

Rural Australians for Refugees Bendigo



Autumn Newsletter, May 2015

Refugee Week Sunday 14 June to Saturday 20 June 2015

Rural Australians for Refugees Bendigo is a group of local people supporting compassionate policies and practices towards refugees and asylum seekers.

We are part of an Australia wide network. The Bendigo group seeks to:

- **Support the work of groups** who work directly with refugees and asylum seekers
- **Support national awareness raising** by providing current and accurate information
- **Apply political pressure** on government to achieve compassionate policies and practices

Contact information:

- **Co-Chair:** Sue Nutall
Marie Bonne
- **Secretary:** Helen Musk – rarbendigo@gmail.com
- Bendigo RAR website: rarbendigo.com
- Follow us on Facebook: [Rural Australian for Refugees – Bendigo](#)

Central Victorian Refugee Support Network News –

- This group, which meets in Castlemaine, has grown to include representatives from six Rural Australians for Refugees groups - Ballarat, Bendigo, Castlemaine, Daylesford, Maryborough and Woodend (Macedon Ranges), as well as representatives from ASRC, Amnesty International, GetUp, BRASSN (Ballarat), and the Uniting Church.
- **Initiatives include -**
 - New national RAR Website - <http://www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org.au/>
 - National RAR [Facebook](#) page
 - National RAR Networking Project
 - The updating of the RAR Ten Point Plan
- **Other activities –**
 - Assisting development of new RAR (and similar) groups
 - Supporting Central Victorian forums, exhibitions, etc.
 - Working co-operatively with other organisations involved with refugees and asylum seekers
 - Working co-operatively with other Refugee Networks



Inside

Page 2

- **Refugee Week 2015**

14 June to 20 June

- **Out of the Darkness Exhibition**

13 June to 21 June



Page 3

- “Good Order Bill”
- **ALP 2015 National Conference and the ALP Party Platform**



News

Pages 4 & 5

- **World Refugee Day**
- **Refugee Week RAR Events**
- **Asylum Seeker Mental Health**



Refugee Week 14-20 June 2015 – “With courage let us all combine”

Refugee Week, coordinated by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is Australia's peak annual activity to raise awareness about the issues affecting refugees and celebrate the positive contributions made by refugees to Australian society.

This year Refugee Week will be celebrated from Sunday, 14 June to Saturday 20 June, which includes World Refugee Day on 20 June. (See page 5 for more information about WRD.)

“With courage let us all combine”

RCOA has chosen “With courage let us all combine” as the theme for Refugee Week in Australia for 2015 to 2017. Taken from the second verse of the national anthem, the theme celebrates the courage of refugees and of people who speak out against persecution and injustice. It serves as a call for unity and for positive action, encouraging Australians to improve our nation’s welcome for refugees and to acknowledge the skills and energy refugees bring to their new home.

More information relating to this year’s theme can be found here <http://www.refugeeweek.org.au/about/>

Out of the Darkness Exhibition - June 13 - 21 from 10am - 4pm

<https://www.facebook.com/events/462702353890921/>

Rural Australian for Refugees - Bendigo is delighted to present this exhibition in St Paul’s Anglican Cathedral, Myers Street, Bendigo.

‘Presented by four artists from Queenscliff Rural Australians for Refugees, “Out of the Darkness” combines, in one installation paintings, fibres, graphics, photography, sculpture and text, to raise the awareness surrounding Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers and refugees.’ - Sue Longmore

Powerful ...

Breath-takingly beautiful ...

Very moving ...

Very disturbing ...



For more information about what is happening in Central Victoria during Refugee Week, visit

1. National RAR Facebook Events Page

<https://www.facebook.com/events/850669004988419/>

2. The Events Calendar on the National RAR Website

<http://www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org.au/events/>

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And while you are online don’t forget to visit the Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Grandmothers-Against-Detention-Of-Refugee-Children-Bendigo/845609712157255> See what events they have listed. Or just join them for a coffee and chat.

URGENT - Contact Labor and Crossbench Senators

"Maintaining the Good Order of immigration Detention Facilities Bill"

This Bill was tabled on 12 May 2015 and is likely to be voted on in the near future.

