



Central Victorian Refugee Support Network Newsletter

September 2017

Central Victorian Refugee Support Network (CVRSN)

meets in **Castlemaine** bi-monthly
with representatives from 6 local Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) groups –
Ballarat, Bendigo, Castlemaine, Daylesford, Macedon Ranges and Maryborough.

For further information - email: rarbendigo@gmail.com

The CVRSN currently has 2 main functions:

1. Sharing of information between local RAR groups
2. To initiating local projects ... *for example* ...
 - Forum in Bendigo - 2013
 - Wannon Project - 2014
 - National RAR Network - 2014 (ongoing)
 - The Accommodation and Employment Working Group - 2016 (ongoing)



Sunday 8th October 2017

Bring the Refugees on Manus and Nauru to safety in Australia
Rallies will be held around Australia

MELBOURNE - 2 pm - State Library, Swanston St City.



Speakers include:

Taqi Azra - Hazara refugee
NUW organiser, and Craig McGregor - Victorian Allied Health Professionals Association.

The rally is calling to Bring the Refugees on Manus and Nauru to safety in Australia, and to put an end to offshore processing and mandatory detention.

PNG and Nauru are unwilling and unable to permanently resettle refugees, and both are dangerous places for refugees to live. <https://www.facebook.com/events/310386559423881/>

Report on RAR at the Melbourne Rally – 2nd September

RAR members from Castlemaine, Ballarat and Bendigo, along with about 500 other people, were at the recent Melbourne Rally held in response to the latest outrageous decision by the Turnbull government to cut income support for over 400 refugees who are in Australia for medical treatment from Manus and Nauru. People have been given six months to prepare themselves to be returned to danger on Manus, Nauru or their country of origin. This is despite the camp on Manus being set to close at the end of October this year, and the majority of those in Australia officially found to have genuine fears for safety if returned to their home country.



Local Rallies –

- BALLARAT
- BENDIGO – 15 Sept, 2017 - Friday following the second Tuesday of every month.
5 pm - 5.30 pm Rosalind Park (Cnr of View Street, near the Fountain), Bendigo
- CASTLEMAINE – every Wednesday.
6 pm Castlemaine Visitor Information Centre, 44 Mostyn St, Castlemaine
- DAYLESFORD
- MACEDON RANGES
- MARYBOROUGH



WALK TOGETHER – 21st October 2017

In all capital cities: Read more: <https://www.welcometoaustralia.org.au/walk-together-2016/>

There is a national RAR petition to use at rallies - see Page 5

Or find it at the RAR Website at - <https://www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/2017-RAR-Petition-2-1.pdf>

Keeping up-to-date with refugee and asylum seeker facts and statistics - [RCOA](#), [DIBP](#), [ASRC](#) & [RAR](#)

Welcome Scroll update ...

The Welcome Scroll will be at the
**Annual Forum of the
Victorian Local Government Multicultural Issues Network
(VLGMI)**
Kensington Town Hall, 9am- 4.30pm 26 September, 2017.

On tour with the Scroll ...



*At the ABC Studio in
Wollongong*



National RAR News

2018 National Conference, Rural Australians for Refugees

- Albury
- 6-8 April 2017
- Speakers include both RAR Patrons, Gillian Triggs and Julian Burnside

Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) Submission

Australian Border Force Amendment (Protected Information) Bill 2017

See Page 6&7 of this newsletter

National RAR is now incorporated – news on national insurance soon

Gillian Triggs is Patron of RAR along with Julian Burnside.

Jan Govett is now also part of the National RAR executive.

ARAN News

Manus crisis actions

The Australian Refugee Action network is calling on groups and individuals to take action in September.

See information at <https://australianrefugeeactionnetwork.wordpress.com/manus-actions/>

Australian Refugee Action Network (ARAN) is a national alliance of refugee action and advocacy groups which call for Australia to uphold its obligations under international human rights law, with regard to people seeking asylum.

