

Inquiry: Offshore processing and resettlement arrangements

Submitted by: Mums4refugees

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## 1. About Mums4refugees and our interest in this Inquiry

Mums4refugees is a community-led network of mothers and allies who have organised for refugee rights for many years, with a particular focus on protecting children and families harmed by Australia's offshore processing regime.

We make this submission because offshore processing is not only an integrity and procurement scandal—it is a long-running system of state-enabled harm. The Inquiry's terms of reference include "payments, contracts and integrity issues," but also "any other related matters," which must include the human consequences, the foreseeable risk of abuse, and the damage to Australia's legal and moral standing.

Our members have supported people who survived offshore detention and those who were transferred to Australia for urgent medical care and safety. We have sat with parents whose children stopped speaking, stopped eating, and stopped trusting adults in uniform. We have supported survivors living with complex trauma, health deterioration, and fractured family life long after physical release.

Offshore processing is not a "policy difference." It is a governance choice that predictably produces secrecy, impunity, and harm.

## 2. Our core position

Mums4refugees submits that Australia should:

1. End offshore processing and related offshore arrangements as a matter of human rights, public integrity, and good governance.
2. Commit to transparent, accountable, onshore processing with humane supports and durable pathways.
3. Ensure any procurement and contracting connected to offshore arrangements is subject to strict integrity safeguards, public reporting, and independent oversight, including publication of contracts (with limited redactions only where genuinely necessary).

This Inquiry is an opportunity to name the reality: offshore processing has been cruel, costly, and ineffective, and the very features that make it cruel secrecy, remoteness, outsourcing, and reduced scrutiny—also make it fertile ground for waste and integrity failure.

## 3. A system built for secrecy produces integrity failure

Offshore processing is structurally designed to reduce visibility and accountability. This is not incidental—it is operationally useful to the policy. But it creates predictable risks:

- Outsourcing core state functions (detention, security, welfare, transport, “community” supervision) disperses responsibility and weakens accountability.
- Remote geography + restricted access limits oversight by journalists, clinicians, lawyers, civil society, and parliament.
- Emergency-style procurement and contract extensions (often justified as “operational flexibility”) create high-risk contracting environments.

These are not theoretical concerns. Australia’s own integrity and governance reviews have raised serious red flags regarding the management of regional processing arrangements.

In addition, the Australian National Audit Office has audited contract management of offshore processing centres, underscoring the public interest in whether procurement and contract practices meet basic standards of value-for-money, due diligence, and risk management.

#### **4. “Costly” is not a slogan—it is a measurable failure**

A consistent theme across independent analysis is that offshore processing is extraordinarily expensive relative to any rational policy objective, and does not deliver sustainable “solutions.”

The Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law has documented offshore processing as “cruel, costly and ineffective,” and details the significant financial burden and policy failure associated with the regime.

Public reporting has also highlighted extreme per-person costs and contract expansions associated with maintaining offshore arrangements for a relatively small number of people.

This matters for integrity: environments where “anything goes” financially—because the project is politically protected and practically hidden—are environments where waste and misconduct thrive.

#### **5. The harm is documented, recurring, and foreseeable**

The record of harm is extensive, including credible reporting and evidence of unsafe conditions, mental health collapse, self-harm, violence, and child abuse in offshore contexts.

The “The Guardian Nauru Files” exposed the scale and nature of reported abuse and trauma inside the offshore system.

More recently, public reporting and advocacy organisations have documented that approximately 100+ people have been held on Nauru, with serious concerns raised about conditions, support, safety, nutrition, and the absence of durable resettlement pathways.

We emphasise: harm is not an “unintended consequence.” It is a predictable outcome of an architecture that strips people of power, isolates them, and removes scrutiny.

#### **6. “From Tampa to Nauru” is not history — it is recurrence**

Australia first implemented offshore processing in 2001, and then reactivated the policy architecture in 2012.

The lesson of the last two decades is simple: when offshore processing returns, so do the same patterns—secrecy, escalating cost, legal controversy, preventable harm, and institutional denial.

## 7. New offshore-related arrangements amplify the risks

This Inquiry is occurring alongside renewed offshore-linked arrangements, including removals/transfers to Nauru under a long-term deal reported as costing around A\$2.5 billion over 30 years, with public commentary and estimates evidence suggesting the total could be higher depending on scale and terms.

There have also been serious public concerns about secrecy and the human rights implications of these arrangements, including statements from the Australian Human Rights Commission calling for transparency and raising alarm about opacity.

From an integrity perspective, secrecy is not a neutral administrative preference—it is a risk multiplier.

## 8. Integrity concerns must be addressed, but not separated from human rights

We urge the Committee not to treat “integrity issues” as separate from the underlying policy harm. Offshore processing creates the conditions in which integrity failure is likely, because it depends on:

- minimising accountability,
- dispersing responsibility,
- contracting out core functions,
- reducing scrutiny, and
- operating in high-risk environments.

Credible public reporting has also raised concerns about alleged infiltration of offshore-linked operations by criminal elements through contracting arrangements—claims that, at minimum, reinforce the urgency of robust, transparent procurement controls and independent oversight.

## 9. A statement from lived advocacy experience

We include the following quote from our National Convener, Dulce Muñoz, to reflect the reality our members have witnessed while supporting survivors:

***“Offshore processing survives on distance, distance from scrutiny, distance from responsibility, distance from the human face of the harm. But distance doesn’t dilute accountability. It only dilutes the political cost—until the evidence catches up.”***

—Dulce Muñoz, National Convener, Mums4refugees (Submission to Senate Inquiry, February 2026)

## 10. Recommendations

Mums4refugees recommends the Committee:

1. Find that offshore processing and offshore-linked removal arrangements are incompatible with Australia’s human rights obligations and create foreseeable risks of harm.

2. Recommend a clear timetable to end offshore processing and close out offshore detention/resettlement arrangements, including bringing remaining people under Australia's care to safety with lawful status pathways.
3. Require publication of all contracts, subcontracts, and key performance measures related to offshore processing and offshore-linked arrangements, with minimal redactions and strict justification.
4. Mandate strengthened procurement and integrity controls, including: independent probity, conflict-of-interest safeguards, open tender wherever possible, limits on rolling extensions, and enforceable anti-corruption clauses.
5. Establish independent oversight and monitoring, including routine reporting to Parliament on costs, service delivery, incidents, and complaint handling.
6. Provide trauma-informed support and redress pathways for survivors, including access to healthcare, mental health support, family reunification, and compensation where human rights violations are established.
7. Ensure meaningful participation of people with lived experience in policy design, monitoring, and evaluation.

## 11. Conclusion

This Inquiry must not become a narrow audit of dollars and contracts while the human consequences are treated as background noise. Offshore processing is a policy model that has repeatedly produced cruelty and integrity failure together—because it is designed to operate beyond ordinary scrutiny.

We urge the Committee to use this moment to recommend not merely “better contracting,” but the only durable integrity reform available here: ending offshore processing and offshore outsourcing altogether.

### Key sources referenced (public)

- Inquiry details and submission closing date (13 Feb 2026).
- Richardson Review materials on integrity and governance for regional processing administration.
- ANAO performance audit on offshore processing contract management.
- Kaldor Centre Policy Brief 11 on offshore processing as cruel, costly, and ineffective.
- Reporting on current Nauru numbers/conditions and costs.
- Nauru deal costs and transparency concerns.
- Nauru Files reporting on abuse and harm.

In solidarity and friendship

Mums4Refugees National Team

“There can be no love without justice.” — bell hooks