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1. Paul Farrell: Federal police raids over NBN leak should ring alarm bells for journalists

The 'official secrets' offence has been invoked in the case of a Labor staffer and his source, not for serious espionage but for disclosing embarrassing documents

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Saturday 27 August 2016 08.07 AEST

The last two people who were successfully prosecuted in Australia for receiving and disclosing an "official secret" were a former intelligence officer and the prostitute he gave classified documents to for the purposes of selling them on to a foreign government.

But now, for the first time in decades, the Australian federal police has dusted off this rarely used law. There are no prostitutes this time, and no sordid allegations of espionage or intrigue.

Instead, there's a Labor staffer who is under investigation for allegedly receiving documents tantamount to an "official secret" from an anonymous source. The documents, according to Labor, are nothing to do with national security but do show failings and cost blowouts in the construction of Australia's highly politicised national broadband network.

Labor argues the Coalition is particularly sensitive about the leaks because they show that despite Malcolm Turnbull's promise the Coalition could deliver a cheaper NBN in less time than Labor's plan, it is now over budget and behind schedule.

The execution of a second series of search warrants this week by the AFP at Parliament House in the course of this investigation made for plenty of dramatic stock video footage as police officers scurried through parliament. And it's provoked a political tit for tat between Labor senator Stephen Conroy and the prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, over the AFP's decision to take up the case and their independence. To add to the complicated legal issues at play, Labor has also made a claim of parliamentary privilege over some of the documents that have been seized by the AFP.

But if you peer beyond the back and forth there are some urgent and pressing issues the raids throw up that go to the heart of Australia's political system. And they raise vital concerns for all journalists in Australia.

We know that the federal police have been quite active in pursuing journalists' sources with a view to prosecuting them. This often occurs in politically sensitive areas such as immigration. Whistleblowers from the detention system have had their phone records accessed. My own email and phone records were obtained by the AFP as part of an investigation into my sources from the detention system. All of this has been done under the still quite serious offence under s70 of the Crimes Act which specifically prohibits disclosures made by commonwealth officials. This offence targets the source, not the journalist.

But what's unusual about the NBN raids is that the even more serious "official secrets" offence under s79 of the Crimes Act is now being invoked to seek to investigate – and potentially prosecute – the Labor staffer Andrew Byrne himself for allegedly receiving the documents as well as the unnamed source for disclosing them, according to the warrants issued.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/27/federal-police-raids-over-nbn-leak-should-ring-alarm-bells-for-journalists>

2. ASIO asks for detention powers without warrant from judge

Canberra Times
August 27 2016 - 12:15AM
David Wroe

ASIO has proposed scrapping the need for judge-approved warrants to detain and question Australians for up to a week without charge in terrorism investigations, in a watering down of safeguards that has alarmed lawyers and rights advocates.

The power to grant the security agency a controversial "questioning and detention warrant" would rest instead with the Attorney-General – a situation the Law Council of Australia has branded "unprecedented".

The changes being requested by ASIO would also remove a current separate requirement that an independent legal authority, such as a retired judge, is present when a person is being questioned. Rather, oversight of questioning would rest with the intelligence watchdog, the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security.

Under laws passed in the wake of the September 11 and Bali bombing attacks, ASIO has the power to hold someone for up to seven days and question them if it may "substantially assist the collection of intelligence that is important in relation to a terrorism offence", even if the person isn't a terrorism suspect themselves.

ASIO head Duncan Lewis told a review inquiry last week into the laws that the organisation would "support amendments to the legislation to make the regime more efficient and effective for use in the current security environment".

While ASIO's submission to the inquiry by the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor is confidential, Mr Lewis told the hearing that "it would be most desirable in our view for there to be a streamlining of the warrant authorisation process" whereby authority for the warrants was given by the Attorney-General.

Currently ASIO needs an "issuing authority" in the form of a serving judge to approve the warrant.

The laws include both "questioning warrants", which make it an offence to refuse to answer ASIO's questions and also "questioning and detention warrants", which allow ASIO to have the Australian Federal Police arrest and hold someone so ASIO can question them.

Mr Lewis told the hearing these powers were "fundamental to ASIO's work in responding to the terrorism threat that we face".

Police and intelligence agencies say that terrorism plots in the Islamic State era are increasingly rudimentary and fast-moving, which means processes such as obtaining warrants need to be streamlined as much as possible so authorities can swoop to protect the public.

But the detention warrants have never actually been used in the 11 years they've been in place. Questioning warrants have been used 16 times since 2004, though not since 2009.

The Attorney-General already has the power to approve intelligence-gathering methods such as phone intercepts and surveillance.

But Law Council of Australia director Arthur Moses, SC, who also gave evidence to the inquiry, told Fairfax Media: "We're talking here about persons being detained in custody and deprived of their liberty. That takes it to an entirely different level."

"Western democracies have always taken the position that we do not in effect have a situation where a politician can give that authority ... Usually people have the protection of a judicial officer ... In my view it's unprecedented.

"We accept and understand that in respect of an evolving security threat environment, sometimes legislation and procedures need to be amended ... but we are not aware of any issue that has arisen where ASIO has attempted to obtain a detention warrant and it has not been able to."

Mr Lewis told the inquiry just because they had not been used recently did not mean they weren't vital. They could be used in the future, he said.

He also said it was an "unnecessary belt and braces situation" to require a retired judge or magistrate to sit in the questioning sessions, given the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security could provide oversight anyway.

University of New South Wales law professor George Williams said countries such as the United States and Britain did not permit such detention for questioning.

"To my knowledge, Australia is the only Western democracy that enables people who are not suspects to be held for up to a week coercively for intelligence-gathering purposes," he said.

"The thought of removing what is one of the few significant checks on the powers is deeply concerning."

But Jacinta Carroll, a counter-terrorism expert at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and former security official, said the last nine plots disrupted had all posed imminent threats and there was therefore a "logical and compelling case" for streamlining the process.

She said the fact that detention powers had never been used showed ASIO was extremely cautious in the way it used its powers.

She said while this was a "pretty heavy power", it made as much sense for the Attorney-General as first law officer to authorise warrants as a judge.

Bret Walker, SC, the former monitor, said he would want ASIO to show the inquiry examples of where the current law had proved deficient.

"The nature of the powers in some sense are drastic . . . so I would really like to look at real-life, demonstrated deficiency before we look at relaxing safeguards," he said.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/asio-asks-for-detention-powers-without-warrant-from-judge-20160826-gr2bxi.html>

3. Goudkamp, Butler & Riemer: No Compromise: Refugee Turnbacks Are Immoral And Illegal

Eminent Australians have called for compromise from activists on the turnback of refugee boats. It's never going to happen, writes Mark Goudkamp, Sadie Grant Butler and Nick Riemer.

New Matilda

By Mark Goudkamp, Sadie Grant Butler and Nick Riemer

August 25, 2016

The scale of the response to the Guardian's revelations of abuse on Nauru should reasonably spell the immediate end of offshore detention. Yet on both Nauru and Manus Island, where detention has been declared illegal under the PNG constitution, over 1,700 people continue to languish, whether in or out of the camps.

For them, the government's announcement that Manus will close at an undisclosed point in the future is small consolation.

Not since February, when the High Court's decision to allow the forcible return of asylum seekers to offshore detention set off the mass 'Let Them Stay' campaign, has there been such widespread community outrage.

Peter Dutton responded with his usual contempt, dismissing the outrage as "hype". But he has misjudged the public mood, just as he did during the election campaign when he labelled refugees "illiterate and innumerate".

The ALP, which was responsible for reopening the offshore centres in 2012 and has been in lockstep with the Coalition ever since, is now attempting to channel some of the community's anger into a push for a Senate inquiry.

Such an inquiry is not enough, but the demand for it presents the refugee support movement with an opportunity to break apart the bipartisan consensus on deterring refugees.

Yet, despite the government clearly being on the back foot, there have been calls, including from former advocates, for refugee supporters to moderate our stance. Some even suggest that our unwillingness to do so is keeping people in detention.

Most notably, a recent Fairfax article by Frank Brennan, Tim Costello, Robert Manne and John Menadue (themselves Howard-era opponents of government policy) urges us to drop our opposition to "turnbacks" and the militarised blockade preventing anyone getting to Australia by boat.

Let's get the facts straight: turnbacks do not just greatly compound the dangers refugees face, they unambiguously violate international law, as Jane McAdam and Fiona Chong, of UNSW's Kaldor Centre, explain in their 2014 book *Refugees*.

It is surprising, to say the least, that self-styled refugee sympathisers – among them two members of the clergy and a professor of law – argue for them.

The turnback policy merely says the government is happy for asylum seekers to die elsewhere. In Europe, closing borders has meant more dangerous routes are used. If we are concerned about lives at sea, we should prioritise search and rescue, not deterrence. There have been allegations of mistreatment of asylum seekers during turnbacks at the hands of the Australian Navy.

In 2014, two boat-loads of Sri Lankan asylum seekers were delivered back to the Sri Lankan navy after on-board refugee assessments. Some of these people were arrested on return.

In April 2015, 46 Vietnamese asylum seekers were returned to Vietnam, after on-board assessments, where some of them were jailed.

Brennan and his co-authors have nothing to say about these cases of direct, illegal refoulement by the Australian government. Refugees who are not detained after a turnback are simply returned to the same situations of precarity and risk from which they are asking Australia to rescue them.

Turnbacks also make it impossible to assess asylum seekers' protection claims. The UNHCR has stated that processing refugee claims whilst at sea through 'enhanced screening' procedures is not acceptable, because the minimum requirements for the proper assessment of refugee status are unlikely to be met on a boat under such time pressures.

In defence of their proposal, Brennan et al. claim that advocates have no short-term solutions. They even go so far as to affirm that our "unwillingness to compromise" our principles "makes it even less likely that the lives of the 1,750 people [we]desperately care about will be saved." But in the same breath they say they are prepared to keep the camps on Nauru and Manus operational in case of later need.

We do have solutions, and have had them for years. Asylum seekers must live onshore in the community while their claims are processed and we must vastly increase the resettlement of people whom the UNHCR finds to be refugees in Indonesia. At the moment, that proposal is politically unacceptable. But there has rarely, in the last 15 years, been a time at which momentum towards it has been as strong as it is now.

