

Manus Island Detention Centre



The Manus Island Detention Centre was built in 2001 as a key part of the *Pacific Solution* under the Howard Government. It was closed by the Rudd Government in 2008, and re-opened by the Gillard Government in November 2012 after an increase in the number of boat arrivals.¹ As at 30 April 2014, there are 1273 men held in the detention centre.²

Dangers

The Australian Government's own travel advice on PNG is that people should 'exercise a high degree of caution in Papua New Guinea because of the high levels of serious crime.'³

Cholera is now considered endemic in PNG, the rate of HIV/AIDS infection is high, and malaria, Dengue fever and other mosquito-borne diseases are all risks. Meanwhile, 'health care facilities in Papua New Guinea ... are poor by Australian standards.'⁴

In July 2013 a former guard at the Manus Island detention centre, Rod St George, confirmed that immigration staff at the detention centre ignored a series of rapes and assaults on male detainees. He also stated that suicide and self-harm occurred 'almost daily'.⁵

February 2014 violence

Between 16–18 February 2014, two nights of violence at the Manus Island detention centre left one asylum seeker, Reza Berati, dead and many more seriously injured.

At present, no arrests have been made nor charges laid, and the timeline of events during the unrest remains unclear due to a lack of media access as well as staff confidentiality agreements.⁶ A Senate inquiry into the disturbances lacks the authority to compel people on Papua New Guinea to give evidence or summon documents, nor can it offer legal protection to 'witnesses outside Australia who suffered (or were threatened with) any penalty or injury in respect of evidence given'.⁷

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) initiated a review into the events of 16–18 February, to be undertaken in cooperation with the PNG Government.⁸ However, the Government declined to release the interim report, and it is unclear when it will publicly release the details of the completed review, due in April 2014.⁹

A major concern regarding Manus Island is the lack of a clear line of authority, ie whether Australia or PNG is in charge, the legal jurisdiction, and who is ultimately responsible for the safety and well-being of asylum seekers detained there.¹⁰

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-11-21/first-asylum-seekers-arrive-on-manus-island/4383876>

² http://www.immi.gov.au/managing-australias-borders/detention/_pdf/immigration-detention-statistics-apr2014.pdf

³ http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Papua_New_Guinea

⁴ http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Papua_New_Guinea

⁵ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/jul/24/manus-island-rape-detainees>

⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/20/deadly-violence-on-manus-island-sparks-call-for-royal-commission>

⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/10/witnesses-at-manus-unrest-inquiry-will-not-be-protected-from-retribution>

⁸ <http://www.immi.gov.au/pub-res/Pages/reviews-and-inquiries/manus-tor-feb2014.aspx>

⁹ <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/report-on-inquiry-into-manus-island-death-to-stay-under-wraps-20140402-35yvv.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-27/who-is-responsible-for-asylum-seekers-detained-on-manus/5275598>

Processing asylum seekers

After the riot, a former staffer at Manus Island stated that there was no processing system in place, and that the detention centre is 'not designed as a processing facility, it's designed as an experiment in the active creation of horror to deter people from trying in the first place'.¹¹

UNHCR's Richard Towle stated after a visit to Manus Island that while the entire purpose of the centre was to process asylum seekers, there was no legal framework for processing and asylum seekers were there indefinitely.¹²

Daniel Webb, a lawyer with the Human Rights Law Centre said that the Government's offshore processing policies were causing grave harm to vulnerable people: 'It's a tragedy that people die at sea when seeking asylum, but ... [instead] of punishing survivors, we must focus on working with source countries to develop safe pathways to protection for those who need to seek it'.¹³

Financial Cost

The cost of maintaining the Manus Island detention centre is more expensive than it would be to process asylum seekers in Australia.¹⁴

The DIBP will spend more than \$13.3 million to temporarily accommodate staff abroad floating accommodation for seven months up until the end of May 2014.¹⁵ More, it will be expended for extra accommodation to house the extra security sent to Manus Island in February 2014. Some \$3.5 million was spent for a tent kitchen and Transfield will be paid \$1.22 billion to run the Manus and Nauru centres for 20 months, equating to \$900 a day for each asylum seeker.¹⁶

In comparison, Martin Bowles, then Secretary of DIAC (now DIBP) stated in 2013 that processing *in* Australia costs just one-fifth (20%) of the amount required to process someone offshore.¹⁷ This was using a conservative figure for offshore processing.

¹¹ <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2014/02/25/i-was-told-lie-manus-island-staffer>

¹² <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-02-04/unhcr-says-manus-island-conditions-violate-law/4498930>

¹³ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/12/united-nations-report-manus-island>

¹⁴ *Hansard*, Senate Estimates, 27-28 May 2013.

¹⁵ <http://www.smh.com.au/national/133-million-hotel-bill-for-manus-island-staff-20140222-338wn.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/35m-spent-on-manus-island-detention-centres-kitchen-defended-20140302-33u0x.html>

¹⁷ *Hansard*, Senate Estimates, 27-28 May 2013.