

CONNECT

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

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A Housing Policy – An Answer To Homelessness

Most of the economists in the western world hold the view that the “market mechanism” is the most efficient method of allocation of resources.

In practice, not all sectors of the economy support this view. The housing sector is one where examination shows that many sectors are most inefficient and a good proportion of the poorer communities have little or no power of moving to a secure basis for their families over many generations, e.g., Aborigines, handicapped people and those in families who have always had poor educational levels and limited work skills.

Australian governments have recognized that the “market mechanism” is inefficient in these cases and have made (inadequate) provisions for such people, e.g., Aboriginal people have had special government funding for this sector. Similarly, handicapped people have special housing – frequently government grants to volunteer committees for the housing needs of these people. For example, fifty years ago government housing provided assistance at reduced rent for workers in decentralized industries in country areas. Later, houses were sold off to private citizens at reduced prices. Not a common practice.

All these special measures lead to problems when the government budget was under pressure – funding was reduced.

The problem was seen in marketing terms. Poor people or handicapped people could not contribute enough in savings to capitalise adequate housing. Voluntary Housing Societies were established where people could become members of a group of savers and could then borrow to build their own homes at reduced interest payments. This system enabled many middle class people to finance and build their own homes but was not available to poorer people who could not afford to make the initial deposit.

What can be done to establish a finance program to build good quality housing for the Australian community ?

Economic circumstances have recently changed to enable government or its departments to access funds at historically low interest rates. The ten year bond rate at which the government may borrow for ten years at a fixed rate of interest is just 2.55% - an all time low !

It is now possible to borrow to finance a labour intensive housing industry on a large scale and provide adequate housing for those impoverished or in special circumstances in the Australian community.

Alan McPhate
27 January 2015

Supplement to Submission 80 Re Amendment C184, R1084 from Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group

1. BACKGROUND TO THE GROUP

The Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group ("the Group") is a voluntary group of concerned citizens established in 2005, whose Constitution lists as its purpose to "*promote understanding and respect for human rights and responsibilities in our municipality and beyond through programs of community education*", and to be "*unaligned with any political party or movement.*"

The Group has long had an involvement in promoting local awareness about accessible housing and homelessness. As well as publicising issues, we know that many disadvantaged people are "outsiders" and not heard, so we promote a "*voice for the voiceless.*" Our starting point is Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which states that:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care.

In response to the 2008 "*Report on Homelessness*" by the Mornington Peninsula Shire ("the Shire"), the Group launched its Operation Concern, a targeted letter-writing campaign to 100 churches and other community bodies, noting that a local supported housing project was abandoned due to fears by the adjacent community and exploring ways to address this. About half of those seeking emergency and longterm accommodation are women with children; who arguably need the "social glue" of inclusive community more than any other cohort. In 2012, members wrote and published a number of articles about social housing, including documenting the Habitat for Humanity work in building six homes for low-income families to purchase on the Mornington Peninsula.¹

We endorse the Shire's concerns about the need for more affordable and diverse housing provision, and its

*"ten year aspirational target to increase the MPS social and affordable housing sector to a minimum of 3% of the total housing stock by 2021. This equates to an increase of 146 social housing dwellings per year for next 10 years."*²

2. MEASURES OF UNMET LOCAL NEED FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

Although housing difficulties are invisible to most people unaffected, a 2008 Shire report³ explained how they can emerge suddenly:

A culmination of events at the wrong time in your life, a death in the family or family breakdown, retrenchment or a series of missed work opportunities, mental health issues, increasing stress and depression, could put you at risk of homelessness, and it can make you both homeless and sick, at a time when you need the most stability in your life.

FMP Medicare Local point out that people with housing problems are also more likely to experience chronic health issues and this is often as a result of their homelessness, not the cause.⁴

¹ See our "Connect" newsletter No.40, July/Aug 2012

<http://mornpenhumanrights.org/assets/Newsletters/CONNECT40.pdf>

² Mornington Peninsula Shire, Social and Affordable Housing Policy – Action Plan 2011

³ Mornington Peninsula Shire "Social Speaking – Home Truths", 2008 p X

In the 2012-13 financial year, 321 people and their families sought emergency housing from Peninsula Youth and Family Services (now known as SalvoCare Eastern)⁵, and 2012 analysis by the state Department of Human Services⁶ shows that across the Frankston-Mornington Peninsula catchment:

- the Frankston - Mornington Peninsula catchment was identified as having more than one third (37.5%) of the Southern Metro Region's total homeless population who were residing in tents and squats.
- Frankston West was identified as having the third largest number of people in the metropolitan region residing in homeless hostels, night shelters or refuges.

3. MEASURES OF HOUSING SUPPLY IN FMP REGION AND MT ELIZA

Lack of improvement in Affordability and Availability measures seems longstanding:

- of the 14 Small Areas Profiles in the Shire measured for rental availability in 2002, Mount Eliza was the equal lowest for public rental housing (0%) and
- the lowest for private rental housing (11%)⁷

The 2006 Census showed that renters in the Mt Eliza Small Area had the largest number of renters (61% of the total) in the highest two quartiles (least affordable on the basis of income and rental costs) in the Shire.⁸

3.1. Affordability

Local rental levels for low income people are just disastrous. Information provided in September 2014 to a Senate Inquiry by the Tenants Union of Victoria⁹ shows:

- The mean weekly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in the Frankston and Peninsula Region is \$210. That would consume 78% of the disposable income of a single person on Austudy (\$269.20 a week), leaving just \$59.20 a week for food, utility and transport, not to mention rapidly rising study costs
- A single person on Newstart (\$312.50) would be slightly better off, with rent eating up 67.2% of their income, leaving \$102.50 each week to cover living expenses
- An older person receiving the Aged pension (\$468.70) would be left with more than half their disposable income or \$258.70 a week to cover weekly expenses, but they would be still living below the poverty line
- A single parent with one child would have to spend 47.1% of their pension to cover the cost of a two bedroom apartment in Frankston (\$265 a week). With an income of \$562.84 a week, they would be left with just under \$300 a week to survive
- A couple both on Newstart with 2 children receiving \$723 per week, would need to spend 44.3% of their income to rent the average 3 bedroom property in Frankston at \$320 per week,

⁴ Fact Sheet *Homelessness and Health in Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula*, FMP Medicare Local 2012

⁵ Mornington Peninsula Shire, *Health, Hope and Happiness II Background Report* 2013 p. 19

⁶ Cited in FMP Medicare Local 2012, above.

⁷ Gutteridge, Hasken and Davey, *Report to MPS on Triple A Housing Policy* 2002 Appendix D

⁸ Mornington Peninsula Shire *"Social Speaking – Home Truths"*, 2008 p 62 Table 10

⁹ Cited in *Mornington News*, 30 September 2014

- If the same parents were both working in minimum wage jobs, they'd need to allocate 35.9% of their net weekly earnings of \$892.25 to cover the rent on a three bedroom home – still well above the threshold for “housing stress” of 30% of disposable income on rental or mortgage payments.

