



**The Parliament of the
Commonwealth of Australia**

**AUSTRALIA AND THE
REFUGEE PROBLEM**

**Report from the Senate Standing
Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence**

**Parliamentary Paper
No. 329/1976**

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Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

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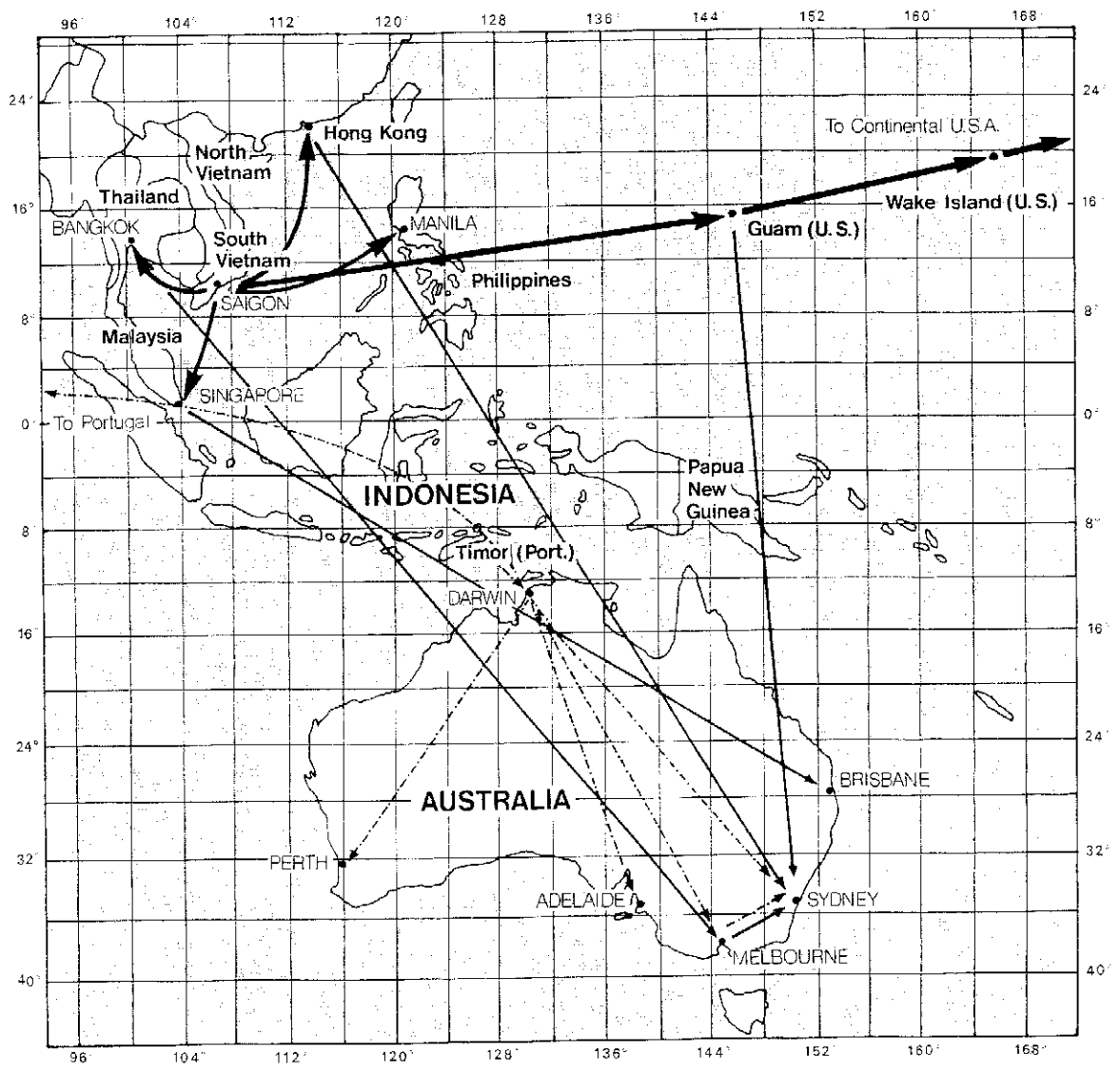
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Refugee Movements