If our solutions sound rigid and uncompromising, then good — so they should. We should be rigid on principle when it comes to the protection of vulnerable people.

With the closure of Manus just announced, this is no time to compromise. Eminent public figures who support refugees should be adding to the impetus for positive change, not undermining it by legitimising outcomes no-one should accept.

We cannot be forever trading off the lives of men, women and children warehoused in detention against an armada of imagined unceasing boats borne over the horizon from Indonesia and beyond.

Refugee advocates will continue to push for the most humane solutions. Why should we compromise on the humanity of asylum seekers? Supporting turnbacks is morally reprehensible, legally inexcusable, and politically counterproductive.

Brennan et al. say the government has a mandate for stopping the boats. But no just or humane refugee policy can be predicated on evading responsibility for the very protection for which refugees are appealing.

Public opinion has changed in the past. It can change again. We've already seen a variety of community actions around the slogan "Bring Them Here", including inspiring protests this week outside MPs' offices by the Christian activist group Love Makes A Way.

Large demonstrations on 27 August will take place across Australia and at Australian embassies abroad.

Genuine supporters of refugees will continue to put pressure on the government and the Labor Party to ensure Australia makes a contribution proportionate to its resources in achieving justice and freedom for refugees.

<https://newmatilda.com/2016/08/25/no-compromise-refugee-turnbacks-are-immoral-and-illegal/>

4. Anna Neistat: I've worked in most conflict zones. I've never seen such high rates of trauma as on Nauru

The Nauru files exposé struck a particular chord since I had only last month witnessed these patterns of horrendous abuse with my own eyes. Europe should learn what not to do from Australia's example

The Guardian
Anna Neistat
Friday 26 August 2016 10.24 AEST

"I have lumps in my breasts, in my throat, and in my uterus." Halimeh spoke softly, but as she quickly uttered these words, I noticed an immense sadness in her dark brown eyes. We were sitting on the rocks near the ocean, wary of wild dogs barking nearby, and melting in the scorching heat of this remote Pacific island. I could feel her fear, so common for any woman in her 30s who checks her breasts in the morning and knows something isn't right.

Halimeh fled Iran three years ago, after she said several of her friends got executed there, because they converted to Christianity, something that she wanted to do as well. She aimed for Australia – a country where she was hoping to find peace and freedom from religious persecution.

Instead, after a gruelling journey through Malaysia and Indonesia, a dangerous ocean crossing on a smuggler's boat, and six months in immigration detention on Australia's Christmas Island, she got sent to Nauru – a tiny, remote island state where Australia has been for years banishing asylum seekers trying to reach its shores.

Like many people around the world, I was repulsed last week by the sheer scale and inhumanity of the abuses and neglect documented in the Guardian's Nauru files exposé.

But for me the leaks struck a particular chord since I had only last month witnessed these patterns of horrendous abuse with my own eyes. It brought back the thoughts about Halimeh and the other 57 people I interviewed during the week I spent on the island. Women, men and children with personal stories to make even the most emotionless readers shudder; people who fled wars, who lost family members and friends, who were tortured by repressive regimes, and who are now stuck on Nauru, in anguish and despair about their future.

More than 1,200 women, men and children from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Bangladesh, Kuwait, Afghanistan, spent months or years in appalling conditions in a detention camp funded by Australia. They lived in crowded, mouldy tents, where guards conducted regular, prison-like searches, and limited their showers to two minutes, before forcing them out.

With no prospect of leaving this impoverished island – which is smaller than many airports I have travelled through – these hundreds of people are effectively facing a future of indefinite, arbitrary detention. As a result, they are breaking down physically and emotionally. Although I've worked in most of the conflict zones around the world over the past 15 years, I have never seen such high rates of mental trauma, self-harm, and suicide attempts, among children as well as adults.

Health problems are simply not being addressed. I spoke with people who suffered several heart attacks, major complications from diabetes, kidney diseases, untreated broken bones, and infections. In most cases, they only got blood tests and Panadol.

Halimeh told me that in 2014 she was sent to Melbourne, and spent four months there, between an immigration detention camp and a hospital. "My doctor said I need surgery for my breasts," she said, her gaze fixated on the ocean in front of us. "He said I cannot go back [to Nauru], but the immigration decided to bring me back anyway." Her condition continued to deteriorate – in 2015 they sent her to Papua New Guinea for an endoscopy and a colonoscopy, which confirmed some of her medical problems ... and sent her back to Nauru again.

Now the lumps are growing and she has a worrisome discharge from her breasts but Australia is denying her treatment or even a proper check-up.

As unthinkable and inhumane as it sounds, this neglect appears to be part of life on Nauru. Australian politicians have been adamant that they will never allow the refugees sent to Nauru to settle in Australia. "I feel they keep us as hostages," Halimeh said. "They make us suffer as an example to others who might think of fleeing to Australia."

What's worse, as remote as Nauru is, it's actually much closer than one might think – right-wing European politicians have been touting the "Australian model" of offshore asylum processing as a solution to the European refugee "crisis". Under the same pretext of "saving lives," European countries are already closing borders, striking deals with states, such as Turkey, that cannot offer refugees adequate protection, and outsourcing their responsibilities.

The latest detailed exposure of what this "Australian model" is like in reality, which has received extensive coverage in Europe, is significant. For hundreds of refugees in Australia's offshore prisons, it brings renewed hope that Australia will finally fulfil its international obligations and allow them to settle in a place where they can get the assistance they need and the protection they deserve.

For Halimeh, it means she might still get vital surgery and treatment before it's too late. And for any European state contemplating similar measures, it is a clear warning of just how wrong things go when fear and populist agendas are allowed to trample core humanitarian values and the international right to seek asylum.

Anna Neistat is a senior director of research at Amnesty International.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/26/ive-worked-in-most-conflict-zones-ive-never-seen-such-high-rates-of-trauma-as-on-nauru>

5. Shira Sebban: We're a disparate group of Australians doing the work our government won't

When I heard that a woman who attempted to seek asylum in Australia but had her boat returned to Vietnam was about to be sent to jail, leaving her kids with no parent and facing life in an orphanage, I started a crowd fund

The Guardian
Shira Sebban
Wednesday 24 August 2016 15.27 AEST

he four children of a Vietnamese woman, who will be sent to jail for trying to seek asylum in Australia, were set to be forced to leave school and live in an orphanage. But the Australian people have done something the Australian government couldn't – or wouldn't – and have raised enough money to ensure the children can stay at school and be cared for by relatives.

The mother of the children, failed asylum-seeker Tran Thi Thanh Loan, is set to begin a three-year jail sentence imposed by the Vietnamese government for helping organise an "illegal departure" to Australia in the family-owned fishing boat last year. Their father, Ho Trung Loi, is already serving a two-year sentence following the attempt to seek asylum in Australia – in a jail seven hours' drive from the family's home – and is not due for release until mid-2017.

Loan recently lost her appeal for leniency on the basis of being the sole carer of her four children, aged from 4 to 16. Maintaining that no one in her family could afford to look after them, she was told they should leave school and go to an orphanage.

"They have been crying a lot and clinging to me," she told the Australian. "My youngest child keeps saying 'Mummy, don't go'. My older children are worried. They feel the pressure and are scared of having neither parent around. They have asked if they can be sent to prison with me."

I could not bear the thought of this family suffering even more and did not want to see them further torn apart. So I decided to try and contact the family's lawyer, Don An Vo, in Vietnam to ask him how much it would cost each month in order for the extended family to care for the children until their father's release from jail next year.

The family was among the 92 Vietnamese asylum seekers intercepted in two separate incidents by the Australian navy last year. Assessed at sea and found not to warrant protection, they were forcibly returned after the Australian government received written assurance from its Vietnamese counterpart that returnees would not be punished. Several members of the two groups have since been incarcerated.

According to Loan, the family originally left because the state had seized their land, they had lost their livelihood due to Chinese incursions into fishing grounds, and also because of institutionalised discrimination against Catholics. While Australian authorities claim they were fairly assessed, she said that a translator was not provided for the group, none of whom spoke English. They only realised they were being returned when they reached port in Vietnam.

Via Facebook and the help of a friend of the family's lawyer, I was able to get in touch with Vo and Loan. Initially, Loan was too embarrassed to accept any help, but finally convinced by her lawyer, she calculated that her children's living and education expenses amount to 7,000,000 Vietnamese dong per month, which is roughly equivalent to AUD\$425, or about \$5,000 for the year. But there was another complication – she did not have a bank account and would need to open one before I could send the first monthly payment.

There have been several reports in the media about these failed asylum seekers being sent to prison despite assurances to Australian officials they would not be punished. So far, the Australian government seems not to have done anything about this injustice. Indeed, Australian authorities have continued to return Vietnamese intercepted in the Timor Sea. That's why I decided I had to step in.

I had never believed before that one person could really make a difference. But social media has changed that. Earlier this month, I launched an online fundraising campaign for Loan's children, with the target amount of \$10,000 in order to ensure not only that they are well provided for but also that their parents are able to get back on their feet once they are released from jail. We are well on the way to achieving our goal. We are a disparate group from various cultural backgrounds and walks of life doing the work that our government won't.

Loan has told me that she and her children are currently living with her parents after her house was destroyed and land confiscated by the Vietnamese government. She earns a few dollars a day by buying fruit from local orchards, which she sells in front of her parents' home until lunchtime. She moves to another site in the afternoon, for which she pays rent, in order to sell the rest at a lower price because it is no longer as fresh. The good news is she has just been granted a temporary reprieve, her sentence delayed for one year until her husband is released from jail.

"Your help and kindness has made me feel much more confident and less stressed now," Loan wrote recently on Facebook. "Thank you from the bottom of my heart for helping my family."

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/24/were-a-disparate-group-of-australians-doing-the-work-our-government-wont>

6. Philippe Legrain: The claim that locking asylum seekers up in Nauru and PNG saves lives is bogus

Throwing desperate asylum seekers in prison on small Pacific islands isn't just morally wrong, it's irrational, illegal and prohibitively expensive to boot

The Guardian
Philippe Legrain
Monday 22 August 2016 15.12 AEST

It is not a secret that the offshore detention on Nauru and Manus Island of asylum seekers trying to reach Australia by boat is inhumane. But the Nauru files recently published by the Guardian are still shocking. The leaked incident reports document assaults, sexual abuse and self-harm attempts mostly among the most vulnerable: children. They are a stain on Australia's conscience and its international reputation. Yet the federal government is unrepentant. The phobia that Australia might be overrun by "boat people" seemingly trumps everything else. Anything is acceptable, it seems, to stop the boats.

