



Creating a Long-Term Framework for Asylum Seeker Policy

High-level Roundtable held at Parliament House, Canberra

A diverse group of 35 high-level policymakers and experts, including a former Indonesian Ambassador to Australia, a strategist from Malaysia, and parliamentarians from three of the four major parties, met all day Friday 11 July to discuss a long-term framework for Australia's asylum seeker policy.

Jointly organised by Australia21, the Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at UNSW, and the Centre for Policy Development, the roundtable was conducted under the Chatham House Rule.

Members of the Steering Committee, Bob Douglas, Jane McAdam and Travers McLeod, said today:

“This roundtable marked the start of a new conversation about a complex policy area that has been a political hot potato for too long. It aims to be a contribution which is helpful to all sides of the political spectrum and which reflects Australian values.”

Participants recognised there is no panacea in this debate, and that a focus on politics over policy is unhelpful. They noted that forced migration is a global phenomenon, not something that Australia can control on its own, nor is asylum seeker policy one that should be viewed in isolation from other aspects of national and foreign policy. The ultimate goal was to consider how Australia could facilitate a sustainable immigration policy that balances protection, safety, transparency and prosperity.

Discussion paper released today

The roundtable drew on a discussion paper '*Beyond Operation Sovereign Borders: A Long-Term Asylum Policy for Australia*' prepared by two former senior Immigration Department officials, Peter Hughes and Arja Keska-Nummi, working with the Centre for Policy Development. Released today, the paper suggests pathways to better policy responses for the future. Drawing on lessons from the past, it examines the evidence, including the rate of irregular maritime arrivals and the regional implications of refugee flows, including the way refugee policy has evolved in Australia since asylum seekers first began arriving by boat in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

Common ground at the roundtable

Contributions at the roundtable were frank, respectful and constructive. Fresh positions were adopted. Although the participants in this first roundtable did not seek to reach consensus on a new policy, some important areas of common ground did emerge:

- While emphasising that Australia must respect its international legal obligations, the roundtable also recognised that the community wants reassurance that Australia retains control over who becomes Australian citizens and under what circumstances.
- Participants stressed the importance of implementing fair, transparent and efficient refugee status determination procedures, wherever processing takes place. They supported raising Australia's humanitarian intake, perhaps set as a percentage of our annual migration intake.

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- Participants expressed concern at the militarisation of current approaches, and emphasised the need to build regional protection capacity and foster bilateral partnerships built on trust and respect.
- There was support for extending the rights available to asylum seekers awaiting the outcome of their protection claims, including the right to work, and for phasing out mandatory detention.
- Participants recommended measures to expedite the processing of particular cohorts of claimants, and encouraged new community initiatives, especially in regional Australia, that bring Australians into direct contact with refugees and use their skills to help rehabilitate depressed areas.
- The participants are committed to creating a 'second track' dialogue that will engage the community, policymakers, experts and politicians in rethinking our approach.
- Finally, it was noted that any new approach must use language carefully, recognising the humanity of those in search of protection.

A full report on this project will be released later in 2014.

Attendees

Paris Aristotle AM, Adam Bandt MP, Paul Barratt AO, Admiral Chris Barrie AC, Father Frank Brennan SJ AO, Julian Burnside AO QC, The Hon Fred Chaney AO, Dr Joyce Chia, Noel Clement, Dr David Corlett, Senator Sam Dastyari, Professor Bob Douglas AO, Erika Feller, Ellen Hansen, Dr Claire Higgins, Peter Hughes PSM, Associate Professor Mary Anne Kenny, Arja Keski-Nummi, Dr Anne Kilcullen, David Lang, Ben Lewis, Libby Lloyd AM, The Hon Ian Macphie AO, Professor Robert Manne, Professor Jane McAdam, Dr Travers McLeod, John Menadue AO, Right Reverend Professor Stephen Pickard, Reverend Elenie Poulos, Paul Power, Ambassador Wiryono Sastro Handoyo, Jo Szwarc, Angus Taylor MP, Oliver White and Steven Wong.

Media contacts

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About the organisers

[Australia21](#) is a non-partisan, non-profit, registered research organisation which seeks to develop and promote new frameworks for understanding and acting on complex questions that are important to Australia's future.

[The Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law](#) at UNSW is the world's first academic research centre dedicated to the study of international refugee law and policy.

[The Centre for Policy Development](#) is an independent and non-partisan think tank which develops and promotes policy proposals to help Australia thrive and lead in a fast-changing global environment over the long-term.