 additional refugees from the Syrian crisis, and Mr Abbott in question time said Australia's refugee intake may have to be "further revised".

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has flown to Geneva to hold urgent discussions with the UNHCR about what more Australia can do to help alleviate the refugee crisis.

In 2013-14, approximately 35,000 people applied to the Australian government for an offshore refugee visa, however just 6500 visas were granted.

In December last year the government said it would increase the number of humanitarian visas by 7500 places by 2018-19 at a cost of more than \$100 million.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/tony-abbotts-plan-for-syrian-refugees-pits-worlds-neediest-against-each-other-advocates-say-20150907-gjqrz9.html>

## **16. Mark Kenny: Crunch time on refugee policy: was it high moral ground or low self-interest?**

The Age  
September 7, 2015 - 7:56PM  
Mark Kenny

Like it or not, these are vital hours - the critical early period in the trajectory of a policy challenge where public calls are made, options are either embraced or ruled out, and positions get locked in.

Long-term policy responses within our adversarial system are frequently decided by this sub-optimal tussle of bravado and pride.

And right now you can see it happening in real-time as our imperfect political machine wrestles with the correct Australian response to the Syrian humanitarian crisis.

For Prime Minister Tony Abbott this is a major moment. It is no less than his chance to prove that his harsh policy tomahawk evangelised as "stop the boats", was not the heartless piece of small minded "fortress Australia" it appeared to be.

Abbott has always defended the moral dimension of saving lives through his policy and ending people smuggling. Indeed, he says that precisely because Australia has addressed these problems, it is better positioned to help more people in desperate need.

Already however, positions are ossifying in another direction. While Labor and the Greens, along with a growing number of compassionately-minded Liberals, are calling for a serious lift in our overall refugee and humanitarian intake - following the quite remarkable examples set by Germany, Austria, et al - Abbott is sending out mixed messages.

Encouragingly, he talks of Australia's big heart, its proud record as an international citizen, and our commitment to do what we can to help in the current extreme circumstances. Australia is part of the solution he flags, dispatching his Immigration Minister Peter Dutton to Geneva on Sunday night for crisis talks with the United Nations refugee agency, the UNHCR.

But when pressed on what form our "extra" intake of Syrians could take, Abbott seems to equivocate, raising fears he is already of a mind to rule out increasing the aggregate number, and referring instead to decisions taken last year to up the Syrian share.

What is going on? Presumably, Dutton is not travelling to Europe simply to restate that while Australia does what it can, we were already doing it and that there will be no increase in our 13,500 intake (rising to 18,000 eventually) - in which 4,400 places have been earmarked for Syrians.

While ministers such as Victorians Andrew Robb and Josh Frydenberg are speaking out, embracing the concept of additional measures, their language is careful and open-ended and thus remains susceptible to interpretation.

Beyond the fundamental moral imperative of responding to the Syrian disaster with material assistance rather than government double-speak, there is a practical and political opportunity for Abbott.

It is to demonstrate through his response to the crisis that stopping the boats, as Mike Baird observed on the weekend, was never intended to be the end of Australia's humanitarian response to displaced persons, but rather, a new beginning.

The alternative is that Abbott will lock in behind his defence of existing policy settings, and view any calls for a change as tantamount to advocating retreat.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/crunch-time-on-refugee-policy-was-it-high-moral-ground-or-low-selfinterest-20150906-gjghrj.html>

## **17. Two years on, Tony Abbott and Bill Shorten - threatened species - seek their better angels**

The Age  
September 7, 2015 - 5:59PM  
Tony Wright

Some days seem too easy for sideline commentators.

It was Tony Abbott's second anniversary as Prime Minister, it would have been Bill Shorten's identical anniversary as Opposition Leader if the Labor Party hadn't diddled around for two months figuring out whether he or Anthony Albanese should get the job ... and it was Threatened Species Day.

That Monday also heralded another Newspoll essentially saying what everyone has known for a very long time — that the government would be slaughtered in an actual poll, but that voters aren't at all keen to find themselves choosing between Mr Abbott and Mr Shorten — simply gave the day extra piquancy.

In truth, Monday turned out to be not an easy day at all.

With the world reeling at the tide of refugees sweeping across Europe, neither the Prime Minister nor the Opposition Leader — plus their colleagues and even sideline commentators — could spare time for flippancy about threatened species.

Mr Abbott had already declared Australia would take more Syrian refugees, with the rider, at least initially, that this wouldn't amount to an increase in overall numbers under the nation's existing humanitarian intake.

He devoted several minutes at the start of question time, however, to making clear the government was still agonising over what assistance it might give.

"The women and children in camps, in particular, the women and children from persecuted minorities in camps, they deserve a compassionate response from Australia, and that is exactly what they will get from this government."

He had sent the Immigration Minister to Geneva and was awaiting a report on what might be required from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees before reaching a final decision.