But it isn't. Throwing desperate people fleeing death and persecution in prison on small Pacific islands for having the temerity to seek refuge in Australia isn't just morally wrong, it's irrational, illegal and prohibitively expensive to boot. It must stop.

Australia is a wonderfully diverse country that is generally welcoming to foreigners. The arrival of some 200,000 immigrants a year is relatively uncontroversial; 28.5% of the population was born abroad. But that generally open attitude makes the paranoia about the perceived threat posed by relatively small numbers of boat people seem all the more irrational.

Unauthorised arrivals by boat totalled fewer than 70,000 people between 1990 and 2013. That is a drop in the ocean for a country of 24 million people. Australia is not in danger of being “swamped”.

While the number of people detained offshore is relatively small and had fallen to some 1,300 at the end of June, the cost of locking them up is large. Each person detained offshore in terrible conditions costs Australian taxpayers an eye-watering A\$430,000 a year each, according to the National Commission of Audit. Just think how much those people could contribute to Australian society if only a small fraction of that amount was instead spent on welcoming them and getting them into work.

The evidence is clear. The Australian government allocated A\$27.8m in fiscal year 2014-15 to support 2,750 “authorised onshore arrivals” (people who arrive in Australia with a visa and then seek asylum), amounting to A\$10,100 per person. That much smaller fiscal outlay is repaid many times over as refugees start working and contributing to society, as many economic studies show.

Indeed, investing one dollar in helping refugees can yield nearly two dollars in economic benefits within five years, according to my own recent study, published by Open, the international think-tank that I founded, and the Tent Foundation, whose mission is to help forcibly displaced people. So even from a heartless, self-interested economic point of view, it is perverse to be locking up at prohibitive expense people who have a lot to contribute to Australia.

There is also the small matter of international law. Earlier this year the high court ruled that offshore detention was lawful under Australia’s constitution. But Australia is also a party to the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, an international treaty that extends the protections of the 1951 Refugee Convention to non-Europeans.

The convention states that asylum seekers should not be penalised for their unauthorised entry to a country, provided they present themselves to the authorities without delay and show good cause for their unauthorised entry. Article 31.2 stipulates that receiving states “shall not apply to the movements of such refugees restrictions other than those which are necessary and such restrictions shall only be applied until their status in the country is regularised or they obtain admission into another country.”

Lawyers can, of course, debate to what extent Australia’s restrictions are “necessary”. But however you interpret the convention, it certainly does not permit indefinite detention in inhumane conditions with no possibility for those with legitimate asylum claims to gain refugee status in Australia.

Economics and the law are both important. But the overriding argument is a moral one. It cannot be right to inflict such suffering on people who have committed no crime, the vast majority of whom are later found to be refugees.

The federal government’s argument that locking people up saves lives by deterring others from coming is bogus. If the government was really concerned about asylum seekers’ welfare, it wouldn’t treat them so badly. And yes, people smugglers are often nasty people. But that doesn’t make punishing innocent asylum seekers acceptable.

The government of Papua New Guinea has just decided to shut the detention centre on Manus Island. It’s time for Nauru to close its doors too.

--->>> *Philippe Legrain is visiting Australia for the Festival of Dangerous Ideas at the Sydney Opera House, 3-4 September 2016.*

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/22/the-claim-that-locking-asylum-seekers-up-in-nauru-and-png-saves-lives-is-bogus>

7. Martin McKenzie-Murray: The dysfunction of offshore detention on Nauru

As the Coalition defends offshore detention in the wake of leaked files, former Nauru social workers and government officials paint a picture of utter dysfunction.

The Saturday Paper
Martin McKenzie-Murray
Aug 27, 2016

Last week, the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, responded to the leak of more than 2000 Nauru incident reports to The Guardian. The 8000 pages detailed allegations of rape, sexual harassment and intimidation, as well as cases of self-harm and suicide. Despite the scale, the leak was far from exhaustive. But Dutton tried to quell what he characterised as “hype”. “Some people have even gone to the extent of self-harming and people have self-immolated in an effort to get to Australia,” he said. “Certainly some have made false allegations.”

Staff of Save the Children, whose contract on the island was terminated late last year and whose reports were included in the leak, watched in anger. As the authors of many of the reports, they felt their professionalism and the reality of their work was being denied by the government that once employed them. Privately they began messaging each other about their frustration. Bound by confidentiality agreements and cowed by the Australian Border Force Act, which outlaws the disclosure of information from offshore camps, the vast majority had remained silent about their time on the island. But now they’d had

enough. “When Dutton went on the news and said that these allegations weren’t necessarily true, I thought, ‘Whoa,’” Judith Reen tells me. “This is primary evidence. What Dutton said was offensive, and we all started writing to each other and it snowballed.”

Reen was a teacher in the Nauruan camp. She is now one of more than a hundred former Save the Children staff who have come out publicly to denounce the offshore program, and to detail their time on the island. Never before have we had so many people who witnessed the operations prepared to speak about it. Many I spoke to felt exposed. Some feared prosecution. But all told me that frustration and serial attacks upon their integrity had finally compelled them to go public. “Personally I feel vulnerable,” Reen says. “I fear there could be some insidious backlash. But those kids are suffering, and you can’t un-know that reality. I saw kids deteriorate. It’s counterintuitive for teachers to watch kids in decline. It chips away at your core.”

Quasi-military culture

Save the Children staff – and other service providers on Nauru – are not the only ones dismayed by the operations of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. I spoke with two former senior executive staff of the department, who left 18 months ago when it merged with customs and created, in parts, a quasi-military. The historic focus of the bureaucracy shifted overnight. “There’s now only about 27 [senior executive] staff left today, from more than 100 two years ago,” one of the former executives tells me. “At the time of the merger I left because of my values, and I thought I’d leave before I was pushed. Essentially it was because I had grave reservations about the ABF [Australian Border Force]. There were some good aspects to it – intelligence, for example – but I couldn’t abide the muscular rhetoric and the new disdain for our experience and the palpable disdain for resettlement and nation building.

“There’s a need for [policy] balance, but I got the feeling that they thought the mission of nation building was accomplished and now it was all about enforcement. You would get outrageous rhetoric like ‘manning the brigades’. They wanted to join the big guys at the table of national security. But to have another armed force established, without much discussion, was disquieting. Among the senior staff to leave, there was wide disquiet or even contempt and derision.”

Another former executive of the department agrees it underwent a profound change in culture, and that its new secretary, Mike Pezzullo, was dictatorial in his approach. “He always thinks he’s the smartest person in the room,” the source tells me, “and that includes rooms he shares with Dutton. His vision for the department is very clearly paramilitary.”

FULL STORY AT <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2016/08/27/the-dysfunction-offshore-detention-nauru/14722200003668>

8. The Age Editorial: Cruel camps must close

The Age
Editorial
August 20 2016

Plenty of people, upset by Australia’s callous treatment of asylum seekers, have warned history will judge the country poorly for dispatching fellow human beings to languish for years in island camps. But that judgment should not be presumed to some distant future: it is here and now that Australia’s reputation is being sullied by the cruel insistence on offshore detention. It is past time the government closed the centres on Nauru and Manus Island.

The misery inflicted by Australia’s policy is compounding daily. Reports continue to mount about abuse, self-harm and psychological distress among the people being detained. On Nauru earlier this year, a man and then a woman set themselves on fire. Officials can quibble the camp gates are now open, but it is abundantly clear the asylum seekers are not free. These islands are bereft of opportunity for those trapped there without the option to leave, and it is a mark of the inhumanity of Australia’s system that the very identity of people is systematically masked by bureaucratic babble, under the label “transferees”.

International condemnation is growing; politicians in New Zealand last week openly wondered whether Australia has lost its moral compass, while the United Nations has raised persistent concerns. It would be mindless parochialism to simply dismiss such complaints as unwelcome foreign interference. These are warnings that match those of human rights organisations within Australia and a host of community leaders.

Yet the Turnbull government has once again reacted to legitimate worry with stubborn indifference. Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, who shamefully implied in May that people who self-immolated had done so at the behest of refugee advocates, last week attacked the media for reporting abuses in the camps. Mr Dutton’s bluster and unfounded warnings about the threat from refugees only betrays the weakness of government’s justification for persisting with what has transformed from a system of offshore processing into one of indefinite detention.

There is an obvious solution to this ridiculous and inhumane stand-off, and that is to bring people from the island camps to Australia. Western Australian Premier Colin Barnett, who could hardly be described as a bleeding heart, said last week his

state would be willing to accept asylum-seeker families. Victoria's Daniel Andrews similarly offered in February to accept responsibility for people threatened with deportation to Nauru.

The need is becoming more urgent. When the Supreme Court in Papua New Guinea ruled in April the Manus Island camp was unconstitutional, the Turnbull government squandered a chance to immediately signal it would end indefinite detention. Instead, Australia has dragged out negotiations to close the camp in the hope of finding another country to settle the people detained. Mr Dutton has admitted there is no "third country option" available.

The government must no longer seek to avoid its responsibility, and merely blaming the problem on Labor is a poor excuse. There is no doubt the challenge of boat arrivals has been exploited for political gain, and Tony Abbott admitted as much when conceding recently he should have allowed the Gillard government to implement its "people-swap" with Malaysia.

Malcolm Turnbull should be devoting every energy to forging a genuine approach in co-operation with the region towards asylum seekers, rather than demanding Australia be treated as an exception. That would be the kind of solution that Australia might be proud to see remembered.

<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/the-age-editorial/cruel-camps-must-close-20160820-gqxbiu.html>

9. Thousands call for Nauru and Manus camps to close in rallies across Australia

Refugees and asylum seekers held on Nauru and Manus Island should be brought to Australia, say activists who organised nationwide protests

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Saturday 27 August 2016 17.19 AEST

Thousands of people have rallied around Australia, calling for the government to immediately close its offshore immigration centres following the publication of the Nauru files.

