

# REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### RCOA WELCOMES ALP REFUGEE POLICY INITIATIVES

“The Refugee Council welcomes the announcement of the new ALP Refugee Policy. “At last we have seen a break away from the bipartisan approach to refugee policy that has stultified creative thinking and has led to the development of policies and practices that have been the subject of considerable criticism from within Australia and internationally,” said David Bitel, RCOA President.

Most welcome among the initiatives announced today were:

- a strong focus on ensuring protection for refugees in countries of first asylum;
- the promise of increased aid to source countries, countries of first asylum and to UNHCR;
- a commitment to engage in public debate in a factual way, free of vilification;
- recognition of the need to support asylum seekers in the community;
- a commitment to end the “Pacific Solution”;
- major changes to the detention regime, especially the commitment not to detain unaccompanied minors and to facilitate the release of women and children and also the commitment to greater transparency and accountability;
- recognition of the need for expeditious status determination procedures;
- commitment to introduce casework management in detention centres;
- changes to the way claims to remain on humanitarian grounds are to be assessed;
- the proposed winding back of some of the harshest provisions of the current Temporary Protection Visa regime;

- recognition of the need to monitor returnees.

This being said, the policy still fails to address many areas of concern to the Council. We would have preferred to see;

- an end to the excision of Australia territories;
- all processing conducted on the mainland;
- administrative review of refugee status decisions;
- only one form of processing in Australia – not two as is proposed;
- an end to the use of temporary protection visas for Convention–refugees;
- expedited family reunion for refugees;
- formal administrative processing of humanitarian claims, as happens in other Western countries;
- restored access to proper scrutiny by the courts.

“The announced policy does not address all of the issues about which we have concerns,” continued David Bitel, “but it does represent a very big step in the right direction. We look forward to our discussions with the ALP in the coming months about how the various proposals can be implemented.”

The Council also notes the announcement by the Government of changes to its detention policy. While these do not go as far as the Council has advocated, most particularly in relation to preserving family unity, these are seen as positive. We call on the Government to re–commence dialogue with the community sector on the implementation of these changes.