



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**Asylum Seekers**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 14 June 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

---

## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 14 June 2011  
**Page** 5858  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Morrison, Scott, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr MORRISON** (Cook) (15:52): The subject of this matter of public importance is the need for a proven, more cost effective and more humane solution to address illegal arrivals to Australia. The government have themselves a new slogan. You will hear it from the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, who is sitting opposite me, or from any other members of the government, every single time they get to their feet. It is: 'Break the people smugglers' business model.' What the government do not understand is that the government are the people smugglers' business model. The government's policies have underwritten the people smugglers' activity for the last three years. Those criminals up in Indonesia and around South-East Asia who have been putting people on boats and sending them to Australia for the last three years have been doing so because of the incentive, the conditions and the environment that the government have created through their policies—

**Mr Ruddock:** Hear, hear!

**Mr MORRISON:** as the Father of the House knows only too well. They are the reason the people smugglers have had such a good run over the last three years.

Any amount of embellishing rhetoric that comes from the minister proclaiming their commitment to breaking the people smugglers' business model must be backed up by proven solutions, solutions that are more cost effective, more humane. This is something the government and this minister have failed to do. Their first approach, their first big project—before this minister was in the chair; it was through Senator Evans—was the asylum freeze, which did nothing more than detain people unnecessarily for six months, expand detention times, increase costs and lead to another 1,200 people turning up in the detention network, leading to the chaos that we now see in our detention network.

The Prime Minister's next big initiative to break the people smugglers' business model was East Timor. East Timor went the same way. East Timor was a farce of historical proportions in Australian international relations. And now we have the sequel, and that is the Malaysian people-swap deal. The government inherited a solution and created a problem. It is a point that the coalition has made many times. They inherited a solution and they created a problem. As I said earlier in my remarks to the House, the people-swap deal is not what this country needs; it needs a policy swap. It needs a swap from the knee-jerk, ill-thought-through measures of this government to the proven, more effective, more humane, more cost effective solutions that the coalition has not only proposed but has implemented—most notably through the Father of the House, the member for Berowra, and then through those who followed him—to ensure that Australia had a border protection system that Australians could have confidence in. Today they have no confidence.

While it is true that this government has been the people smugglers' business model for the last three years, I can guarantee that one thing that will break that people smugglers' business model is an election. An election would see a change, to the policies that are proven, that are cost effective, that are sensible and that the Australian public overwhelmingly support. This government has, frankly, run out of excuses when it comes to picking up the phone to the President of Nauru and reintroducing temporary protection visas. First of all, there was the great excuse of, 'They're not a signatory to the convention.' The Prime Minister said on 8 July 2010, when talking to 6PR:

I would rule out anywhere that is not a signatory to the refugee convention.

As we all know, Malaysia is not a signatory to the United Nations convention. We know that the Prime Minister was quite happy to throw that pledge away, as she threw away her pledge to the Australian people that there would be no carbon tax under the government she leads. This is a Prime Minister who simply cannot be believed on these pledges that she makes. But we also know that Malaysia is not a signatory to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. This is a serious convention that imposes obligations on countries to ensure that things such as caning cannot be indulged in by countries that are signatories.

Nauru has been working through its process, as I have been aware for some time. I visited there last August and the President told me on that occasion that they had begun a process to look at how they could sign the refugee convention. This was never a deal breaker from our point of view, because I have always known that the people of Nauru, the President of Nauru and all Nauruans would treat those who were sent there from Australia to the highest of standards in terms of their human rights. This has never been in question, and the demonising of the Nauru practice that we had when we were in government and the demonising therefore of the Nauruans has been a disgraceful practice of those who now sit on the government benches and those who sit outside this place and have demonised the Nauruans for how things were conducted. The Nauruans are a friendly people, they are a hospitable people, they are a welcoming people and they will take good care of the people we put in their care. Nevertheless, they have indicated to the Leader of the Opposition and I, just as recently as yesterday, that it is their intention to sign the refugee convention. As a result, this government has run out of excuses to not proceed and pick up the phone. The government also said, back in the election campaign, that the government of Nauru was not stable. The Prime Minister said:

Well the Parliament of Nauru is deadlocked and obviously there isn't a functioning government ...

What the Prime Minister did not understand at that time was that we had spoken to every single member of the Nauruan parliament, and every single one of them was supportive of reopening the facility in Nauru, as they are today.

The Prime Minister is purveying this fantasy that somehow they are going to reach an agreement with Papua New Guinea. Even the Minister for Foreign Affairs has said he will not go to Papua New Guinea to try to get this Prime Minister out of trouble, because he believes they have more important things to talk about. So the simple question for the Prime Minister and the minister at the table, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, is: do they agree with the Minister for Foreign Affairs that they should not be proceeding and arguing their case with the Papua New Guinea government at this present time?

They have said quite openly to members of parliament there that, if the great Minister for Foreign Affairs were to get on a plane and go to Papua New Guinea, things might be different. But the Prime Minister, Minister Bowen opposite and the foreign minister are not prepared to do that. They will send the parliamentary secretary to run an errand for this government and treat the people of Papua New Guinea and treat the people of their government with disrespect. That is what we are seeing from this government when it comes to matters in the Pacific. The refusal to pick up the phone to Nauru and the refusal to deal at a senior level with those in Papua New Guinea are extremely disappointing. That is the excuse put forward and it is an excuse that has fallen over.