Protests were held in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Newcastle, Hobart, Brisbane, Adelaide, Ballina, and at the Australian embassies in London and Tokyo on Saturday. Another rally is planned for Darwin on Sunday, the day after the Northern Territory election.

Chris Breen, a spokesman for the Refugee Action Collective and organiser of the Melbourne rally said about 2,000 people attended.

"The point was to keep the pressure up on the Turnbull government after the election. We think refugee policy is coming apart at the seams," Breen told Guardian Australia.

The publication of the Nauru files, which included more than 2,000 incident reports documenting the everyday trauma and distress of detainees on the Pacific island as well as widespread mental illness and frequent acts of violence, showed the ongoing urgency to close the camps and bring the asylum seekers and refugees to Australia, Breen said.

"The abuse isn't a product of lack of oversight, it's built into the detention system."

A former teacher from Nauru addressed the Melbourne crowd and shared her experiences in the centre, including an incident when guards ran a mock serious response scenario, including ambulances and fake blood, but didn't warn detainees. The exercise was held in front of the school, she said.

Behrouz Bouchani, a Kurdish Iranian journalist currently detained on Manus, said he had witnessed the same "system of abuse" as that described in the Nauru files.

"I have seen physical assaults, death, sexual abuse and torture. I have seen the deliberate denial of medical care, even for serious and potentially life-threatening conditions. If you saw what was happening here, you would have no doubt it is a system of punishment and deliberate cruelty," he said.

Bouchani said he believed the system was against the values of Australian people.

"Once you understand what is happening here and in Nauru I know you cannot accept it. So I am asking you to do everything you can to help us, and end this cruelty. After all I've seen these last three years I believe the only way we will get freedom is when enough Australian people support us."

The Sydney rally began at the city's town hall, and marched past the Papua New Guinea consulate office on route to Circular Quay.

Nick Reimer, a spokesman for the RAC in Sydney, said between 3,000 and 5,000 people attended in what he believed was one of the biggest refugee rights demonstrations in Sydney for some time.

He said there was a variety of speakers, including union leaders, Father Rod Bower of the Gosford Anglican church, and an Afghan speaker, Habiba “who spoke about the omnipresence of danger and insecurity and death that people are fleeing from, and saying the only thing people who are fleeing to Australia want is freedom.”

In London protesters staged a live reading of all the incident reports contained in the Nauru files outside Australia House.

“The duration, monotony and repetition entailed in the reading of each file echoes the normalisation of the violence and tedium endured by refugees in indefinite detention,” said Sarah Keenan, a co-organiser of the event held by the International Alliance Against Mandatory Detention.

The Australian and Papua New Guinean governments have confirmed the Manus Island facility will close, after the PNG supreme court ruled it illegal and unconstitutional in August, but there are no details on how it will happen or on the fate of the 854 men detained.

The Australian immigration minister, Peter Dutton, maintained that no asylum seekers or refugees would be brought to Australia.

Labor has said it is open to negotiating settlement options with New Zealand, which has a standing offer to take refugees from Australia’s offshore system. The Coalition has dismissed that offer as helping people smugglers who could perhaps sell it as a way for asylum seekers to get to Australia.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/27/nauru-files-manus-island-close-the-camps-rallies-asylum-seeker>

10. Refugee supporters rally across the country against offshore detention

ABC News Online

First posted Sat 27 Aug 2016, 1:13pm

Updated Sat 27 Aug 2016, 2:48pm

At a pro-refugee rally today new Greens' immigration spokesman Nick McKim denied a rift with his predecessor Sarah Hanson-Young over her dumping from the portfolio, saying he understands her disappointment.

Senator Hanson-Young was demoted to the trade portfolio on Thursday after nine years as the Greens' immigration spokeswoman, and this morning told AM she did not understand leader Richard Di Natale's rationale for the move.

Both Ms Hanson-Young and Mr McKim attended rallies against the offshore detention of asylum seekers and refugees which were held in cities around Australia today.

"Look, I understand Sarah's disappointment," Mr McKim said at the rally in Hobart.

"She's given her heart and soul to this portfolio for a long period of time and I would have been disappointed in Sarah's position too."

Mr McKim said he had spoken with Ms Hanson-Young since the portfolio change.

"I'm not going to go into details of discussions but my relationship with Sarah is very good."

But he would not be drawn on when he had been tapped on the shoulder to take over the portfolio.

"I'm not going to go into the details of who said what to whom and when."

Ms Hanson-Young expressed anger at the post-election shake-up by Mr Di Natale and has promised to continue fighting for the rights of refugees.

Senator Hanson-Young has also pledged to embrace her new portfolios of trade and education.

"Of course I'm disappointed, but at the same time, there's a whole raft of new portfolios for me to take on, I'm looking really forward to it," she said.

'Close the camps, bring them here'

Thousands of people turned out across the country in support of refugees today, calling for the closure of detention centres at Nauru and Manus Island.

"Close the camps, bring them here" was the catchphrase of the day as supporters staged rallies and marches in cities including Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Melbourne, Newcastle, Perth and Sydney.

Another rally is scheduled for Darwin on Sunday, as well as international rallies in Tokyo and London.

Organisers want all refugees and asylum seekers to be housed in the community while they are being processed, and refugees to be given permanent protection in Australia.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-27/refugee-supporters-rally-across-country-against-detention/7791456>

11. Nauru files: leaked reports read aloud in 10-hour vigil outside Australia House in London

Organisers read aloud 8,000 pages to emphasise normalisation of violence for refugees held in indefinite detention

The Guardian
Guardian staff
Saturday 27 August 2016 10.27 AEST

Protesters have read aloud more than 20,000 leaked incident reports published by Guardian Australia as the Nauru files during a 10-hour vigil outside Australia House in London.

The protest at the Australian high commission was organised by members of the International Alliance Against Mandatory Detention.

The files, totalling more than 8,000 pages, include allegations of sexual abuse, torture and humiliation inflicted on children held by Australia in offshore detention.

“We want Australia to be internationally shamed,” said Sarah Keenan, who co-organised the event with seven other members of the alliance. “We want everyone to hear these documented incidents of abuse, self-harm, humiliation and squalor that is the everyday life for refugees on Nauru.

“The duration, monotony and repetition entailed in the reading of each file echoes the normalisation of the violence and tedium endured by refugees in indefinite detention.”

Nadine El-Enany, another alliance organiser, said: “These detainees must be settled in the Australian community as is their right under international law.

“We have chosen to read the report out in front of Australia House because this narrative of abuse directly contradicts the image the Australian high commission seeks to convey of Australia as a progressive nation and a desirable destination for tourists, students, highly skilled workers and international investors.

“Nauru Files Reading embodies the ongoing racist violence that has defined the settler colony of Australia since its inception.”

Australia’s opposition Labor party says it will move to establish a parliamentary inquiry into allegations of sexual assault and child abuse at Nauru. However, the governing Liberal and National party Coalition says there is still public support for the policy to detain asylum seekers offshore.

The Australian immigration minister, Peter Dutton, has attacked news organisations, refugee advocates and Save the Children Australia, accusing the child rights agency of leaking the more 2,000 incident reports published as the Nauru files.

El-Enany said: “The Australian government detains refugees indefinitely [on these islands] as part of its offshore detention policy designed to deter refugees from arriving in Australia by boat.

“More than 500 refugees are detained on Nauru, including many children.

“Refugees on Nauru are regularly subjected to abuse, violence, sexual assault and rape. Self-harm and suicide attempts are common.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/aug/27/nauru-files-leaked-reports-read-aloud-in-10-hour-vigil-outside-australia-house-in-london>

12. Nauru asylum seeker protest targets Australia House in London

Children's accounts of sexual abuse, torture and humiliation in offshore detention to be read outside Australian high commission

The Guardian

Amelia Hill

Friday 26 August 2016 19.57 AEST

A reading of more than 2,000 leaked incident reports from Australia's detention camp for asylum seekers on the remote Pacific island of Nauru will be narrated in a 10-hour protest outside the Australian high commission in London.

Totalling more than 8,000 pages, as published by the Guardian earlier this month, the personal accounts of sexual abuse, torture and humiliation inflicted on children held by Australia in offshore detention will be narrated by members of the International Alliance Against Mandatory Detention, which has organised the event.

"We want Australia to be internationally shamed," said Sarah Keenan, who co-organised the event with seven other members of the alliance. "We want everyone to hear these documented incidents of abuse, self-harm, humiliation and squalor that is the everyday life for refugees on Nauru.

"The duration, monotony and repetition entailed in the reading of each file echoes the normalisation of the violence and tedium endured by refugees in indefinite detention," she said.

The Nauru files – the largest cache of leaked documents released from inside Australia's immigration regime – set out as never before the assaults, sexual abuse, self-harm attempts, child abuse and living conditions endured by asylum seekers held by the Australian government. The picture they paint is one of routine dysfunction and deliberate cruelty.

"These detainees must be settled in the Australian community as is their right under international law," said Nadine El-Enany, another alliance organiser. "We have chosen to read the report out in front of Australia House because this narrative of abuse directly contradicts the image the Australian high commission seeks to convey of Australia as a progressive nation and a desirable destination for tourists, students, highly skilled workers and international investors.

"Nauru Files Reading embodies the ongoing racist violence that has defined the settler colony of Australia since its inception," she added.

The protests are timed to coincide with a national day of action in Australia, with events planned across the country to demand that the government immediately close the camps on Nauru, Manus Island and Christmas Island.

The Guardian's analysis of the files revealed that children were vastly over-represented in the reports. More than half of the 2,116 reports – 1,086 incidents, or 51.3% of the total – involve children, although children made up only about 18% of those in detention on Nauru during the time covered by the reports, May 2013 to October 2015. The findings came just weeks after the brutal treatment of young people in juvenile detention in the Northern Territory was exposed, leading to the Australian prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, announcing a wide-ranging public inquiry.

Some reports contain distressing examples of behaviour by traumatised children. According to a report from September 2014, a girl had sewn her lips together. A guard saw her and began laughing at her. In July that year, a child under the age of 10 undressed and invited a group of adults to insert their fingers into her vagina; in February 2015, a young girl gestured to her vagina and said a male asylum seeker "cut her from under".

