

CONNECT

the Newsletter of the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group

*Committed to promoting in our municipality and beyond
understanding of and respect for human rights
through programs of community education*

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<http://mornpenhumanrights.org/>

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Our next public forum will be held at
3.30pm on the 19th November, 2012
Dromana Community Hall (next to Old Shire
Office)

Robin de Crespigny, will talk about her prize
winning book 'People Smugglers'

ALL WELCOME

gold coin donations will be welcome

A BRIEF REPORT AND THANKS FROM OUR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

by Jenni Colwill

This meeting was about quality of membership, rather than quantity – which means we had a quorum with only a few extras. Quite a few members were overseas enjoying holidays in the Pacific and other corners of the earth, and others were unexpectedly detained due to illnesses and family responsibilities. Despite this, the meeting was very lively with one participant reporting she had gone home “exhilarated but exhausted.” Many thanks to those who were able to attend.

As anticipated, our Chair, Hellen Cooke, stepped down at this meeting. Helen Howells presented her with a beautiful pot plant as a small ‘thankyou’ for the work Hellen had put in over the preceding 12 months. Hellen never intended to take the Chair role on by herself, but when the two other co-Chairs had to step back from the role, she willingly stepped in, subsequently playing an important role in keeping the Group together for the year. Well done, Hellen.

The main purpose of the AGM was achieved, and a new Committee was elected as follows:

Chair and web manager: Jenni Colwill Deputy Chair: Deidre Greig Secretary: vacant Treasurer: David Ball Newsletter Editor: vacant	Committee member (minutes secretary): Steve Warne Committee member (records secretary): Maureen McPhate Committee member (fundraising): Denise Hassett Committee member: Ray Kenny
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Vale Patricia Rodriguez. Patricia was a founding member of the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group, and is fondly remembered by many of our members.

Vale Yaroslav Mamchak. It is with great sadness that we also say farewell to Yaroslav Mamchak, another active member of the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group for many years.

REPORT OF THE INSIDERS' BRIEFING HELD BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS LAW CENTRE

by Helen Howells

On 20 August the Human Rights Law Centre organised an Insider's Briefing which John and I attended on behalf of the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group. The aim of the meeting was to give information on human rights issues in which the Centre has been involved to those groups which support the Centre. A further aim was to hear feedback from the audience.

The Briefing was chaired by Phil Lynch executive director of the Centre. Phil is on the Editorial Board of the Alternative Law Journal, he is an appointee to the Federal Government's Human Rights Grants Scheme Expert Panel, and was a member of the former Victorian Attorney-General's Human Rights Leadership Forum. In 2008, he was one of 25 'Future Global Leaders' invited to attend the InterAction Council meeting of former Heads of Government and of State in Sweden.

Phil opened the meeting by explaining that three other members of staff would give presentations focussing on the Centre's work first in relation to particular international issues for example the case of Stefan Nystrom; then to deaths that resulted from police action; and then focussing on the reform of the Australian Constitution in relation to the rights of indigenous Australians.

Rachel Ball, who is Director of Policy and Campaigns for the Centre spoke about the case of Stefan Nystrom. Since joining the Centre in 2008, Rachel Ball has led much of the Centre's work in the areas of equality rights, women's rights, refugee and asylum seeker rights, health rights, aid and development, and engagement with the Asia-Pacific. She has worked with the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, the Castan Centre for Human Rights Law, Human Rights First in New York and the World Bank in Washington. She is Co-Convenor of the Human Rights Network of the National Association of Community Legal Centres.

Rachel told the story of Stefan Nystrom who was born in 1973 in Sweden. His mother, an Australian permanent resident, was visiting her parents in Sweden in the late stages of her pregnancy. She arrived back in Australia with Stefan when he was just 27 days old. Since then he had lived all his life in Australia, never leaving the country, and he speaks only English. By 2004, aged 30, he had committed a large number of serious criminal offences and was deported to Sweden in 2006. No one denies he has been guilty of serious criminal behaviour but it is claimed that Australia has a responsibility for him and that deportation has aggravated his mental disability. The Human Rights Law Centre will continue to advocate in cases like this where it seems that Australian decisions have not been compatible with United Nations obligations and international law.