Contents

Preface

Factual Background to the Vietnamese Refugee Problem

1. Chronological account of events and major responses 3

Consideration of the Australian Government's Response to Requests for Assistance with Resettlement and Rehabilitation

2. Response to the events in South Vietnam 13
3. Australia's concern and involvement with refugees in Guam, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand 26
4. Vietnamese students, orphans and other persons 37
5. Settlement of refugees admitted to Australia 46
- Reception 46
- Orientation and settlement work of government agencies 50
- Orientation and settlement work of the local 'Settlement Committees' 54
- Settlement problems—areas where action is most needed 59
6. The 'resettlement process' 80

Recommendations

7. Refugee policy—major recommendations and conclusions 89
- Acknowledgments 99

List of Appendixes

- Appendix 1* Information provided (in Vietnamese) to the refugees by the Australian selection team in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia—'Brief points for Vietnamese refugees coming to Australia'. 103
- English translation 114
- Appendix 2* The 'Cultural communicator' scheme—Lysaght Brothers & Co. Pty Ltd, Chiswick, New South Wales 119
- Appendix 3* Petition of the Vietnamese refugees at Wacol Hostel, Brisbane 127
- English translation 134*
- Copy of the petition received by the Department of Labor and Immigration 137
- Appendix 4* *The Vietnamese Study*, Jean I. Martin 1 June 1976 141
- Appendix 5* List of persons and organisations who submitted evidence to the committee 155

Preface

On 11 June 1975 the Senate referred the following matters to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for examination and report:

- (a) The plight and circumstances of refugees and other persons forced to leave South Vietnam following the occupation of that area by North Vietnamese forces, together with the existing and future circumstances of all South Vietnamese students now in Australia and their close relatives;
- (b) The response of the Australian Government to the requests made both from within Australia and at the international level for assistance in the matters of resettlement and rehabilitation; and
- (c) The areas of operation in which the Australian nation could render appropriate and effective assistance.

In considering the reference the Committee invited and received submissions from a wide range of interested persons and organisations to all of whom we express our appreciation for their co-operation and assistance. A list of those from whom evidence was received is attached at Appendix 5.

Hearings for the reference commenced on 10 October 1975 but were interrupted by the dissolution of Parliament in November. Members were reappointed to the Committee on 24 March 1976 and hearings resumed on 21 April and continued until 20 May 1976. Where possible, evidence was heard in public sessions although there were several instances where the nature of the material presented necessitated some hearings being held *in camera*.

During May 1976 the Committee visited the 168 Vietnamese refugees who remained at the Wacol Migrant Hostel in Brisbane to discuss the difficulties they faced in settling in Australia. Following this visit, and prior to preparing its report, the Committee conducted a detailed program of research into the practical matter of the settlement of the Vietnamese (and other) refugees. This was accompanied by a number of detailed requests for further information from the various Commonwealth departments having responsibility for the post-arrival care of refugees in Australia.

During the course of the inquiry considerable difficulty was experienced by the Committee in obtaining accurate and comprehensive statistical and other information and in reconciling the sometimes conflicting and often incomplete information which was submitted in evidence by various government departments, voluntary organisations and individuals. To the best of the Committee's ability, this fragmentary information has been pieced together to provide an accurate and factual basis for the conclusions and recommendations which are contained in the report.

The report is divided into three parts. The first part provides a factual background to the Vietnamese refugee problem and consists of a chronological account of the events surrounding the fall of Saigon during April

1975 and the major responses to these events. In the second part consideration is given to the Australian Government's response to the requests for assistance with the resettlement and rehabilitation of the Vietnamese and other refugees who were admitted to Australia during 1975 and in the early part of 1976. In this section the Committee has canvassed such matters as the evacuation of refugees, criteria used for their selection, reception procedures, orientation work, and the post-hostel settlement assistance which has been provided to them. The section concludes with a chapter on the overall nature of the 'resettlement process' itself. The final part of the report contains the Committee's recommendations for the formulation of an Australian policy for refugees together with the necessary advisory and other administrative machinery. These recommendations, if implemented, should ensure that Australia is able to respond quickly and effectively to refugee situations which may arise in the future. The Committee has also included its specific recommendations concerning areas where action is most needed to alleviate the problems experienced by the 1975 and 1976 intakes of Vietnamese, Timorese and Indochinese refugees.