"Any response we do finalise in the next 24 or 48 hours may in fact need to be further revised as this particular crisis unfolds, but it is my intention to listen to the minister, to see what advice he has received from the people on the spot," he said.

Mr Shorten responded seriously, too, urging the government to put aside the idea that it couldn't expand its current humanitarian quota, and to accept an extra 10,000 refugees right away.

He wanted an urgent "bipartisan" meeting that would include not only the government and the opposition, but state, community and religious leaders to discuss what Australia could do.

With Abbott ministers chipping in with their own views — including a re-run of the temporary asylum granted to Kosovars in the worst days of the Balkan wars — there was a clear sense that both government and opposition were genuinely seeking a worthy formula without acrimony.

It looked, indeed, as if Australia's two political leaders were behaving, after two years of false starts, like political leaders.

If this were to keep up, they might not remain at the top of the endangered species list after all.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/two-years-on-tony-abbott-and-bill-shorten--threatened-species--seek-their-better-angels-20150907-gjh10d.html>

## **18. #LightTheDark: tens of thousands gather across Australia over migration crisis**

Candlelit gatherings spring up in towns and cities to remember drowned Turkish boy Aylan Kurdi and call on politicians to tackle unfolding humanitarian disaster

The Guardian  
Guardian staff and agencies

Monday 7 September 2015 20.14 AEST

Tens of thousands of people gathered at events across the country on Monday evening to urge action on the humanitarian crisis arising from the conflict in Syria.

The call went out on social media under the hashtags #refugeeswelcome and #LightTheDark, with planned gatherings in major cities as well as more spontaneous events elsewhere.

Many people lit candles at major rallies in Hobart, Adelaide, Perth, Sydney and Melbourne to light the gloom, echoing the scenes in February 2014 when vigils were held across the country for Reza Barati, the Iranian man killed during violent scenes at the Manus Island detention centre.

A huge crowd braved a cold, drizzly night in the Treasury Gardens and paid tribute to Syrian boy Aylan Kurdi, who drowned during his family's flight from Syria.

The image of Aylan's body, washed on to a Turkish beach following his families failed bid to flee Syria by boat, has become a symbol of the humanitarian crisis.

The large crowd circled a tiny marquee and backed along Spring Street and Treasury Place listening to speakers including two resettled refugees and refugee advocate Pamela Curr. Ms Curr led a minute's silence for Aylan as rain tumbled.

"It's amazing how dark it is up here, but by golly it's not dark down there," she told the vigil. "I can see the hearts of Melbourne are warm and alight."

Curr said refugee supporters would protest "until our government opens its heart, opens its mind and opens to doors of Australia".

She urged the federal government to review its border protection policies and welcome refugees to Australia.

In Darwin, several hundred people gathered at Nightcliff Jetty to listen to speeches by advocates, former Save the Children workers and refugees.

Several speakers urged local residents not to ignore what was going on in their own backyard with asylum seekers – some suffering severe health problems – held at the nearby Wickham Point detention centre.

Local Catholic bishop Eugene Hurley told the crowd he remained affected by people he met at South Australia's Woomera detention centre.

Hurley said he was told by one detainee: "If freedom is all you've known then you've never known freedom."

On Sunday, the prime minister, Tony Abbott, said Australia would consider taking more Syrian and Iraqi refugees as part of the humanitarian visa program, while ruling out an increase in the overall number.

The opposition Labor party wants the government to offer a one-off boost of 10,000 permanent refugee places to deal with the humanitarian crisis from the ongoing Syrian conflict. The visas would include family reunion and community-sponsored humanitarian visas.

The opposition leader, Bill Shorten, said on Monday: "We are proposing a significant increase because this is a significant crisis."

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/sep/07/refugeeswelcome-thousands-gather-across-australia-over-migration-crisis>

## **19. Tony Abbott baulks as his own party mounts pressure to aid Syrian refugees**

The Age  
September 7, 2015 - 9:00PM  
Peter Hartcher

Craig Laundry was sitting down to dinner with his family on Thursday night in their home in Sydney's inner western suburb of Abbotsford when it happened.

His 16-year-old daughter, Sophie, produced her mobile phone. She showed her family the heart-wrenching photos of Aylan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy who drowned as his family travelled from Turkey to Greece to seek refuge from the Syrian civil war.

"The family ended up in tears," says Laundry, the federal Liberal MP representing the Western Sydney seat of Reid. It was a connection, replicated worldwide, a transformative moment of empathy, that moved millions.

"I got up the next morning and I thought, 'bugger it'", says the holder of the Abbott government's most marginal seat with a margin of 0.1 per cent.

Laundry called two of his ministerial colleagues, Immigration Minister Peter Dutton and Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop on Friday morning. It was the biggest movement of people since World War II and it was a dire tragedy. Australia had to do more, he urged.

His wasn't the only voice but the straight-talking ex-publican's is an unmissable one.

Another of the government's most finely-tuned barometers of public sentiment, the National Party's Barnaby Joyce, went public: "Who thinks watching a child drown is a good outcome?"

