

GREAT LAKES RURAL AUSTRALIANS FOR REFUGEES

The Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
P.O. Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Anti-People Smuggling and other Measures Bill 2010

The supporters of Rural Australians for Refugees in the Great Lakes area of New South Wales disagree with a number of the provisions in the Anti-People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2010. If this legislation is enacted, Australia will have the harshest people smuggling laws in the World. To resort to draconian measures such as this is to only apply a bandaid to the problem.

The smugglers would not be in business if the governments of the world were to co-operate and introduce an efficient system to manage the surges of refugees. Throughout history, and in recent times such as the French Revolution, Second World War to the present there have been waves of refugees. People smugglers are providing an essential service to those who have to flee their countries to preserve their lives.

Very few admire the method of the smugglers that are bringing people to Australia by boat. In the early part of this decade the risk to refugees was enormous. The boats were in dreadful condition and grossly overcrowded. The boats that have come in the past year or so are of a much stronger build and very few have more that 60-70 refugees on them. This would point to the added overhead costs particularly if the boats are never returned to Indonesia. Naturally the smugglers charge a price to cover those costs.

The proposed mandatory term for the Indonesian sailors or fishermen is deplorable as they are usually contracted by smugglers to do the job that they desperately need to ease their poverty. The Indonesian fishermen have fished these seas for many centuries. The decision by Australian to extend the ocean boundaries has increased their poverty. These people should not be made the scape-goats for not being able to apprehend the principal smugglers.

The proposal to involve ASIO in investigating the transfer of assistance to people outside Australia, such as sending money, is an infringement of our human rights. It also demonstrates that there is little understanding of the ethics and customs of others. It is obligatory for many Muslim peoples to give help and charity to those in need, and it would be very distressing for someone in Australia to have to refuse to help a relative or friend urgently requesting money to exist in another country.

There has been an incremental erosion of the human rights of Australians over the past decade in the name of combating terrorism or "protecting our borders". Those of us in the community that have been aware of this issue consider such legislation to be a very dangerous as, once on the statutes, such measures are rarely repealed.

Submission by Great Lakes Rural Australians for Refugees (Cont)

The fact that no member of the present Cabinet was prepared to support a charter of Human Rights to be prepared is even more alarming.

We request that the Committee be extremely careful in the manner in which they endorse many measures contained in the proposed Act.

Prepared by Mrs. Kathleen Smith

On behalf of supporters of Great Lakes Rural Australians for Refugees