



Answer to question:

## PARLIAMENTARY JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

### MIGRATION, PATHWAY TO NATION BUILDING INQUIRY

#### QUESTION:

**Mr Al-Khafaji:** ...Unfortunately, in the past 10 or so years, Australia has gone down a path of using migrants as a political football, if I may put it that way, and I believe that has eroded Australia's reputation internationally.

**Dr WEBSTER:** Can you just explain what you mean by that, please?

**Mr Al-Khafaji:** Sure. I believe that politicians have used migrants to score political points, and by that I mean, when people run out of great policy ideas, it is easy to blame the migrants for the issues that we have in Australia, whether it's congestion, whether it's a lack of housing. It's the 'othering' of the people, and that we know resonates with people when you create fear. That's undeniable. That's what's been happening. We have called it out. We've urged politicians to steer away from that. And that's definitely had an impact on Australia's reputation internationally. When people come to choose between Australia or Canada, that is definitely a consideration. We've seen what has happened to Indian students when they choose between whether they study in Australia or whether they study in other countries. I believe we have started changing that narrative very quickly. The government is saying the right things. We're doing a lot of outreach with some of those countries and trying to reset Australia's reputation to a more positive one, a more welcoming nation, and we're really pleased to see depoliticisation of this whole issue. I really hope that we don't go back there again. ...

**Dr WEBSTER:** Being from that side of government myself, I would like **evidence for what you've actually claimed. I'll just put that on notice.**

#### ANSWER:

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) presents quotes from former Prime Ministers Tony Abbott, Malcom Turnbull and Scott Morrison, former Ministers for Home Affairs Peter Dutton and Karen Andrews, former Health Minister Greg Hunt, and former Assistant Minister for Multicultural Affairs Jason Wood, which we view as examples of politicising migrants and migration.

Quotes were chosen from the above seven politicians due to the significance and relevance of their portfolios to multicultural communities, and their influence on the public narrative during their term in Government. The examples provided below are in no way an exhaustive list of all comments made about migrants by the seven members from the Liberal-National Coalition listed above.

### **Example 1: 'Buying in' on public fear regarding border control**

On the day of the 2022 federal election, voters from several electorates in New South Wales and Victoria received a text message about the interception of an illegal boat by the Australian Border Force. On the same day, the then Prime Minister Scott Morrison made the following statement: *"I can simply say this. I've been here to stop this boat but in order for me to be there to stop those that may come from here, you need to vote Liberal and Nationals today"*<sup>1</sup>. At a separate press conference, the then Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews stated that *"Those ventures indicate very clearly what risk a Labor government poses ... to our borders,"*<sup>2</sup> and *"This is not scaremongering, this is the reality"*<sup>3</sup>, despite the Labor Party's policy on illegal maritime arrivals being similar to that of the Coalition<sup>4</sup>.

In the lead up to the 2016 federal election, the then Immigration Minister Peter Dutton made a series of inflammatory remarks towards refugees and asylum seekers. Mr Dutton stated that *"For many people - they [refugees and asylum seekers] won't be numerate or literate in their own language, let alone English"*<sup>5</sup> and *"these people would be taking Australian jobs, there's no question about that"*<sup>6</sup>. Mr Dutton further stated that *"for many of them that would be unemployed, they would languish in unemployment queues and on Medicare and the rest of it so there would be huge cost and there's no sense in sugar-coating that, that's the scenario"*<sup>7</sup>. This is contrary to the research which the Refugee Council of Australia states shows that once established, refugees make important economic, civil and social contributions to Australian society<sup>8</sup>.

### **Example 2: 'Othering' of migrants**

During the 2018 Victorian state election, a spate of crimes involving Australians of African heritage was brought to centre stage, attracting the attention of federal politicians, including the then Prime Minister Malcom Turnbull. Mr Turnbull stated that *"we are very concerned about the growing gang violence and lawlessness in Victoria and in particular in Melbourne,"*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/21/scott-morrison-breaks-own-rule-against-commenting-on-on-water-matters-to-confirm-asylum-boat-intercepted>

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/peter-dutton-says-illiterate-and-innumerate-refugees-would-take-australian-jobs-20160517-goxhj1.html>

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

and that *“this is a failure of the Andrews Government”*<sup>9</sup>. The then Health Minister, Greg Hunt stated *“we know that African gang crime in some areas in particular is clearly out of control and the failure is not the police, but the Premier”*<sup>10</sup>. This is despite the former Victoria Police Deputy Commissioner Andrew Crisp’s assurance that Melbourne did not have a gang problem, and his request to not label youth groups as *“gangs”*<sup>11</sup>. An internal review of the Victorian Liberal Party after the election found that *“the focus on ‘African gangs’ became a distraction for some key voters who saw it as a political tactic rather than an authentic problem to be solved by initiatives that would help make their neighbourhoods safer”*<sup>12</sup>. *“African gangs”* have been used by federal members of parliament for political gain even at the federal level as shown in the example below.

**Jason Wood MP** ✓  
30 April 2019 · 🌐

African youth gangs are out of control - now at Fountain Gate.

I've secured legislation to deport foreign-born thugs, but Bill Shorten and Labor will not support! I've arranged with Minister for Home Affairs Mr Dutton, to have the AFP as part of a National Anti-Gangs Squad to target violent youth gangs in the South East and Western suburbs.

Join my campaign team to KEEP LABOR OUT!  
Share to warn others - Bill Shorten and Labor are SOFT on crime and SOFT on gangs. #toughongangs #jasonwoodmpdeliveries

HERALDSUN.COM.AU  
**Shopping centre under siege from rampaging teen gangs**  
Westfield Fountain Gate traders are too terrified to try and stop gangs of teens raiding their shops and...