Dutton and Bishop spoke by phone on the same day and agreed that Australia needed to look at fresh measures.

They took the question up with their prime minister. The government for weeks had been preparing to announce that it would order RAAF strikes on the so-called Islamic State forces in Syria.

It would be awkward to announce more aggression against the barbarians without more compassion for the innocents fleeing them.

As Tony Abbott considered the government's options on Saturday, the pressure built, hour by hour.

The Greens defined the most ambitious end of the political debate. They made a dramatic call for Australia to take an emergency one-off intake of 20,000 Syrians, more than the entire national humanitarian intake of 13,750 people.

But the Greens, who have no chance of forming a government, have all care and no responsibility.

The political party that truly put irresistible pressure on Abbott was his own. The Liberal Premier of Tasmania, Will Hodgman, saying that "our door's open," announced that his state could take 500 Syrian refugees.

The Liberal premier of NSW, Mike Baird, took some soundings of his federal colleagues on Saturday and decided to get involved, too.

"Stopping the boats can't be where this ends. It is surely where humanitarianism begins," he said in a statement issued around 5pm.

"I am deeply encouraged by the Federal Coalition Government's commitment to increase our humanitarian intake over the coming years" up to an annual total of 18,750 over the next three years.

"But I believe we should do even more. And we should do it now. NSW remains ready and willing to do more than our fair share."

Abbott duly called a press conference the following day, Sunday. He announced that Dutton would fly that evening to Geneva for talks with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to see what more might be done.

Yet he specified that while Australia could take more Syrians, it would not increase the total humanitarian intake. In other words, the government would be reordering refugee priorities rather than talking more.

He had opened the door to Labor, and Labor's leader, Bill Shorten walked through it.

On Monday, he called for a one-off increase in the humanitarian intake to accommodate 10,000 Syrians above and beyond the regular annual quota.

The Abbott government will, no doubt, end up doing more to help with the Syrian suffering.

But, as with other examples, like Australia's response to the Ebola outbreak, he will eventually do the right thing yet get scant credit when he does.

If he were more adroit, Abbott could have turned this humanitarian crisis to his political advantage and helped the Syrians at the same time.

His government has indeed "stopped the boats" and this is, as Mike Baird acknowledged on the weekend, a "great thing".

It is because Australia has an orderly refugee program that it is now in a position to increase it.

Imagine if Australia still had the Labor chaos with people smugglers dumping people at a rate of 50,000 a year. No politician would dare suggest taking more.

For well over a year, Australia has actually been one of the more active countries in trying to help the humanitarian cause in Syria.

In the UN Security Council. In funding schools for refugee kids in Jordan. In accepting 2200 Syrian refugees last year, more than any country other than the frontline states.

Yet this is little known and little appreciated because it has been overwhelmed by Abbott's personal image of churlishness.

Australia will have plenty more opportunities to take positive leadership if it has the wit to do so.

Syria has been burning for four years, yet it burns more fiercely than ever.

So far, about 4 million Syrians have fled the civil war in their country. Still, 17 million remain and the so-called Islamic State threatens the regime lifeline, the M5 highway that connects Damascus to the remaining areas of government control.

Only an end to the civil war can stem the butchery and mass suffering. There is no end in sight.

<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/tony-abbott-baulks-as-his-own-party-mounts-pressure-to-aid-syrian-refugees-20150907-gjh22d.html>

## **20. MEDIA RELEASE: Refugee supporters urge Barnaby Joyce to release Villawood Syrian accountant**

Monday September 7, 2015  
Refugee Action Coalition  
Ian Rintoul  
mobile 0417 275 713

The Refugee Action Coalition has welcomed Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce's call for Australia to resettle more Syrian refugees.

The Deputy Prime Minister was quoted saying, "As an accountant myself, when you see an accountant walking across the border into Hungary from Syria when his life has been destroyed I feel a sense of empathy for him."

"Barnaby Joyce has only got to look to the Villawood detention centre to find a Syrian accountant asylum seeker who has been in detention over two years. I hope Barnaby Joyce's empathy extends to him," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"He spent a year on Manus Island and now a year in Villawood. It is time he was freed from detention."

The 43 year-old asylum seeker whose house in Aleppo was destroyed in 2012 by bombs dropped by the Assad regime, is one of at least six Syrians being held in Villawood, Manus and Nauru. His wife and four children remain in danger in Syria.

"We are calling for the government to release all Syrians from detention. It is sheer hypocrisy for the government to express any concerns at all for the Syrian asylum seekers fleeing to Europe while it condemns Syrian asylum seekers seeking protection in Australia to indefinite detention on and off shore."

Around two weeks ago, the Australian government removed one Syrian asylum seeker from Manus to Syria even though IOM (which is usually contracted to arrange asylum seeker returns) refused because Syria is too dangerous.

