




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

Record of Proceedings, 11 May 2016

MOTION: BORDER PROTECTION

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for Training and Skills) (6.24 pm): I rise to speak to the motion moved by the member for Everton and say why I supported the change to federal Labor's policy when it was last in government and why I support its policy now which is to prevent deaths at sea through the combination of offshore processing and regional resettlement together with the policy of turning back the boats to stop the flow of vessels arriving on our shores. To do this is to stop people smugglers and deny them the opportunity to offer an incentive to vulnerable people to board unsafe boats to make the dangerous journey to Australia by sea.

I also support us as a country encouraging migrants. We are all migrants. Unless one is from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, we were all migrants at some point. We should be supporting migrants and refugees to this country. I am very pleased with federal Labor's policy to increase the number of migrants and refugees and the decision made by the current federal government and the Palaszczuk government to accept Syrian refugees. That is the right thing to do.

I want to say why when I was a member of the federal Labor government I supported the changes to the policy. I think it is best said by Mr Raymond Murray, a resident of Rocky Point and the first person to arrive at the scene of the Christmas Island tragedy. He told the federal parliamentary committee—

There was this overwhelming feeling of helplessness. Standing right out on the edge of the rocks, there were times when that boat was closer than you are to me now. I will never forget seeing a woman holding up a baby, obviously wanting me to take it, and not being able to do anything. It was just a feeling of absolute hopelessness. It was like it was happening in slow motion. A wave would pick the boat up and almost hit the rocks and then go back again, and then finally it was like it exploded.

That tragedy continues for that community—and not just for the survivors but for the people on Christmas Island who sought to help. The committee report states—

The community's trauma is still apparent ...

Every time there is a boat out there you worry if the weather is rough. If the weather is really rough you think, 'Is there a boat out there?' because we do not want to see this happen again.

That is why Labor changed its policy. It is about saving lives. Is it perfect? Absolutely not. Can we do better? Absolutely. Should we do better? Of course we have to. Labor's policy seeks to do that.

I have been on the parliamentary committee on migration. I have visited almost every detention centre in this country. I have been to Christmas Island. They are not nice places. We have to do more globally. In 2015 internationally we hit the highest number of people displaced. The figure exceeds 60 million people. This is the number of people who are displaced.

We have to do more and we have to do it internationally. The only way to do that is to stop things like this. This motion was moved to be divisive, to be a wedge on this side, to play politics. The only way we are ever going to have any change, not just in Australia but anywhere, is to stop playing politics

with this issue. This involves people's lives. It is a difficult issue for everyone. It is not fair to wedge people on these issues. It is a difficult issue. To do this at election time is all about playing politics and trying to win votes. Their three-word slogan was 'stop the boats'—enough is enough. We really need to do more. I am pleased with the Liberal government federally which said we would take the Syrian refugees, but we need to do more and Labor's policy does that.

There will be many who do not like offshore processing, who do not like turning around the boats. I do not like that policy either, but I could not ever stand by as a federal member and accept a policy that put lives at risk because women and children and men were getting on those boats with the false hope that they were going to get to land to have a better life and instead drowned. We could never accept that again. You cannot have a policy that does that.

I stand by Labor's policy. I am supportive of it. I am not apologetic for it, but we really have to take the politics out of this if we truly want to make a difference.