



Migration Committee welcomes decision to extinguish detention debt

The Chair of the Australian Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Migration, Michael Danby MP, has congratulated the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, on the introduction of a bill that would abolish the practice of charging a person for their time in immigration detention.

Under the arrangements proposed by the bill, introduced to the Senate this morning, people convicted of people smuggling or illegal foreign fishing will still be liable for their costs of detention and removal. All other detainees, however, currently invoiced for \$125 per day, will no longer be charged.

Additionally, all existing debts for current and former detainees will be extinguished.

Mr Danby said that he was pleased that the Minister had taken action in line with the recommendations of the Migration Committee in its December report on immigration detention.

The Committee's report strongly questioned the rationale and appropriateness of charging a person for their immigration detention.

"We found the policy to be unnecessarily harsh, punitive and without effective purpose", said Mr Danby.

"The debts issued to people continued to have huge impacts on their lives after detention and made it difficult for them to put the experience behind them, particularly if they were released from detention into the Australian community."

"The Committee received in evidence, for example, an invoice for \$162,000 issued to a person who had been in immigration detention for several years and was now an Australian resident."

"Furthermore, the policy didn't make sense from a fiscal point of view, as the actual cost recovery was virtually non-existent and it failed to offset the costs of immigration detention in any meaningful way."

"The Minister's announcement reflects a more rational, humane approach to our immigration detention framework."

At the time of its introduction in 1992, the charging of people in immigration detention was to ensure that all unlawful non-citizens would bear the primary responsibility of costs associated with their detention.

For media comment, please contact the Committee Chair, Michael Danby MP, on (02) 6277 4520 (Canberra).

For background information, including the full terms of reference, please visit the inquiry website at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/reports.htm> or contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 4560 or jscm@aph.gov.au.