

Media Release: Embargoed until Monday 22nd August

## Beyond political opportunism on refugees and asylum policy New report points to a way out of the impasse

As we approach the tenth anniversary of ‘the Tampa’, our political leaders continue to put forward refugee and asylum seeker policies that are cruel, ineffective and expensive.

*A New Approach: Breaking the Stalemate on Refugees & Asylum Seekers*, a report released on Monday by the Centre for Policy Development, comprehensively critiques Australia’s processing of asylum seekers within an international context - and presents a way out of the current impasse.

**34 prominent Australians are endorsing *A New Approach* and urging our nation’s political leaders to return to constructive bipartisanship in our treatment of people fleeing war and persecution – for media quotes see below. A full statement of support with recommendations is also available at <http://cpd.org.au>**

*A New Approach* challenges the idea that mandatory detention deters asylum seekers from making the journey to Australia by boat and reveals that, despite public and political obsession, Australia receives just one per cent of all applications for asylum worldwide.

The authors of the report - John Menadue, Arja Keski-Nummi and Kate Gauthier - draw on their extensive policy experience to inject facts into a politicised debate and put forward policies that ensure we treat people seeking asylum with fairness, assess their claims rigorously but with compassion and develop policies that are in the interests of all Australians.

“We need to return to a rational, values-based discussion on the vexed issue of Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. Our 13 recommendations are an expression of a common-sense policy approach that we are urging our nation’s political leaders to consider,” said John Menadue, a Director of the Centre for Policy Development and co-author of *A New Approach*.

“It is time to plot a new course on the question of refugees and asylum seekers after more than a decade of fear and misinformation. Our report, *A New Approach*, points to a way past our shameful policies and aims to put an end to the race to the bottom,” said John Menadue.

The report identifies five main areas for tangible policy progress, including:

- Addressing community misinformation to ensure that refugee and asylum policies are based on sound public information.
- More active engagement in the region based on burden-sharing.
- Increasing Australia’s refugee resettlement quota to 20 000 and de-linking its onshore and offshore components. This will go some way towards nullifying concerns that asylum seekers (especially those who arrive by boat) ‘jump the queue’.
- Phasing out mandatory detention within two years and ending mandatory detention of children and their carers by the end of this year.
- Re-allocating much of the substantial detention expenditures to refugee services, particularly English language training.

*A New Approach - Breaking the Stalemate on Refugees and Asylum Seekers* will be available for download at <http://cpd.org.au> from Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> August.

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**The report’s co-authors John Menadue, Arja Keski-Nummi and Kate Gauthier are available to discuss the report’s findings. For interviews contact:**

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## The need for urgent change...

**Heather Ridout, Chief Executive of the Australian Industry Group**

*"The new approach to refugees and asylum seekers proposed by the Centre for Policy Development deserves widespread community support and should be given serious consideration across the political spectrum. With genuine political will there is no reason why Australia cannot move away from the corrosive and divisive state of the current debate and back to the bipartisan approach which served Australia so well for so long."*

**Ged Kearney, President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions**

*"As a nation we've engaged in vigorous debate about the issue of asylum seekers over the last decade. This paper examines the common-sense approach that has been lost in the politics of refugees. Somehow among the fractious dialogue we have lost typical Australian values such as tolerance, compassion and generosity."*

**John Hewson, AM. Leader of the Liberal Party of Australia (1990 – 1994)**

*"This is an issue that should be above and beyond politics, not one to be exploited in a mindless, short-term political race to the bottom, the "winner" being the toughest and most inhumane to those who are predominately desperate people fleeing war and persecution in search of a new life for themselves and their families."*

**Carmen Lawrence, Former Premier of Western Australia (1990 - 1993)**

*"Long-term detention of asylum seekers fleeing persecution not only violates their human rights, but also severely damages their health, resulting in further trauma, depression, self-harm and profound psychological damage."*

**Gideon Haigh, Journalist**

*"Australia's policies for the treatment of refugees are tired, cynical, populist and punitive. I wholeheartedly support the CPD's thoughtful, comprehensive and realistic proposals, in the belief they will enhance the contribution this country makes to the alleviation of a worldwide problem."*

**Ian Macphie, AO. Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (1979 – 1982)**

*"Australia has failed to honour its commitment to being a humanitarian nation. This is due to the failure of our major political parties. They compete in pandering to paranoia. I have no doubt that the majority of Australians would continue to welcome refugees fleeing tyranny. But, instead of adopting a bi-partisan policy such as that which welcomed Indo-Chinese refugees in the 1970s and 80s, there is competition for bigoted votes. We must return to the days when we seek to be part of the world and expand our cultural diversity while maintaining unity."*

**Neville Roach, AO. Former Chairman of the National Multicultural Advisory Council**

*"Why has the trickle of asylum seekers made us so fearful that we abandon our commitment to human rights? The crisis is entirely because of the extreme and ultimately futile measures we have adopted. The right and smart solution is to work within the framework of our immigration and humanitarian program."*

**Tuong Quang Luu, AO. Director, ActionAid Australia and Head of SBS Radio (1989-2006)**

*"As a former Vietnamese refugee who survived his escape on a waxed bamboo basket in the Gulf of Thailand, I would never suggest to anyone to risk their life on unseaworthy boats to Australia. But asylum seekers hardly have choices and those who survive their horrific journey should be treated with compassion while their claim to refugee status is considered. In my view, the Centre for Policy Development's Recommendations to the Commonwealth Government, which I fully endorse, represent a balanced and sensible solution to the difficult and often misunderstood issues of boat people and border protection. If approved, Australia would not only restore its internationally-recognised reputation as a humanitarian civil society but could also maximise its human and financial assets."*

**Samah Hadid, Human rights activist and former Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations.**

*"The Centre for Policy Development's report 'A New Approach – Breaking the Stalemate on Refugees and Asylum Seekers' is exactly the fresh and comprehensive approach that is needed in this policy debate. This report is the circuit breaker refugee advocates and policy makers have been looking for."*

**Ian Anderson, AM. Founding Chair, Australians for Just Refugee Programs (2002-2005)**

*"Asylum seekers are not political pawns. We need principled responses to their human tragedy, not political opportunism. I therefore support the Centre for Policy Development's call for a return to the constructive humane, generous and bi-partisan refugee policy and practice which has contributed so much to our nation."*

**Kerry Goulston, AO. Emeritus Professor, Sydney Medical School, University of Sydney**

*"To my mind mandatory detention as it is now occurring is both inhumane and un-Australian. It is difficult to cope with the fact that it is supported by both major political parties. The concept of restricting it to 30 days for adults and 14 days for children is one I fully support."*

**Ian McAuley, Adjunct Lecturer the University of Canberra and Fellow at Centre for Policy Development**

*"Our political approach to boat people reflects the worst of what has emerged as a new political culture, a culture in which emotions are fuelled by the voices of fear and bigotry. We need to restore decency to our public discourse."*

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**Professor Frank Brennan SJ AO**

*“We Australians are still all at sea seeking to find an asylum policy which is workable, economic, legal, politically saleable and above an agreed moral bottom line. The report, A New Approach, from the Centre for Policy Development deserves consideration as a conversation starter and a prospective circuit-breaker.”*