3.2. Diversity

There is the problem of diversity for clients seeking to access the private rental market due to dwelling types being of limited range, or discriminatory practices operating:

- one or two bedroom units with minimal outdoor space, and mainly designed for ageing couples or singles who are often not seeking long term stay; these are often low grade housing not suitable for children
- 3-4 bedroom houses on quarter or fifth of an acre blocks, at vastly higher rentals; this may be discriminatory to some family types eg. single parents, same sex couples raising children, indigenous people, or group sharing.
- local workers identified indigenous people, young people, people leaving prison and single men as experiencing significant difficulties in accessing the private rental market eg. Peninsula Youth and Family Services identified a gap in accommodation options for single people living with a chronic illness aged between 40 to 60 years old¹⁰
- these are reason for purpose-built housing, increasingly by community housing groups with knowledge and commitment to make these projects work.

4. SHIRE POLICY OBJECTIVES FOR SOCIAL HOUSING

Social Housing is defined by the Shire¹¹ as

“generally ... dwellings constructed, purchased or leased for the purpose of providing rental accommodation at a rent level below the market rate on a ‘not for profit’ basis, through a direct government subsidy or rebate, and includes public, community, transitional and crisis housing... (and)... social and affordable housing for people with support needs should optimally be integrated with appropriate support services.”

In the Mornington Peninsula Planning Scheme, the Shire has recognised that "Appropriate, affordable and secure housing provides a basis for life stability."¹² The keynote statement from their Triple A Housing Policy is

“The Mornington Peninsula Shire believes that both the Federal and State governments have primary responsibility for ensuring the rights of people to access affordable and appropriate housing. However, the Shire recognises that, to give effect to its own stated values local government, in partnership with local communities, other agencies and levels of government, can also play a role in enabling the fulfilment of these rights. The Shire is therefore committed to facilitating a range of housing options and services in the Mornington Peninsula that achieves more affordable, appropriate and available housing outcomes to sustain our diverse communities. Particular consideration is given to vulnerable households of low income, young people, older people, people with

¹⁰ Cited in Katlynx Consulting: *Emergency/Transitional Housing Properties on the Peninsula, Future Strategies for the Management of Properties with Joint Ownership Between the Office of Housing and the Mornington Peninsula Shire*, December 2006

¹¹ MPS, *Social and Affordable Housing Policy*, Policy No. 11, 2011

¹² Mornington Peninsula Shire, *Health, Hope and Happiness II Background Report 2013* p. 28

disabilities, single parent and single person households, and people of non-English speaking or indigenous backgrounds.”¹³

The State Planning Policy Framework (at 20.01) notes that the Municipal Strategic Statement is intended to

Provide(s) the strategic basis for the application of the zones, overlays and particular provisions in the planning scheme and decision making by the responsible authority...(and) planning and responsible authorities must take the MSS into account.
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5. POLICY APPLICATION TO MOUNT ELIZA PROPOSAL

The State Planning Policy Framework includes clauses which are relevant to our argument for the inclusion of two 1000 m² blocks within Lots 441 and 442 LP10791 at Bethanga St, Mount Eliza for social housing.

5.1. Housing Affordability

“Increase the supply of well-located affordable housing by: Facilitating a mix of private, affordable and social housing in activity centres and strategic redevelopment sites... Planning for housing should include providing land for affordable housing.. Facilitate the delivery of high quality social housing to meet the needs of Victorians.” (Clause 16)

The majority of the existing housing contiguous to the development site (in Kanya St, Bethanga St, Barmah St, Kunyung Rd) appears to be single storey 3-4 bedroom houses, many of 1960s-70s era, on quarter acre blocks. Use of 2 blocks for social housing on quarter acre blocks is therefore not considered to be out of character with the visual or size parameters of the existing built environment, and the Shire is keen to see purpose built social housing as being a model of excellence.

As the 24 development blocks are vacant means that a claim that social housing would be inconsistent with the local area presumes that the nature of adjoining new dwellings is known, when it is not. It also ignores that the great majority of social housing is currently provided by the private rental market in dwellings built without differentiation according to the occupants’ position as a public or private tenant.

5.2. Access to Services and Facilities

“New housing should have access to services and be planned for long term sustainability, including walkability to activity centres, public transport, schools and open space” and “Support opportunities for a wide range of income groups to choose housing in well-serviced locations.”

5.3. Schools and Shops

It is noted that these facilities are close by. From the furthest point of the site (57 Kunyung Rd)

- Kunyung Primary School is 200 m distant
- Kunyung Pre-school at 44 Barmah St (Bruce Cameron Reserve) is 300 m distant
- Mount Eliza Secondary College is 1.9 km by foot
- Mount Eliza village (IGA) is 1.9 km by car,
- A family GP practice is located at 118 Mt Eliza Way, 2.2 km by car

¹³ Gutteridge, Haskins and Davey, *Report to MPS on Triple A Housing Policy* 2002 p 88

¹⁴ Dept of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure, *Victoria Planning Provisions*, Nov 2014

- Peninsula Mental Health Clinic is located at the corner of Kunyung Rd and Nepean Highway (1.3 km from the development site)

Mount Eliza village is a very well-serviced centre for the full range of banking, shopping, household service facilities, comparable in range to bigger centres such as Mornington or Frankston. Mt Eliza had the highest family household proportion (singles/couples with children & couples without children) at 79.4% in the 2006 census¹⁵

5.4. Social and Recreational Spaces

- Mount Eliza Community Centre is also in the village precinct (2.1 km)
- The development site is around 400 m from the Earimil Creek Bushland Reserve, and a similar distance from both the Bruce Cameron Reserve and playground, and also from Moondah Beach.

5.5. Public Transport

The geographic dispersion in much of the Shire means that car ownership is a must (93% of households compared to the Melbourne average of 87%)¹⁶, location of low income close to public transport is a major benefit to reduced living costs and greater social access. The Mount Eliza area is one of the best locations to realise these objectives.

- The Frankston Mornington Bus stop at Nepean Highway/Kunyung Rd intersection is 1.3 km from the site, and also transits via Mount Eliza village; services in both directions are hourly.
- For those unable to access this, the Mornington Peninsula Shire operates a subsidised Dial A Bus service from Mount Eliza to Mornington for passengers aged 60 plus and people of any age with a disability (and their carer) every Wednesday; this is door to door and wheelchairs and mobility aids are accommodated. Once a month the service goes to Frankston.
- The Shire also operates a shopping delivery service for residents assessed as needing it.
- Taxi costs to Frankston are significantly lower than from other Peninsula townships

5.6. Employment

As “40 percent of the Peninsula’s workforce works outside the Shire, with 13 per cent employed in Frankston but with less than 4 per cent in any other centre”¹⁷, it makes sense to take advantage of this opportunity for low-income social housing residents to be located close to Frankston, with its higher employment, lower taxi costs to access (compared to say, Rosebud), radial buses to Dandenong etc., and metropolitan rail link.

