**SOFTENING AUSTRALIA’S POSITION ON REFUGEES**

The baker’s dozen of reasons set out below for softening Australia’s position on refugees are idealistic, humanitarian, legal, practical and economic. They apply to refugees in Australia’s detention centres as well as from other parts of the world. They may not be your priority, or even your reasons, so feel free to comment on them one way or the other. You can delete every reason, reorder them, or expand on them. But you cannot ignore this overall issue, for it defines Australia as a nation. What we are, and what sort of country we want a future Australia to be

1. A vision for the future is that Australia, of all nations, could be the first to show the world that people of many creeds and beliefs can live together in peace. [The world has been at war since time immemorial](http://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/06/books/chapters/what-every-person-should-know-about-war.html). One deep underlying reason is that we divide the world into ‘them and us’. If Australia were to open its doors, we would reduce these divisions. The benefits to the world of Australia demonstrating that people of all colours, all nations, all religions, can live together in peace, is beyond imagine.
2. Australia is a nation of immigrants. We started off as immigrants. By 2007, some 6.5 million people had [migrated to Australia since the end of WWII](https://www.border.gov.au/about/corporate/information/fact-sheets/02key). Initially English speaking, but Greece, Yugoslavia, Italy, Vietnam, Netherlands, Hong Kong and the Philippines are now in the top 10 countries. Australia already leads the world’s list with the highest percentage of foreign born people
3. We already are hugely multicultural. One in five households in Australia’s communities speaks a language other than English. [In the five mainland state capitals, 34% of people were born overseas](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs%40.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main%2BFeatures30April%2B2013#back3). Some suburbs in the major cities have close to 80 % born in other countries. ABS statistics tell us that in [Harris Park in Sydney](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/lookup/4102.0main%2Bfeatures102014), for instance, it is 76%, of whom 43% were born in India.
4. The unbelievable destruction of the cities in Syria that we see nightly on our TV screens. This war has resulted in over a quarter of a million Syrians killed, and over one million injured. Five million Syrians have been forced to leave the country, and 6.5 million are internally displaced. The photos of the destruction in Syria, of the [dead](https://www.google.com.au/search?q=dead+syrian+boy+on+beach&rlz=1C1PRFC_enAU622AU622&espv=2&biw=1600&bih=760&tbm=isch&imgil=7YC9LrUKO63fCM%253A%253B6tpbrCMHL6-83M%253Bhttps%25253A%25252F%25252Fwww.youtube.com%25252Fwatch%25253Fv%2525253Dj-sktprm5K0&source=iu&pf=m&fir=7YC9LrUKO63fCM%253A%252C6tpbrCMHL6-83M%252C_&usg=__AVYqkBCsb9gVcQ9RUJBn1VkCegU%3D&ved=0ahUKEwit5OOgoLPPAhURtJQKHREfAHwQyjcIJg&ei=GlfsV63vIZHo0gSRvoDgBw#imgrc=7YC9LrUKO63fCM%3A) and [injured](https://www.google.com.au/search?q=injured+syrian+boy+photo&rlz=1C1PRFC_enAU622AU622&espv=2&biw=1600&bih=760&tbm=isch&imgil=_dNpKd9KeNIyYM%253A%253BTbqzyaPP5H64wM%253Bhttp%25253A%25252F%25252Flearningenglish.voanews.com%25252Fa%25252Finjured-syrian-boy-reaction%25252F3470973.html&source=iu&pf=m&fir=_dNpKd9KeNIyYM%253A%252CTbqzyaPP5H64wM%252C_&usg=__lGkGHthU-19EYmAwJVALsLm0Eq4%3D&ved=0ahUKEwi5xt7SoLPPAhXLm5QKHSekCmoQyjcINA&ei=g1fsV_n4E8u30gSnyKrQBg#imgrc=_dNpKd9KeNIyYM%3A) children, call on our deepest humanitarian sympathies.
5. Our incarceration of people on Manus Island or Nauru is unconscionable. It is akin to setting up concentration camps. Also the [inability of the press to visit Nauru](https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2016/08/australia-abuse-neglect-of-refugees-on-nauru/) is suppression of one of the strongest of democratic guidelines - the Freedom of Speech
6. Adoption of a national belief that, as Robert Manne says [‘Australians are not, in general, redneck racists hostile to refugees’](https://www.facebook.com/abccompass/posts/1704730756449965). would make us feel a little more pride in our country
7. We signed international agreements that say that we would protect children (The [international Convention on the Rights of the Child),](http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx) also that people could move from country to country. Breaking these commitments is wrong, even immoral. The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights,](http://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf) which Australia has signed, says in Articles 14 & 15: “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution” and that “No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality”.