ARAN's Aims and Objectives:

- To provide an avenue for communication and collaboration for action and advocacy groups with a wide membership or which operate as networks in their cities or regions
- To promote a stronger and more coordinated approach to campaigns and days/periods of action across the nation
- To facilitate information dissemination so that grass roots action/advocacy groups are better informed and equipped to undertake actions in their own localities
- To offer a single point where various activities across the country can be listed and promoted for quick reference

ARAN Billboard – National Actions - <https://australianrefugeeactionnetwork.wordpress.com/news/>

ARAN Website - <https://australianrefugeeactionnetwork.wordpress.com/news/>

ARAN on [Facebook](#)

Local RAR Group News

Ballarat RAR

- On Saturday the 26th August members stood for an hour in the medium strip of Sturt Street opposite the cafes holding signs, REMEMBERING TAMPA, Welcome Refugees, Let them Stay, Bring them Here. Read the Tampa story and had a minute silence for those who have lost their lives on Manus and Nauru. Several members talked with members of the public while they were having their morning coffee and got some signatures for the RAR petition.
- 5 people attended the Let Them Stay rally in Melbourne on the 2nd September and members will continue action with the regular monthly letter writing on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Ballarat Library.
- Members continue their weekly vigil outside Catherine Kings Office Monday's 11-12.
- Around 280 signatures for the Bellingen and Nambucca RAR petition are ready to post off.
- Several members continue with regular Visits MITA Detention Centre in Broadmeadows.

Bendigo RAR

- **Monthly Vigils – 5pm on the Friday** following the 2nd Tuesday of every month. Rosalind Park.
- **Fundraiser** (Funds for the ASRC) – **Ali's Wedding** – The Star Cinema – Thursday, 14th Sept
- The **Grandmothers** (Bendigo) have suggested a float for combined Refugee groups in the Easter Parade 2018.
- **Right Track Conversations** - a dry run was held on Tuesday 29th August. 10 people attended.
- **Nauru Postcards** (for PM, Minister Dutton, Opposition Leader, and Shadow Minister Neumann) were handed out at Bendigo Writers' Festival and at local rallies.
- **Directory of Refugee Services** – additions being planned
- 1 person attended the **Let Them Stay rally** in Melbourne on the 2nd September
- **Young People for Refugees (YPR)** have now received their \$2000 sponsorship for Garage People from Bendigo Regional YMCA, and are revising their product output for the program - greeting cards and post cards, and Karen woven bracelets.
- Gill Wells and Jan Govett attended the "**Bridging the Gap**" Forum in Ballarat – 6th September 2017. This was a forum discussing how Ballarat and the Wimmera are preparing for the arrival of SHEV holders.

Castlemaine RAR

Daylesford RAR

Macedon Ranges RAR

Maryborough RAR - August 2017

- Jeanne reported that 7 ALP federal members have come out in support of closing down Manus Island and Nauru, and bringing the remaining refugees to Australia. It would appear Labor for Refugees branches are having some success at last. Jeanne has emailed these people and praised them for standing up against the status quo.
- Heidi-Claire McDonald (Maryborough ALP Treasurer) has offered to donate some woollen scarves she has croqueted for a garage sale we may be contemplating. This has been accepted and a thank you forwarded to her.

**TO THE HONOURABLE THE SPEAKER
AND MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

This petition of the Rural Australians for Refugee Network, draws to the attention of the House:

- People seeking asylum have the right to live with dignity and in safety in our community while their claims for protection are processed.
- Our society should be compassionate and just for all people, including refugees and people seeking asylum

We therefore ask the House to:

- Cease mandatory detention.
- Immediately close the camps on Nauru and Manus Island in a humane and responsible manner.
- Process all claims for asylum in Australia in a fair and timely manner.
- Refuse to deport people to dangerous or life threatening situations.
- Replace temporary protection visas with permanent protection visas.

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Signed ORIGINALS must be returned NO LATER than:

21st September, 2017

Please return ORIGINAL copies of petition to:

Mike Griffin, Bellingen and Nambucca RAR
39, Rogers Drive, Valla Beach NSW 2448

Published by Rural Australians for Refugees - Email: rar.australia@gmail.com

Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) Submission Australian Border Force Amendment (Protected Information) Bill 2017

Background to RAR

Rural Australians for Refugees (RAR) is a network of groups of everyday people throughout regional Australia working to bring about change to the way that Australia treats refugees and people seeking asylum. Currently RAR comprises 70 groups across all states.

RAR was formed in 2001 to give people in rural communities a means for expressing their concern about the inhumane direction of government policies and practices in asylum and refugee settlement. RAR groups formed in small and large regional communities and developed activities that suited the strengths of their members and their communities. Groups work autonomously. Some groups have focussed on providing support to newly arrived refugees. Others have chosen community education and awareness programs and yet others have sought to advocate their concerns to government and the public. Many have done all three.

