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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Asylum Seekers

SPEECH

Tuesday, 27 November 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Page 13468
Questioner
Speaker Morrison, Scott, MP

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Mr MORRISON (Cook) (15:16): I understand the minister for immigration may be joining us for this MPI today, and I know that the member for North Sydney would be keen to know that because he has been looking for Captain Emad just like I have—

Mr Hockey: I have!

Mr MORRISON: and maybe the minister will be able to tell us where Captain Emad is today, given that on the last few occasions he has been out searching!

This is a serious matter—five years of failure that have no peer. Earlier in this place today we were debating, as we continue to debate, the excision bill that is currently before the parliament. Back in 2006, it was the current Minister for Immigration and Citizenship who described that bill, should it be passed, as 'a stain on our national character'. One thing that is very clear is that the only stain is on that side of the House for their failure to put in place effective border protection measures over the last five years. In that 2006 speech, the minister for immigration said that he thought amending the bill was 'like putting lipstick on a pig'. The government's hypocrisy is such that it is now coming into this place trying to use that very pig, as the minister described it, to try and save their own political bacon—because it is this government, as it creeps from failure to backflip on this issue, that continues to repeat every single day it is in office the failures that have put Australia in such an adverse position when it comes to our borders. Labor's failures on our borders are without peer and, without any doubt, they have exceeded our worst expectations. Five years of failure, rising costs, chaos, tragedy and now hypocrisy on a grand scale: all of this has been on Labor's watch.

I refer now to page 2 of the Immigration Detention Statistics Summary of 23 November 2007, the day before the federal election of that year. When the Howard government left office in November 2007, the number of people who had arrived illegally in Australia by boat, described in here as 'unauthorised boat arrivals', who were in any form of detention—including community detention, alternative temporary detention in the community, immigration detention centres, residential housing and immigration transit accommodation, all of these places—was four. Four.

Opposition members: Four!

Mr MORRISON: Four. You could count the number of people who had arrived illegally by boat who were in any form of detention, going through processing, on one hand. There were four. I seek leave to table the document.

Leave granted.

Mr MORRISON: I turn now to the Immigration Detention Statistics Summary for 30 September 2012, the most recent that the government has published. It is a much bigger report this time; it goes for far more pages—there is a lot more to report. Going to page 5 of that report, the number of people in any of those forms of detention I just referred to who had arrived illegally by boat as of 30 September 2012 was 8,987. Now, that does not include the 4,000 or thereabouts we estimate are on bridging visas and out in the community, following the government's decision on 25 November last year; and it does not include the 4,000 that have turned up since that report was published. So it has gone from just four people to, we estimate now—including those inside and outside detention—over 12,000. If those metrics do not speak of policy failure, then I do not know what does.

There is a very interesting chart in that report. It is a chart showing the population in immigration detention since January 1990. If you want to know what lift-off looks like, this is what it looks like. When you get to January 2009, once the effects of the government's decision to abolish the Howard government measures took place, you get lift-off when it comes to illegal boat arrivals. You get lift-off. That graph is included in the earlier reports, Madam Speaker, and I seek leave to table that report of 30 September 2012.

Leave granted.

Mr MORRISON: We have had to produce that result. Over 30,000 people have arrived on illegal boats since this government abolished the effective policies of the Howard government. That is a large number of people. The numbers that we might take under our immigration program may be relatively smaller, but 30,000 people is a lot of people. To give people an idea of how many people that might be: it is bigger than a town like Alice, as I said on the weekend; it is bigger than Albany; it is bigger than Busselton, as the member behind me mentioned; it is 1½ times the size of Goulburn; it is bigger than the city of Warrnambool; it is bigger than Nowra-Bomaderry, where I was last week; it is bigger than Mount Gambier; it is bigger than Gawler; it is bigger than Victor Harbor.

If you want to get another idea of how many people have turned up, then maybe the member for Lindsay can assist. The next time the member for Lindsay, the commander, is piped aboard the Panthers' stadium out there in Penrith, he should know that the number of people who have arrived on illegal boats under the watch of the government of which he has been a part is 1½ times the number of people you can put into the Panthers' stadium; it is 1½ times the number that you can put into the Sharks' stadium, in my own electorate of Cronulla; it is 1½ times the number you can put into Parramatta Stadium. For any major rugby league ground you go to, whether in New South Wales or Queensland, you will find that it is 1½ times the number you can put in it. It is more than you can put into Canberra Stadium, not far from this place.

Thirty thousand is a significant number to have arrived. For the Howard government to achieve that, it would have taken half a millennium, in terms of the number of people that arrived in the last six years after the Howard government's effective border protection policies were put in place.