6. CAPITAL CONTRIBUTION FROM SOUTH EAST WATER

The South East Water company (SEW) is a State Government-owned enterprise not subject to commercial pressures from private shareholders, and has benefited from a monopoly franchise over the Mornington Peninsula for over 100 years. As a public enterprise, it is very reasonable to expect it to distribute to the local public for socially beneficial ends a small portion of the enormous windfall capital gains it will realize from sale of the Bethanga St property. It is reported that SEW purchased the referenced land for \$18000 in the early 1960s, and it is now

¹⁵ Mornington Peninsula Shire “*Social Speaking – Home Truths*”, 2008 p 10

¹⁶ Mornington Peninsula Shire, *Municipal Strategic Statement* Clause 21.02 Profile of the Mornington Peninsula, 2006

¹⁷ Ibid.

worth \$10.8 million.¹⁸ Based on this estimate of current value, a capital gain of 600 times the purchase price will be realised.

Such gains are well known as derived from the scarcity value of land, population growth and economic development, rather than the enterprise of the owner and are therefore windfall capital gains. It seems reasonable that long term stakeholders - the Shire as host and its residents as franchised customers for many decades - should receive some of the huge benefit being realised. This would enable affordable rental accommodation in an appropriate location to low-income or disadvantaged local residents who aspire to housing security, as well as reducing the contribution from ratepayers.

Assuming land cost is approximately half of total capital costs for a social housing project at this site, if SE Water was to gift 2 of these 24 development lots, it would enable a sustainable financial (and therefore functional) model, as the new owner (the Shire or an appropriate social housing body) could levy residential rents discounted significantly from the commercial rate, but still recover the cost of capital (dwellings only, as land would be gifted). This could reduce rental subsidy requirements and therefore recurrent pressures on local and state Government budgets, and ultimately on taxpayers and ratepayers.

7. CONCLUSION

The use of 2 blocks for social housing at this location is entirely consistent with

- the Shire Strategic planning objectives, being within the Mount Eliza township and
- the Shire Disability strategy since the location is accessible to existing services, and
- the Shire Housing strategy because it integrates residents into an existing community, rather than treating them as "fringe dwellers"
- more employment opportunities for low-income people, in Frankston and the Metropolitan region.

An innovative, tailored model which would cater for the needs of those who have not found the private market either affordable, non-discriminatory or sufficiently diverse is not only possible but has been realised locally with Shire input (the "Hastings Model"). A well-designed and well-functioning model would clearly reduce perceptions by neighbours of detrimental impact, and do what good social housing should do: enhance and extend local amenity and strengthen community bonds.

We have all seen in recent years the growth in awareness and community strengthening which has occurred as people with disabilities are brought into the mainstream of society. Such reciprocity can occur towards homeless people also, but the pre-condition is physical proximity – community development cannot occur without it. There is very little social housing in the Mount Eliza precinct, and it is an ageing area with some parts (not at this location) reflecting high income households and large blocks eg. Woodlands area. A step towards greater affordability, even in this small way, will promote a more diverse demographic cohort and a balanced, inclusive community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This submission draws on the research, advocacy and action on homelessness and insecure housing issues by many local organisations and individuals over many years, who we thank for their dedication. The MP HRG contact for this issue is Kevin Bain, secretary kbkevinbain@gmail.com, mob. 0413 427 851

¹⁸ Frankston Times, Feb 24 2015, p 1

Victims Twice Over: The British And Dutch Prisoners Interned In Australia During World War 2

Kevin Bain

Cyril Pearl, “The Dunera Scandal”, Angus and Robertson, 1983 (for loan from me)

Rupert Lockwood, “Black Armada”, Australasian Book Society, 1975 (for loan from me)

Jan Lingard, “Refugees and Rebels”, Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008 (at City of Boroondara library)

With commemorations of the end of WW2 afoot, it's good to highlight these three books, about foreign subjects of England and Netherlands East Indies at that time who were interned in Australia unjustly - and in the Dutch case illegally - due to a feeble Australian attitude to their human rights. Both examples show the influence of the White Australia policy, and our government's submission to European governments who displayed some arrogance. The treatment of German and Austrian Jews fleeing Nazism as though they represented the enemy in some way was pervasive within ruling circles, and is echoed in attitudes to today's asylum seekers.

How many people know that it is usually the oppressed minorities fleeing Iran (over half in Australia are non-Muslims)¹⁹, Buddhist Burma (muslim Rohingyas comprise 4 percent), Tamils from Sri Lanka, Ahmadiya muslims, ethnic Hazaras from Afghanistan etc. There is also the idea that refugees have little regard for their children – “why do they put them in harm's way? why do they get pregnant?” – as if people with an uncertain future in refugee camps must wait for stability to magically appear before they can marry, procreate, seek a future for their children. Would you put your life on hold for ten years?

As well as the striving for improvement by internees, these books record the humanity and egalitarianism –sympathy and empathy²⁰ - towards displaced strangers which can emerge when people question imposed rules and roles. In both cases, it was often their guards (usually retired WW1 soldiers) who discovered the internees were not sympathisers with the enemy, and assisted them in various ways. The important function of formal advocacy against the juggernaut of a state at war also made a difference, but it took some time.

The “Dunera Scandal” (the title comes from a Manchester Guardian article) is about Australian government acceptance of Britain's decision in July 1940 to send about 2,700 mainly Jewish refugees rounded up in Britain as “potential” enemy aliens, to Australia on the transport ship *Dunera*. When the war began in September 1939, the 74,000 Austrian and German people who had fled to England during Hitler's time were assessed by tribunals, with three-quarters classified as “refugees from Nazi oppression” and allowed to live without restriction (“C” class aliens). During the first few months of the war (the “phoney war”), Home Secretary Sir John Anderson had said that “it is not a British characteristic to oppress the man who is powerless to retaliate” but much of the popular press - which previously had championed Hitler, Mussolini and the British fascist Oswald Mosley - said there was no room for Jews in England. In early 1940 there was a campaign of unsubstantiated stories about spies and saboteurs, including false quotations from London police about dangerous refugees, a story twice denied by the London police commissioner. In Cyril Pearl's view, this was coordinated between the press and the military, to prepare the public for mass internment. While military institutions are now seen more benevolently, it should be remembered that militarism as an ethical value was widespread in both the Allied and Axis countries.