Anna Brown, Director of Advocacy and Strategic Litigation then spoke about the issue of deaths from police action. Anna was previously an adviser to the former Victorian Attorney-General and Deputy Premier, the Hon Rob Hulls, with primary responsibility for human rights, equal opportunity,

Indigenous issues and GLBTIQ rights. Anna advised extensively on the operation of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights, including preparation for the statutory review of the Charter. She has also worked as a Senior Solicitor with the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office. Anna has provided legal advice, education and training on both domestic and international human rights law to a diverse range of clients including corporations, the public sector and international organisations. At the Centre, Anna focuses on projects regarding Equality Law reform and the Commonwealth Government's National Human Rights Action Plan.

Anna gave information about deaths following police action. The Victorian figures are the worst in Australia and the use of tasers is a key concern. There is a need for evidence based work to achieve change, policy work to make sure police use of force is human rights compatible and there is independent investigation of incidents not investigations by police. Anna pointed out that the Human Rights Law Centre intervened in the Tyler Cassidy case. The Centre conducted a survey of these issues and their report is being used by others especially the police. The Centre will monitor the future work of the office of police integrity

Ben Schokman, Director of International Human Rights Advocacy at the Centre, leads much of the Centre's engagement with the United Nations human rights system and in relation to Indigenous rights, disability rights, and prisoner and detainee rights. He has experience with a range of national and international Non Government Organizations and human rights institutions, including the International Service for Human Rights and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Ben is the Chair of the LIV Human Rights Committee and Co-convenor of the Federation of Community Legal Centre's Human Rights Working Group.

Ben discussed the issue of the constitution and aboriginal rights. As he pointed out the constitution dates from 1901 when aborigines were not recognised but times have changed and there is a growing desire to have a bipartisan look at changes to the constitution. There has been a nation wide consultation resulting in five recommendations for possible changes to the constitution to remove racially discriminatory provisions. The government is in favour of the recommendations but gaining support for referendum questions in Australia is not easy. The Centre has been involved in a submission to the Universal Periodic Review and the visit of the United Nations Special Rapporteur who gave a critical report on the human rights of Indigenous people in Australia.

In the question and comment session that followed the three presentations a wide range of issues was raised. These covered the work of the Centre in putting together advice on the effect of the expert panel on asylum seekers, advice which supports working with existing organizations. The Centre has also worked on the issues of violence against women, foreign policy, detainee rights, human rights law and the human rights work of United Nations bodies.

Another comment was made about the police issue - that the real failure in the police issue is the education of police. Frontline police have had no recent training in dealing with people with mental illness. There is a need now to concentrate on education rather than duty of care which is being looked after. Also under the Stronger Futures Bills program changes to income management for aborigines have been extended to everyone, and there are concerns that the extension of the intervention for another 10 years will have undesirable consequences. The 'Say No to Racism' campaign is being supported by the Centre and they are developing advice for people who want to be involved. Finally, it was suggested that Australia's aid projects should include human rights objectives.

The Briefing was an impressive and useful event. The work of the people at the Centre, their commitment to enhancing the human rights of people in Australia and beyond and their willingness to assist others who have the same commitment, is an invaluable resource for our Human Rights Group. Over the six years since the MPHRCG was formed we have benefitted from their attendance at some of our functions as speakers and panel members, we often have recourse to their website for up to date information about human rights issues and they have frequently assisted us when we needed answers to the more complicated aspects of human rights issues. We support their on going role in human rights action.

AUSTRALIA'S ASYLUM SEEKER DILEMMA

by Xiaoli Ma

On the 7th of August the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group in conjunction with U3A hosted a forum at the Old Shire Offices in Dromana to debate Australia's 'dilemma' with asylum seekers. The event was attended by more than 50 eager residents from across the Peninsula who wanted to hear from the Member for Flinders, Greg Hunt MP, Robyn Hughan, local film director and Rebecca Eckard, Research Coordinator of the Refugee Council of Australia, on the topic of asylum seekers. Helen Howells who is the founding member of the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group moderated the discussions to ensure everyone received a fair go at being heard.

