



Asylum seekers arrive at Christmas Island

Julia's boat policy taking on water

It appears there can be no co-operation over poisonous political issues such as border protection, writes

STEVEN SCOTT

NOW that another boatload of asylum seekers has arrived in Australian waters, both sides of politics will be rushing to blame each other.

Both the Government and Opposition risk suffering some political damage from their stalemate over what to do with unauthorised boat arrivals, but Labor has the most to lose.

The asylum-seeker debate has now entered a weird phase where both Labor and the Coalition say they want to send asylum seekers to third countries but they refuse to do a deal with the other side to allow this to happen.

Both major parties are willing to settle for an outcome they don't want because they can't cede any ground to their opponents.

Is it any wonder that both Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott have higher dissatisfaction than satisfaction ratings in opinion polls?

Despite promises the so-called

new paradigm of the hung Parliament would lead to a more co-operative polity, it appears there can be no co-operation over poisonous political issues such as border protection.

Those on the Labor side point to a recent rise in Abbott's dissatisfaction rating in Newspoll as evidence voters are starting to question the Opposition Leader's negativity to anything on the Government's agenda.

But, despite a recent uplift in Gillard's approval rating, there are still more people who are dissatisfied than satisfied with the Prime Minister's performance.

The reasoning behind the Government's current attacks on the Opposition is voters may start to tire of Abbott's refusal to act in a bipartisan way.

This may work to some extent but it's a desperate hope from a Government that has lost so much over the border protection debate.

The main problem for Gillard is that her inability to strike a deal to revive the Malaysia deal after it was struck down by the High Court is just the latest in a series of stuff-ups in this policy area.

From the failed East Timor solution to the plan to re-open the Howard government's "Pacific

Solution" era detention centre on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island, the Government has stumbled from one problem to another in a bid to neutralise the political problem of boat arrivals.

You can hardly blame Abbott for trying to make the Government's humiliation complete by demanding the reopening of the Nauru detention centre, the reintroduction of temporary protection visas and turning boats around at sea.

Gillard yesterday took the rather cute step of claiming Abbott was acting in cahoots with the Greens to kill off offshore processing of asylum seekers, despite the Coalition and the minor party having diametrically opposed policies.

Sure, Abbott might cop some criticism that he is effectively wrecking the Government's plan to deter people smuggling with its Malaysia solution. But Labor is likely to suffer most of the downside.

The Government can argue Abbott must share some of the blame for every new boat that arrives. But Abbott can deflect this by saying the Government rejected his alternative policy.

Labor, meanwhile, will continue to be riven with internal disputes over what to do with

people who arrive on boats. Gillard has stared down two caucus revolts over her continued support for offshore processing, but this tension will continue to bubble away.

It will return again with future boat arrivals.

It will be there if the Immigration Department's predictions of overcrowding and further unrest in detention centres come true.

And it will be aired in the ALP's national conference in December, where there is likely to be a fiery debate between those who want to toughen the party platform's existing support for onshore processing and those who insist offshore processing is the most humane way to deal with the scourge of people smuggling.

There doesn't seem to be any ray of hope for Gillard in this area.

Labor is likely to see further progressive inner-city voters shift to the Greens over its opposition to onshore processing and it will hardly win back many votes from those who are worried about border security when Abbott can argue he has a better plan to "stop the boats".

Steven Scott is the Courier-Mail's national political correspondent

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WHY dont all you so called educated do gooders open your house and let the asylum seekers stay at your place if they are granted visas. Darwin is starting to look like \$%#king Somalia. We so called bogans will be the first to ones to arm up and defend this country if anyone did try and invade, whilst you hippy sooks will be trying to run to the hills and flee to ga ga land.

Dave of Nakara

SO all the haters. There are no Anglo-Saxon car-jackers and criminals that have immigrated to our country? Would you deport them too? There's bad everywhere and we are only citizens here by accident of birth. We have no birthright to have all the good in this country. That's absurd.

L.Smith of Canberra

WHAT a great article. I wish our political leaders would show the same courage. It is such an old and worn out political trick to rev up asylum seekers as a major political issue in an attempt to cover over appalling leadership and governance. It would be great if they just got on with the job of governing and showing their political 'toughness' through fair and sound policies for Australia rather than trying to legislate new laws to outrun the High Court cause they didn't like their decision.

Fran Tolhurst of Darwin

WHAT a load of shite. Most of them are just looking for more money thru wages or handouts. You can't come here crying "Refugee" when you've managed to accumulate a fortune in your home country to pay the people smugglers. Let them apply for refugee status at the Aussie embassy in Iran or Sri Lanka and wait out the processing time in the comfort of their own home.

Woodie of Darwin

IF A person has the guts to gamble all his money, to up stakes and leave his own born shore, and dare to let himself and his family be put in harms way in the hope of a better life in Australa, then that is the sort of spirit that this country very sorely needs. Our white population is sadly becoming a bunch of inbred Xenophobes. Thank You Kylie.. I think u will find a lot of us coming out of the woodwork to be heard.

Woodie

NICE one Kylie! Thank you for writing this article. The compassion has been sucked out of the asylum seeker debate and the current position of the Labor party is just unreal. I expect Tony Abbott to be heartless but I am very disappointed in Labor pandering to the bogans for votes.

Brizben

WHAT a load of rubbish , these people come here knowing what handouts they will receive from stupid people like you. why do we give them more than we give our own pensioners? if they are true refugee assylum seekers how can they afford to tavel this far? and if you cant see that their religions are the most violent on earth then you truly deserve to be locked up with them

mark of northlakes

STOP the bogans! Nice. Although, reading some of the comments, it appears they are alive and well.

Sydney to Darwin of Bayview

GREAT article would offer an addition and reminder that the first boat people came in 1788 ;)

Yorta Yorta of Geelong

KYLIE I must be on of those "xenophobic bogans" you speak of. The "polls" show what the majority want. They never asked me, so please don't presume to represent the majority.

sean g of darwin