¹⁹ Markus, Jupp, McDonald, “Australia's Immigration Revolution” 2009, p 72

²⁰ Roman Krznaric's recent book, “Empathy: a handbook for revolution” gives a persuasive argument that programs which develop empathy have significant potential for positive social change.

Britain feared invasion in May 1940 as Hitler marked up European victories, and on military advice the government announced that “every male enemy alien between 16 and 70 should be removed forthwith from the coastal strip”, meaning from Inverness to Dorset. There was a rough and rushed roundup process which included hundreds of outright mistakes: most of these “temporary internees” were racial or anti-fascist refugees who had fled Hitler’s Germany and Austria during 1932-38, including those who had lived in Britain almost all their lives, were working for the government, and had family fighting for Britain. The dragnet was widened within a few days, and extended to the whole country for “B” class aliens (free but with some restrictions), and to all “C” class alien males under 70 when France capitulated in June 1940. This allowed Hitler to make propaganda about the situation: “The enemies of Germany are now the enemies of Britain too. The British have detained in concentration camps the very people we found it necessary to detain. Where are those much vaunted democratic liberties of which the English boast?”

On 1 July 1940 Prime Minister Menzies agreed to take 6,000 internees and prisoners of war, if the individual classification files were provided to Australia. In the end, only 12 files were provided but we still took the first shipment of 2700, which turned out to be also the last. British Foreign Secretary Herbert Morrison later said only about 400 of the 2700 were transported on security grounds (“A” class aliens), the rest were detained as a “precautionary measure”. Australia had yielded easily to the British, so the capacity to discriminate between hostile and friendly detainees on arrival was undermined. It seems their identity as German Jews was seen as more important than their identity as mostly anti-Nazi fighters and refugees; their civil liberties was of no consequence.

Their treatment on the voyage is not inconsistent with this view in that the detainees had their luggage thrown overboard; with grim humour they called the Dunera a “pick-pocket battleship” and a “luggage destroyer”. They were kept in filthy conditions on the ship (including no change of clothes for eight weeks) and abused by guards; some of the senior officers were later court-martialled for violence and theft. Detention on arrival behind barbed wire in Hay NSW, and later Tatura in Victoria was enforced but they were surprised that the Australian regime was benevolent: at the train stops en route to Hay, food boxes and coffee were delivered, and one internee was amazed when a guard said “Hey mate, hold my rifle while I roll a cigarette”. Interventions and abuse by officers and men was absent at the camps and the men were able to domesticate their new lodgings, but resources were very sparse.

The invasion panic quickly subsided, and Britain’s general internment was cancelled after 3 weeks. Subsequently the Dunera deportation was described as “a deplorable and regrettable mistake” by Churchill, but it was too late for the “Dunera boys”: they had already been despatched. Within a few months Britain advised Australia to “apply a less custodial treatment to genuine refugees from Nazi oppression” but this was rejected on national security grounds, and because of “questions including employment, sustenance and ultimate repatriation of such persons.” Even though Britain had agreed to cover Australia’s expense, the prospect of the internees becoming embedded in Australian society was ruled out by our leaders. They had not listened to Churchill when he said “Since the Germans drove the Jews out and lowered their technical standards, our science is definitely ahead of theirs.”

A remarkable aspect of the prisoner group was that so many had been professionals in many fields, and some of world reputation, such as the writers Walter Kaufmann and Franz Borkenau. There were athletes, lawyers, scientists, doctors, judges, psychologists, academics, artists and musicians, and Cambridge students (the students had been on excursion to a “coastal area” when the detention rule was announced, and so were press-ganged).

At Hay they organised concerts, as well as setting up a camp university teaching each other everything from atomic research to theology, including the teaching of fourteen different

languages. They started a newspaper - the *Desert Hayrald and the Views of the World* – but the only paper available was toilet paper and labels taken off tins so the print run was two copies. It must have been difficult for the many poets in the group; Pearl's book reprints many poems. They made their own currency to facilitate barter transactions, and fashioned chess pieces from stale bread. Camp organisation was based on a wage scale where the more unpleasant jobs were the highest paid: from latrine cleaners down to potato peelers and waiters; enjoyable jobs like camp spokesmen, teachers and librarians were unpaid. A visiting inspector, Dr Morris of the European Emergency Committee said "they are imbued not only with a sense of duty but also with high ideals of tolerance, justice and fair play."

The harsh environment at Hay was a challenge. Dr Morris reported that most cleaned their teeth with a moist finger dipped in sand or grit, and the internee dentists treated their comrades with tools made from nails. As official Australian visitor to the Hay camps, Justice Jordan said it breached Article 12 of the Geneva Convention to not supply adequate footwear and warm clothing; the many restrictions proved that the internees were regarded as prisoners of war not refugees. The Australian press largely ridiculed their complaints, with *The Bulletin* saying it had no time for "foreigners who after all were getting free board and lodging."

Material support and vigilant advocacy from the Society of Friends and the Victorian International Refugee Emergency Council (VIREC) was a crucial counterweight. VIREC represented five Protestant organisations, the Australian Jewish Welfare Society, the Dacome Relief Committee, the Council for Civil Liberties, YMCA, YWCA, National Council of Women, Australian Women's National League, Women's College, and the Chamber of Manufactures. Military intelligence in Melbourne had decided that all the internees were Nazis and therefore anyone taking an interest in them were Nazi sympathisers, and the Society of Friends were harassed.

Lord Gowrie, the Australian Governor General, seemed to have sympathy with the advocates, as their reports were included in his letter to the British War Office. It appointed a court of inquiry into the matter; its hearings were in secret and the findings never disclosed.

The British government asked Australia to separate the dangerous aliens from the rest, an offer emphatically rejected due to the lack of individual dossiers. There was a suggestion that jurisdictional complexities were used by Australia to enforce its immigration policy rather than military security being the rationale. Some internees whose release had been authorised by Britain due to their special skills were unable to travel to the USA to work, as a visa would not be issued until they had been released, but Australia would not release them until they had a landing permit in the USA. About a third were sent back to Britain a year later to join the Pioneer Corps, a part of the domestic Royal Engineer Service.

In October 1941, the Australian government eventually decided that internees considered refugees could be released if they could contribute to the war effort or support themselves, and in February 1942 they were allowed to volunteer for military service, not in the AIF but in the 8th Employment Company. Others stayed in detention until the end of the war. Despite a reluctant Australian government, many stayed in Australia and made their mark over ensuing decades: you may recognise names like Franz Stampfl, (Olympics athletic coach), professors Henry Mayer and Hugo Wolfsohn (politics), Fred Gruen (economics adviser to Whitlam), Werner Pelz (sociology), Felix Werder (operatic composer and *The Age* music critic), Fred Lowen and Ernest Rodeck (FLER furniture).