The Government refused to resettle the man in Australia and also refused to consider any third country from which he could have sought to help his family. His friends have not heard of the man since he was returned.

"Notwithstanding Baranby Joyce's comments about Syrian accountants, the hypocrisy of the Abbott government over Syrian refugees is starkly being revealed."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

## **21. Australia could accept far more refugees than 10,000, Mike Baird says on Q&A**

Panellists discuss response to increasing calls for greater assistance for those fleeing Isis, with NSW premier stressing his state is 'happy to play a big role'

The Guardian

Helen Davidson  
Tuesday 8 September 2015 06.39 AEST

Australia could accept far more refugees than even the 10,000 called for by Labor, the New South Wales premier, Mike Baird, has suggested on ABC's Q&A program as the world reacts to thousands of people fleeing Islamic State arriving in Europe.

The country's response to the growing refugee crisis, brought into sharp relief by the image of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi – whose body was washed on to a Turkish beach after his family tried to flee Syria on a boat – should not be about politics, Baird said, and Australia should do as much as it could.

"All of us have been moved by that image and many of the images we've seen," Baird told the panel and audience. "There must be action. We can't sit here in this country and let those sort of events take place."

On Sunday Tony Abbott said his government would consider taking a larger proportion of Syrian and Iraqi people within the current limits – set by the government – on humanitarian visas. The prime minister ruled out lifting that number beyond the goal of increasing it from 13,750 places to 18,750 in 2018-19.

Labor has called for a one-off increase of 10,000 refugee placements while the Greens have called for 20,000. Government ministers have also supported emergency action.

On Q&A the shadow treasurer, Chris Bowen, said Australia should not take Syrian people over other refugees.

"[To do that] is saying we're going to take less refugees from South Sudan, Africa, anywhere else," he said. "They shouldn't be the ones who pay a price because we're taking more people from Syria."

Baird pushed Bowen on the 10,000 figure and said: "It was very easy to put a number up. Who's to say we can't do more?"

He reiterated previous statements that NSW was "happy to play a big role" in a larger humanitarian response, including with financial support, and noted other states had also come forward offering to take in thousands of people.

The ABC program spent much of its first half discussing Australia's response to increasing calls for greater assistance as thousands of people cross Europe on foot, seeking asylum.

It took place as tens of thousands of Australians took to the streets in #LightTheDark vigils to honour Aylan Kurdi and call for generosity towards asylum seekers by the Australian government.

While Baird defended the lack of commitment made by Abbott in recent days, saying the prime minister had pledged to act and had sent the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, to Geneva, he added: "But ultimately what we have to do is do more."

Dutton will make his assessment on Australia's response after speaking with of the UN high commissioner for refugees, António Guterres, in Geneva. "It is my intention to listen to the advice of the minister," Abbott said in parliament on Monday.

Catherine Livingstone, the president of the Business Council of Australia, supported calls for a greater humanitarian response but told Q&A Australia had to ensure it was prepared for the long-term response, with "compassion continuing for as long as it takes".

The human rights lawyer and activist Geoffrey Robertson said: "We should be taking 30,000 at least because the message is no country is an island, not even Australia."

He criticised Abbott's decision to send Dutton to Geneva "at considerable expense" when the conversation with Guterres could have been had on the phone.

"[Guterres] will be telling Mr Dutton in a few hours what he told the Guardian this morning, that people in its refugee camps ... are having their medical services cut," Robertson said.

The UN has warned its humanitarian agencies are on the verge of bankruptcy owing to the scale of the crisis. "They have \$13 a month to feed and clothe each family," Robertson said. "I'd hope that as well as taking at least 30,000 [refugees] Australia will also step up with a large amount of money."

The Q&A episode was largely free of its usual partisan cross-panel hostility and covered topics including Senate obstructionism, tax reform and the GST, and voluntary euthanasia.

A question on whether Labor would support the expected Coalition announcement of Australian forces being sent to bomb Isis targets prompted Bowen to question what the mission would be. "Is it to degrade Isis? ... is it to bring down the Assad regime?" he asked.

"If we've learned anything from the last 15 years in the Middle East it's that we are very quick to go in but we don't think enough about what comes next."

Robertson also dismissed the idea, noting that the London blitz, which occurred 75 years ago on Monday, had not “degraded” the fight in Londoners.

“Bombing by itself will not destroy Isis,” he said. “On the contrary they will embed themselves with the local people and build a resistance that allows them to fight and fight again.”

Robertson also said that in any “real democracy” such a decision would be debated and voted upon in parliament, not decided by a government.

In response to a question about voluntary euthanasia, Helen Joyce, the international editor of the Economist which has written editorials in support of the policy, said “political cowardice” was the reason it was not yet legal.

She noted law reform in various other countries had been in place for a while, “and we haven’t seen the sky fall in”.

Bowen said the issue had not been debated in federal parliament in more than a decade and “it should be on the agenda”.

He added: “I would guess there would be strong support on my side of politics for some kind of reform here. At the end of the day it is about dying with dignity.”

