

Letter writing project:
forcing politicians to be honest
about Australia's refugee policy and human rights
[found at <http://www.julianburnside.com/>]

Mr Howard and his Immigration Minister take the praise and also most of the criticism for Australia's refugee policy.

However all Federal politicians are responsible for it, unless they actively oppose it.

Many Federal politicians do not know the facts about our refugee policy, and most have not confronted the moral issues it raises.

One way to force them into the open is to write to them, asking very simple, focussed questions and then pressing for an answer.

Pressing for an answer is important: they will not want to answer: rather, they will refer your letter to someone else, or respond with bureaucratic fog in the hope that you will go away.

Tips for writing to federal politicians:

- Ask just two questions: keep the letter short; do NOT make speeches or offer opinions.
- Write often enough that you get through all the questions on the list.
- A sample letter is attached. Just insert your chosen questions.
- Handwritten letters often get more attention than word-processed letters; emails are often ignored.
- You are likely to get a wordy or evasive answer. Read it carefully. If it does not actually answer your questions, write again pointing out politely that they have not answered the question.

Repeat the question and ask for an answer. A sample follow-up letter is set out below. Repeat this process as often as necessary.

- If you get an answer, write asking different questions and repeat above process. A sample is attached.
- Remain polite and keep letters brief. This makes evasion all the more evident. Remember: repeated refusal to answer a simple question carries its own story.
- Keep copies of all letters: yours and theirs. Once you have completed correspondence on a question, feel free to send copies to Julian Burnside at 205 William St Melbourne, 3000. If you can make a list of responses and send that as well, it will simplify the task of collating responses.
- Write to Coalition members first: they carry most of the blame.
- PLEASE: Consider NOT writing to the Democrats or the Greens: they DO understand what the government is doing, they oppose it, and they are understaffed.

Finding federal politicians - addresses for correspondence

House of Representatives: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/index.htm>

Senate: <http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/senators/index.htm>

For information about refugee issues generally, see:

<http://www.chilout.org/index.html> | <http://www.julianburnside.com> | <http://www.safecom.org/refugees.htm>

Questions:

1. Do you believe it is right to imprison innocent children?
2. Do you believe it is right to imprison innocent women?
3. Do you believe it is right to imprison innocent people?
4. Should asylum seekers in Australia be treated:
 - a) humanely?
 - b) decently?
 - c) fairly?
5. In your opinion, are asylum seekers in Australia treated:
 - a) humanely?
 - b) decently?
 - c) fairly?
6. Do you consider that people who arrive in Australia informally and seek asylum should be called "illegals"?
7. Do you believe that people commit an offence by arriving in Australia without permission and seeking asylum? If Yes, what offence do they commit?
8. Do you believe that people who arrive in Australia informally and seek asylum should be detained?
9. Do you believe that people who arrive in Australia informally and seek asylum should be detained indefinitely?
10. Do you believe that Courts should be denied the power to order the release on bail of people who arrive in Australia informally and seek asylum and who are detained?
11. Do you believe the Refugee Review Tribunal should be legally required to determine cases fairly?
12. Do you believe Courts should be prevented from overturning unfair decisions of the Refugee Review Tribunal?
13. Do you believe Australia's policy of indefinite mandatory detention of asylum seekers is:
 - a) necessary?
 - b) humane?
 - c) decent?
 - d) fair?

Initial letter:

Dear _____

I am concerned about Australia's refugee policy and human rights record.

I am a voter in the electorate of

I have 2 questions: {insert chosen questions}

I would be grateful for your response.

Yours faithfully,

[name]

[address]

Follow-up Letter:

Then, unless you get a clear answer to the question, a follow up letter:

Dear _____

Thank you for your letter of _____ [date]

Unfortunately, it did not answer my questions.

My questions were: {insert original questions}

I would be grateful if you could answer them.

Yours faithfully,

[name]

[address]