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/victorian-gang-violence-pm-blames-daniel-andrews-government/news-story/fe01c9bdb53ffcaeba6c87281d717967>

<sup>10</sup> ibid

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-01/african-gang-crime-out-of-control-in-melbourne-minister-says/9296476>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/how-the-victorian-liberal-partys-focus-on-african-youth-gangs-backfired/eiilqsrect>

Mr Wood went on to claim that *"Most migrants when they come here don't know what it means to be Australian"*<sup>13</sup>, demonstrating the lack of understanding of the experiences, characteristics and contributions of new migrants and disregarding the fact that Australia is a nation built on migration and that the Australian people are multicultural.

In 2017, Mr Dutton asserted that lawyers acting on behalf of asylum seekers trying to stay in the country, are "un-Australian"<sup>14</sup>. This builds on the position that migrants are 'other' than Australian, by also including those that represent them as un-Australian.

### **Example 3: 'Reducing migration' positioned as the solution to problems**

Reducing the permanent migration intake was a debate that emerged throughout the past decade. Former prime minister Mr Tony Abbott stated that there was *"absolutely no doubt"* that *"record"* numbers of *"newcomers"* were putting *"downward pressure on wages, upward pressure on housing prices and adding to the crush on our roads and public transport"*<sup>15</sup>. Former prime minister Mr Scott Morrison stated that voters in Australia's biggest cities *"are concerned about population"* and that *"they are saying: enough, enough, enough. The roads are clogged, the buses and trains are full. The schools are taking no more enrolments"*<sup>16</sup>. Former Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton also stated that it was a *"perfectly legitimate argument"* that Australia's cities were *"overcrowded"* including *"gridlocked traffic in the mornings"* and use of services like hospitals. *"We have to try and encourage people out into regions, we have to reduce the numbers where we believe it's in our national interest,"* he said. *"It's [The migration program] come back considerably and if we have to bring it back further, if that's what required and that's what's in our country's best interests ... that is what we will do"*<sup>17</sup>. The statements not only mask the shortcomings of the government's responsibilities in planning for and addressing the infrastructure and labour market needs in our country, but also undermines the significant contributions migrants make to both our economy and society. Migrants were framed as dispensable by former prime minister Scott Morrison during the COVID-19 pandemic when he suggested those under various visa arrangements who couldn't support themselves that *"it is time....to make your way home"*<sup>18</sup>.

The migration program continues to be used for political gains by the Liberal-National Coalition even while in opposition. During the 2023-2024 Budget reply speech, Opposition

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/no-regrets-new-multicultural-affairs-minister-proud-of-campaign-against-african-gangs-20190528-p51s0c.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/lawyers-representing-asylum-seekers-are-unaustralian-peter-dutton-20170828-gy5ci7.html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/turnbull-hoses-down-immigration-review/so3smbosq>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/nov/20/scott-morrison-flags-cutting-migration-in-response-to-population-concerns>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/feb/15/peter-dutton-calls-for-migration-cut-we-have-to-reduce-the-numbers>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-03/coronavirus-pm-tells-international-students-time-to-go-to-home/12119568>

Leader Peter Dutton said *“the Albanese government’s big Australia approach will make the cost-of-living crisis and inflation worse”*<sup>19</sup> despite the budget scaling down projections over Australia's population, which is estimated to be 700,000 people smaller than anticipated in 2019<sup>20</sup>.

The negative political narrative impacts upon Australia’s international reputation as a migration nation of choice. During consultations, our communities have told us that Canada is considered to be a more welcoming nation with an affordable, timely and flexible migration system. Perceptions among communities are powerful and can have a significant influence on the decisions of new migrants who are relying on community members already in Australia for information about the migration journey. A survey of 6,000 temporary migrants carried out by academics at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) found that among international students, graduates and Working Holiday Makers, 59% were less likely or much less likely to recommend Australia as a place to study or have a working holiday, following their experience during COVID-19<sup>21</sup>. Embracing a strengths-based, celebratory narrative to migration and multiculturalism is vital to ensuring that we regain our international reputation as a welcoming nation.

**QUESTION:**

**Dr WEBSTER:** ... I am interested that the social security Canada provides—I assume it's straight off when people arrive?

**Mr Al-Khafaji:** I don't have details of the Canadian model. I'm just using Canada as an example, but I'm happy to look into that, if that's of use.

**Dr WEBSTER:** If you could take that on notice, that would be great.

**ANSWER:**

Canada provides a number of services to newly arrived residents through its Settlement Program. The Program is aimed at assisting immigrants and refugees to overcome barriers specific to the newcomer experience in order for them to be able to undertake their longer-term integration and participation on a similar footing to other Canadians. The Program provides newcomers with the information required to make informed decisions, language skills adequate to their settlement and integration goals, and the support the need to build networks within their new communities. The Canadian Government funds and works with

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/may/11/peter-dutton-opposes-labors-jobseeker-boost-and-doubles-down-on-migration-attacks-in-budget-reply>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/peter-dutton-warns-migration-boost-will-worsen-australias-housing-crisis-in-budget-reply/ubm4ugk63>

<sup>21</sup> <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-09/apo-nid308305.pdf>



provincial, territorial or municipal governments, international organisations, not for profit organisations, businesses, educational institutions and individuals to deliver the Program. The Program delivers immediate, intermediate, ultimate and strategic outcomes such as the successful integration of newcomers to Canada and the participation of citizens and newcomers in fostering an integrated society. Details of the Canadian model can be found at <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/program-terms-conditions/settlement.html>.