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/sep/08/australia-could-accept-far-more-refugees-than-10000-mike-baird-says-on-qa>

## **22. Liberal backbencher Ewen Jones calls for Abbott government to accept up to 50,000 Syrians**

The Age  
September 8, 2015 - 6:50AM  
Daniel Fallon

Liberal backbencher Ewen Jones has called for the Abbott government to accept up to 50,000 Syrian asylum seekers in response to the growing humanitarian crisis engulfing the Middle East and Europe.

ABC journalist Sabra Lane interviewed the federal member for Herbert for a 7.30 report about the current humanitarian crisis and the government’s expected decision to expand military operations to target Islamic State in Syria.

I think if we’re gonna play in that space, we should have a significant number, somewhere between, like, 30,000 and 50,000 people I think is something that we could do effectively and is something that we could absorb relatively quickly into our country,” Mr Jones said.

“Make no mistake about it, this is gonna be a generation’s work and more than a generation’s work. I think what you’re seeing here is an incredibly difficult time.”

The total number of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries such as Turkey is now more than four million people, according to the UNHCR.

At current rates, UNHCR expects the figure to reach around 4.27 million by the end of 2015.

“Worsening conditions are driving growing numbers towards Europe and further afield, but the overwhelming majority remain in the region,” said UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres. “We cannot afford to let them and the communities hosting them slide further into desperation.”

Mr Jones believes people in his electorate of Herbert are willing to take people in, especially after recent images of the influx of migrants into Europe and the tragic image of drowned toddler Aylan Kurdi, Sabra Lane reported.

“You forget how light children are, you forget how small they actually are as they grow,” Mr Jones said. “And it’s one of those things that you just saw this poor, lifeless little - lifeless little tot and that really does chill you straight through.”

Prime Minister Tony Abbott was also quoted on 7.30 about the federal government’s commitment to increase the number of refugees accepted into Australia. “I can inform the House that it is the government’s firm intention to take a significant number of people from Syria this year. We will give people refuge.

“We have already taken some 4500 people who have been displaced by the fighting in Syria and Iraq and we’ve now got the Immigration Minister in Europe because we are determined to do more.”

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/liberal-backbencher-ewen-jones-calls-for-government-to-accept-up-to-50000-syrians-20150907-qjh8mk.html>

## 23. Christians to get priority as Abbott faces pressure to take in more refugees

ABC News Online

By political reporter Anna Henderson and political editor Chris Uhlmann

First posted Tue 8 Sep 2015, 8:03am

Updated Tue 8 Sep 2015, 8:08am

The Abbott Government wants to restrict any intake of Syrian refugees to minorities which are largely Christian, as passions run high in the Coalition over the way Australia should handle the crisis in Syria.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott is under increasing pressure to increase this year's humanitarian intake of 13,750 people, but has put off a decision while further international consultations are conducted.

Labor is pushing for an additional intake of 10,000 people, while the Greens want double that number.

Beyond the debate over numbers there is an argument over what kind of refugees should be accepted.

Government ministers, like Malcolm Turnbull, have argued for accepting more Syrian Christians, and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has nominated minorities like the Yazidis.

One backbencher told the ABC the message being sent to the Prime Minister by some in the Coalition was clear: "No more Muslim men".

Mr Turnbull said yesterday he was very concerned about the plight of Christian communities in Syria.

"They are a minority, they survived in Syria, they've been there for thousands of years, literally since the time of Christ," he said.

"But in an increasingly sectarian Middle East, you have to ask whether the, the gaps, the spaces that they were able to live and survive in will any longer be available."

Ms Bishop told AM the Government was looking at the best way to offer both temporary and permanent protection options for those fleeing the crisis.

"I think that Christian minorities are being persecuted in Syria and even if the conflict were over they would still be persecuted," she said.

"So I believe there will be a focus on ensuring we can get access to those persecuted ethnic and religious minorities who will have no home to return to even when the conflict is over.

"That includes Maronites, it includes Yazidis, there are Druzes, there are a whole range of ethnic and religious minorities that make up the populations in both Syria and Iraq.

"We'll be focusing our attention particularly on the families who are in the refugee camps along the border of Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey."

### ***'Persecuted minorities' must be the focus: Bernardi***

Yesterday in the Senate Liberal backbencher Cory Bernardi said persecuted minorities must be the focus on Australia's efforts.

"The Christians in the Middle East are among the most persecuted people on Earth," he told the Senate.

"If we can provide safe haven to them, then I say we should do it. And that is what the Prime Minister has said."

Senator Bernardi also questioned the motivation of thousands of those who are trying to enter Europe.

"This seems to me to be becoming an opportunistic cycle which is masking the true humanitarian need that is the responsibility of all Western nations," he said.

"That is the challenge for us - to distinguish between those who are being opportunistic and those are truly in need."

Government backbencher Ewen Jones said Australia had the capacity to take up to 50,000 refugees.