The forum began with a preview of Robyn Hughan's upcoming film, 'Journey To Nowhere'. Audience members were taken on a journey into the lives of a group of women and their families, originally from Afghanistan, who fled for reasons of war, death and persecution. The majority of these families now live in Malaysia as UN registered refugees, waiting for re-settlement to Australia and the US. While they wait, the women are unable to work legally, own or rent property, access health care or send their children to school. They are frequently exposed to violence, harassment, exploitation and abuse. They have no support and no rights as they wait in hope of being resettled. Human rights abuses go unchecked in countries like Malaysia, which are not signatories to the Convention. In one instance, a woman who had participated in a rally to highlight the fact they have been waiting for many years to have their refugee claim processed was arrested and informed that her claims for asylum will never be processed. As the years go by their hopes for resettlement are fading, and many would rather risk their life at sea to escape the hopelessness of their living situation to be able to find safety and security for themselves and their families.

Since 2001, 840 people have been estimated to have died at sea while attempting to reach Australian shores for the purpose of seeking asylum. The evidence currently shows that deterrence does not necessarily work rather it has the effect of transferring the problem elsewhere¹.

Following the film, the guest speakers on Australia's asylum seeker policy gave presentations. While their views varied, a common concern centred on the desire to prevent such tragic deaths from occurring again as refugees desperately attempt to cross the sea to seek asylum in Australia.

Greg Hunt, Member for Flinders argued in favour of reinstating the Howard Government's border protection policy. He stressed that disincentives introduced by the Howard Government were successful and enabled refugees such as the women from the film to be resettled through Australia's Humanitarian Program. For every boat person recognised, a refugee in a camp is struck off the list for resettlement. Australia is the only country in the world that links the granting of onshore asylum to its resettlement program.

Refugees are defined by the Convention as persons who:

*“... owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it
...”²*

¹ Sources from <https://theconversation.edu.au/asylum-seekers-and-australia-the-evidence-8173>

² UNHCR, *Convention relating to the status of refugees*, UNHCR, Geneva, 2007, p. 16, viewed 5 May 2010, <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.pdf>

As the debate continues as to what we should do about the number of people wishing to seek asylum, it is important to remember that the number which attempt to seek asylum from Australia is very small (0.6%) in comparison to the rest of the world. The United Nations estimated 7.1 million refugees were in a protracted situation in 2011 (refugee populations in exile for five or more years). The total of refugees recognised by the UN in 2011 was 15.2 million. Australia's total Humanitarian Program of 13,799 persons in 2010-11 included 5998 refugees through our Humanitarian Program and 2973 persons through the offshore Special Humanitarian Program during 2011¹.

Any form of deterrence implemented is unlikely to compare to the state of terror and threat to life, liberty and persecution faced by people who genuinely believe they have no other alternative than to travel by boat to Australia for asylum. Everyone has a right to seek asylum in Australia. In light of the fact that Australia is a signatory to the Convention, obligations are owed to anyone who is a refugee and who wishes to seek asylum in Australia. Proposals to turn back boats at sea and process asylum seekers offshore can be seen by neighbouring nations as a failure to fulfil our obligations.

Rebecca Eckard, Research Coordinator of the Refugee Council of Australia presented various solutions in contrast to the current one offered by the Australian Government.

The Bali process which involves over 50 countries and international organisations working to combat people smuggling, people trafficking and related crimes in the Asia Pacific region appears to be the most holistic and respectful of human rights principles². Other solutions offered include:

- Increase in family reunion visas for people to aid in the reduction of people risking their life in order to come to Australia by sea.
- Increase in Australia's Humanitarian intake of refugees to reduce the frustration felt by people waiting for years to be resettled. This can reduce the agony experienced by people who do not know what their future may hold.
- Improvement in the process for people to be registered as refugees. At present there are millions of displaced people and unable to be registered as a refugee.
- Provision of a regional citizenship (similar to the one adopted within the East African Community) to provide refugees with a form of "political" repatriation – a workers' visa and a passport from their country of origin. Presently, 71% of refugees are in protracted exile with the average displacement lasting twenty years.
- Provision of basic needs such as health care and education for people waiting to be resettled.
- De-linking Australia's resettlement program from the number of processed onshore and offshore asylum seekers. Australia is the only country that subtracts the number who arrive by boat from our humanitarian obligations.

