



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**BILLS**

**Migration Legislation Amendment (Offshore  
Processing and Other Measures) Bill 2011**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 14 August 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

---

## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 14 August 2012  
**Page** 8523  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Truss, Warren, MP

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

**Mr TRUSS** (Wide Bay—Leader of The Nationals) (16:33): Australians will certainly be scratching their heads today in a combination of sadness and frustration. More than four years after overturning the asylum seeker policies of the previous government, Labor has outsourced its decision-making responsibility to a panel. After four years of intransigence, hollow pride and avoidable deaths at sea, the government has now accepted that panel's recommendation to return to the nub of the Howard government's Pacific solution.

This government and this Prime Minister's judgement in a policy vacuum that has precipitated this disaster is at the forefront of people's minds. How could the Prime Minister have got this so wrong? After Mr Angus Houston handed down his 22 recommendations, most of which support or adopt coalition policy, this Prime Minister capitulated to adopt all the recommendations without reservation. What was wrong is now right. What could not be done now can be done—and, of course, must be done. After 1,000 deaths at sea, 22,000 illegal arrivals and a \$4.7 billion budget blow-out, something has to be done. Even this government now seems to have realised that fact.

All of the angst, the cost and the turmoil of boats at sea, let alone the lives lost, could have been avoided if Labor had listened to the coalition in the first place. When Labor came to office, the people smuggling trade had stopped. They inherited a policy that was working and they turned it into a failure, a monumental policy failure. This is far worse than the pink batts, the overpriced school halls, the NBN and all of the waste and mismanagement. In this instance, so many lives have been lost. So much policy failure has been delivered to the Australian people. Labor stopped offshore processing, they abandoned temporary protection visas and they stopped turning boats around when they came to office—and the results have been disastrous.

The Prime Minister today was implying that it was the previous Prime Minister that had taken these decisions, and of course that is true. But I refer her to her interview with Laurie Oakes on 27 June 2010 in which the Prime Minister said:

I was the substantive author of a policy paper which became Labor's policy.

So back in June 2010 the current Prime Minister was taking credit for this policy; now she seeks to distance herself from it.

Labor put the people smugglers back into business. They gave them a business model, and the vile trade in the lives of people got underway and it grew stronger and stronger. The people smugglers knew that this government was weak and not prepared to deal with the issues but prepared to allow this appalling trade to continue.

The Australian people were crying out, 'Enough is enough,' for quite some years, but the government was not listening. If the Prime Minister had not been so belligerent and entrenched in what was clearly a rolling disaster, the human tragedy and massive cost of Labor's failed border protection policies could have been avoided. For four years the Prime Minister and Labor insisted that offshore processing at Nauru would not work; now they have embraced it. For four years Australia's borders have been open to incursions at will by people smugglers and their despicable trade in human misery. Lives have been lost, Australia's reputation with its neighbours has been trashed and the costs have grown by hundreds of millions, then by billions, as Labor completely lost control of this issue. After all that time and the moneys lost, yesterday Angus Houston's expert panel gave the green light to Nauru and the red light to Malaysia and the people-swap deal. The panel certainly also rejected the Prime Minister's rhetoric on Nauru.

However, I want to note the efforts of the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. The Houston report does give him some vindication. If media reports are to be believed, 10 months ago Minister Bowen took these very proposals to the Prime Minister and cabinet but was thrown out on his ear. Within Labor, he was ahead of his time but I guess three years behind recognising his government's policy failure. In question time today the minister was complaining about the current policies resulting in people jumping the queue for a refugee place in Australia. But

the government were the ones who changed the policy to provide incentives for queue jumping. Now the minister says that this is unacceptable, but they put in place the changes of policy that delivered these disastrous results.

Australians have to wonder why it has taken the government four years to act, let alone the suggestion that almost a year ago these same proposals were put to them and they turned them down. Why the pretence that Nauru would not work? Why the wild claims that it would cost billions to reopen? Why the stubbornness that has done so much damage to Australia's reputation while fuelling the pull factors underpinning the people smugglers' trade? Why all that when Angus Houston's report says Nauru is the way to go and the government so readily now accepts it?

The stubbornness that rejected Nauru is the same stubbornness that is still rejecting other proven elements of the coalition's successful formula to turn around the people smuggling trade. The government has not accepted temporary protection visas, for instance, which are an absolutely key element of removing the incentive for people to come to Australia. The coalition's goal has always been to restore the integrity of our borders and immigration program and to uphold the fairness principles which are important to all Australians.

The reopening of the Nauru processing centre is not enough in itself to stop the people smuggling business. It is important to use Nauru as an offshore processing centre, and we chose to use it because there is a pre-existing facility there. The Nauru government is keen for that centre to be reopened. It is now going to be reopened, but it is not going to be called a detention centre anymore; it is just going to be 'accommodation'. They are the same buildings, but this time it is just going to be accommodation. It is also going to be a 'regional processing centre'. It is still the same island, but for some reason or other now it is a regional processing centre. In reality, it is going to be home for a lot of people for a very long period of time.