After the war, resentment about their access to ex-servicemen education and training schemes flared up, and the Australian Council for Civil Liberties, led by historian Brian Fitzpatrick and KC (later Justice) Barry had to defend them again.

Yet to get its own TV movie, so lesser-known, is the story of the political prisoners from the Netherlands East Indies (NEI) who were evacuated here after the Japanese invasion in 1942, without Australia being advised of their status.

An NEI (Netherlands East Indies) contingent of refugees had fled to Australia after the quick Japanese takeover in March 1942, and set up an operational Commission of the London-based Netherlands Government-in-Exile. Under the NEI Commission's direction were mostly merchant seamen from Dutch ships stranded in Australia, but also Royal Dutch Navy sailors, government officials and their domestic servants, and civilians. The open door provided by Australia was extended to Eurasians and "natives" - a crack in the White Australia policy, but restored at the end of the war with a strong deportation policy. The evacuees numbered somewhere between 5-10,000 over the period up to 1946.

Later, and unexpected arrivals, were 500 political prisoners and their families from "Tanah Merah", the gaol at Boven Digul in Dutch New Guinea. They were brought here to prevent them gaining political influence under the Japanese occupation, so enabling the Dutch to return later as rulers. As it turned out, bringing them here made the prisoners arguably more effective in undermining the Dutch: they persuaded many of their Australia-based peers that there was a better future than restoration of Dutch rule. As historian Jan Lingard said, there was "a foreign revolution being fought in part on Australian shores".

In effect, the Dutch claimed, and the Australian government allowed, the application of the military law of a foreign government (which no longer existed) to civilians in Australia. When this was brought to Attorney General Evatt's notice in late 1943, he ordered their release as the facts "suggest not only illegality but an unjustifiable use of a great power, which should only be exercised in the clearest of cases."

Rebellion was already in the air about more prosaic issues. In April 1942 the native seamen on Dutch vessels stranded in Australia were instructed by the NEI Commission to ship armaments and personnel around the Pacific region, but on pay rates about half of the Dutch and Australian seamen. They were already disgruntled at back pay not paid by the Dutch and not being able to return to Indonesia, and 240 were fined for disobeying the *Oranje* ship's master. When they walked off the ships, thereby becoming illegal immigrants under Australian law, they were then sentenced to six months in Long Bay gaol. Over the following few months, another 1,200 seamen took industrial action in solidarity, and were also detained. To deal with severe overcrowding in the gaol, 860 were sent to Loveday (South Australia) and Cowra (NSW) POW camps, where a hard labour regime was reportedly developing.

The Australian Seamen's Union entered the fray, and forced better working conditions on the ships, and increased pay for those Indonesians who had returned to work. However many Indonesians still rejected these improvements, and the Dutch came up with a new solution which kept them away from the waterfront where they might influence loyal seamen. They were now required to work in labour camps in various Queensland country towns under "military provisions for punishment, discipline and military law".

The 1944 Atlantic Charter had been an Allied attempt to gain stronger support from colonial peoples and promised a diminution of empire; for many it was taken to be a declaration of the end of empire. When the ships still weren't moving, the Dutch recruited merchant seamen from India and brought them to Australia to break the strike. But India had its own anti-colonial fight, and the Indians refused to work when they became aware of the situation, despite attempts to force them to work at the point of a gun. The Chinese and Vietnamese seamen who were stranded in Australia by the war also took action in support, for better incomes and for their national interests as well.

The dispersion of the Indonesians to many city and country towns, and the social exposure of Australians to people of a different colour was a first for many on both sides, with the Indonesians – perhaps as subjects of a wartime ally - being accepted in a way that Chinese or Aboriginal people had not been. Already, Australia had reluctantly accepted black US soldiers, and the Army Minister Frank Forde was required to tell the public that “coloured soldiers were good soldiers”, but this went further. Of course there was still racialism, but being imbedded in a society not based on an authoritarian relationship was liberating to the visitors .

There was sympathy and community support in many places for the refugees. When a small ship of 67 skilled engineers and their families fled a project in Sumatra and arrived unannounced at Victoria Dock, they were welcomed by officials. They were valuable additions at the Fishermen’s Bend Government Aircraft Factory, and the Port Melbourne Methodist church led by Rev John Freeman helped them integrate into the local community, with much cultural exchange. For one of the young parishioners his life took a different course as he ‘learned to admire and respect them for their generous good nature and natural friendliness’, something which those of us who have lived in Indonesia have found to be still true.

At the end of WW2, the Dutch saw their control slipping away, yet their increasing demands for strong action by the Labor government of the time undermined their influence at that level. Australia refused to return the political detainees to Dutch-controlled territory, and resisted the Dutch intention to train 30,000 troops in Australia to restore their rule. Australia led by Evatt and Chifley began to switch from a neutral position to covert, then overt support for the republican struggle, taking an opposite stance to the US and Belgium at the UN Good Offices Committee.

Despite our traditional ties to the pro-Dutch British command in Java, when the Dutch needed Australian shipping and port facilities for troop and material transport to Indonesia they didn’t get it, despite a personal visit and pleas by Lord Mountbatten to the communist led maritime unions. The Australian unions supported the anti-colonial struggle, and applied pressure to the Australian government to do the same. The union bans were taken up by maritime workers in other countries, and the Dutch later acknowledged the 4 year union bans as significant in their eventual decision to grant sovereignty to the new republic, while much goodwill was created in Indonesia.

So there was a contest for work rights (against labour militarisation and for equal pay), civil rights (Dutch subjects were subject to ongoing direction by the government-in-exile, and the political prisoners were under military control) and self-determination rights (national independence instead of colonial restoration). Lingard documents that the native Indonesians, many highly educated and with organising ability, did not accept inferior status and were prepared to take personal risks to assert their human needs. Both the union and government action in Australia are acknowledged as major factors in achieving national independence for Indonesia. It was a time when Australia was a participant at a significant moment in an anti-colonial struggle, starting to see Australia’s identity and interests as different to “white” Europe and North America. Yet at the same time, we hosted the political prisoners of a foreign country desperate to defend the restoration of its rule after the war.

There is a lot more intrigue in this fascinating story, including a local connection. An Indonesian woman had married her landlord, a Mr O’Keefe of Bonbeach, after her first (Indonesian) husband had been killed while on active service for the Australian defence forces. However she was ordered in 1949 to leave for Indonesia with her 7 children. Immigration Minister Arthur Calwell had taken a stand against Dutch attempts to control the repatriation of evacuees, but he was firm on deportation: “We can have a white Australia, we can have a Black Australia, but a mongrel Australia is impossible.” Such inflammatory words meant Annie O’Keefe’s case became an international cause celebre: the Sultan of West Borneo threatened to deport all Australians, and Australian ambassadors in the Hague, New Delhi and Karachi came

under pressure. She appealed to the High Court and won her case, because she had not been asked to complete the famous “dictation test” so couldn’t be a prohibited immigrant. Calwell later claimed that this case knocked out the central legal and legislative pillar of the White Australia policy, and historian Sean Brawley agrees. However, the new Australian alignment with an emergent independent Asia began to lose its credibility.

