

Submission No. 2

Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Migration, 28th June, 2008

Date Received

Nancy Lynette Eggins,

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Points commented upon:

BY: MIG

1. Length of time that a person should be held in immigration detention
2. Preferred infrastructure options for contemporary immigration detention

Submission

Having been a regular visitor to Villawood Detention centre now for a period of almost two years, I would like to submit that I have observed many cases of inmates who have been detained for quite lengthy periods of time, and whose mental state has deteriorated significantly in that time.

Most of the detainees are waiting for outcomes to do with applications for visas of one sort or another, and spend their time in a state of limbo, frustrated and depressed when nothing appears to be being done to expedite their cases. In some cases months can go by without any contact with their case manager, if they have one, and in other cases they suffer frustration because relationships they had in the community before being detained are undermined by the length of time of their detention. This frustration leads to despair, and costs the community much in terms of mental health assessment and support.

I would like to submit that a period of no more than six months should be needed to process the cases of most of the detainees, at least to a point of being able to place them in either community housing within the centre, or in a place of abode in the general community, while cases are being reviewed in courts or elsewhere.

The people I have met in detention are not hardened criminals, and would not be a threat to the community at large. If they knew that their period of detention was to be less than the years they see before and behind them at present, their state of mental health would be greatly enhanced, and the status of Australia as a country with humanitarian concerns would be expanded.

As I see it, the community housing is not fully utilised at Villawood Detention Centre, and many more people could be far more comfortably housed there than at present. The situation in Stage One is particularly abysmal. and in Stages Two and Three, leaves much to be desired.

In particular, the food presented to the detainees is not usually culturally appropriate, and in fact can often be less than appetising and insufficient in quantity, particularly for the men.

(Mrs) N.L. Eggins

Retired school teacher, and regular visitor to Villawood Detention centre (2006-2008)