This is the record of the government's failure on our borders, and it is getting worse. It is not getting better, it is getting worse, because more than half of those arrivals have turned up since the beginning of this year. More than a third of them have turned up since 1 July this year. Remember: on 1 July this year, the Treasurer stood at that dispatch box and presented a budget which said that the average number of people he estimated arrived every month was 450. The average figure for this financial year is more than 2,000. If you were to use the methodology adopted by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship for when MYEFO would have updated that figure, the 30-month average, then the figure now underpinning the budget would be around 715 per month, which is less than half what is occurring, which means that this budget, if anyone ever doubted it in the first place, is blown, and they have blown it on boats alone.

The cost of these increases in arrivals is breathtaking. The blow-out alone over the last four years, going out over the forward estimates, is \$6.6 billion, and that does not include the cost of increasing the refugee and humanitarian intake, which is the policy of this government, to 20,000, which is 25,000 extra places over the next four years at a cost of \$1.3 billion and at a cost of more than \$50,000 per place.

To give people some understanding of the rate of increase: in 2007-08, the cost of managing this issue was \$85 million a year; in this year, not including capital costs, the cost will be \$2.4 billion. This chart I am showing sets out—

The **SPEAKER:** The member for Cook can desist from showing the chart.

Mr MORRISON: the high level of increase in costs, which we have seen to rise from \$85 million a year to \$113 million in 2008-09, to \$292 million in 2009-10, to \$879 million in 2010-11, to \$1.4 billion in 2011-12, and this year to \$2.4 billion—and that is based on a budget which is estimating arrivals at less than half the rate that is occurring. This is a government that has blown the borders and, as a result, they have blown the budget, too, without any hesitation or doubt.

The humanitarian consequences of these failures are the most significant, and we know of the loss of life that has occurred over the last five years—we estimate it to be over 1,000 people; how many it is, we really do not know. We also know that over 8,000 people have missed out on protection visas in Australia, waiting in places all around the world, because they did not come on a boat under this government. These are the human costs of the government's failure over the last five years.

It all results and stems from an unwillingness by the government to recognise when they have got something wrong—and I do not mean politically wrong, because that is the only thing the government ever seems to be

able to come to terms with, but when they have got the policy wrong. And these policies will continue to fail as long as the government continues to cling to the failure.

Labor have decided—rather than to restore the measures that worked, as the member for Berowra was saying just before we came in here for question time—to go their own way. And go their own way they have. They decided to chance their arm, and the record of failure is as I have related to the House: the asylum freeze, the East Timor farce, and the failed Malaysian people swap, which the government itself has abandoned.

The government itself abandoned the Malaysian people swap, refusing to take any genuine action after the Houston report. We continue to make clear our objections to this policy, but the government itself has decided to just drop it, leave it alone and blame the opposition rather than take action. Yet one of the key actions they could take is this. Malaysia has a choice, and the government has a choice in its dealings with Malaysia. Malaysia could sign the refugee convention which would ensure there were binding legal protections in Malaysia. I think that is highly unlikely. I do not think it will happen. The other thing Malaysia could do, which the government could negotiate for, is to introduce legally binding protections in their immigration act. Has the minister raised that with the Malaysian government since the Houston report was handed down? I doubt it, given that a year ago, almost, he told me that they had rejected that notion.

The policy of bridging visas and community release announced just a year ago on 25 November has proved to be an absolute disaster, with over 16,000 people—well over half of the total arrivals—turning up since the government introduced that policy. After being dragged kicking and screaming to reopen Nauru and Manus Island, the daily problems of the government's inability to implement anything effectively continue to be demonstrated, and I will have the opportunity to witness that firsthand when I head to Nauru next week. The no-advantage policy which the government have thrown their arms around but are yet incapable of explaining to anyone also continues to be a thorn in the side of a government struggling and still trying to find their way on an issue where the Prime Minister herself said they had lost their way when she took office. They are no closer to finding it today. In fact, they are further away than they have ever been.

There is a different and better way forward. It is the way forward that the coalition offered when we were in government and it can turn failure around and turn it into success. It can turn it into success with policies that have worked. Those policies still have their doubters, just as they had back in 2001. In the *Australian* on 1 September 2001, it was said when John Howard had turned around the *Tampa*: 'The government is hoping its hard-line approach towards the *Tampa* will bear fruit. That is unlikely given the global reality of 22 million refugees, many of whom are languishing in countries on the Indian Ocean Rim.' Well, they were wrong. All those who said John Howard's policies would not work were wrong. Those who say they will not work again are wrong.

We will restore those policies, and we will ensure that this country once again has a government that believes in strong border protection and implements strong border protection. As we go to the next election, there will be a simple question: who do you trust to protect the nation's borders—the mob who have trashed our borders with over 30,000 arrivals, \$6.6 billion in cost blowouts and carnage, chaos, cost and tragedy to back up that record, or a coalition who have the conviction, the belief, the policy, the resolve and the record? That is the choice. By making the choice of the coalition we can send a message to the people smugglers that they will understand.