



CARING FOR REFUGEES IN OUR COMMUNITY

HUMANE, PRACTICAL, SAVING LIVES

Ending the cruel detention of refugees in Australia, PNG and Nauru

Detaining refugees and their children in cruel offshore camps or in harsh centres in Australia is expensive and deeply harmful. Long-term detention causes mental ill-health and wastes the lives of people who are fleeing persecution. There is a better way.

Australia's notorious practice of indefinite mandatory detention is causing serious damage to vulnerable people who have already suffered trauma and persecution. By deporting refugees to inadequate facilities in Manus Island and Nauru, or stranding families in detention and in poverty here in Australia, we are failing the Australian spirit of fairness and compassion.

While the old parties compete to punish people in harsh detention camps, Australian taxpayers are footing a multi-billion dollar bill. Only the Greens are standing up for better, cheaper and more humane policies to save lives and care for refugees.

> CLOSE DOWN CRUEL DETENTION TO SAVE MONEY AND PROTECT HEALTH

Deterrents, including expensive and cruel detention centres in Australia or overseas, have never been effective to stop refugees arriving by boat. In fact, mandatory detention has never actually worked as a 'deterrent' since it was first established by the Labor Party in 1992.ⁱ

The current detention regime supported by both the old parties is founded on the plundering of foreign aid, the punitive incarceration of people who have committed no crime, and the re-traumatising of an already damaged generation of people.

It is also massively expensive, with the combined costs of Gillard's 'no advantage' visa freeze and Rudd's offshore deportation plan already rising above \$8 billion across the forward estimates.ⁱⁱ

The Parliamentary Budget Office has indicated that the average cost of allowing someone to live in the general community is \$35 000; compared to \$225 000 to detain a person on Manus Island or Nauru.

The costs of detention are not just financial; Australia's international reputation, foreign aid goals, legal integrity and,

most importantly, the lives of many vulnerable people are also at stake.

The Greens' plan treats refugees with humanity saves Australia \$3.2 billion over the forward estimates. Our plan will:

- **Close down offshore detention on Manus Island and Nauru.**
- **Close down the worst Australian detention centres** on the mainland and on Christmas Island.
- **Establish 30 day time limits on detention in Australia** so initial health, security and ID checks can be done, and periodic judicial review of any detention thereafter.
- **Refugees to live in the community** as soon as possible.
- **Give full work rights to refugees** and asylum seekers on bridging visas so they can support themselves where possible.
- **Fair rate of assistance for those in the community** who are unable to work.

Under the Greens' fully costed plan, Australia would be treating refugees with compassion and fairness while saving taxpayers \$3.2 billion.

The costing by the Parliamentary Budget Office provides a breakdown of savings as follows:

- **\$827 million saved** by closing down offshore detention camps in PNG.
- **\$970 million saved** from closing down offshore detention camps in Nauru.
- **\$925 million saved** by having people live in the community rather than be locked up in detention.
- **\$81 million saved** by not building the two new detention centres announced by the Rudd government.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **\$366 million saved** by closing down remote onshore detention centres including Curtain, Scherger, Wickham Point, Northern and North West Point on Christmas Island.



> CRUEL MANDATORY INDEFINITE DETENTION MUST END

To our shame, Australia is the only OECD country that imposes indefinite mandatory detention on refugees.^{iv} We know full well how harmful detention is to refugees and especially children. Mental ill-health, self-harm and suicide attempts are sad and constant features of long-term detention, whether it is in Australia, PNG or Nauru.

Amnesty International has noted that a 30 day time-limit on detention is broadly comparable with other countries.^v Many other legal experts and organisations have long made it clear that indefinite detention is not legally justified.^{vi}

The Greens have been resolutely standing up in Parliament and around Australia for reasonable and safe time-limits on detention, including moving amendments to the Government's offshore processing legislation in 2012 which were voted down by both the old parties.

> CLOSE THE WORST AND REMOTE AUSTRALIAN DETENTION CENTRES

Detention centres in remote places around Australia are seen by many to be 'factories for mental illness'. These centres are very expensive to run and extremely isolated. The remote centres are notoriously unattractive to trained staff, impractical for supplying goods, and removed from the reach of compassionate Australians, whose regular visits currently help refugees in metropolitan detention centres keep hopeful and healthy.

It is also hard for refugees in remote centres to access legal advice, excursions and medical care. The Green's plan closes the most expensive and damaging of the remote centres, and leaves open or on standby enough metropolitan centres to deal with the current backlog and cater for the requirements of non-humanitarian short-term immigration detention.

> CHILDREN SHOULD NEVER BE IN DETENTION

Imprisoning children in detention is a violation of their rights. As a starting point, children should never be in detention in Australia or any country, except for the absolute minimum period to complete basic health checks, and even then, it should be accommodation which is child-appropriate and not in mandatory detention centres.

For years, successive Labor and Coalition governments have been locking children up in detention where they are witnessing serious trauma, self-harm and despair, and often experiencing these things themselves. It is impossible to equip detention centres in Australia, and especially detention camps in Manus Island and Nauru, with appropriate education and paediatric

care that children require. Even the Labor Government had to bring back all the children it cast off to Manus Island in late 2012 within a year, because conditions were so appalling and damaging to children despite the billions that were poured into that camp.

The Greens are the only party standing up for the rights of the child and proposing an approach in which no child grows up behind bars or fences.

> WORK RIGHTS FOR PEOPLE ON BRIDGING VISAS

Right now there are thousands of families living in destitution in the Australian community because the 'no advantage' allowance is so meagre and they are banned from working for a living and contributing to the Australian economy.

The Greens' policy to allow people to work would lead to healthier lifestyles as people wait for their claims to be assessed, and take the pressure off thinly-stretched charities and non-government organisations. It would also save the public purse. Most of the refugees who come to Australia by boat come from skilled trades and professions. They are keen to make a contribution to Australia.

Without the right to work, refugees living in the community face very harsh conditions and poor mental health. In utter desperation they could be exposed to exploitation and harm on the illegal job market.

People waiting for their claims to be assessed in the community who are unable to work should receive fair assistance. Keeping people in destitution on 89% of Newstart is punishing people for having sought Australia's protection from persecution.

ⁱ "Immigration detention in Australia", Parliamentary Library, Parliament of Australia, updated 2013, http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/2012-2013/Detention

ⁱⁱ See Economic Statement, August 2013, http://www.budget.gov.au/2013-14/content/economic_statement/html/index.htm and Immigration Department Portfolio Budget Statement, 2013.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Economic Statement, August 2013, http://www.budget.gov.au/2013-14/content/economic_statement/html/index.htm. Government announced intention to build detention centres at Blaydin Point and Singleton.

^{iv} "Immigration detention in Australia", Parliamentary Library, Parliament of Australia, updated March 2013 http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BN/2012-2013/Detention

^v Dr Graeme Thom, Amnesty International, evidence to the Joint Select Committee on Australia's Immigration Detention Network, Hansard 26 September 2012, p 9.

^{vi} Submissions to Joint Select Committee on Immigration Detention from; UNHCR, Law Council of Australia, Gilbert and Tobin Centre for Public Law, Castan Centre for Human Rights, Migration Institute of Australia.