You are urged to write **urgently** to Labor and Crossbench Senators to protest about the "Good Order Bill", which gives the Australian Border Force Commissioner the power to do all things necessary or "convenient" for, or in connection with, the performance of his or her duties.

Suggested letter from Refugee Advocacy Network (tweak as required)-

Dear Senator

The Maintaining the Good Order of Immigration Detention Facilities Bill will the extend powers of security guards, allowing them to use excessive force against asylum seekers being held in detention centres.

I am very concerned that the Government is trying to further reduce the protections for asylum seekers held in detention. Detention is already being used as a punitive measure and this would place people at further risk.

If passed these laws would allow security guards to "beat asylum seekers in detention to death", according to a former Victorian Supreme Court judge. See: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-16/former-judge-says-new-powers-authorise-killing-with-impunity/6398958>.

We know of the harms suffered by people in detention. Long term detention destroys hope and breaks people. We need to be focussed on alternatives to detention - people could and should be allowed to live in the community, while their claims are processed.

We are squandering our international reputation as a decent global citizen, and eroding our own sense of fair play. We value our own right to freedom, while flagrantly denying others the same liberty and dignity.

I urge you as a senator to use your influence, and with other parliamentarians, stop the proposed draconian measures. It's time for Australia to stop the cruelty, and find a new way of responding to vulnerable people who seek our protection.

Yours sincerely (include your name and address)

A full list email addresses of Senators and Members is available at -

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Senators

Labor Party Conference in July

Recently Bill Shorten signalled that there would be no weakening of Labor's policy on asylum seekers. He refused to rule out keeping the Coalition's policy of turning back the boats.

It seems that, whether the Coalition or Labor win the next election, the cruel treatment of asylum seekers in off-shore detention will continue. The best that one Labor MP could offer was that the ALP doesn't demonise asylum seekers and doesn't refer to them as "illegals".

The issue will be hotly debated at the Labor party conference in July. In the weeks ahead, RAR members can write to Labor MPs and Senators to press them to adopt a more humane policy.

For information about the changes proposed by the ALP see –

1. ALP National Platform - 2011 National Platform
(**Current** ALP platform)
Migrants and Refugees - page 170
<http://www.australianlaborparty.org/2011ALPNationalPlatform.pdf>
2. ALP National Platform – **2015 Consultation Draft**
(**Proposed** ALP platform)
Human Rights - page140
Migrants and Refugees - page 170
<http://www.australianlaborparty.org/2015ALPNationalPlatformConsultationDraft.pdf>
3. **Labor for Refugees – 2015 Draft Refugee Policy - Migrants and Refugees**
(**Recommended** ALP platform by Labor for Refugees)
<http://www.australianlaborparty.org/CombinedDraftPolicy19-4-15.pdf>
<http://www.australianlaborparty.org/laborforrefugees.html>

Key messages for World Refugee Day, 20 June 2015:

World Refugee Day is held every year in June 20. According to UNHCR, there are more than 50 million refugees around the world, half of which are women and children.

For years, many countries and regions have been holding their own Refugee Days and even Weeks. One of the most widespread is Africa Refugee Day, which is celebrated on 20 June in several countries. The General Assembly therefore decided that 20 June would be celebrated as World Refugee Day.

For 24 years now, WFTO Member WEAVE amongst others has been working with refugee and displaced women artisans to support their weaving of traditional crafts and help them to access income. Their handicrafts are an important source of livelihoods providing employment and income for their family.

In Australia -

We can do better:

It's NOT OK to lock up innocent people

- **CLOSE ALL DETENTION CENTRES**

It's NOT OK to send people back to places of torture

- **STOP DEPORTING PEOPLE TO DANGER**

It's NOT OK to hold people in limbo on Nauru and Manus Island in punishing conditions

- **CLOSE the camps on MANUS ISLAND AND NAURU**

It's NOT OK to take short cuts with life and death decisions

- **PROVIDE FAIR & THOROUGH PROCESSING OF REFUGEE CLAIMS**

We can welcome refugees ...