In the files, there are seven reports of sexual assault of children, 59 reports of assault on children, 30 of self-harm involving children and 159 of threatened self-harm involving children.

The files raise stark questions about how information is reported on Nauru, one of Australia's two offshore detention centres for asylum seekers who arrive by boat. They highlight serious concerns about the ongoing risks to children and adults held on the island. They show how the Australian government has failed to respond to warning signs and reveal sexual assault allegations – many involving children – that have never previously been disclosed.

The most damning evidence emerges from the words of the staff working in the detention centre themselves – the people who compile the reports. These caseworkers, guards, teachers and medical officers have been charged with caring for hundreds of asylum seekers on the island.

"The Australian government detains refugees indefinitely [on these islands] as part of its offshore detention policy designed to deter refugees from arriving in Australia by boat," said El-Enany. "More than 500 refugees are detained on Nauru, including many children. "Refugees on Nauru are regularly subjected to abuse, violence, sexual assault and rape. Self-harm and suicide attempts are common," she said.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/26/nauru-asylum-seeker-protest-australia-house-london>

13. Danish politicians to visit Nauru to study use of offshore detention centres, Government says

AFP / ABC News Online
Posted Thu 25 Aug 2016, 4:03am

Danish members of parliament are set to travel to Nauru to visit the island's controversial detention centre and study the use of offshore settlements for asylum-seekers, one of the MPs said.

Six members of the Danish parliament's Immigration and Integration Affairs Committee will reportedly leave on Saturday for Australia and Nauru, Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen of the leftist Red-Green Alliance said, confirming reports in Danish media.

Ms Schmidt-Nielsen said that although she found the Australian offshore detention system "grotesque", the trip — planned for several months — was a chance for her to "ask some of the questions that the Australian Government is preventing journalists from asking".

The recent release of more than 2,000 leaked reports of incidents on Nauru detailing allegations of widespread abuse and self-harm, including children wanting to kill themselves, have renewed calls for a parliamentary inquiry.

But the Nauruan Government responded last week, saying asylum-seekers had made up most of the claims in the hope of being relocated to Australia.

However, not all Danish MPs are critical of the offshore detention policies that have been implemented in Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

Martin Heriksen of the anti-immigration Danish People's Party (DPP) and the chairman of the Danish parliamentary committee, has previously described the Australian policy as being "very sensible".

Meanwhile the ruling Venstre party's hardline Integration Minister, Inger Stojberg, has said that the system "apparently works in an Australian context" and that her government would "continually consider ... experiences from other countries".

The Australian Government said on August 17 that it had agreed to close the Papua New Guinea camp.

The Guardian, which published the Nauru reports, said that only two Australian journalists had been granted access to the Nauru detention centre in the past three years.

The Danish Government rules with the help of the anti-immigration DPP in parliament and has passed tough legislation to deter asylum seekers from coming to the country, including allowing police to confiscate some of the asylum seekers' valuables to help pay for their accommodation.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-25/danish-politicians-to-visit-nauru-offshore-detention-centre/7783164>

14. Danish MP confirms visit to Nauru camp at heart of offshore detention outcry

Cross-party delegation from Denmark will visit Australian detention centre criticised after leaked files detailed asylum seeker abuse amid push from some rightwing Danish MPs for similar hardline regime in Europe

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Tuesday 23 August 2016 16.09 AEST

A parliamentary delegation from Denmark will visit the Pacific island of Nauru and gain rare access to Australia's offshore detention centre to consider whether such controversial immigration policies could be adopted in Europe.

In the next week cross-party group of Danish politicians will visit Australia and Nauru and are seeking access to inspect the detention centre, according to reports by Danish radio station 24syv.

The visit to Nauru was confirmed to the Guardian in a statement from Danish MP Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen, who said her party was "highly critical" of Australia's immigration policies, and would use the visit to closely scrutinise the policy. It has been planned for more than six months by the parliamentary delegation, with six of the 29 member parliamentary committee attending.

The visit has coincided with the publication of the Nauru files by the Guardian, which highlighted devastating trauma and abuse inflicted on children held in offshore detention in the largest cache of leaked documents released from inside its immigration regime.

Schmidt Nielson said she was deeply concerned about the reports of conditions on Manus and Nauru, and said: "The Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten) is highly critical of this model. Nauru and Papua New Guinea are rather poor nations and highly dependent on the money they receive from the Australian government in return for housing the refugees."

"The countries with which Australia is cooperating – including Cambodia – do not have a good human rights record, and we are very worried by the reports about conditions on Nauru and Manus Island."

"It is also worrying that Australian teachers, doctors, nurses and others who have worked at Australian overseas refugee facilities – as we understand it – are not allowed to speak freely about their experience. This is a problem for a democratic debate about the refugee policy of the Australian government."

"The timing of our visit a few weeks after The Guardian's publication of the news about the Nauru Files is purely coincidental. But obviously it increases the focus on our visit – in Denmark and probably also in Australia and elsewhere."

It also follows a challenge put forward by Australia's opposition leader, Bill Shorten, to the prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, to join him in visiting Nauru and inspecting detention centre conditions.

Schmidt-Nielson said she would also be meeting with the Australian Human Rights Commission president Gillian Triggs, Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young and the UNHCR in Australia: "For me the visit is an opportunity to ask critical questions about the model. That is the reason why I have urged that the programme includes human rights NGOs and other critics of Australian refugee policy."

The visit will also include Martin Henriksen a member of the far-right Danish People's party, Marcus Knuth from the Danish government, Dan Jørgensen from the Social Democrats and Jacob Mark from the Socialists People's party.

Simon Emil Ammitzbøll from the centre-right Liberal Alliance and Schmidt-Nielsen from the socialist-green unity party Enhedslisten are also in the delegation.

It is unclear how the delegation has been granted access to the detention centre on Nauru or whether it has occurred with the consent of the Australian or Nauruan governments. Comment has been sought regarding the circumstances of their access.

Access to the Nauruan detention centre has been largely cut off to Australian reporters. Only two journalists – one from the Australian newspaper and another from Channel Nine's A Current Affair TV program – have been granted access to the detention centre in the past three years. Attempts by the Guardian to gain access have been repeatedly refused.

Heated debate has occurred in Denmark over how the country should respond to migration in Europe. Some far-right groups have urged the country to adopt a similar model to Australia's system of offshore detention.

The Danish People's party has even suggested asylum seekers should be sent to Greenland or Tanzania as part of a similar offshore arrangement.

The publication of the Nauru files renewed international attention on Australia's immigration policies. The UK and New Zealand governments have faced calls to summon Australian high commissioners to explain the reports of abuse and assault in the incident reports published.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/23/danish-politicians-seek-to-visit-nauru-site-at-heart-of-offshore-detention-outcry>

15. Nauru bans Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young from visiting refugees

Canberra Times
August 24 2016 - 4:15PM
Michael Gordon

Sarah Hanson-Young has declared the culture of secrecy on Nauru "out of control" after she was barred from returning to the tiny country to investigate the plight of refugees.

The Greens senator has called on Malcolm Turnbull to intervene, insisting "Australians deserve to know what is being done in their name on Nauru".

She suspects the decision is payback for her role in exposing the extent of sexual and other abuse of detainees inside the Nauru detention centre more than two years ago.

The senator's allegations prompted the Moss review in October 2014, which found evidence of rape, sexual assault of minors and guards trading marijuana for sexual favours from female detainees.

The rejection of the senator's visa application came a week after Fairfax Media was denied a visa to visit the country, but coincides with a decision to permit MPs from Denmark to visit.

During Senator Hanson-Young's last visit to Nauru, in 2013, she was spied on by guards from Wilson Security.

Senator Hanson-Young had requested a visa to return to meet with refugees who have been resettled into the Nauruan community and visit those still living in the processing centre.

"The senator understands that many within the Nauruan community and government have worked hard to integrate refugees into their community and she would like the opportunity to talk with community members and members of government about how they feel the process is progressing," her request for a visa said.

"As a member of the Australian Parliament, the senator believes it is important to meet with community leaders and members of government to listen to their perspectives and further strengthen the relationship between our two countries."

The wording of the rejection of her application was almost identical to one rejecting an application by Fairfax Media. "We regret to inform that we will not be able to proceed currently with your visa requests," she was told.

In both cases, there was no response to requests for the reasons for the visa rejection.

"What are the Australian and Nauru governments so desperate to hide?" Senator Hanson-Young asked.

"Real journalists aren't allowed anywhere near the island and now members of Parliament aren't allowed to inspect the detention camp or meet with people that have been sent there."

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten has renewed his call for Malcolm Turnbull to accompany him on a visit to Nauru and is calling for a Senate inquiry into the latest revelations concerning asylum seekers and refugees on the island.

Addressing the National Press Club, Mr Shorten also repeated his support for those who have been held on Nauru and Papua New Guinea's Manus Island for three years to be resettled in countries with resettlement programs, including New Zealand.

"If there are resettlement nations who are willing to conclude reasonable settlements with us, I believe we should pursue that - and I have no doubt they exist," Mr Shorten said on Wednesday.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/nauru-bans-greens-senator-sarah-hansonyoung-from-visiting-refugees-20160824-gr05oh.html>

16. Greens Senator Hanson-Young loses immigration role

Sky News / AAP
Thursday, 25 August 2016

The Australian Greens have dumped Sarah Hanson Young from the immigration portfolio in a post-election reshuffle which has left her fuming. The South Australian senator who has been in the politically-charged portfolio for nine years is set to take over education, finance and trade and water. Tasmanian colleague Nick McKim will take over the immigration role.

Senator Hanson-Young copped flack over the years from the government for tearful speeches in the Senate over the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. There were also revelations Wilson Security spied on her during a trip to Nauru and gave her the nickname Raven.

'Ultimately it was a decision of the leader of the party,' Senator Hanson-Young said. 'While I am disappointed, I understand that politics is a team game and will work tirelessly in my new senior portfolio areas.'

Senator Hanson-Young will spearhead the push for a banking royal commission, which has the support of Labor. Senator McKim said it was a massive honour to follow in the 'giant footsteps' of Senator Hanson-Young. 'I will give everything I have to #closethecamps and #bringthemhere' he tweeted. Other major changes include Adam Bandt losing treasury to Peter Whish-Wilson.