RAR members come from diverse backgrounds and political persuasions. RAR members maintain and represent strong connections within their own communities – with local government, service agencies schools and churches. Many also have strong connections into other groups in the refugee and human rights advocacy sector as well as with organisations providing direct help and services to refugees and asylum seekers who are in detention or needing support within the community.

A guiding value for RAR groups has been the need for accountability, transparency, fairness and compassion in the conduct of refugee policy and “good practical neighbourliness” in their own activities. RAR groups want to see an end to “blame the victim” asylum practices by the Government which treat refugees and people seeking Australia’s protection worse than convicted criminals.

General comments

Since RARs inception members have increasingly been concerned about what they perceive to be a retraction and diminution of accountability by Government in the operation of refugee and asylum policies which has been accompanied by overt resistance to transparency in their operation. Over the past 15 years members’ legitimate questions have either been ignored or been met with obstruction and/or outright obfuscation in the name of “security” or “privacy” or “client confidentiality” or “commercial-in- confidence” Members have noted that excuses about security – and the implication that people being held in detention are possible terrorists - are used in cases where full checks have been completed and where those people have been recognised as refugees. Members have noted administrative arrangements aimed at making accessibility to people being held in detention routinely and deliberately difficult.

Members have also noted an unwillingness to account to taxpayers and the Australian community and ongoing opacity in relation to their legitimate questions about the costs and about the conduct of private contractors, often presented as some security enhanced form of *extra-commercial* in confidence justification. Members have also questioned why their legitimate questions and attempts to obtain information and access have been met with attack from Ministers and officials.

RAR wants to state for the record that it **fully supports the need for special and indeed heightened arrangements to protect Australia’s security**. What it does not accept is the conflation of security with secrecy as a means for avoiding scrutiny of routine and non-sensitive operational and administrative arrangements. RAR does not accept a dilution of the standards of accountability that apply more generally to government in our democracy.

RAR members have seen the above dynamic represented in the scope and intent of the original Border Force Act. RAR members perceive that the Border Force Act is an attempt to create a body that is in some way above and beyond normal government and thus separate out the Border Force from ongoing accountability standards that the community could expect from a normal government department.

RAR welcomes the move to amend the Border Force Act to remove the elements unduly constraining democratic access. RAR is however concerned that this is a somewhat reluctant concession that is weak in its

effect and does little to challenge the framing and intent of the overall legislation. RAR believes that, while the amendment may reduce some elements of overt obstructions to accountability evident in the original, it does little to specifically provide for any remedy in their breach. This lacuna leaves open the possibility of “business as usual” and continuation of a culture of secrecy and avoidance of the challenge of democratic scrutiny in the implementation of the Act.

Specific comments on the Bill

Failing the ability to rewrite the intent and objectives of the original Act, RAR members would like to see ***a stronger amendment that objectively – and specifically - supports improved capacity for external scrutiny of Border Force operations.***

RAR suggests that this could be achieved by:

- **Specific provision for an external and independent arbiter** for complaints and breaches about the onshore and offshore operations conducted by the Australian Border Force

RAR would normally expect that the Office of Commonwealth Ombudsman could fulfil this role. However, it considers that the blurred boundaries in offshore operations and the involvement of third parties (foreign governments and international organisations) suggest a purpose designed body would be more appropriate. Such a body would consider appeals on secrecy and public interest.

A Review Committee comprising representatives’ familiar with administrative law, with humanitarian and international standards and obligations would be a good starting point. It should be accountable to the Parliament.

- **Removal of the special clause providing protection of commercial interests**

RAR believes that the special consideration of commercial interests is not necessary and indeed may lead to perceptions that of Border Force operations belong somehow outside of, or above, normal government commercial arrangements.

RAR believes that there is sufficient body of practice to protect commercial -in- confidence interests and that problems accountability, confidentiality and deliverables are best handled with skilled professional contractual arrangements.

Coda

RAR is a community-based network representing the views of everyday Australians and focussed on positive support for refugees and for compassionate values. We do not have the expertise or the experience to outline in more detail what the above suggestions might look like in actual wording of amendments to the amendments. We would however be very pleased to discuss our submission in more detail with Committee members or with the Secretariat.