We can resettle ...

We can treat asylum seekers with dignity ...

We MUST stop the cruelty



Don't Miss these two Refugee Week events -

Chris Cummins at the Old Church on the Hill - Tuesday 16th June 2015

- 7 pm
- Old Church on the Hill, Cnr Harkness and Russell Streets, Bendigo
- No cost but donations to ASRC welcome.
- supper provided.

If you missed hearing Chris speaking recently about her experiences on Christmas Island, or want to hear her talk again, now is your opportunity. Chris will be speaking at the Old Church on the Hill at 7 pm Cnr Harkness and Russell, Bendigo.

Fundraiser Fashion Parade - Thursday, 18 June 2015

- **Blue Illusion** - 48 Williamson Street, Bendigo
- 5.30 - 8.30 pm
- Free entry
- Enjoy light refreshments and a fashion parade of the new collection
- 15% of proceeds to ASRC Winter appeal

From [The Guardian Newspaper](#) – 5 May 2015

Asylum seekers' mental health data collected but not used, says expert.

Dr Peter Young, former mental health director within Australia's detention system, says mental health of asylum seekers in detention is deteriorating

Dr Peter Young says about a third of all those in detention exhibit significant clinical problems.

[Mental health](#) screening data on asylum seekers held in detention is still being collected but not used or analysed, a former mental health director within Australia's immigration detention system has said.

Dr Peter Young is the former director of mental health services for International Health and Medical Services, which provides healthcare across Australia's immigration detention network.

[When Young first spoke out on this issue, to Guardian Australia](#), he said the immigration department had delayed using new measures to screen mental health issues in detention.

But the measures were eventually implemented in early 2014 – after the Australian Human Rights Commission began its inquiry into children in detention – and Young presented some early figures at the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) conference last May.

Speaking at this year's conference in [Brisbane](#) on Tuesday, he said the early figures highlighted significant deterioration in the health of asylum seekers in detention, with about a third of all those in detention exhibiting significant clinical problems.

But since that time, Young told the conference, while the data was still being collected, it was not being used to assess the health of people in immigration detention.

"This resulted in the collection of a lot of data, which unfortunately is not accessible now," he said.

"The department were very unhappy about these results. Following this mental health screening was removed.

"The measurements are still occurring. But nobody is actually using the data, and nobody can look at them. And there's been no further development in child mental health screening."

Young also told the conference that the Australian federal police had contacted him before the conference.

"All of this information is published publicly on the department of immigration website," he said. "It's been brought to my attention that I must not speak about anything which is confidential information in the public domain.

"I had recent words from the federal police to that effect when they found out I was presenting here today."

The Australian federal police have been contacted about their approach to Young.

The former mental health director of IHMS [has been praised by peak mental health bodies](#) and international human rights groups for speaking out about conditions in Australia's immigration detention system.



Surprisingly, many people are still saying they have never heard about Rural Australians for Refugees.

Talk to your family

Talk to your friends

Talk to the other groups to which you belong

Mention RAR when you write a letter to the Bendigo Advertiser or the Bendigo Weekly

The Pledge to Asylum Seekers was written by two Australian writers who wanted to create something that would generate empathy, humanity and hope.

We wrote the Pledge to bring some perspective to an issue that has become lost in politics.

We hope that it will move people's hearts, demonstrate the depth of compassion felt by both individuals and groups, and inspire further action.

Pledge to Asylum Seekers

To those who come to our shores seeking sanctuary, you are welcome here.

<http://www.pledgetoasylumseekers.org>

[https://www.facebook.com/pages/The Pledge/80596907608261](https://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Pledge/80596907608261)



Bendigo RAR meetings - All Welcome

We meet at **5.15 pm** for about an hour on the **second Monday of the month** (unless it is a public holiday) in the **Wine Bank on View Street**, generally in the upstairs room

Email -

[National Rural Australians for Refugees](#) – has current news on their web site

- www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org.au
- <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Rural-Australians-for-Refugees/1601207846767506?sk=timeline>
- email - rar.australia@gmail.com