"Not long after this forum, our two major political parties took a bipartisan stance to reopen offshore processing of asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus Island. However the reintroduction of temporary visas and turning back boats has been rejected by the Federal Government".

Australia's newly adopted policy to deter boat arrivals is contrary to our obligations, along with the removal of human rights protection from our Migration Act 1958. As a country, Australia has the ability to provide leadership and promote better human rights standards for refugees. The current policy of Australia may be driven to deter lives from being lost at sea as asylum seekers attempt to arrive by boat, but the fact is refugee and asylum seekers remain in appalling situations throughout the South East Asia region. These conditions are driving people to risk their lives at sea in an attempt to arrive on Australian shores for the chance of gaining protection.

¹ <http://theconversation.edu.au/what-role-does-australia-play-in-accepting-the-worlds-refugees-8328>

² Sourced from www.baliprocess.net

SOMEWHERE OR NOWHERE

by Steve Warne

At the forum¹ on “Australia’s asylum seeker dilemma” jointly presented by the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group and Southern Peninsula U3A on 7th August 2012, it was agreed that we need to do more to stop the increasing number of deaths at sea which those coming to Australia are experiencing, and that people should be deterred from taking this route.

But there was no consensus on how this should occur. With one exception: that we need to pursue a regional solution, perhaps via the Bali negotiating process. But this raises the question as to what 'shared responsibility' should really entail? Surely we are not promoting the idea that the mainly poor developing countries in our region should take the same number of refugees as wealthy and underpopulated Australia?

And speaking of 'deterrence', there was surprisingly little mention, even by Flinders MP, Greg Hunt, of the much talked about, and rightly disputed, need to deter refugees from coming to Australia at all.

Greg Hunt expressed the view that we should prioritise the resettlement of refugees from camps or detention centres, but as Rebecca Eckard, Research Co-ordination for the Refugee Council of Australia, pointed out, only a quarter of the world's refugees are in camps, and in our region, less than 20% are located in camps. So, taking this too literally will not address the human rights needs of the majority of refugees, most of whom are not in camps, but experience regular threats to their security and lack basic rights to work, education and health care.

Other crucial facts and opinions that emerged were:

- That there are 200,000 registered refugees awaiting resettlement right now, but there are only 80,000 available places for resettlement, of which Australia provides a mere 6000;
- That there are 2.55 million Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan;. Currently, only 700 of those who are 'registered' refugees there can be resettled due to the rest of the world's lack of generosity and compassion. At this rate, it will take 1000 years to resettle these people;
- That half of the world's refugees are in our region. This, despite the lack of human rights in the region. Neither Malaysia or Indonesia are signatories to the UN Convention of Refugees and in Thailand, it's not even possible to be registered as a refugee;
- That Australia is the only country in the world that links resettlement policy with refugee arrivals policy. For every person who arrives by boat one less person is permitted to come here under our vastly safer, but far too competitive humanitarian resettlement program;
- That Australia is the only developed country practising mandatory detention and that the time we take to process on-shore arrivals is longer than any other, in particular, the US, which is exemplary in this regard;
- That Australia is well respected by nations which offer resettlement, so we are in a good position to offer leadership in terms of getting these other countries to resettle more refugees. However, this can't happen until we seriously increase the number of refugees we are prepared to resettle. Otherwise, we will rightly be accused of shirking our responsibilities; and
- That where refugee processing happens is not the critical issue, because without more opportunities for resettlement, the waiting will remain intolerable and people will continue to risk their lives on leaky boats.

Just as I was wondering why Greg Hunt had not mentioned the core policy of the Opposition, that we should be 'turning the boats back', MPHRG member, Robyn Hughan, asked some very pertinent

¹ The forum was presented with a 26 minute overview of Robyn Hughan’s film, ‘Journey to Nowhere’ and heard the views of two speakers, the Member for Flinders, Greg Hunt, MP and Rebecca Eckard, Research Coordinator for the Refugee Council of Australia.

questions. These questions came after an earlier screening of a film teaser for her forthcoming 'Journey To Nowhere' documentary, about the Afghan refugees in Malaysia.