But the calls for ever larger intakes were rebuffed by another Coalition backbencher, Andrew Nikolic.

"We will do this in an evidence-based way," he said. "We're not going to do it in a way with this rhetoric of trying to out-compassion each other."

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten has cautioned against singling out particular groups for refugee places.

"Being a victim of war doesn't know a particular religion, we're interested in making sure that minorities and oppressed groups have the access to safety," he said

"But if you're a woman facing terrible crimes to be committed against you, if you're a child, a little child, potentially drowning at sea, I'm not interested in their religion, I'm interested in their safety."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-09-08/christians-to-get-priority-in-syrian-refugee-intake/6757110>

## **24. Fact check: do refugee claims made by Tony Abbott and Peter Dutton stack up?**

In the past few days, the PM and immigration minister have praised Australia's record on refugees. But their claims are often contested or inaccurate

The Guardian  
Ben Doherty and Nick Evershed  
Tuesday 8 September 2015 10.50 AEST

Tony Abbott and his immigration minister, Peter Dutton, have claimed that Australia is generous to refugees and that the "stop the boats" policy has helped save lives. Here, Guardian Australia disentangles the rhetoric to explain the facts.

1. Tony Abbott, on 6 September, 2015: "We are a country which, on a per capita basis, takes more refugees than any other. We take more refugees than any other through the UNHCR on a per capita basis."

The first sentence is not true. The second is, but it represents a tiny fraction of the world's response to the refugee crisis.

The vast majority – somewhere around 86% – of the world's refugees are hosted by developing nations, usually near to the one they have fled. The countries that host the greatest number of refugees are: Turkey, 1.58 million; Pakistan, 1.5 million; and Lebanon, 1.15 million. Fully one-quarter of Lebanon's resident population are refugees.

Australia currently hosts 35,000 refugees, ranking it 48th of 187 countries. These are people who are here as recognised refugees but have not yet been given a permanent home here.

The Abbott government cut the number of new refugees accepted each year by almost a third, to 13,750, when it came into office (see below).

However, Australia does, on a per capita basis, take the largest proportion of refugees under the UNHCR's resettlement program. Resettlement is the process of transferring recognised refugees from the country where they initially sought refuge to a third country that has agreed to accept them.

But formal resettlement represents only a tiny fraction of the world's refugee program, less than 1%.

The United States is the largest resettler of refugees under the UNHCR program, taking more than 70% of all resettlements, 73,000 a year. Canada takes the second-largest number, 12,300, while Australia is third on 11,600. Per capita, Australia takes the largest number.

2. Tony Abbott, also on 6 September: "Like just about every other Australian, I was moved by the horrific imagery of that little boy washed up on a beach in Turkey ... Australia is a country which has always taken its international obligations seriously. Australia is a country which has always done what we can to assist when people are in trouble around the world ... obviously this is a very grave situation in the Middle East. People in Syria are caught between the mass execution of the Daesh death cult [Islamic State] on the one hand and the chemical weapons of the Assad regime on the other. It is important that there be a humanitarian response."

An estimated 250,000 people have been killed in Syria's civil war since March 2011. The conflict has both political and religious elements. War crimes, including murder, torture, rape and enforced disappearances, have allegedly been committed by both the military and Shia Alawites loyal to President Bashar al-Assad, and by rebel forces, representative of the Sunni majority. Neighbouring countries and distant world powers have been drawn into the conflict, further complicated by the rise of Isis.

The civilian humanitarian crisis is far greater than those who have managed to flee the country. An estimated 7.6 million Syrians are displaced within the borders of the country, compared with 3.8 million refugees outside.

"The Syrian situation is the most dramatic humanitarian crisis the world has faced in a very long time," the UNHCR has said.

As to how good a global citizen Australia has been in this regard, it's record on Syria, and the region, is mixed. Australia has donated additional funds to the Middle East region (\$100m this year) and to Syria itself (\$155m in humanitarian assistance since 2011), but Australia's broader aid budget to the Middle East and North Africa has been cut by 82%, from \$2.8m to \$0.5m in the last federal budget.

Both Labor and Liberal governments have been actively deporting refused asylum seekers to Syria. In 2014, Guardian Australia reported that the current government was preparing to remove Syrian asylum seekers despite the men being, in the words of one public servant, "quite adamant that I would be sending them home to their death".

Recordings obtained by Guardian Australia also revealed the Australian government told Syrians on Manus Island they would be passing on their details to the Syrian consulate if they opted to return.

3. Immigration minister Peter Dutton on 4 September: "As soon as we were elected the Coalition government implemented strong policies to put the people smugglers out of business and end the deaths at sea. Our policies are lawful. They are safe. And they work. They save lives."

The much-trumpeted success of the "stop the boats" policy is contested.

Boats are being stopped – Australia has stopped 20 boatloads of asylum seekers since December 2013, and the rate of boats attempting to arrive has slowed dramatically.

