

Submission: Migration Amendment (Evacuation to Safety) Bill 2023
From: Rural Australians for Refugees

To: Committee Secretary
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House

From: Rural Australians for Refugees

Dear Committee Secretary,

Thank you on behalf on Rural Australians for Refugees for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion of the proposed bill Migration Amendment (Evacuation to Safety) Bill 2023.

Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) is a national organisation established in 2001 in the Southern Highlands of NSW. Today RAR comprises about 90 RAR group members and associates across Australia. Each RAR group is based in a rural or regional location and has membership ranging from 10 people to 400 people. Hence we represent many thousands of ordinary Australians from all walks of life, who believe that refugees and people seeking asylum need to be treated with fairness and compassion, in line with Australian values and international law. RAR is a volunteer based organization.

RAR groups:

- provide material and social assistance to refugees and people seeking asylum
- advocate for humane and constructive changes to Australia's refugee and immigration policies.

Rural Australians for Refugees wishes to offer its strong support for the passage of this legislation.

Rural Australians for Refugees supports the passage of this legislation firstly of the grounds of the large amount of documented evidence of the terrible harm done to our fellow human beings by being held in detention outside of Australia for such a long time. It has been shown that such conditions have the effect of re-traumatising already traumatised people.¹

Second, Rural Australians for Refugees supports the passage of this legislation because the long-term detention of refugees contravenes the principle of action that

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1Silove D, McIntosh P, Becker R 'Risk of Re-traumatisation of asylum-seekers in Australia', Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 1993, Vol 27, No 4, pp606-612 <http://tinyurl.com/Silove-McIntosh-Becker-1993>

an innocent group of people should not be punished or treated badly in order to achieve an end directed at *another* group of people.

It is clear that the offshore and traumatising conditions on Nauru and in Papua New Guinea are directed not primarily on the innocent people who have already arrived within our waters, but against the operations of people who might be tempted to bring *more people* to Australia. Such collective punishment of innocent people is contrary to Paragraph 33 of the Geneva Convention, and article 31 of the 1951 Refugee Convention, to both of which Australia is a Signatory.

Third, Rural Australians for Refugees supports this legislation because it accords with ALP policy, and previous statements by ALP Members. Its enactment will therefore reflect the Australian people's democratic decision to elect a Labor government at the last election, and which, with regard to this policy, we understand Australians still uphold. We refer specifically to the now repealed Med-evac legislation which was supported by the ALP and to the following elements of ALP Policy:

“Labor will ensure asylum seekers who arrive by irregular means will not be punished for their mode of arrival.”

And

“Labor will] Improve the medical transfer process, establish an Independent Health Advice Panel to provide medical advice and maintain ministerial discretion in all decision making.”

And

“... effort must be made to remove asylum seekers from immigration detention centres through community detention or the granting of bridging visas with work rights. People seeking asylum will have means-tested access to funded migration assistance, and to appropriate social services, including income, crisis housing healthcare, mental health, community, education and English as a Second Language support during the assessment of the claim for protection. ”

Rural Australians for Refugees strongly urges the passage of this legislation.

The Rev'd Dr. D. Paul Dalzell (Vice-President, for and on behalf of Rural Australians for Refugees)