



NEWSLETTER July 2022

Dear Grandmothers and Friends

With the new government in office for two months, and the 47th Parliament holding its first sitting, we rightly look now for signs of change for the better for refugees.

At the very least, we should expect the Labor Government to implement its policies. How quickly that will happen is unclear. Indications of slowed progress are emerging. For starters, there is a mountainous backlog of a million visa applications clogging up the already dysfunctional department that is Home Affairs.

Home Affairs 'sources' and is inclined to repeat the crude political manoeuvre of election day, when a convenient boat arrival was announced despite pushback from public servants adhering to caretaker government convention.

If the Government is to be motivated to do more than is in Labor's policy platform "bible", it will only be when individual MPs argue for it in the party room due to the constant pressure they are under from their own constituents. This helps set the strategic direction for Grandmothers for Refugees.



Cathy Wilcox, The Age, 26 July 2022

Operation Sovereign Borders is here to stay. Boat turn-backs or immediate returns (of hungry and poor Sri Lankans) are still happening. Don't expect to hear about them in the media – unless Opposition Leader Peter Dutton has kept open channels with his pre-election ADF and

Rather than a post-election tiring, our movement is growing. Two new groups have started in WA, increasing our ability to speak up for refugees with a national voice. Efforts are being made to connect scattered members in Queensland. Common sense suggests we focus on building the Grandmothers for Refugees presence in electorates held by government and independent MPs. Increasing connections with all Senators remains a strategic goal

To carry the movement through its next phase, a new Grandmothers for Refugees Executive group has been elected. You will find more about the new executive in this July Newsletter along with more about key issues affecting refugees.



Slow-Going in Home Affairs

The two years of border closures and zero migration appear now as a lost opportunity for the Home Affairs Department to get on with things.

The incoming government has found a backlog of one million visa applications to be processed, many from people already in the country and working. Nevertheless, the business community is pushing for more workers to be brought in from overseas. With the Jobs Summit in early September, expect the focus to be on new migration rather than giving willing refugees already here their chance to settle, work, and spend on rebuilding their lives as permanent residents.

When it happens as promised in the policy platform, the commitment to transfer around 19,000 people on temporary and safe haven enterprise visas to permanent visas will be a massive improvement for them. However, it appears these won't be done as a 'job lot' and will be dealt with individually, adding to the departmental workload.

In the media



Immigration Minister Andrew Giles has a backlog of asylum applications to deal with, with more incoming (Image by Dan Jensen)

After ten years or more, there are still people indefinitely held in immigration detention. The new Immigration Minister, Andrew Giles, is understood to be reviewing these cases.

We know some things won't change. Boat turn-backs are still happening. Operation Sovereign Borders is here to stay. For the 'transitory persons' – all those who spent any time on Nauru or in PNG – there is still no softening on the ban on their settlement in Australia. Many are in their tenth year of hopelessness. Their imagined futures, even for families with children born in Australia, are still in the US and NZ under agreed deals, or perhaps Canada where only private sponsorship resettlements are currently possible.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese promised to govern with respect and kindness. That intention will likely be tested on a daily basis. In the meantime, we see welcome signs of a willingness to listen and talk with interest groups about their issues and be available to the media.

Albanese Government inundated with growing asylum applications. [Albanese Government inundated with growing asylum applications \(independentaustralia.net\)](https://independentaustralia.net)

By Abul Rizvi 12 July 2022

Home Affairs Minister, Clare O'Neil: "Operation Sovereign Borders is Government Policy."

<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/labor-to-prioritise-skilled-migration/13980802>

PM sets a new tone

[The change in tone at Arden and Albanese's meeting could not have been more stark | Jacinda Arden | The Guardian](#)

News Daily Podcast: [The boatloads of asylum seekers Australia forgot - ABC](#)

[Why I am suing the Australian government over my hotel detention after being brought from Manus Island | Mostafa Azimitabar | The Guardian](#)
[Meet today's Ned Kelly: trapped and forgotten in a factory of suffering \(smh.com.au\)](#)

Refusing to eat the Democracy Sausage!

Both former Prime Minister Scott Morrison and former Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews have been severely criticised and accused of “**undermining democracy**”.

On Friday, 22 July 2022, the Minister for Home Affairs Clare O’Neil received an internal departmental report on circumstances surrounding the politically convenient news that a boat with Sri Lankan asylum seekers aboard was attempting to reach Australia on election day.

News of the on-water matter was released and confirmed by the Prime Minister, breaching its own secrecy code that has kept citizens in the dark about vulnerable asylum-seeking refugees for almost a decade. The Liberal Party used the information to urge voters to choose the Coalition over Labor.

Below is a summary of the report’s findings:



Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

SECRETARY

OFFICIAL

EC22-002635

The Hon Clare O’Neil MP
Minister for Home Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

On Tuesday 24 May 2022, the acting Prime Minister asked me to investigate the circumstances that led to the issuance of the public statement by the Joint Agency Task Force (JATF) Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) concerning the interception of the Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel (SIEV) 915 on the day of the Federal Election, Saturday 21 May 2022. My report is enclosed. It assesses whether the actions taken by officials were in accordance with the *Guidance on Caretaker Conventions 2021*.

The *Guidance on Caretaker Conventions 2021* do not have the force of law and Departments and Agencies do not have the legal power to enforce their observance. It was for the responsible Minister to determine whether it was in the public interest for the details of the arrival and interception of SIEV 915 to be made public. In the absence of any statutory provisions governing the matter, the release of this information was a matter of administration in relation to which the Minister could give directions, having regard to their ministerial role.

The legitimate purposes for previous publications of interceptions have been considered to be for transparency and deterrence - particularly of the role publication plays in deterring the people smuggling trade. It was for the Minister to determine the purpose of the announcement.