8. Other countries [do so much more](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.REFG) than Australia. The population of Greece is 11.03 million (2013). [Refugees in Greece total 57,000](http://greece.greekreporter.com/2016/06/14/how-many-refugees-are-in-greece-heres-the-head-count-ahead-of-world-refugee-day/), or one in 150 of the population. In Australia, with 23 million population, the [Syrian refugee intake is about 12,000,](https://www.dss.gov.au/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/syrian-and-iraqi-refugee-crisis/refugee-settlement-media-hub) or one in 2000. Germany, population 82 million, estimates that refugee [arrivals were about 800,000 in 2015](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/20/germany-raises-estimate-refugee-arrivals-800000), or one in 100.That country [has accepted just over one million Syrians since the start of the Syrian crisis](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/28/germany-300000-refugees-2016-bamf). [Turkey has the largest Syrian refugee settlement](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/02/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/) with some 2.5 million people.
9. People who are willing to migrate, to get themselves out of trouble, will be an asset to Australia. Partnership for a New American Economy found more than [40 percent of Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants](http://www.renewoureconomy.org/research/new-american-fortune-500/) or their children. Eighteen percent (or 90) of the 500 companies had immigrant founders. The US has also found that immigrants commit fewer crimes than native-born Americans and take jobs that no one else will ([Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/07/02/surprise-donald-trump-is-wrong-about-immigrants-and-crime/),). U.S.-born adult men are incarcerated at a rate over two-and-a-half times greater [than that of foreign-born men.](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/cacounts/CC_208KBCC.pdf) Melbourne University analysis found that a higher proportion of students with a refugee background had taken up studies in health and engineering than the national average. ([The Age 15/08/2016).](http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/meet-the-university-students-who-have-been-through-hell-20160812-gqreh1.html)
10. We will have jobs for them. They will largely create their own jobs, but [Treasury's budget forecast for growth in employment](http://budget.gov.au/2016-17/content/glossies/overview/html/overview-01.htm) says that more than 200,000 jobs are to be created in 2016-17.
11. The argument that it is ethically correct to stop the boats –as we stop the drownings - is false. An overriding ethical guideline is that we are allowed to do anything we want to provided we do not harm anybody else. John Stuart Mill articulated this principle in On Liberty, where he argued that, "[The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others](https://books.google.com.au/books/about/On_Liberty.html?id=uWAJAAAAQAAJ&redir_esc=y)." An equivalent was earlier stated in France's Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 as, "Liberty consists in the freedom to do everything which injures no one else. [Article 4](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/rightsof.asp) .Supporting statements can be found in [the bible](http://biblereasons.com/hurting-others/). If asylum seekers want to risk their lives in coming here by boat, it is their choice, not ours.
12. A Save the Children/UNICEF [report released in September 2016](http://www.savethechildren.org.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/159345/At-What-Cost-Report-Final.pdf) found that the government’s deterrence policies against refugees cost a total of $9.6 billion over four years between the 2013 and 2016 financial years. This includes the cost of detention both in Australia and on Manus and Nauru, as well as the government’s turn back policies. Ending this expenditure on Australia’s inhumane “concentration camps”, would make a massive dent in the country’s foreign debt.
13. After we have cleared the camps we could take in refugees from other parts of the world. A common sense priority would be to take families first. Their need is greater, the pull on our empathetic feelings is stronger, and the chance of importing a terrorist is reduced. Single men create a disproportionate percentage of the world’s problems. It is [young adult males who comprise the terrorist organisations](http://www.searcct.gov.my/publications/our-publications?id=55) and who commit the acts of terror. A collaboration of The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and the Brookings Institution has found that [child sexual abuse is overwhelmingly committed by males](https://victimsofcrime.org/media/reporting-on-child-sexual-abuse/statistics-on-perpetrators-of-csa). Findings from the [ABS Personal Safety Survey (2005)](https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/who-abuses-children.) indicated that of participants who had experienced physical abuse before the age of 15, 55.6% experienced abuse from their father/stepfather and 25.9% experienced abuse from their mother/stepmother. Just over nine in ten [prisoners in Australia were male (93% or 24,365 prisoners](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4517.0~2015~Main%20Features~Sex~15)). In fact all countries world-wide carry a dominantly male prison population. The same worrying statistic applies to [mass shootings in the United States](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/mass-shootings-in-america/). There have been 81 in total. And of these, a huge 79 involved a male shooter