Both these situations had long term consequences, but in different ways. The Dunera boys have been described as the largest import of intellectual capital Australia has ever had, and their economic and social influence on post-war Australian society was significant. The Dutch case was more politically transforming, as it cracked the White Australia policy, and saw solidarity struggles in Australia for the human rights of foreigners from Asia. It also saw a cautious shift by Australian governments towards greater support for postwar anti-colonial movements, and a lesser view of Asia as a group of European-controlled outposts. It was also a time (perhaps the first?) when Australian workers actively supported Asian workers in an anti-colonial struggle.

OTHER REFERENCES

Drew Cottle and Angela Keys, “Transnational Struggle: Asian Seafarers And The Struggle For Indonesian Independence In Australia”, 17th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Melbourne 1-3 July 2008 (available at <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/mai/files/2012/07/drewcottle.pdf>)

Klaus Neumann, “Guarding the Flood Gates: The Removal of Non-Europeans, 1945–49” (available at <http://researchbank.swinburne.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository/swin:5191>

Sean Brawley, “Mrs O’Keefe and the battle for White Australia”, Margaret George Award Paper, NAA, 1 June 2006
http://www.naa.gov.au/Images/Brawley%20Oct%202007%20edit_tcm16-35888.pdf

Publicly Accessible (From Local Libraries) & Recent (Mostly Last 5 Years) Books On Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Immigration, Multiculturalism

This reading list (starting with items recently published) may be useful to those interested in the above interconnected issues. It does not include everything: for more, search under the Subject heading of library catalogues. (Did you know you can join and borrow from a public library outside your area?) A more comprehensive list of online sources is in preparation. Kevin Bain Feb. 2015

For a list of all holdings at Australian libraries (including universities) see the National Library website <http://trove.nla.gov.au/>

Quarterly Essays (most public libraries stock these, sometimes also in online version; also see the subsequent issue for feedback comments.)

No. 53 “That Sinking Feeling: Asylum Seekers and the Search for the Indonesian Solution”, Paul Toohey 2014

No. 13, “Sending Them Home: Refugees and the New Politics of Indifference”, Robert Manne with David Corlett, 2004

No. 5 “Girt By Sea: Australia, the Refugees and the Politics of Fear”, Mungo MacCallum 2002

“This is Still Breaking People – update on Manus Island”, Amnesty International, May 2014 (online at

http://www.amnesty.org.au/resources/activist/This_is_still_breaking_people_update_from_Manus_Island.pdf) and

“This is Breaking People – human rights violations at Manus Island”, Amnesty International, Dec 2013 (available online at

http://www.amnesty.org.au/images/uploads/about/Amnesty_International_Manus_Island_report.pdf)

“Walking Free”, Munjed Al Muderis with Patrick Weaver, Allen and Unwin 2014

The true story of a young Iraqi doctor who fled Iraq at the time of Saddam Hussein, came here by boat, was detained at Curtin detention centre, and is now a pioneering surgeon implanting prostheses to patients who have lost limbs. The short version is in this [Women’s Weekly](#) article.

“Sri Lanka’s Secrets: how the Rajapaksa regime gets away with Murder”, Trevor Grant, Monash University Publishing, 2014

This documents the brutal ethnic cleansing directed towards Tamils by the regime over a long period, in particular the murderous hunting of civilians in the last period of the civil war in 2009. (The film No Fire Zone – on Youtube - bears shocking witness to these events.) Also shameful are the Western countries (including Australia), China and Russia, who turned a blind eye for their strategic ends. A compelling case, which shows the dirty diplomacy behind the smiling faces of our current and previous foreign ministers.

“The Undesirables: Inside Nauru”, Mark Isaacs, Hardie Grant 2014

A shocking eyewitness account of the treatment of men at Australia’s offshore asylum-seeker processing centre. In July 2013 asylum seekers had rioted and razed it to the ground. For Mark Isaacs, who had worked with the men in the Nauru Regional Processing Centre over the previous 10 months, this riot was an inevitable outcome of a cruel and degrading policy.

“Refugees – why seeking asylum is legal and Australia’s policies are not”, Jane McAdam & Fiona Chong, UNSW Press 2014

Noting that Australian policy changes continuously, two refugee law academics explain how it operates in Australia, and how much of it is at odds with our voluntary international obligations. Updated to the end of the Gillard govt: it is a useful primer, with chapters on

definitions and common myths, offshore processing, turning back boats, and the effect of decreased legal assistance, with an important chapter on the feasibility of a regional protection framework.

“The Drownings’ Argument Australia’s inhumanity: offshore processing of asylum seekers”, ed. Robin Rothfield, Labor for Refugees, 2014

A short book with chapters by well-known opponents of offshore processing (Julian Burnside, Tony Kevin, Pamela Curr, Anna Burke, Melissa Parke etc.) which critiques the current policy and canvasses alternatives.

“Becoming Australian: migration, settlement, citizenship”, B Galligan, M Boese, M Phillips, MUP, 2014

Documents the last 40 years of our move away from cultural homogeneity or Britishness to a focus on demand-based skills, and the rise of temporary against permanent migration since 2000. It reports strong support for multiculturalism, including from traditional and non-urban Australia, but as “a liberal form of integrationism rather than a nation of multiple cultures.”

“Asylum Seekers and Immigration Detention”, ed. Justin Healey, Issues in Society Vol. 353, The Spinney Press 2013

Intended as a text for high schools, this is surprisingly comprehensive in scope, and distils much of the arguments and facts into 60 pages and its three chapters: Australia’s Obligations to Asylum Seekers, Immigration Detention in Australia, Offshore Processing Policy Debate.

“Profits of Doom: how vulture capitalism is swallowing the world”, Antony Loewenstein, Melbourne University Press, 2013

Investigative journalism about the companies which have gained a major role in “the privatised state.” This includes those operating detention centres in Curtin (W.A.) and Christmas Island, and each merits chapters in the book. In 2001 the WA Inspector of Custodial Services described Curtin as “gulag conditions.”

“A Country Too Far”, ed. Rosie Scott and Tom Keneally, Penguin 2013

An anthology of personal stories, fiction, “faction”, reflections, poetry and documentary reports from 27 of Australia’s top writers; all in short form, so can be dipped into as thought pieces.

