

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
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13 February 2026

Dear Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee,

Re: Offshore processing and resettlement arrangements

We welcome the decision of the Senate to establish this Inquiry and shine a light on Australia's offshore processing and resettlement arrangements since 2022.

About CAPSA

The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) is a collaborative national alliance of Catholic organisations who advocate for policy changes to achieve more just outcomes for people seeking asylum in Australia. CAPSA's work is grounded in Catholic Social Teaching principles: the common good; dignity of the human person; subsidiarity and participation; and solidarity. By partnering with agencies who work to welcome, support and advocate for people seeking refuge, CAPSA strives to have its advocacy initiatives informed by the voices of people with lived experience.

CAPSA was officially launched during World Refugee Week in June 2015. Formed out of a project partnership between Jesuit Social Services and Cabrini Health, CAPSA was and continues to be governed by an Advisory Group of peak bodies and national social service organisations, convened by Jesuit Social Services.

We outline our grave concerns about Australia's offshore processing and resettlement arrangements below.

Human costs

Australia's policy of offshore detention has caused significant harm since its beginning. It compounds trauma for people who have already faced serious risk or harm. This has been extensively evidenced through formal inquiries, reports and accounts that demonstrate



the long-term and often permanent consequences to the physical health, mental health and wellbeing for people detained offshore. There is documented evidence of deaths, child abuse, physical and sexual assault, medical neglect and urgent court injunctions for medical transfer of people to Australia.

With global displacement of people having doubled in the last decade, we are concerned that Australia continues to retreat from its responsibilities towards refugees and people seeking asylum. This includes continuation of offshore processing and resettlement on Nauru; refugees who remain in Papua New Guinea with no resettlement pathways; and people previously detained on Manus Island and Nauru, now living in Australia with no permanent status.

CAPSA's member organisations understand firsthand that people who seek protection in Australia do so because they fear harm to themselves and their families, often as a last resort. The decision to leave their country of origin and seek protection elsewhere is not made easily or without risk.

People currently living in offshore arrangements remain at significant risk. Nauru is a small, poor island nation, with a population of around 13,000. It has high unemployment and is increasingly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, such as sea-level rise. We are concerned about the limited level of health and mental health care and social supports available to people seeking asylum who have been transferred to Nauru. Meanwhile, those sent to Papua New Guinea more than a decade ago – under an offshore processing deal which has since ended – languish there under a deal that forces them to cover all living expenses with a single allowance.

Financial costs

In addition to the human cost of offshore detention, the financial cost to Australia is substantial. Further considerable costs are incurred with health and psychosocial support services needed to manage the long-term impacts of those held in third countries. While independent analyses can vary, in 2022–2023, the average annual cost of holding one person in detention was around \$505,176. This compares to a cost of \$81,759 for a person seeking asylum to live in the community.

Still, as recently as October 2025, Australia entered into a \$2.5 billion deportation deal with Nauru to accept up to 354 members of the 'NZYQ cohort'. The deal allows Australia to apply for 30-year long-term visas on behalf of the cohort to enable their deportation

from the country. The total lifetime cost of the deal is estimated at more than \$7 million per person if all members of the cohort end up in Nauru. The extraordinary cost of this continuation and expansion of offshore arrangements could be redirected to resource other much needed services as part of a more humane migration policy.

Infringement on the rights of individuals, families and children

Amendments to the Migration Act in 2024 and 2025 expand Ministerial powers to overturn protection findings and send people to third countries, without adequate transparency and review. The broad powers risk reducing transparency and safeguards, making it less likely that once protection is granted, Australia can be a safe place for people to rebuild lives that are productive and fulfilling.

Families and individuals seeking protection in Australia are often traumatised from their experiences, and this can have intergenerational impacts. Australia's humanitarian program appropriately recognises family reunification as a priority for resettlement. Yet recent Migrant Act amendments contradict this priority by allowing Australian citizen children to be separated from their parents and for long term community ties to be severed. This jeopardises the wellbeing of individuals, including children, who have sought safety here.

Australia's international human rights standing

Australia's current approach to refugees has drawn criticism from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi. In January 2026, Australia's Universal Periodic Review by the United Nations Human Rights Council resulted in 23 nations making recommendations in relation to Australia's offshore processing and immigration detention policies. Six countries (Brazil, China, Finland, Germany, Serbia, Switzerland and Türkiye) unequivocally called for an end to Australia's offshore processing of asylum claims. Australia's previous Universal Periodic Review in 2021 also resulted in calls for Australia to end its policy of detaining refugees and people seeking asylum offshore.

Our call to the Australian Government

When the Labor Government came to power in 2022, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese promised to "lead a government worthy of the people of Australia – a government as courageous and hardworking and caring as the Australian people are themselves." As a Catholic alliance guided by Catholic Social Teaching, we are committed to welcoming the stranger and upholding the dignity of all people, regardless of their status or circumstances.



In line with this, we call on the Government to deliver on the Prime Minister's promise, and use its strength in parliament to initiate a fair, humane and principled reset of Australia's treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum. This must include:

- **Ending offshore detention and processing** and quickly re-settling all people in Australia
- **Ending the uncertainty for people seeking asylum** by providing fair and timely pathways to permanency in Australia
- **Ensuring people seeking asylum have access to work and study rights**, as well as other public services including Medicare, housing and financial support
- **Increasing Australia's humanitarian intake** including by expanding the existing community support program which covers most expenses and assists arrivals to integrate with society.

We have the ability, but also the responsibility, to offer safety and protection to people fleeing danger and harm. CAPSA's member organisations would welcome the opportunity to partner with Government to develop a sustainable and humane alternative to offshore detention, and to contribute to the creation of community-based support arrangements.