



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

BILLS

**Migration Legislation Amendment (Regional
Processing and Other Measures) Bill 2012**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 15 August 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Questioner
Speaker Nash, Sen Fiona

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Senator NASH (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (19:15): I too rise to speak on the Migration Legislation Amendment (Regional Processing and Other Measures) Bill 2012. I do not think that there is anybody in this place who does not react to tragic loss of life, and we certainly have seen that. I think it has affected everybody in this place and, certainly, people right across the nation. There is no doubt that this is a very, very difficult issue.

But I think what has been so concerning for the Australian people is the inability of this Labor government to do anything about it to date. That has really concerned people. People I talk to—mostly across regional areas, where I spend most of my time—have been so concerned with the government's complete inability to deal with the issue. It has affected a lot of people, and certainly they have had no confidence that the government has been able to do anything to try and deal with this issue.

Let us not forget: when we were in office this situation had all but been resolved. When the coalition left office there was a handful of people in detention. We had policies in place that had acted as a deterrent for the people smugglers, that significantly slowed down the boats and, indeed, it left us with a handful of people in detention. This is the important point that many people have not raised and which has been missed over the last few years, I think. It is the fact that the Labor government chose to change that policy. They chose to change the policy that had been working to stop the tide, to stop the flow of the boats coming to the country. We need to recognise that it was this Labor government that made that change.

We have seen in recent times a lot of focus and a lot of spotlight being put on the coalition—to date, from previous times until now—that we would not compromise and that we would not agree with what the government wanted to do, and it was all the coalition's fault that there could not be any kind of resolution to this issue when it came to things like the Malaysian solution. But if the government had never changed the policies in the first place we would not have been in that position. It was not the coalition's fault that the government's policy in this area simply was not working. We were not going to sign up to a plan with a country that was not a signatory to the international refugee conventions. We were not going to do that, and I think that was absolutely the right thing to do.

I think there was probably a lot of headshaking across the nation today and yesterday when we saw the change from the government in this policy. And we are supporting it—there is no doubt about that. It very much reflects what the coalition had in place. But the headshaking I refer to is the utter confusion and dismay from the Australian people that the Labor government and the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, were so stubborn that they refused to change the policy to a policy that was going to work simply because of their stubbornness. One of my colleagues in the other place—indeed, it was the shadow foreign minister—last night referred to the fact that the government was stupid. I think she was absolutely correct because the definition of stupidity is doing things the same way and expecting a different outcome.

That is exactly what the government has done over the last period of years. They kept doing things the same; they refused to change to the policy that had been proven to work, and now it has been put forward by the Houston report that it will work—what they see will work. I think the Australian people are absolutely dismayed that it has taken this long—this long!—for the government to bring in legislation to this place, under good advice, that will work and that will do the right thing by all those people. It will act as a deterrent, reflecting the coalition policy and what we have been asking the government to do for the last four years.

Debate interrupted.