“The People Smuggler: the true story of Ali Al Jenabi, the ‘Oskar Schindler of Asia’”, Robin de Crespigny, Penguin 2012

This is the confronting and true story of an Iraqi man seeking to rescue his family, which answers many questions about the movements of people from conflict zones and “transit” countries, and the complexity of motivations and influences on those who facilitate it. A memoir and thriller described as “engrossing” by Tom Keneally which has won many awards.

“Reluctant Rescuers”, Tony Kevin, self-published, 2012

A former diplomat which gives him a vantage point to ask how far Australia’s legal obligations are being ignored for partisan politics, and how that threatens the culture of the public service. He quotes Peter Mares: “Despite the ‘universal’ rhetoric, refugees are human beings who are in essence citizens of nowhere. Which is to say, they are human beings with no rights worth speaking of.”

“Border Vigils: Keeping Migrants Out of the Rich World”, Jeremy Harding, Verso 2012

A short book which manages a historical survey of the issue over the last 100 years, which illustrates many situations, and goes beyond asylum seekers to the wider issues which propel people to move. Documents the sudden rise of unwanted immigration from the 1990s to Europe and the US, and the reaction of “receiving” states.

‘Refugees – a cruel, discriminatory and unjust policy’, Mirko Bagaric and Peter Faris QC, in “The Greens” ed. Andrew McIntyre, Connorcourt Publishing 2011

A conservative critique of the UN Refugee Convention, based on its existing race, religion, political criteria, preferring famine, war, natural disasters.

“Essays on Muslims & Multiculturalism”, edited by Raimond Gaita, Text Publishing, 2011

An Australian book of analysis on political theory, philosophy and public policy, history and racism, centred around understanding our contemporary situation. All the contributors - Waleed Aly, Ghassan Hage, Graeme Davison, Shakira Hussein, Geoffrey Brahm Levey, and Gaita – have a strong vantage point for their perspective.

“Boat People: personal stories from the Vietnamese exodus 1975-1996”, ed. Carina Hoang, Carina Hoang Communications, 2010

This glossy illustrated book gives first person accounts by refugees about the situation they fled from, their boat voyage to HK, Philippines or Indonesia, and the horrors of Thai pirates, starvation, and what people do in desperate situations. A shocking book which is rich in content, and includes copies of original refugee documents, and stories by officials, journalists and aid workers. Some of the heroes were simple Indonesian and Chinese fishermen and villagers who took pity on the refugees and shared their scarce food and water with them.

”Pacific Solution”, Susan Metcalfe, Australian Scholarly Publications, 2010

A persistent advocate and researcher, she reports her visits to Nauru, extensive interviews conducted with refugees and advocates, media reports, long-distance correspondence and new research.

”Border Crimes: Australia’s War on Illicit Migrants”, Michael Grewcock, Sydney Institute of Criminology 2009

This presents an argument of Australian “state crime” based on restricted rights granted to refugees, who are mostly “forced” migrants, dating from the White Australia policy to the Pacific solution. Detention has enabled violence and abuses, underpinned by legal restrictions on refugees. Why there was a break with the policy towards Indochinese refugees in the late 70s is explained.

”Australia’s Immigration Revolution”, Andrew Markus, James Jupp, Peter McDonald, Allen and Unwin 2009

Three of Australia’s academic experts write on Australian policy (which has changed a lot since the book was published), global trends (population issues, immigration and the nation state), and the Australian experience (residential concentration and dispersion, multiculturalism, public opinion, social cohesion).

“Haneef: a Question of Character”, Jacqui Ewart, Halstead Press, 2009

Dr Haneef, an Indian doctor working on the Gold Coast, had a family connection with one of the 2007 Glasgow terrorists to whom he had lent a SIM card some years before. He was imprisoned for three weeks, but found to be an innocent man presumed guilty by overzealous police and prosecutors, and over-excited politicians and pressmen.” This started as a case study of how the media report issues relating to Muslims, ethnicity and terrorism, but the Immigration Department pulled the funding. It is a work of comprehensive and dispassionate reportage, and Ewart interviews almost all of the key players.

“Family journeys : stories in the National Archives of Australia “ 2008

“Drawing the Global Colour Line: white men’s countries and the question of racial equality”, Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, MUP, 2008

This is a transnational history of the institutional entrenchment of “whiteness” as the basis of

national identity in the settler states of North America, Australasia, and South Africa, around the late 19th, early 20th centuries, and how that influenced policy and attitudes before the civil rights, human rights and anti-racist reforms after World War 2. The deep roots of the White Australia policy are explained, and how the discrediting of ‘race thinking’ occurred.

“The Rugmaker of Mazar-e-Sharif”, Najaf Mazari & Robert Hillman, Insight Publications, 2008

This memoir from an Afghani refugee of 2001, now living in Melbourne, is a famous best-seller, being included on the VCE reading list for some years. It deserves to be there, as a well-written literary work which is convincing and empathetic in conveying the emotions and decisions of Mr Mazari’s life from childhood to Australian citizenship. It tells much about Afghanistan, including its history, the influence of tribalism and religion on day to day life, and his experience of escape and transit to Indonesia and Australia. The atmosphere of detention camps and government control is revealing and credible. An unforgettable must-read book.

”Human rights overboard : seeking asylum in Australia” ed. Linda Briskman, C. Goddard, S. Latham 2008

“Immigrant Nations”, Paul Scheffer, Polity Press 2011 (translated from 2007 Dutch edition)

A fascinating book by a sociologist with deep and broad experience of the European and North American experience of post WW2 immigration. It’s complicated, and he imparts much historical knowledge and explanation of the debates on reconciling loyalties of religion and foreign cultures to receiving nation states, and the new phenomenon of second-generation terrorism. Prepare to be challenged by his controversial conclusions; read the Epilogue first.

” The Longest Journey: resettling refugees from Africa”, Peter Browne, UNSW Press, 2006

Covers the period from early 1990s when conflicts in the NE of sub-Saharan Africa led to large numbers of international refugees and internally displaced persons. It documents how the Australian humanitarian resettlement program, historically reflecting labourforce and political (Cold War) objectives, changed significantly towards Africa and Sudanese refugees, as local integration and repatriation alternatives dried up. It also reports on UNHCR, the history of international treaties, recipient and resettlement country policies, and the real story of “the lost boys of Sudan.”

“Following Them Home: the fate of the returned asylum seekers”, David Corlett, Black Inc. 2005

In mid-2004, David Corlett travelled to meet asylum seekers whom Australia had returned to Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

”The ethics and politics of asylum : liberal democracy and the response to refugees”, Matthew J. Gibney Cambridge University Press, 2004.

A rigorous academic survey of philosophy and politics of ethical policies in this , and a detailed history of the UN refugee convention, and its application in US, UK, Australia and Germany.