Mr Bandt will move into the climate change portfolio, which the Greens want to elevate onto the political agenda over the coming term. He said fighting for strong action on climate change is the reason he quit his job to run for election in 2010. 'It is the number one economic, social and security challenge facing our country and the world,' he told AAP.

Scott Ludlam gains the defence portfolio and takes international aid and development from Lee Rhiannon, who will add a newly created portfolio of gun control to her responsibilities for local government, housing, industry and electoral reform.

Senator Di Natale said the changes gave the senators and MP a chance to take on new challenges. "Every one of my colleagues should be proud of the work they have done in their portfolios over the past years," he said in a statement.

<http://www.skynews.com.au/news/politics/federal/2016/08/25/hanson-young-loses-immigration-role.html>

17. Sarah Hanson-Young 'doesn't understand' dumping from Greens immigration portfolio

ABC News Online

By political reporter Peta Donald

First posted Sat 27 Aug 2016, 3:02am

Updated Sat 27 Aug 2016, 3:40am

South Australian Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young has criticised the move by Greens leader Richard Di Natale to dump her from the high profile immigration portfolio.

On Thursday, Senator Hanson-Young was demoted to the trade portfolio after nine years as the Greens immigration spokeswoman.

Tasmanian Senator Nick McKimm, a relative newcomer who entered the Senate last year, was given the immigration portfolio in a Greens reshuffle.

"I don't agree with it, I don't accept it," she told AM.

In her first interview since being forced to change roles, Senator Hanson-Young said she was "incredibly sad" to move from an area she had put her "heart and soul into".

Senator Hanson-Young argued against losing immigration, but failed to convince Senator Di Natale.

"I fought very hard," Senator Hanson-Young said.

"I don't really understand Richard's decision, but I have to accept it's the decision of the leader.

"I'm ready to roll-up my sleeves and get stuck into the new portfolios that I have been given."

Policy 'remains absolutely rock solid': Di Natale

Senator Di Natale yesterday defended his decision.

"After nine years, sometimes it's time to refresh and reinvigorate the team," he said.

He praised Senator Hanson-Young's performance as immigration spokeswoman, saying she had done an "incredible job".

The Greens leader denied that he was starting to take a more moderate approach to asylum seeker policy.

"We want to shut those camps down and bring those people here.

"In terms of the policy, our policy remains absolutely rock solid."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-27/hanson-young-criticises-di-natale-dumped-from-immigration/7790644>

18. Refugee artist detained on Manus Island wins international cartooning award

Cartoonist Rights Network International says Mr Eaten Fish's work pushes through secrecy surrounding detention centre

The Guardian

Helen Davidson

Saturday 27 August 2016 10.45 AEST

An Iranian man currently detained in the Manus Island detention centre has won an international cartooning award for courage.

Ali, who goes by the pen name Mr Eaten Fish, has been detained in Australia's offshore immigration processing centre for more than three years. The 25-year-old suffers from obsessive compulsive disorder and has been assaulted while in the centre.

In giving Ali the award for courage in editorial cartooning, the Cartoonist Rights Network International (CRNI) said his work "pushes through the veil of secrecy and silence and layers of fences in a way that only a talented artist speaking from the inside can".

"Eaten Fish has been able to keep up a stream of cartoons documenting the unspeakable abuses and excesses of the guards and administrators of the camp," said the organisation.

“For this he has been the subject of beatings, deprivation of food and, even worse, degrading treatment by the guards. Australia has made publication of negative information about the camp punishable by two years in prison.

“Eaten Fish is one of those whose work as a cartoonist brings to light the horrors that are happening around him. CRNI believes that his body of work will be recognised as some of the most important in documenting and communicating the human rights abuses and excruciating agony of daily life in this notorious and illegal prison camp.”

CRNI is an international human rights organisation with a network of more than 600 illustrators. It seeks to support and defend cartoonists facing censorship, intimidation, imprisonment, violence and death.

It campaigns for protection and freedom of cartoonists, and its annual award seeks to honour an individual for expressing their freedom of speech rights.

“We do not award a cartoon,” the organisation said. “We make no comment on the quality or intent of a specific cartoon. We award a cartoonist under threat or attack.”

Medical experts and advocates have pushed for Ali to be brought to Australia for medical care of his mental and physical illnesses, including post-traumatic stress disorder, OCD and panic attacks.

More than 30 Australian cartoonists, including the Guardian’s First Dog on the Moon and David Squires, as well as David Rowe, Jon Kudelka, David Pope, Fiona Katauskas and Cathy Wilcox, drew cartoons in support of Ali.

The cartoonist’s Australia-based advocate, Janet Galbraith, who will accept Ali’s award on his behalf, has previously told Guardian Australia she fears for his life.

“He arrived in Manus as a young man who was already quite a vulnerable person and I remember being told by some of the workers there that this guy just doesn’t fit here at all, it’s so dangerous for him,” Galbraith said.

“That has played out. He has severe OCD, he will wash his clothes or body for hours and still feel like it’s disgusting. He will wash himself until he’s bleeding.”

She said Ali has frequently been targeted by some guards and occasionally by other detainees.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection has defended the care and treatment of Ali in the Manus centre.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/27/refugee-artist-detained-on-manus-island-wins-international-cartooning-award>

19. Canberra asylum seekers granted access to regional long-term visa program

ABC News Online

By James Fettes

Posted Thu 25 Aug 2016, 4:21am

Asylum seekers living in Canberra will have access to longer visas with a pathway to permanent residency, as part of the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) program.

The SHEV program was designed to encourage asylum seekers who arrived by boat to work or study in certain parts of regional Australia, and until now only applied to Tasmania and some parts of New South Wales.

But the ACT’s Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Yvette Berry, successfully applied to the Federal Government for Canberra be included in the scheme.

“[This] gives them more certainty about where they live now and the communities that they’re part of ... giving them more hope and stability,” she said.

Under the visa, refugees can access Medicare, receive some social security payments and access up to 510 hours of English language tuition.

Unlike temporary protection visas, refugees who work or study in a designated area over five years can then apply for other visa types, like partner or skilled visas.

Migration lawyer and academic, Marianne Dickie, said the change would be of most help to the 200 asylum seekers already living in Canberra.

“They’re terrified that they have to move, because they have support networks here, they’ve been living here for three or four years,” she said.

"They know their neighbours, their family, their schools, their jobs. So [this is] wonderful news for them."

Ms Dickie said the program would be an important part of helping asylum seekers contribute to the community at large.

"In developing their potential they'll help Canberra, because these are talented people who are seeking protection and seeking a new life."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-25/canberra-asylum-seekers-granted-access-to-long-term-visas/7782510>

20. Labor MP to renew cross-party push for a more humane asylum seeker policy

The Guardian

Katharine Murphy Political editor

Monday 22 August 2016 16.04 AEST

Steve Georganas, who strived to broker a compromise on refugee policy in the 43rd parliament, says detaining people indefinitely is 'insane'

Labor MP Steve Georganas says he wants to revive and reboot a cross-party working group to keep the pressure on for a more humane policy for asylum seekers in the wake of the recent revelations from the Nauru files.

Georganas, who was a key player in a cross-party effort during the 43rd minority parliament to broker a compromise between the major political parties on refugee policy, told Guardian Australia on Monday he wanted to kick off a new bipartisan initiative once parliament resumes next week.

"Refugees will always be around, and they will always want to come to Australia, whether we have policies like Nauru, or something else," Georganas said.

"We haven't solved the refugee problem, and we never will. We are just going to have to deal with it," he said. "We don't want to return to a situation where people drown at sea, but we can't detain people for indefinite periods. It's insane."

Georganas won back the South Australian marginal seat of Hindmarsh at the recent federal election with a 2.5% swing after losing the seat in the 2013 election.

In 2012, Georganas, with a cross-party group of concerned backbenchers, launched a structured effort to intervene in the asylum debate, calling on Labor and the Coalition to wipe the policy slate clean and begin again.

The group came together in the wake of a tragedy at sea where up to 90 asylum seekers drowned when their boat sank on its way to Australia, and in the middle of a frenzied parliamentary debate about the so-called "Malaysia solution" – a Labor initiative, where the Gillard government proposed to send 800 asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat to Malaysia in exchange for 4,000 verified refugees.

The Malaysia proposal was thwarted by the Coalition after it was rebuffed by the high court. The former prime minister Tony Abbott recently expressed public regret about that decision.

The cross-party group in the 43rd parliament made no practical progress, but Georganas said such groups remained a useful means of keeping focus and pressure on important policy questions, and educating MPs about the complexity of the issues.

He acknowledged the last initiative "raised the issue, it got it back on the national agenda".

Georganas's move comes after Labor's decision to establish a parliamentary inquiry into allegations of sexual assault and child abuse at Australia's detention centre on Nauru.

It also comes as key church groups are planning to intensify their lobbying efforts to persuade parliamentarians to overhaul current policies.

Jan Barnett, a Josephite nun, who is the justice coordinator of the Sisters of St Joseph, was writing on Monday to both the prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, and the opposition leader, Bill Shorten, to call for a summit to discuss asylum policy on a bipartisan basis.

Barnett was a key external driver of a cross-party group of MPs during the last parliament which included Liberals Craig Laundy and Russell Broadbent, Labor MPs Melissa Parke and Anna Burke, Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young and the independent MP Cathy McGowan that worked in a low-key way to get children out of immigration detention.

Barnett told Guardian Australia she would step up her lobbying efforts in the wake of the Nauru files in coordination with other church groups, such as the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce.

"We would hope both major parties would come together and have a summit to discuss alternatives to the current impasse," Barnett said on Monday.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/22/labor-mp-to-renew-cross-party-push-for-a-more-humane-asylum-seeker-policy>

21. Don't let them die in our arms: Liberal MP Russell Broadbent's emotional plea

The Age
Michael Gordon
August 26 2016 - 4:49PM

A failure to act swiftly to remove refugees from Nauru and Manus Island could result in "the worst of all scenarios", veteran Liberal MP Russell Broadbent has warned.

"It's one thing to have people die at sea; it's another to have them die in your arms and be responsible for that," Mr Broadbent told Fairfax Media.