It is important to note that in what Labor are now proposing, and the minister said it again today in question time, they do not want any advantage to be given to those people who have arrived illegally by boat. So they are going to have to stay at Nauru, Manus or other offshore detention centres for as long as they would otherwise have spent in a United Nations refugee camp. We all know that there are more than a million people in these sorts of camps around the world. People are spending 10 years or more in these immigration centres. Is it Labor's plan that people are going to live in Nauru for 10 years so that there is no artificial advantage given to them in their entry to Australia? It would have been so easy to reintroduce temporary protection visas, which would have achieved the same objective, the same disincentive, without having to have people live on an island for 10 years away from family and friends.

It is important to put disincentives in place. They need to be strong because this trade is indeed vile and it needs to be stopped. The reality is, however, that that could have been done and was done under the previous government through the use of temporary protection visas and the other elements of our policy platform. Labor instead issued permanent visas to asylum seekers instead of the temporary protection visas that we applied. The temporary visas allowed for repatriation. Australia's obligations under the refugee convention are to give safe haven to people who are at risk of persecution or injury in their home country. This obligation does not extend to the country of haven being required to accept these people permanently. Once their home country has become safe and peaceful again, there is no reason why they cannot be returned to their homeland. Labor's decision to stop issuing temporary protection visas was the biggest single factor that reignited the people smuggling trade.

By the end of 2001 the coalition had introduced offshore processing at Nauru and Manus and temporary protection visas and had initiated policy to turn back boats where it was safe to do so. In the previous three years, 12,176 people had arrived on 180 boats. By 2002 the people smuggling trade was broken. In the six years after these measures were introduced only 272 people turned up on 16 boats. There was only one boat arrival in total between 2002 and 2005. Since Labor changed the policy in November 2007, 22,518 people have arrived in Australia on 386 boats. It was the Prime Minister who was fond of saying, 'Another boat, another policy failure.' Under Labor there have been 386 policy failures. Since the Prime Minister herself came to office, 15,169 people have arrived illegally in Australia. That is 246 boats on her watch—246 policy failures.

It is important to note that when the Howard coalition government succeeded in stopping the people smuggling trade it did not put an end to refugees coming to Australia. Those people brought into Australia by people smugglers were taking places in Australia's annual refugee quota which otherwise would have been allocated to those who had been assessed as genuine and most needy by the United Nations. Some of the people had been waiting in refugee camps for more than a decade and at last were given entry into Australia. Indeed, the Howard years enabled the most significant refugee intake into Australia in the modern era, and there are many genuine

refugees from around the world who owe their current lifestyle and safety in Australia to the cessation of people smuggling in 2002.

Australia has a history of generously accepting refugees. Many Australians can trace their ancestry to a generation that came into Australia to seek a new life and escape persecution in other parts of the world, and in doing so they have made a valuable contribution to the growth and development of modern Australia. Australians remain ready to accept our share of refugees from the trouble spots of the world, but the public also expect that those who come to Australia will be properly screened to ensure that they are not a threat to the peace and safety of our own country.

Julia Gillard has been proved wrong on Nauru, and she is still wrong on TPVs and turning the boats around. As Angus Houston says, it can be done. The coalition has consistently argued for proven policies that work to strengthen Australia. Our policies on the borders, offshore processing at Nauru and Manus, TPVs and turning the boats around when safe to do so are proven to work. The coalition understands that the Howard government's solutions worked then and they will work again now.

In October 2009 I raised concerns about 25 people who had died trying to get to Australia since Labor signalled its new open-door policy on border security. That was way back in October 2009. I proposed that that should have been enough deaths for Labor to rethink its failed strategy. The response from the Deputy Prime Minister, who is now the Prime Minister, was savage. She accused me of a vile and despicable slur. Today, having acknowledged that her policies have failed, I sincerely hope that no more lives will be lost. Yet I fear that, unless TPVs and the turning-boats-around feature of our former policy are included in the new regime, there will still be people who continue to make the perilous journey to Australia.

The amendments that the coalition is proposing are essential to help deliver the effective deterrent that is going to be necessary to stop this trade. Whilst the opening of Nauru, Manus and other places will make a difference, an improvement that the opposition of course will support, unless the policies of the Howard government are embraced in full, there will not be the final solution that we all want. Australia is prepared to accept people who are suffering persecution in their own country and to give them an opportunity to make a home here in this country, but, as John Howard said, we have a right to choose who comes to this country. In association with the United Nations, that can be done in a constructive and effective way to deliver a fair immigration policy in this country.