The political character of the public service was preserved in this instance by the refusal on the

Read the full text of the Pezullo Letter here: [SEIV 915 and the Commander JATF Operation Sovereign Borders public statement \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](#)

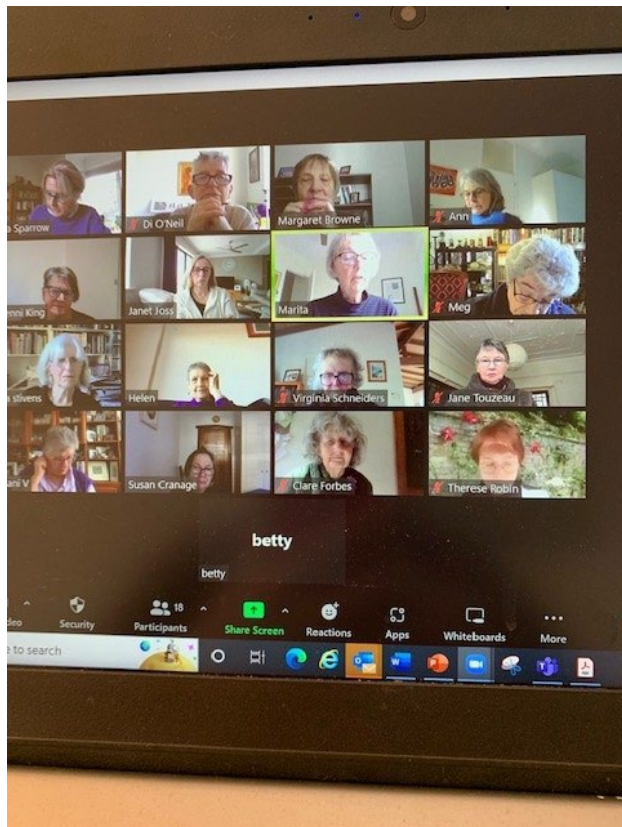
In the media:

[Home Affairs report sheds light on election day intercept of asylum seeker boat \(themandarin.com.au\)](#)

[Coalition 'undermined our democracy', should apologise for election-day asylum seeker boat saga, Labor says \(sbs.com.au\)](#)

Turning up the volume on our national voice

Just weeks after holding a meeting of interested Grandmothers and Friends, new Perth and Fremantle groups of Grandmothers for Refugees are being represented at the monthly Co-ordinating Committee meetings.



The June meeting via zoom welcomed **Marita Keenan** who is leading a group from various electorates around Perth and **Betty McGeever** is coordinating new members in Fremantle. A separate group is likely to begin meeting within the Curtin electorate soon.

We welcome all those WA members “to the tribe” and promise to give them every support. We look forward to hearing their perspectives and receiving regular reports on their advocacy activities.

While we have members across several electorates in southern Queensland, no-one is in a position right now to take on a co-ordinating role. So, **we are keen to hear from Grandmothers and Frogs who would like to take on the role and add their unique Queensland voice to our advocacy.** We know that Uighur and Bangladeshi refugees in the Gatton area lack regular income support, decent housing, and work rights so there is a real and present need to take their case up with local MPs and Senators.

Every active electorate is invited to have a representative voice on the coordinating committee. Email us on info@grandmothersforrefugees.org. We meet via zoom on the third Wednesday of the month.

Refugee Sector Letter Kit



Issue for July 2022:

Call for access to Safety Net Income and Support for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum

Supported by ARAN, RAR, G4R, & NARN

Available to download at - <https://ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org.au/write-a-letter>

- Access to income support is critical for refugees with insecure work due to their short-term visa conditions.
- The Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project reports significant numbers who are destitute.
- Ongoing access to basic Medicare is essential for continuity of care.
- Your Member of Parliament may be blissfully ignorant of the real-life circumstances of the most vulnerable people in our community.

Fewer than a dozen letters from local constituents are enough to get an MP to sit up and take notice. So do your bit and join the national effort to raise awareness about the needs of refugees – without having to join a meeting or spend more than the price of a postage stamp. Thanks!

Grandmothers for Refugees New Executive July 2022-2024



Top (L): **Janet Joss** – Communications Coordinator

Middle (L): **Therese Robin** – Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Officer

Below (L): **Virginia Schneiders** – Electorate Development Mentor

Above: **Jean Ker Walsh** – Co-chair

Below: **Margaret Browne** – Co-chair



The make-up of the new executive group has a balance of experience for continuity and new members for freshness in ideas and approach. A transition meeting has been held and key roles agreed.

We warmly thank retiring members **Linda Sparrow** (below left) and **Jane Touzeau** for their contribution to the work of the executive over the past two years. Linda will continue to curate our Twitter account and Jane will keep up her posts on our Facebook page.



Coming up – National Members Forum

With Covid still rampant, we have shelved plans for a face-to-face forum of members in Victoria to which we had invited Immigration Minister Andrew Giles to give an opening address.

We are now planning to shift to a national members online forum on or around 29 August when the Albanese Government will chalk up the first 100 days in office.

We are hopeful that Minister Giles will accept our invitation as an opportunity to listen to Grandmothers' views and share his reflections on what has been achieved to date, and likely timelines for what remains to be done in implementing Labor's platform on refugees. Watch our website for updates.

Finally...

- **What would you like to see more of in your monthly newsletter?** Let us know with an email to info@grandmothersforrefugees.org
- **Do you know that you can keep up with more timely updates, info and resources via our website?** Go to www.grandmothersforrefugees.org
- **Are you into the Socials?** Follow us on Twitter and Facebook via the links on our website contact page [CONTACT US — GRANDMOTHERS FOR REFUGEES](#)

That's it for this month. Best wishes,
Jean, Margaret, Virginia, Janet and Therese