If we do 'turn the boats back', what will happen to the refugees who are turned back? Where will they go? What might happen to them on the way? Who will accept them and, most importantly, who will respect their human rights?

Interestingly, Greg couldn't answer these, but was gracious enough to take them on board.

In retrospect, it's salient that the Gillard Government's expert committee on asylum seeker policy has determined that turning the boats back is not currently a practical possibility. But, even if it were, would it be ethical?

And what are the human rights implications of the Government's subsequent embrace of the Pacific Solution (Mark2) under which on-shore processing will again be suspended altogether, as it was under the Howard Government, and refugees arriving by boat will be sent to faraway Manus Island and Nauru.

How humane is it to punish refugees arriving by boat at all, let alone by sending them there for an unspecified period of time? Does this not make a mockery of our international obligations under the UN Convention? If so, who will lead the challenge?

What happens when the facilities at these islands are full? And above all, what will be the emotional and health costs for the refugees themselves - on top of all the injustices they have previously faced.

Yes, we ought to be concerned about the wellbeing of people coming here in leaky boats, and yes, we ought to be providing safer travel alternatives, not just discouraging the boats. But, given that around 90% of refugee boats do make it to Australia, these dangers have been exaggerated.

The negative impact of scuttling boats that are captured is never talked about. The resulting message to people smugglers from this practice is to send only the worst and most dangerous boats because you will never see them again. Who pays the real price of this policy?

However unattractive the boat option now is, I expect it will continue to be seen as a small price to pay by the increasing number of refugees who are growing tired of waiting in nearby transit countries, not to mention the huge increase in refugee arrivals which we should anticipate as a consequence of the situation in places like Sri Lanka, Sudan, the Congo, Somalia. Stay tuned, too, for new arrivals in the wake of the Arab spring, Syria and the West's pending withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In short, don't underestimate the push factor, but do keep pushing our politicians and our fellow citizens for truth and just action.

THE SCOURGE OF WAR

ARTICLE 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

- *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

by John Howells

At the meeting of the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group on 6 August 2012, our Chair, Hellen Cooke, reminded us that it was on this day 67 years ago that an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. She told us that some 90,000 people were killed instantly with many thousands more dying as a result of the bomb during the following months. Some 12 square kilometres of the city, i.e., about 70% of it, were completely destroyed. This started me thinking again about what the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations calls "the scourge of war".

A few years after the dropping of the Hiroshima bomb an American philosopher and theologian, Henry Nelson Wieman, said that the action was like a knife cutting history in two. He meant that the prospect of a war fought with atomic bombs was so horrendous that no nation would be able to contemplate it. War, he thought, was now no longer possible. Before Hiroshima there were wars. After Hiroshima there could be no wars. Hiroshima divided history.

Well, it hasn't worked out quite like that. Certainly there have been no nuclear wars since Hiroshima, but war is still a constant in this world and war is increasingly violent and destructive.

How should we think about war? As a retired Anglican priest, my thinking on the subject has been deeply influenced, as might be expected, by the Christian tradition. I make no apology for writing out of this tradition. I am merely letting you know where I am coming from.

The New Testament says very little about war. Soldiering is nowhere forbidden although some early churches would not baptise soldiers. Jesus gives no guidance as to what the attitude of his followers to war should be, except that his own life preaches non-violence. When, on the night before he died, Peter cut off the ear of one of those who would arrest him, Jesus told Peter to put up his sword. Nowhere does Jesus say explicitly that military force may not be used to defend the defenceless. However, nor does he say that it may.

After Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, war became accepted and even glorified. In the Middle Ages going on a crusade against the Muslim inhabitants of Jerusalem was proclaimed by the Pope to be a godly work.