"I don't want to be part of a government that takes people to that point."

Mr Broadbent is calling on his leader Malcolm Turnbull to devote all necessary resources of the Prime Minister's office to finding a solution for asylum seekers and refugees on Nauru and Manus Island.

The Victorian MP is the only member of the group of Liberal MPs who forced John Howard to soften his hardline border protection policies in 2005 to still be in the Parliament.

Fairfax Media is aware that a member of Mr Turnbull's frontbench feels as strongly as Mr Broadbent on the need for immediate action to find resettlement countries for those who have been on Nauru and Manus Island for three years. That MP is yet to make his concerns public. Advertisement

Mr Broadbent's plea confronts the argument of those in the government resisting resettlement of those in offshore limbo: that it will encourage people smugglers to resume their trade and result in deaths at sea.

Mental health experts say the risk of self-harm is escalating among asylum seekers and refugees on Manus and Nauru, with minors now regularly threatening suicide.

"We know that these sorts of risks continuously escalate over time and that the system is designed to drain people of hope," says Dr Peter Young, who was director of mental health for the offshore detention centres from 2011 until 2014.

Dr Young said children were particularly at risk because they were a "vulnerable group in a vulnerable situation" made worse because parents were affected by mental illness.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has said there is no third country option available for those on Manus Island and the only option for those on Nauru is resettlement in Cambodia, where only one of the handful of refugees who accepted resettlement from Nauru remains.

It is understood that officials are examining other options, including countries with established resettlement programs, but it is unclear whether Mr Dutton would support their adoption.

Labor leader Bill Shorten has been pressing Mr Turnbull to engage the United Nations refugee agency to approach resettlement countries. These could include countries with established programs, such as Canada and New Zealand, as well as Malaysia.

Asked if he intended raising the issue in the Coalition party room on Tuesday, Mr Broadbent said it was "already out there".

"It just a matter of saying that the Australian people, I believe, are getting to the point where they have had enough and the worst thing that we could have is suicides caused by indefinite detention that we are responsible for.

"This is about dealing with the worst case scenario now and getting the resources of the Prime Minister's office working on it - or living through the worst-case scenario and having to explain that to the Australian public.

"We have to be in front the situation so we don't confront the worst of all scenarios."

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/dont-let-them-die-in-our-arms-liberal-mp-russell-broadbents-emotional-plea-20160826-gr261j.html>

22. Bill Shorten says Labor 'open' to resettling refugees in New Zealand

Opposition leader says Malcolm Turnbull's government not putting enough energy into resettlement

The Guardian

Gareth Hutchens

Wednesday 24 August 2016 18.21 AEST

Labor would be open to accepting New Zealand's offer to resettle refugees from Australia's offshore detention centres if it was in power, Bill Shorten has said.

Speaking at the National Press Club on Wednesday, the Labor leader said the Turnbull government was not putting enough energy into resettling Australia's refugees and should be pursuing offers from nations that were willing to conclude "reasonable settlements" with Australia.

If he were prime minister, he would work far more closely with the UN to find resettlement nations, he said, and on his first day after being sworn in he would send his immigration minister to Geneva to re-energise the resettlement process.

But asked repeatedly if he would accept the long-standing offer from New Zealand to send it an annual intake of Australia's refugees, Shorten said he would – given it was a resettlement nation.

"We would go to the UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] and we are open to doing that, yes," Shorten said.

"I think that we should start with the United Nations. If there are resettlement nations who are willing to conclude reasonable settlements with us, I believe we should pursue that."

New Zealand's prime minister, John Key, has repeatedly offered to resettle some of the asylum seekers inside Australia's offshore detention program.

In a deal brokered between Key and the former prime minister Julia Gillard in 2013, he agreed to accept 150 refugees from Australia's offshore processing centres each year from 2014-15.

The quota remains in New Zealand's forward planning for humanitarian resettlement but Tony Abbott effectively scrapped the deal when he succeeded Gillard, saying it would be called upon only "if and when it becomes necessary".

"Our determination is to stop the boats and one of the ways that we stop the boats is by making it absolutely crystal clear that if you come to Australia illegally by boat you do not go to New Zealand but to Nauru or Manus and you never ever come to Australia," Abbott said.

The Coalition government is loath to have refugees resettled in New Zealand as it is seen as undermining a fundamental tenet of the policy: that boat-borne asylum seekers will never be settled in Australia.

Refugees resettled in New Zealand can apply to become citizens after five years. New Zealand citizenship would give those people the right to travel and work in Australia.

In April, the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, said New Zealand's proposal would do nothing but encourage people smugglers to "get back into business" because once asylum seekers were granted NZ citizenship they could settle in Australia.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/24/bill-shorten-says-labor-open-to-resettling-refugees-in-new-zealand>

23. Mitch Fifield says nothing is 'systematically wrong' with offshore detention

Canberra Times

Georgina Mitchell

August 23 2016 - 1:28AM

Communications minister Mitch Fifield said he doesn't think there is anything "systematically wrong" with Australia's offshore detention system despite recent disturbing reports about the experiences of detainees on Manus Island and Nauru.

On ABC's Q&A on Monday night, Tracey Donehue - a former teacher who said she worked on Nauru until November 2015 - described "appalling" instances of death threats levelled to students by guards. In one case, she said a "very large guard" lifted a student and threw them to the ground with force.

Ms Donehue said some of the reports she filed about the incidents were included in "The Nauru Files", a cache of more than 2000 leaked reports published by Guardian Australia.

"The government has again tried to absolve itself of responsibility," Ms Donehue said. "What do you think is the responsibility that the Australian government has for the refugees and asylum seekers on Nauru?"

Mr Fifield responded that, as his colleague, Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, has made clear, some of the reports from Nauru are "without foundation".

"I don't think there's anything systematically wrong with the system of offshore detention," Mr Fifield said, as the studio audience jeered and one person shouted "shame".

"I'm sure that's a bipartisan view."

Labor's health spokeswoman Catherine King, who was also on the panel, said it was Australia's responsibility to make sure detainees are safe. She called on a senate inquiry into the detention system and for detainees to be rapidly resettled to third-party countries.

"Yes Labor agrees with offshore processing, but we don't agree with people being harmed in this way," she said.

"They are being treated badly, so then what are we going to do about it? That's the issue."

Asked if he would support a senate inquiry into detention centres, Mr Fifield said it wasn't his call as he wasn't the minister for immigration.

"What Peter Dutton has made clear is that those 2000-odd incidents which were cited will be investigated. It has to be acknowledged that not all those incidents are of equal significance," he said.

"No one in government, no one in the parliament, has any tolerance for people being treated badly."

Comedian Corinne Grant, an ambassador for the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, said there are 1313 men, women and children currently in offshore detention including an Afghan man who acted as an interpreter for Australian soldiers.

"Because of that, he watched his children get killed by the Taliban," Ms Grant said. "Instead of thanking him and protecting him, we have locked him up on Manus for three years so far."

Ms Grant said the government used instruments like the Australian Border Force Act - which makes it illegal for employees to publicly reveal information about detention centres - to keep information from the Australian public.

"The government is hoodwinking you," she said.

"They don't want you to know what's happening in these centres, because if you did - if you genuinely knew what was happening to these people - no one in Australia would allow it to continue to happen.

"Every one of those 1313 people would be brought to this country immediately if we really knew what was happening to them."

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/qa-mitch-fifield-says-nothing-is-systematically-wrong-with-offshore-detention-20160822-gqyni7.html>

24. 'Nothing systematically wrong with offshore detention,' minister tells Q&A

Communications minister Mitch Fifield says people smugglers will 'have a product to sell again' if refugees on Nauru are resettled in Australia

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Tuesday 23 August 2016 06.29 AEST

Labor and the Coalition remain resolute that no refugees now detained on Nauru and Manus Island will ever be resettled in Australia as both major parties have been urged to consider alternative policies to offshore detention in the wake of the Guardian's publication of the Nauru files.

During a belligerent and at times bewildering episode of ABC's Q&A, the Nauru files dominated debate.

The academic and entrepreneur Erin Watson-Lynn from Monash University said Australia was "missing an enormous opportunity" and that the refugees now in detention should be viewed not as a problem but rather as a potential boon for the country.

“Research tells us that migrants are ... some of the most entrepreneurial people that we have in the country,” she said. “And, in fact, refugees are ... the most likely to start a business.

“As we move into the ideas boom and this knowledge-based economy, don’t we need more of those people here in country? We have an ageing population, we need to replace the labour market.”

The comedian and refugee advocate Corinne Grant urged both parties to consider alternative policies. “There are 1,800 immigration experts, including former members of the immigration department, who have recently put out a report and are begging to sit down with the government and talk about options around safety process and an orderly process in order to determine people’s claims.

“My question to you, Mitch [Fifield, manager of government business in the Senate], and to the ALP as well, is why will you not sit down with these 1,800 people who have options to give you? Why will you not sit down and listen to them?”

Fifield, who is also the communications minister, said none of the refugees held by Australia offshore would ever be brought to Australia: “We would be saying to the people smugglers, ‘Get back into business. You have a product to sell again.’”

He reiterated the immigration minister Peter Dutton’s response that every one of the 2,166 incident reports revealed in the Nauru files would be investigated.

But Fifield said Nauru’s sovereignty needed to be respected and that the laws in that country were “as harsh as Australia’s” in addressing assault and abuse. “I don’t think there is anything systematically wrong with the system of offshore detention,” Fifield said.

Labor’s spokeswoman on health, Catherine King, said Labor supported offshore processing as policy but condemned the government’s handling of the Manus and Nauru detention centres.

“The Australian government has a responsibility to make sure that people are treated, that they are safe, that they are treated with dignity and that they are treated humanely.

“It is also incumbent upon the government to get on with the business with the way these people are resettled. They have been offered no hope for three years.”

Both Labor and the Coalition advocate for the resettlement of refugees in agreed “third countries”. Papua New Guinea has said it cannot resettle all of the 850 men now on Manus, and Nauru has refused to permanently resettle any refugees.

No viable third country – Cambodia has resettled a single refugee at a cost to Australian taxpayers of more than \$40m – has been put forward by either party. Fewer than half of the countries in the Asia-Pacific are party to the refugees convention and could accept the refugees who are Australia’s legal responsibility.

