



Refugee Council of Australia

June 25, 2008

The Editor
Courier Mail
PO Box 130
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Dear Editor,

The article "Dole payment plan for illegal migrants" (Courier Mail, June 25) is wildly inaccurate and completely misses the point of the policy change under discussion.

The people the article refers to are not "illegal migrants" and no-one is suggesting "dole payments" for them.

People granted a Bridging Visa E by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship are on a valid visa while their long-term status is determined.

The Refugee Council of Australia has been working with other community-based organisations to try to get a change of Federal Government policy on this issue. Never, at any stage, has anyone suggested that Centrelink benefits might or should be paid to people on this visa.

The story that the reporter completely missed was that, for the past 11 years, the Australian Government has prevented many asylum seekers on Bridging Visa E from working, from getting access to basic medical care or even from volunteering.

I think many fair-minded Australians would be troubled to learn that people who have escaped persecution in their countries of origin and sought refuge in Australia are being left destitute for extended periods under this policy.

Around Australia, many volunteer groups are working very hard to raise funds to ensure that people do not starve on the streets of Australian cities.

The Refugee Council is trying to get a fair and common-sense resolution of this issue, to enable people with serious claims for asylum to support themselves while they wait for their status to be resolved.

Yours faithfully,

Paul Power
Chief Executive Officer