Then there is the great suggestion that the great majority of people who went to Nauru ended up in Australia. Minister Bowen told Jason Morrison on 9 June 2011—not that long ago—that there were 2,000. Morrison replied:

4 , 000. How many thousands came through Nauru to Australia?

Bowen: About 2 , 000.

That is a quote from the minister opposite. Apparently 2,000 people were transferred to Australia from Nauru. I refer the minister to the statement from Senator Evans issued on 8 February 2008—and I am happy to table it, by leave. It says:

A total of 1637 people were detained in the Nauru and Manus facilities, of whom 1153 ... were ultimately resettled from ...

these centres—

to Australia or other countries. Of those who were resettled ... 705 ... were resettled in Australia—

not 2,000, not a majority of the 1,637 people, but just barely over 40 per cent. This government and those outside this place constantly put this nonsense that the majority of people who went through the Pacific solution ended up in Australia. It is just simply not true. The minister should be honest about it and those outside this place who continue to repeat this nonsense should also be honest about it.

The government also says that it costs too much. The minister opposite said on 10 May to Howard Sattler—his good mate over in 6PR; Howard Sattler is always happy to talk to you, Minister; he loves having you on the program; so does Ray Hadley; he sends his regards:

Well Nauru would be a very expensive option, a lot more expensive than this Malaysian arrangement ...

That is what the minister said. The cost of the Malaysian agreement is \$292 million over four years. As the minister knows, from the same celebrated statement from Senator Evans, the cost of running the Pacific solution was \$289 million over six years. That is actually less than what this government asked for in one year as a top-up to its budget. We know the budget has gone from less than \$100 million a year in expenditure on asylum seeker management to more than \$1 billion. The government's budget has blown out by \$3 billion in this area over two years, and that includes around \$450 million in additional capital costs. This government is going to lecture us on this side of the House that we apparently spent too much money. Amazingly, Senator Evans says in his statement that the Pacific solution is 'a cynical, costly and ultimately unsuccessful exercise introduced on the eve of a federal election by the Howard government'. The department expended \$289 million between September 2001 and June 2007. If we could compel the member in the other place to come in here and give an explanation, we should, because he should describe the \$3 billion blow-out that this government has incurred. Its \$1 billion expenditure has gone up from less than \$100 million a year. So, if he wants to do that, then I think it would be a welcome gesture.

But it does not stop there. The minister knows that he has put in the budget \$130 million on top of the \$292 million for a phantom regional processing centre, which in estimates the government could not say where it was, how big it was, who would go there or where they would come from. They said: 'We thought we could put \$130 million in there and just slip it in and not mention it to anyone.' I am quite happy to say to the minister opposite that I can get Nauru up and running for a lot less than that. The minister has, I think, 7,700 people working for him in the department of immigration. If he were happy to make them available to me, I would be happy to work through these matters. But I can tell him this: I have been there; the minister has not. I know that it is going to cost a fraction, because the minister knows that when we set up Nauru it cost \$10 million. Senator Cook—your own Labor senator in your own inquiry—found that the capital cost of establishing Nauru was \$10 million. So 10 million bucks—it may be a little more than that now, but it is not \$292 million. That is the cost of your disgraceful Malaysian people swap, your five-for-one deal, which sends people over there into the never, never.

The other point is that the government has said that it is not part of a regional solution. This is the great fig leaf that it tries to put over its feign measures in this area. The region has an Australia problem when it comes to asylum seekers. It does not have a regional problem; it has an Australia problem. If the minister were honest he would tell us what the Indonesians and the Malaysians have said about that on the record. They have called these regional processing centres that the minister likes to champion but can never get established anywhere 'an asylum magnet'. We know that they are actually proposing an offshore processing centre in Papua New Guinea, which is not a regional processing centre. They think it is good idea to set up a processing centre in Papua New Guinea. Senator Cash in estimates recently asked the departmental secretary in relation to PNG: 'Are we talking about a regional processing centre or just a processing centre?' The secretary said, 'We are talking about a processing centre.' So what we have from the minister is a proposal from the government to establish an offshore processing centre in Papua New Guinea that will actually be staffed by Australians. This is by the secretary's own confession. I am puzzled to understand the difference between what the minister is now proposing in Papua New Guinea and what is on offer in Nauru. I suppose the only difference between what is on offer in Papua New Guinea and what is on offer in Nauru is that Nauru can actually happen and it can actually start. They actually want to talk to you, they actually want to get on with it and they actually want to look after people. They are actually prepared to do it because they are a generous people who are prepared to just do it. They understand the great support that Australians have given Nauru over the years from both sides of this House. I have just visited a school in Nauru which was built for \$11 million. You would not get that much under the BER in Australia, I can assure you, but they built a good school in Nauru for \$11 million. That proposal, I think, shows the goodwill on all sides of the House towards the Nauruan people when it comes to such projects—and the Nauruan people are happy to help. This is a humane proposal in Nauru because I would know, if I were the minister, where they are every hour of every day. After six weeks this minister is going to tag people, put them into the community and will never see them again. Unless he can guarantee how long they are going to be there and the conditions they are under then he cannot go ahead with this diabolical proposal. (*Time expired*)