“Lives in Limbo” M Leach and F Mansouri, UNSW Press 2004

This well-written book provides the refugee experience - especially those from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan - in their own words, both before their flight and in Australian detention camps. Also explains the problems and administration of Temporary Protection Visas and Australian law, the 1951 Refugee Convention, the UNHCR role and practice, ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors, psychological effects, media representations of refugees, and the language of ‘queues’, deterrence, economic migrants. While published 10 years ago, this is mostly still relevant because re-cycled policies and their problems are still with us.

”Asylum: voices behind the razor wire”, Heather Tyler, Lothian Books 2003

This includes 7 refugee stories, but Tyler is a well-informed journalist and also includes much knowledge about political events in their countries at the time, the Australian history of the issues, including details of detention centre events and Australian organisations working in the field.

“From Nothing to Zero – letters from refugees in Australia’s detention centres”, Lonely Planet Publications 2003 (Frankston)

“Tampering with Asylum – a universal humanitarian problem”, Frank Brennan, UQP 2003

Includes a detailed account of the Indochinese refugees who came from the 1970s-90s.

”Borderline : Australia's response to refugees and asylum seekers in the wake of the Tampa”, by Peter Mares. UNSW Press, 2002

A major book which won many awards when it came out (2 reprints and 2 editions from 2001 to 2002), it is the major report and analysis of what happened and why to the policy direction during those crucial years; Peter Mares is an expert who writes regularly on these issues for Swinburne University’s “Inside Story” magazine (free online at <http://insidestory.org.au/>)

“Refugees: perspectives on the experience of forced migration” ed. Alastair Ager, Continuum 1999

This book of readings by ten scholars analyses the framework of support and identification of refugees as outsiders, as well as their own diverse responses to alien circumstances both within and without their countries of origin. So political and policy trends are discussed, including the emergence of new expectations and controls by nation states, as well as the changed objectives of humanitarians towards gate-keeping, and how these affect the restoration or disablement of refugees’ lives. How refugees construct their own identity, whether in their transitional state, in repatriation or adjustment to a new society is discussed, with case studies, including psychological reports of torture effects. This is a scholarly book of analysis, reflecting on modern versus postmodern perspectives, and how globalisation and the frequent wars since 1980 have changed the responses towards ethnic group conflict.

END

AGM - CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT 2013-14

“Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution”

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

This year has been another difficult year for asylum seekers who have turned to Australia for help. Their right to asylum has been rejected by our government, who has secretly detained asylum seekers on the high seas, attempted to dump families in lifeboats in the ocean, transferred asylum seekers secretly at night and frustrated their access to lawyers and the courts.

We have also heard that asylum seekers in the care of the Australian government have been given little access to medical treatment, particularly for mental illness.

Our government has also created a partnership with, and returned asylum seekers to, the Sri Lankan government – a government that has a track record of torture and mistreatment of people in custody. More recently, our government is apparently negotiating to settle asylum seekers, mostly Muslims who sought refuge in Australia, in Cambodia, a largely Buddhist country that with 45% of its own population living in poverty has no infrastructure for resettling refugees and no government services to assist them.

Well done team Australia.

To make it worse, our government has adopted a policy of secrecy surrounding asylum seekers. As we wrote in a letter to the Hon. Greg Hunt, MP (our local member) *“Any government that makes public only what they want citizens to know is a government based on pretence, and makes accountability meaningless. ... This only makes sense if your government wishes to encourage ignorance, seeking to withhold from citizens the power that comes from knowledge”*. At the time of writing this report, we had received no reply from Mr Hunt, and can only assume that the government's policy of secrecy is beyond his sphere of influence.

On top of this depressing news, this year the Mornington Peninsula Human Rights Group has experienced even lower membership numbers and attendance at meetings. As a result, we have made little impact on the state of human rights in Australia, but we have supported the efforts of relevant groups where possible. This has included the following:

Sept 2013 *Film showing and presentation on refugees and asylum seekers to Year 10 students at Rosebud College. A 26 minute teaser for ‘Journey to Nowhere’ about the plight of Afghan refugees, and ‘Destination Shepparton’, a series of short films made by refugees were screened and enthusiastically discussed by Year 10 English students.*

Oct 2013 *Agreed to support Bookmarks for Asylum – approximately 1000 bookmarks were created by primary school children on the Peninsula in 2013 on the theme of Children in Detention.*

Nov 2013 *Wrote to Senator the Hon. G. Brandis, MP about the government's treatment of genuine refugees detained indefinitely without legal recourse. In reply, Senator Brandis advised that the requirements of the ASIO legislation were being met. 8.*

Mar 2014 *Baany to Warrna Ngarga Water to Water Festival, where Justice Bell, Darren Parker (Ngunnawal man, lecturer at College of Law & Justice, Victoria University), Tim Wilson (Human Rights Commissioner), Auntie Caroline Briggs (Mornington Peninsula/Boonwurrung Elder), Jidah Clarke (Associate to the Hon J Almond of the Supreme Court of Victoria) and Justice David Habersberger (Supreme Court Judge, ret'd) debated three possible changes to the Australian Constitution: – Removing the actively racist sections that exist in the*

Constitution; – Including the power for the Commonwealth to legislate beneficial legislation for Aboriginal people; and – Including recognition of Aboriginal people as the first occupants of Australia and acknowledging the continuing relationship they have with the land and waters.

May 2014 Mornington Peninsula Shire Colourfest Film Festival

July 2014 Wrote to the Hon. G. Hunt, MP asking him to intervene to ensure the welfare and safety of the boatloads of 157 adults and children who were seeking asylum in Australia. In the same letter we expressed our concern regarding the government's policy of secrecy about asylum seekers.

Aug 2014 Amnesty and Friends of Los Palmos fund raiser – a film night at Mornington Cinema showing 'Beatriz's War' – an award winning East Timorese film about the struggle experienced by one woman during the Indonesian occupation of the colony.

We also explored the possibility of running an *Unfinished Business Forum* in partnership with the Shire's Indigenous Team, and with the help of a grant from the Shire to the Human Rights Arts and Film Festival, developed a business plan for a biennial *National Human Rights Arts Prize*. In February 2014, we published our newsletter *Connect*.

Once again, my thanks to those loyal members without whose support we could not continue. In particular, I am grateful to Bruce Bowden, for stepping in to help with the minutes, and to Maureen and Alan McPhate, whose consistent support has meant more than I can describe. I am also grateful for the support we have received from the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, particularly from Xiaoli Ma, to Tony Coburn who has Chaired the meetings I have been unable to attend and to Treasurer Kaye McKay, and members Ray Kenny and Alice Oppen.

Jenni Colwill. August 2014

General meetings were held on:

Monday 2 September 2013
Monday 7 October 2013
Monday 7 November 2013
Monday 3 February 2014
Monday 3 March 2014
Monday 1 April 2014
Monday 5 May 2014
Monday 2 June 2014
Monday 7 July 2014
Monday 4 August 2014