In other discussion on Q&A, the government has no plans to reform the controversial section 18C of Australia’s Racial Discrimination Act, because it has “higher legislative priorities”, according to Fifield.

He echoed earlier sentiments from the prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, that the government had more pressing concerns. “I’ve got to say, as a member of the government, while I appreciate many of the worthy arguments that some of my colleagues put forward in relation to 18C, it’s not something we have an intention to change. We have many higher legislative priorities.”

Section 18C makes it unlawful for a person to commit an act that is reasonably likely to “offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate” someone on the basis of their race or ethnicity. Section 18D provides exemptions to 18C which protect freedom of speech. Artistic works, scientific debate and “fair comment on any event or matter of public interest” are protected, provided they are made reasonably and in good faith.

Both sections were introduced in response to three major independent inquiries, including the royal commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody, which found that racial hatred and vilification causes psychological harm to its targets, and reinforces and normalises more severe acts of discrimination, harassment, intimidation and violence.

Brendan O’Neill, the editor of Spiked Online, said Australia’s laws restricting hate speech and vilification were an “outrage”. “It’s very important when it comes to expressing opinion, even if it’s ugly opinion, we have to protect people’s right to do that, otherwise you’ll end up in a situation where the state has the right to decide what’s a good opinion or a bad opinion,” he said. “And least of all minority groups should support that.

“Every marginalised group in history has seen free speech as their greatest friend. It’s the means through they can express themselves, can argue against their oppression, through which they can challenge the authorities. We have to defend the right for free speech for everyone, particularly for marginalised groups.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/aug/23/nothing-systematically-wrong-with-offshore-detention-minister-tells-ga>

25. 'Compliant, groggy state': In Nauru's ghost camps, refugees sleep away the pain

Canberra Times
August 22 2016 - 12:15AM
Nicole Hasham

When Asal Jabar is bored she yearns to play hide-and-seek. But in Nauru's refugee ghost camps, the young Iranian must creep around drowsy, medicated inhabitants who can reportedly sleep for more than 15 hours a day.

"We want to run and play hide-and-seek but the people say to us: 'We want to sleep'. They sleep all day. We have nothing to do ... we just have to sit in our home and watch the wall," Asal complained in video footage obtained by Fairfax Media.

Her father, Mehran, concurred: "Everyone here has stress, everybody has depression . . . now everyone uses the tablet for sleep, and now everybody [is] asleep."

Human rights advocates and doctors say inadequate psychological, psychiatric and medical care at Nauru means refugees are relying on a diet of sedatives and other sleep-inducing medication to escape their physical and mental pain.

A briefing report by Amnesty International researcher Anna Neistat, who visited the island last month, said private health contractor IHMS "appears to make heavy use of strong sedative and anti-psychotic medication - for children as well as adults - to address mental health issues".

"Refugees and asylum seekers said that these medications have severe side-effects but provide little relief," the report stated.

Ms Neistat told Fairfax Media that during her interviews with refugees, the subjects or their relatives frequently "seemed to be in ... a sedated state".

Doctors for Refugees convenor Barri Phatarfod said almost every patient whose files the group had reviewed was "on some sort of sedative, anti-depressant, anti-psychotic or a combination of all of them".

"The whole system seems designed to keep people in this compliant, groggy state of either sleeping or just getting about doing basic functions," she said.

"The Immigration Department has decided that it's a lot easier to give them wholesale mass sedation and anti-psychotic medication ... rather than make sure each person has an individually tailored mental health plan.

"People in their 20s and 30s who presumably have a productive life ahead of them are sitting there ... effectively in a stupor."

A department spokeswoman said psychological and psychiatric care at Nauru was adequate and "refugees settled in the Nauruan community receive health care in line with Nauruan community standards".

Dr Paul Stevenson, a psychologist and trauma specialist who spent one year on Nauru until mid-2015, told Fairfax Media that IHMS facilities "were inadequate to cope with people suffering from any kind of psychosis". He added that poor medical facilities meant people suffering conditions such as toothache were not receiving timely treatment, and were given analgesics that "provide some level of sedation".

Intense heat on the remote Pacific island also meant many people slept during the day, and deeply depressed refugees spent "a lot of time in a vegetative position ... just lying around," he said.

An Australian worker who lived at the island until early this year, and had close contact with refugees, said "everyone just sleeps, I reckon some 15 or 20 hours a day". "There's not one person there I know of who is not on those sort of [sedative] drugs," the worker said.

In late 2013, IHMS reported to the government that "requests for sleeping pills due to anxiety and stress-induced insomnia are common" and prescription rates are reviewed regularly. Neither IHMS nor the department would provide data on the rate of patients prescribed sedatives and other sleep-inducing medication.

"IHMS only prescribes medications where clinically indicated ... [and] refutes the allegation that asylum seekers and refugees are routinely prescribed sleeping tablets for conditions such as anxiety and depression," a spokeswoman said.

A multi-disciplinary mental health team at Nauru provided a wide range of services to asylum seekers and refugees, and mental health care was also available at a settlement clinic, from visiting psychiatrists, at weekly outreach preventative mental health workshops and by specialist trauma services, she said.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/compliant-groggy-state-in-naurus-ghost-camps-refugees-sleep-away-the-pain-20160819-gqwcaj.html>

26. Manus Island workers suffered 'psychotic' episodes after being given anti-malarial drug

Canberra Times

Nicole Hasham

August 24 2016 - 5:23PM

Manus Island workers have reportedly suffered psychotic episodes after being given a controversial anti-malarial drug and detainees are still being offered the medication despite official warnings that people with mental illness should not use it.

Experts say the Department of Immigration's persistent use of mefloquine, also known as Lariam, is "risky" and "illogical", and further evidence that the Turnbull government is failing in its duty of care to refugees and asylum seekers.

The Australian Defence Force has come under fire for failing to acknowledge the potentially severe side-effects of mefloquine, which was reportedly given to thousands of soldiers during trials between 2001 and 2003.

The ABC has reported that a small group of veterans have developed severe mental illnesses, and that the ADF has admitted it should not have exposed one soldier to the drug due to his history of mental illness.

The soldier has reportedly since developed depression and psychosis, and repeatedly attempted suicide.

A department spokesman said refugees and asylum seekers at Manus Island are offered medication to prevent malaria, advised of potential side-effects of mefloquine, and "monitored for adverse reactions".

The Therapeutic Goods Administration states that patients with a history of depression, generalised anxiety, psychosis or other major psychiatric disorders should not be prescribed the drug as a prophylaxis, or preventive treatment.

Paul Stevenson, an experienced psychologist who has worked at Manus Island, said detainees were "suffering a high degree of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety [and] depression".

Extensive use of mefloquine at Manus Island was "part of our overall dereliction of duty," to detainees, he said, adding that workers had also suffered ill-effects.

"I know of staff members who have experienced short-term psychotic effects as a result of their use of the drug," Mr Stevenson said.

He had observed "anxiety, depression ... paranoia, some degree of delusional thought."

The department said mosquito populations were controlled at the detention centre through a range of activities including "fogging" to spread larvicides and insecticides.

Mr Stevenson said while staff wore masks and protective suits while fogging, detainees were often shrouded in clouds of the toxic haze and offered "no protection at all".

Dr Jane Quinn, a Charles Sturt University neuroscientist whose husband committed suicide after being given mefloquine as a British Army major, said exposing immigration detainees to the drug was "risky".

"The probability of anxiety or depression in that population is extremely high, therefore they would be ... contra-indicated from taking the drug at all," she said.

"We've seen the high rates of ... unusual behaviours that can occur in detention situations - suicide attempts, the incidence of aggression and violence. All of those are likely to be fuelled, in part, by use of this drug."

Dr Quinn said mefloquine was cheaper and required less frequent doses than some other anti-malarials, which may explain the department's "illogical" decision to keep using it, despite the safety concerns.

The department failed to respond to questions including whether adverse effects in patients had been identified, and what proportion of staff and detainees had been prescribed mefloquine.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/manus-island-workers-suffered-psychotic-episodes-after-being-given-antimalarial-drug-20160824-gqzz8v.html>

27. Asylum seekers who made desperate bid for rescue on makeshift raft dead, coroner says

ABC News Online

By Joanna Menagh

First posted Mon 22 Aug 2016, 1:20pm

Updated Mon 22 Aug 2016, 2:14pm

Three asylum seekers died after setting out on a makeshift raft from a sinking asylum seeker boat in 2013 in a desperate bid to get help, an inquest in the Perth Coroner's Court has heard.

The plight of the men, Mohammad Hassan, 21, Mohammad Noor, 20 and a man known as Mr Sabibullah, had come to the court's attention because the administrator of the island wanted to nominate them for a bravery award.

The men were among a group of 16 asylum seekers and three Indonesian crew members who left Java in Indonesia in January 2013 to travel to Australian waters.

The inquest was told the boat was in very poor condition and on the third day of the journey, about 31 nautical miles from Christmas Island, it broke down and started taking on water.

The boat had no radio, flares, lifejackets or satellite phone.

Counsel assisting the coroner, Lyle Housiaux, said the three men and the boat's captain then built a "makeshift raft" and tried to paddle to Christmas Island, but it broke up in a storm and the captain became separated.

The raft was made of tyre inner tubes, and four pieces of bamboo bound with rope.

In the meantime, the Australian Navy intercepted the asylum seeker boat, and the remaining passengers told officers about the four men.

The boat's captain was discovered alive on a beach on the eastern coast of Christmas Island but, despite an extensive search, the three passengers could not be found.

The captain told rescuers the raft broke up but he found a piece of driftwood and using it to stay afloat, swam towards Christmas Island.

When they found the captain he said he had been on land for four days, slept in the jungle and walked by day before being found by two locals.

But he said he lost sight of the other men.

After hearing evidence from a police officer who prepared a report on the matter, the deputy state coroner, Evelyn Vicker, said she was "satisfied beyond a reasonable doubt" the missing men were deceased.

The inquest heard the men were identified using information from the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) and the Red Cross, however their families could not be located.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-22/christmas-island-asylum-seekers-raft-deceased-coroner-finds/7773052>