

From: Kate Kennedy
To: [Committee, Public Works \(REPS\)](#)
Subject: Submission on the extension of the Broadmeadows detention centre
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From Kathryn Kennedy

I believe the extension to MITA Broadmeadows will be a waste of money, extremely detrimental to the health and well being of Asylum Seekers detained, and stressful for the staff employed there.

One major factor against the building of the expensive facility is that the high numbers of people presently being deported will soon be decreasing and the need for such a facility will diminish

The decision to deport convicted criminals is being applied retrospectively and so there is a backlog at the present time. It will not be long before this backlog has been dealt with. In the future, once the Courts have handed down a sentence, the deportation proceedings can commence. This will mean it should be possible to deport criminals on release from prison. There should be no or little need for holding these people in immigration detention centres.

I have been visiting the Broadmeadows Detention Centre on a regular basis for over eight years. During this time there have been changes but nothing to compare with the recent changes, which have coincided with the inclusion of non-asylum seekers in the group being held.

The new approach has been determined by the need to control criminals awaiting deportation. This is to the great detriment of the unwell asylum seekers. Where criminals are mixed with asylum seekers it means all have to be treated as though they are hardened criminals.

It is a fact that the vast majority of the Asylum Seekers will be determined to be genuine refugees. It is also a fact that there have been very few behavioural issues with this group. Any issues that have arisen have been easily dealt with.

The majority, if not all, of this group have some mental and/or physical health problems. Many are traumatised from past experiences and need a safe environment that is conducive to promoting their recovery. It must be remembered we have a duty of care to Asylum Seekers and must not deliberately place their health at risk.

In the past the facility was able to provide some freedom of movement. Detainees were able to visit the Prayer Room when they wished. Many used this when they were finding it difficult to cope. They also could go to the gym when they wished. Visitors could come any time within visiting hours. Visitors could bring gifts of food items that were very appreciated by the detainees. It was not necessary to have staff regulate and monitor

where people sat. It was possible for certain Asylum Seekers to have some community access. For example there were day trips and visits to the local swimming pool. All of this gave some normality to their lives. All these activities are essential for the treatment of mental illnesses such as depression, and post traumatic stress disorder.

Now the mixing of criminals with Asylum Seekers means a far stricter regime is in place. Consequently staffing numbers per detainee have been greatly increased. For example the checking of every item taken in by visitors needs to be very painstakingly adhered to. Booking of visits requires a staff member from at least 9:00-1:00 daily. Detainees cannot move freely within the compound but rather have to be accompanied by a staff member. Rooms have to be frequently and thoroughly checked. This requires at least two staff at a time. Camera monitoring is necessary throughout the centre. All the additional staff per detainee is extremely costly and wasteful.

Another factor which I believe needs for more consideration is the effect the mixing of the two groups is having on the staff's own mental welfare. It is causing work place stress. Many staff accepted the holding of asylum Seekers and were aware of their health issues. They saw their role as managers. They kept an eye on sick refugees. Now they must act as though everyone is extremely dangerous. They know this is not true of the Asylum seekers and so are conflicted when they are enforcing harsh regulations. I have seen many staff members sheepishly apologise when they have had to stop a game of cards or the preventing of someone taking a piece of fruit out of the visitors room. I have been thanked a number of times by staff members who care about the Asylum Seekers. The mixing of the role of carer and jailer makes the role of staff members untenable.

The Broadmeadows Detention Centre should not be extended. It makes no sense to mix asylum Seekers with criminals awaiting deportation. The only possible logic for such a project is the trying to associate refugees with criminals in the public's mind. Trying to make the Asylum Seekers look guilty by association. A very cynical act.