However, war and the suffering and destruction that it brings has often been a problem for the Christian conscience. So, scholars like Saint Augustine in the fifth century and Saint Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth developed the theory of the "just war" to try to limit the resort to war as a way of solving disputes and to try to control the way wars were fought. "Just war" theory includes four principles:

1. War may only be waged by constituted authority, such as a king. Rich men with private armies may not make war. This aimed to control those medieval barons who were constantly at war with each other.
2. The cause must be just, e.g., self-defence against an invading neighbour. This rules out the most common causes of war, the lust for power, land and wealth.
3. There must be the intention of establishing good or rectifying evil, i.e., the aim must be the resolution of a dispute and the creation of a genuine peace.
4. It must be waged by proper means, e.g., women and children should be immune from attack, and the cost in life and property must not outweigh the good achieved.

This theory has served to some extent over the centuries to limit and control war, but enormous problems continue. Let me look at just two - weapons of mass destruction and guerrilla warfare.

Firstly, **weapons of mass destruction**. Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, if used, would cause such vast destruction and suffering that no civilised nation could use them. But how to ensure that they are never used? The United States of America and the old Soviet Union developed what became known as "mutual deterrence". Both had great stockpiles of nuclear weapons aimed at each other with the threat that whoever pushed the button first would automatically receive answering destruction.

This worked during the period of the Cold War, it has worked for several decades between India and Pakistan, and some¹ argue today that it could work between Israel and Iran. However, for deterrence to work, each side must not be bluffing but be willing to destroy countless innocent people, even though both may hope never to have to do it. This involves a morally unacceptable commitment. No way has been found to abolish nuclear weapons despite much international diplomacy and many treaties. The

¹ See Kenneth N. Waltz, "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb" in *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug 2012 Vol 91, No. 4

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is seen by many as implying a double standard. Why is it alright for America to have nuclear weapons but not Iran? What would happen if such weapons fell into the hands of a rogue state or a private army? We continue to live with this threat hanging over the world.

Secondly, **guerrilla warfare**. Campaigns by bands of irregular soldiers are probably the most frequent form of war in the world in recent years, whether fought for the gratification of a warlord, as in Angola and Sierra Leone, or for national self-determination, as in Palestine, Chechnya and Libya, or in self-defence against oppression, as in Bosnia and Kosovo. Such wars are almost impossible to control because one or other of the participants is not a state which might respond to international pressure, e.g., the Tamil Tigers, or is a state but powerless to control its side, e.g., Lebanon's difficulties with Hezbollah. Wars involving irregular soldiers tend to break all the ethical rules for limiting the suffering and destructiveness of war. "Just war" theory and international law are powerless to control such combatants.

This is not a happy picture. I am sure, too, that we are all very conscious at the present time of the terrible destruction being wrought daily in Afghanistan and in Syria. It is extremely difficult to be optimistic about the future of the world. However, I think there are some small signs of hope.

Firstly, there is international diplomacy and the beginnings of an international legal system. Deep-seated problems that lead people to go to war are rarely settled by war but by diplomacy. Sooner or later a political solution has to be found. Let us be grateful for the United Nations Organisation and for the International Criminal Court which now tries perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. For all the criticism heaped upon the United Nations for its failure to end particular wars, it has been instrumental in bringing and maintaining peace in many parts of the world, and the International Criminal Court is a continuing warning to murderous dictators like Slobodan Milosevic and Laurent Gbagbo. Let us support the United Nations and work for its strengthening. May its moral authority grow and be widely recognised and respected. Let us be grateful, too, for nations who act as honest brokers when disputes arise. Often it is a small nation that is most effective. Norway and Canada have fine records in this regard.

Secondly, there is a growing revulsion against war across the world. Television makes it much harder today to glorify war. To the extent that we are all aware of the true horrors of war, so we will be less willing to allow our leaders to take us to war except as a last resort. Indeed, it may frequently be better to suffer injustice than to suffer war. Given the destructiveness of modern weapons, the case for pacifism is much stronger today than it has ever been, but personally I am still not quite ready to go down that path. Perhaps the time is coming when human beings will effectively outlaw war. Unfortunately that day has not arrived.

It is, of course, important to distinguish between war and police action. In the submission of our Human Rights Group to the 2008 "White Paper on Defence process" we gave strong support to the Australian Defence Force being involved in peace-keeping and peace-enforcing actions, but we questioned our involvement in high-intensity wars like Iraq. The response we received to our submission claimed that in an unstable world the safest form of defence is to be well-armed - "to speak softly and carry a big stick". I find this a difficult argument to challenge. I can see that it involves the immorality implicit in deterrence, but in the real world one can be faced sometimes with having to choose the lesser of two evils.

