



## Refugee Council of Australia

21 November 2012

### **'NO ADVANTAGE' IS MAXIMUM DISADVANTAGE FOR BOAT ARRIVALS**

The Australian Government's change to the "no advantage" asylum policy announced today is more punishment for asylum seekers who arrive by boat seeking Australia's protection.

Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) CEO Paul Power said the decision to apply the "no advantage" test to boat arrivals' claims being processed on the Australian mainland, lacked decency and humanity and further downgraded Australia's international reputation on human rights.

Under the changes announced by the Minister for Immigration, asylum seekers who arrived by boat after 13 August, and all future arrivals, will be forced to wait for an indefinite period before being granted a protection visa – even after being recognised as refugees.

"Asylum seekers and refugees will wait years before being granted a protection visa, have no work rights, will receive the lowest level of financial support and will be denied access to family reunion while they wait," Mr Power said.

"Added to this uncertainty is the knowledge the Australian Government could at any time send them to Nauru or Manus Island.

"It will increase the likelihood that women and children will travel to Australia to reunite with husbands and fathers, just as the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) policy did when it was introduced in 1999. However, it will do something the TPV policy didn't do – leave recognised refugees in enforced unemployment and financial hardship for the first years of their new life in Australia."

Mr Power said RCOA and its members had grave concerns about the ability of asylum seekers and refugees to survive under the new arrangements.

"The uncertainty, unfairness and punitive nature of the 'no advantage' test risks exacerbating the fragile mental health of people who have already been brutalised, persecuted and then traumatised as a result of their journey to Australia.

"Our member agencies, already under enormous strain to provide basic support and emergency care for asylum seekers and refugees on bridging visas, will be stretched to near breaking point."

Mr Power said the application of the "no advantage" test continued to undermine Australia's efforts to build a regional refugee protection framework, which was one of the Expert Panel's key recommendations.

"Saving lives at sea is about building safer pathways for asylum seekers and refugees so they don't have to undertake dangerous sea voyages to find protection. Until the countries in the Asia Pacific region can offer the protections and safety asylum seekers and refugees need, they will search for protection further afield.

"Instead of offering protection, the Australian Government is handing out punishment to asylum seekers because, in the absence of safer pathways, they have been driven by desperation to travel by boat to seek asylum.

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The Refugee Council of Australia represents  
non-government organisations and  
individuals working with and for refugees  
in Australia and around the world

“Australia must set a better example for the countries in Asia by modelling the best practice refugee protections, including the right to work, that we want to see replicated throughout the region.”

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