



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**PROOF**

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:  
TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS**

**Asylum Seekers**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 27 November 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 27 November 2012  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Urquhart, Sen Anne

**Source** Senate  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Senator URQUHART** (Tasmania) (15:07): I rise to take note of answers by Minister Lundy on the government's asylum seeker policy. I firstly need to take umbrage at the continual use of the terms 'illegal arrivals' and 'illegal immigrants' and the like. In using these terms, the opposition show their true colours in this debate. They highlight that they are interested only in perpetuating the fear of the unknown that unfortunately abounds in sections of our community. This government is committed to continuing to break the people-smuggling trade. We are committed to stopping people from getting on boats to make a very dangerous journey to Australia, and we are committed to an orderly migration program.

The government sought to implement the Malaysia agreement but this place voted it down. We then moved to seek recommendations from an expert panel chaired by former Chief of Defence Force Angus Houston. The Houston report includes numerous pieces of evidence gathered by the trio who worked on that inquiry. Air Chief Marshal Houston, Mr Aristotle and Professor L'Estrange provided clear recommendations to the parliament in their report. The government said at the time of announcing the review that to break the policy impasse it would accept the recommendations of this review in full. This has seen the government work through an extraordinarily difficult process, looking at thousands of people in need, people seeking help from a rich country like Australia—and those opposite seek to demonise these people.

The Houston inquiry report recommended action that was very different from what was put forward by the Pacific solution. The report drew clear differentiation between what happened in the past and what their recommendations said. The government committed to come back into this place and implement what was said in the Houston inquiry report. Senators need to pay close attention to the whole of the Houston inquiry report. They need to look closely at all of the recommendations as a package, as a process to achieving regional cooperation, as a process to stopping people from getting on leaky boats and risking their lives and as a process to increasing Australia's humanitarian intake of refugees. We have committed to implementing the recommendations as a suite, and we continue to do so. It has been constantly stated that you cannot just choose elements of the recommendations. You cannot pick and choose the politically expedient

ones. You have got to look at all the processes, all the steps, and you have got to ensure that they work together. You cannot just explain three specific policies as being the silver bullets to this difficult policy issue.

Labor will continue to look at the issues of those who seek asylum and will work to ensure that people are treated with dignity and respect. In doing so, we want to remove the incentives for these people to take the decision to go onto these dangerous boats, to leave their place of refuge and face an unknown future—but this process will need to have the commitment of all people in this parliament. We need to appreciate the desperation of the people who are caught up in the horror of seeking asylum. What those opposite seek to do is to demonise people who are seeking asylum.

On that note, I congratulate the producers of the television series *Go back to where you came from*. This show had six high-profile Australians, including former coalition Minister for Defence Mr Peter Reith. The six Australians faced intense danger on the streets of some of the world's most dangerous cities. Three were taken to Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, and the other three were taken to Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. All six experienced time inside the walls of the Christmas Island detention centre. All six took part in a voyage, south from the Indonesian coastline, on a wooden fishing boat. But, most importantly, this show put these six high-profile Australians in direct contact with asylum seekers in Australia and across the world. It showed the desperation of these people, who want a better life, free from persecution. It showed that the baseless attacks from many of those opposite on these people can be combatted—combatted through conversation, through basic dialogue about humanity. The desperation of the people who take to these boats is admitted across the board.

The government is committed to a process that seeks to break the trade of the people smugglers. That is why we commissioned the Houston report. We are seeking to implement the suite of its recommendations to achieve a regional framework for assisting refugees. We need to stop the dangerous rhetoric of turning back the boats. *(Time expired)*