Looking back over the last hundred years, there has been an enormous change in the public attitude to war. I hope that public antipathy for war will continue to increase. I hope that the day will soon come when going to war will not be a vote-winner, as the 2003 Iraq War was for George W. Bush in 2004. I hope that Australians will be people who will not say "yes" to war except in the most grievous of situations. I pray that war will be no more.

DEMOGRAPHIC DILEMMAS

by David Ball

I feel sure that most readers would share my view that an enormous amount of resource is now devoted to “research” into the statistical relationship of any matter under investigation for any reason with a range of commercial and governmental committees and other interested parties. That is, almost nothing can be undertaken in the public domain until some clerical people analyse what implications might affect something else that another group is sponsoring. The inevitable result is huge increases in supplementary costs, and in the likelihood that the proposition is shelved.

Population growth and statistics have affected me personally for some time, dating back to 1954 when my now wife (of nearly 54 years) agreed that we would marry. We thought an appropriate place for us to live would be Mount Waverley, close to my place of employment; an area where farming land was being subdivided for residential living. The estate agent proudly discussed the Government legislation that a broad area of land immediately east of the farm being subdivided had been set aside as a permanent Green Belt, so that we could confidently plan the use of our quarter-acre allotment.

By the time we built our home in 1960 not only had the Green Belt gone the way of most development promises, but the demographic centre of the city of Melbourne was now in Glen Waverley. Today, of course, it is even further east.

We lived in Mount Waverley for 43 years before moving in 2003 to Portsea into the “beach house” we had purchased in 1986. The move saw our two-person complement increase the population of Post Code 3944 to 320 persons. We understand that figure has changed very little in the last nine years.

What has changed is the number of homes in Portsea – now well over 2,000. **This means there is around one person for every seven homes.**

Some readers will know that the Australian Tax Office publishes statistics which show the average personal tax paid by residents, related to the postcode of their principle residence. Of course, Portsea heads the list almost every time the detail is published. And that is because, of the 2,000 and more homes here, there are properties belonging to some of Australia’s wealthiest people. They do not live here, as everyday residents, but their Portsea address is shown as their principle place of residence to ensure that they can avoid paying annual land tax in excess of \$100,000. The tax they do pay will be levied against their “normal” suburban home at a much lower rate.

Naturally, there will be “permanent” redirection notices lodged with Australia Post, so that their mail reaches the appropriate collection location. All this is perfectly legal. In case you do not know the range, sale prices for homes in Portsea over the last twelve months have ranged from \$450,000 to \$27,000,000.

There are further skewing anomalies, of course, because plenty of “legitimate” Portsea residents pay no income tax at all.

Many homes in Portsea are very large, with five and more bedrooms, able to house family and friends on the occasion of visits – yet, for over three hundred nights per year, many of the houses are empty. For example, although our home is inhabited for over three hundred nights each year, it is mostly just the two of us – but we have five bedrooms and can sleep up to fourteen people.

Why is this important?

In May this year, I attended a forum at the Mornington Shire Council Offices in Queen Street Mornington, aimed at alerting interested citizens on the status of the Triple A (Affordable Housing) initiative the Shire has been pursuing. We had available to us an expensive looking report prepared by KPMG, and some of the attendees were people with relations who are severely restricted in their

opportunities to rent a home. In areas of the Shire, for example Rosebud and Hastings, we have some very poor instances of overpriced offerings, and the statistics taken over the whole Shire are severely inaccurate because of the Portsea anomaly.

While those in the work force who justifiably initiate worthwhile projects to help those in need, sometimes desperate need, know what this article expresses, the “system” requires them to statistically justify their proposals.

What can be done?

To justify the very high expenditure on staff to plan and promote the Triple A project, the three levels of government need to drastically amend the statistics gathering techniques, so that the postcode 3944 anomaly – probably mirrored in other areas throughout Australia – does not prevent necessary initiation from being successful.