



## CLARENCE ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

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Date: 29<sup>th</sup> April 2011

The Hon Chris Bowen  
Immigration Minister  
Parliament House  
Canberra

Dear Minister

### Treatment of Refugees

The Clarence Environment Centre was formed more than 20 years ago and has maintained a shop-front in Grafton for that entire period. Our charter includes the support of environmental and social justice issues, which prompts us to protest the despicable treatment of refugees by the Government.

We refer of course to those refugees the Government calls “boat people” or “illegal immigrants”, terminology, we believe, is a political ploy designed to keep the Australian people in ferment and distract their attention from those important issues the Government is failing to address, such as:

- Reversing the man-made deterioration of our environment.
- Our response to the worsening global economic crisis.
- A response to Global Warming, and
- financing the maintenance and improvement of the country's health and education systems,

just to name a few.

Frankly we were disgusted by the disgraceful maneuvering earlier this year in relation to children and others trying to attend the funerals of their parents and relatives, which shamed Australia in the eyes of the world.

This month's events at Villawood, Christmas Island, South and Western Australia, all arose as a result of keeping men, women and children behind barricades, sometimes for years on end, for no other reason than they arrived without passports, having fled war and/or persecution in their homelands.

While accepting that some degree of screening is essential, we believe claims that this is necessary to prevent terrorists from entering the country this way, rather than coming by plane, are nonsensical and clearly designed to keep the public on edge. However, what this added abuse of their human rights must do to their psyche can only be imagined, and which they, and we, will pay for in the future. It would be hardly surprising if this treating of innocent people as criminals did not result in some turning into terrorists.

A recent report has claimed that 2 months should be sufficient to assess the refugee status of asylum-seekers, therefore we urge, indeed demand, that some decency and humanity be shown to these refugees by allowing them to stay within the community whilst their bona fides are being investigated.

We are yours in hope

Jim Knight  
Founding Chairman.