But boats have not "stopped". People continue to attempt to come to Australia by boat: two have been stopped in the past three months alone.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of people continue to seek asylum by sea in Australia's region.

In south-east Asia last year, 63,000 people travelled irregularly by sea to seek asylum, and at least 750 are believed to have drowned.

Australia-style policies of boat turnbacks have this year been employed by other nations, including Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, which led to the situation of nearly 8,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants being stranded at sea in vessels that the UN feared would become "floating coffins", because they were unable to land anywhere. Asylum seekers on board fought each other to death over dwindling food and water supplies, according to observers.

There are also questions over how legal Australia's stop-the-boat practices are.

It is not legal for Australia to intercept, detain or "turn back" boats in international waters.

It is also not legal for Australia to turn back boats (from within Australian waters) if that would send a person back to a place where they faced persecution (the non-refoulement principle under the 1951 refugees convention), or back to a place which does not provide effective refugee protection (such as non-refugee convention countries like Indonesia and Malaysia).

The high court found Australia's practice of "screening at sea" asylum seekers' claims for protection was legal. However, the UNHCR says it has "deep concerns" about the process.

4. Peter Dutton, also on 4 September: "Because of the success of our policy in restoring the integrity of our borders, the Coalition government is increasing our offshore humanitarian program by almost 40%. By 2018-19 places in resettlement program will increase to 18,750."

The 18,750 is not an increase, it is a decrease on the figures of recent years.

In 2012, Australia accepted 20,019 refugees (this figure was an unusual spike on previous years). The Abbott government cut that number in 2013 to 13,750. The government has vowed to increase the number of refugees accepted to 18,750 over four years.

But Australia's refugee intake is significantly smaller, in gross terms and proportionally, than it used to be: in 1980-81, Australia accepted 22,500 refugees, at a time when the country's population was only 15 million.

In 2012, the Labor government-commissioned Houston expert panel on refugees recommended progressively increasing Australia's refugee intake to 27,000.

Visas granted onshore (to people physically in Australia) and offshore (outside the country) are not intrinsically linked. This is a government construction. Australia's onshore and offshore programs were directly linked by the Howard government. As a result, every time an onshore applicant is granted a protection visa, a place is deducted from the offshore program. Australia is the only refugee-accepting nation in the world to do this.

The conflation of the offshore and onshore components has given risen to the argument that people arriving by boat are "queue jumpers", taking places from more deserving people who remain abroad. In reality, there is no queue.

In countries where people are facing persecution, it is rarely possible for them to present themselves to an embassy or UNHCR office (if those places exist). On their journeys seeking asylum, many asylum seekers have come either directly from home countries (such as Sri Lanka) or without passing through any country that offers legal protection for refugees (Malaysia, Indonesia).

Finally, the UNHCR's resettlement process works less like a queue than a hospital triage system, where individuals with an acute resettlement need (severe sexual abuse, disability, continuing vulnerability) are prioritised ahead of those whose need for resettlement is less urgent. At current resettlement rates, the UNHCR "queue" – if no more people were to join it – is estimated at 117 years long.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/sep/08/fact-check-do-refugee-claims-made-by-tony-abbott-and-peter-dutton-stack-up>

## 25. 'Stop bombing, start resettling': Jeff Kennett's plea to 'failed' Federal Parliament

The Age  
September 8, 2015 - 1:11PM  
Latika Bourke

Former Liberal premier Jeff Kennett has launched a blistering attack on the Federal Parliament saying the lack of national leadership is failing voters and the question of welcoming tens of thousands of refugees from Syria into Australia should not even be up for debate.

Hailing Australia as a great country built on successive waves of immigration since 1788, Mr Kennett called on the federal government to quit plans to bomb Syria and spend the money on processing refugees for resettlement in Australia instead.

"This country is a country that has always had its arms open wide. What I see this with this latest discussion, which is based on humanitarian grounds, is actually a wonderful opportunity for us to take over the next three years 50,000 people who are displaced of their freedoms," he said.

He said instead of constantly looking to raise taxes, state and federal leaders should seize the opportunity of boosting the population with traditionally hard-working migrants as a different way of expanding the economy.

"This shouldn't be requiring much debate," he said.

The former Victorian leader said it was up to political leaders to stare down bigots who oppose any mass migration because of their religious beliefs or claims they not fleeing persecution. Liberal Senator Cory Bernardi is being branded an "embarrassment" for saying the toddler Aylan Kurdi, pictured drowned on a Turkish beach, was not a legitimate refugee.

"There will be always be people who oppose, and there are always going to be some bigots, but leadership rises above it and the Australian public is desperately crying out for leadership," Mr Kennett said. "The Federal Parliament has failed, absolutely failed, the people of this country for a decade," a passionate Mr Kennett told Fairfax Media.

Mr Kennett urged opponents to "open their eyes": "I say to those Australians who are expressing anti views, open your eyes, look around you. Look in hospitals, without our immigration programs many of these institutions could not operate."

