



Refugee Council
of Australia

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LIMITS TO IMMIGRATION DETENTION URGED

The Federal Government should use immigration detention only as a risk management process to check the health, security and identity status of asylum seekers, the Refugee Council of Australia said today.

Adopting a risk management approach to immigration detention is the main recommendation of RCOA's submission to the Joint Select Committee on Australia's Immigration Detention Network.

Chief executive officer Paul Power said RCOA was opposed to mandatory detention but acknowledged it was supported by both the Government and the Opposition.

"Detention is currently being used as the only option available, instead of a last resort for entire categories of asylum seekers," he said.

"It applies for a length of time well beyond what is necessary to meet identity, health and security checks," he said.

The RCOA submission calls for asylum seekers without visas to be assessed to the same criteria as people who seek to enter the country on a temporary basis.

Mr Power said more than 4 million non-citizens entered Australia on a temporary basis each year.

"These temporary entrants are allowed to enter Australia and enjoy full freedom of movement after being identified through the visa application and passport processes, passing health checks if deemed necessary and passing a security checking processes," he said.

"The RCOA believes the same principles should apply to asylum seekers who enter without a visa," Mr Power said.

Among industrialised nations and among the 148 nations which have signed the Refugee Convention, Australia is alone in maintaining a policy of indefinite mandatory detention of asylum seekers who arrive without visas.

"Without legislated time limits, immigration detention remains indefinite, often with serious consequences for the wellbeing and mental health of detainees," Mr Power said.

"The costs of detention are escalating, both in the deteriorating mental health of asylum seekers and the exorbitant cost to taxpayers," he said.

“In just two years, the operational costs of Australia’s detention centres have increased five-fold – from \$147 million in 2008-09 to \$772 million in 2010-11,” Mr Power said.

“Despite this, the Government is determined to build new detention facilities and add to its existing stock without looking at alternatives are how these issues are handled elsewhere,” he said.

RCOA’s submission to the Joint Select Committee on Australia’s Immigration Detention Network is available at

http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/submissions/1108_JSC_Detention_sub.pdf

Media contact: Andrew Williams 0488 035 535