Cabinet's National Security Committee meets on Tuesday to finalise plans to authorise air strikes on ISIS targets in Syria.

But Mr Kennett said military action was not the right response for Australia.

"It's too far away, we haven't got a military force of substance," he said.

"So for goodness sake, spend that money on setting up the camps to process these people and bring back 50,000 who want a new life and new hope."

Mr Kennett dismissed suggestions that Australia lacks the infrastructure to house 50,000 refugees and said migrants traditionally worked harder than locally born Australians and pointed the effect the Vietnamese influx in the 1970s had in regenerating Sydney and Melbourne.

The federal opposition is calling for an emergency one-off 10,000 increase to the intake along with \$100 million funding for the UNHCR.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop is suggesting the Coalition could agree to offering refugees a mix of temporary and permanent protection visas. Mr Kennett is the third state Liberal voice to call for greater humanitarian action, in sharp contrast with Mr Abbott's response, which will be finalised when the Immigration Minister Peter Dutton returns from Geneva, where he has been holding talks with the UNHCR.

Mr Abbott backs accepting more Syrian refugees but only if they are contained within the current humanitarian intake of 13,750 that is scheduled to increase by 5000 in 2018.

New South Wales Premier Mike Baird also wants the federal government to do "more" and promised his state "remains ready and willing to do more than our fair share."

Victorian Liberal leader Matthew Guy has also called for Australia to accept refugees above the current intake and has suggested the Point Nepean barracks could be used to house Syrian refugees.

Mr Kennett said the Federal Parliament's failure over the past 10 years had made State Parliaments look good.

"Right now the state of Australian Parliament makes every State Parliament looks good and it has never been the case before," he said.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/stop-bombing-start-resettling-jeff-kennetts-plea-to-failed-federal-parliament-20150908-gjhi6h.html>

## **26. MEDIA RELEASE: Manus asylum seekers appeal to Europe for help**

MANUS ASYLUM SEEKERS APPEAL TO EUROPE FOR HELP --- FREE THE SYRIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS

Tuesday September 8, 2015  
Refugee Action Coalition  
Ian Rintoul  
mobile 0417 275 713

An appeal for help from Europeans and European countries has been signed by over 100 asylum seekers in detention on Manus Island (attached and text below. Full letter with signatures is available on request).

Among other things, the Manus Island appeal says, " We have fled war and persecution just like the asylum seekers in Europe. We need safety and resettlement," and requests European countries to "to urge the Australia government to cease the illegal detention of us".

Almost 1000 refugees and asylum seekers are indefinitely detained on Manus Island. A similar number, including families and children are on Nauru.

"It is astonishing that there has among the calls to action over the European crisis, there has been no mention of the asylum seekers that are the victims of the government's mandatory and offshore detention regime," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"There are Syrian asylum seekers in Villawood, Manus and Nauru, who have been held in detention for over two years while their families were bombed in Syria.

"It will be darkly ironic if Australia agrees to bring asylum seekers from Syria while Syrian asylum seekers languish in Australian detention centres. The dead boy on the Turkish beach could just as easily have been the child of an asylum seeker in detention in Australia.

"It is shocking that the Prime Minister could play to anti-Muslim sentiments by suggesting that Christians would be the first to be selected from Syria. It is not just racist, and an explicit break from the pretence of a non-discriminatory humanitarian policy, it is hypocritical. There are plenty of Christians in Australian detention centres also being persecuted by this government.

"The callous indifference being shown by the Abbott government to the asylum seekers in Europe is a product of the brutal, anti-refugee policies it enforces in Australia."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

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APPEAL FROM ASYLUM SEEKERS ON MANUS ISLAND:

This is a letter from Australia's asylum seekers to Europeans and European governments:

While your countries have been faced with the critical and difficult crisis due to the constant flow of war-torn people, and all the world is witnessing that the Europe is endeavouring to exercise its humane and moral responsibilities through providing hundreds of thousands of refugees with protection, the Australian government has imprisoned us, 900 asylum seekers, for 26 months on Manus island in the heart of Pacific Ocean.

The situation is utterly inhumane and difficult over this period.

We have been under very heavy mental pressure. We have lost two of our friends -Reza Barati and Hamid Khazaei- due to the locals attack on the prison and lack of health facilities. The Australian government has done everything to persecute us. We desperately request the Europeans and the European countries to urge the Australia government to cease the illegal detention of us in this hell-hole and to fulfill its international obligations in relation to the refugee crisis.

We have fled war and persecution just like the asylum seekers in Europe. We need safety and resettlement.

The Australian government has treated us like criminals and calls us boat criminals because we came by boat.

In order to obtain more information about our difficult situation in the prison on Manus island, please refer to the international organisations' reports on this matter such as reports from Amnesty International, UNHCR, Australian Senate Inquiry, Human Rights Watch, the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment and Punishment.

Signed: Manus asylum seekers