

PRIME MINISTER

GILLARD GOVERNMENT STRENGTHENS AUSTRALIA'S BORDER PROTECTION

The Prime Minister Julia Gillard today announced new steps to strengthen Australia's border protection arrangements and to manage irregular arrivals.

Ms Gillard said she had initiated steps to develop a sustainable regional protection framework involving the establishment of a regional processing centre.

Such a centre would ensure that asylum seekers are subject to consistent, fair assessment processes.

The plan aims to wreck the people smuggling trade by removing the incentive for boats to leave their port of origin in the first place.

This will mean people smugglers will not be able to sell a ticket to Australia.

Ms Gillard said she had already begun discussions with President Jose Ramos Horta of East Timor and New Zealand's Prime Minister John Key who have both welcomed the discussion and confirmed their commitment to explore the proposal.

The Prime Minister has also spoken to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, to reiterate the Government's support for the development of a sustainable, effective regional protection framework.

The Government also announced today that the suspension on processing claims for Sri Lankan asylum seekers will be lifted immediately, in light of the continuing improved security and human rights situation in Sri Lanka.

The Prime Minister indicated that the Government would continue to review the suspension of processing of Afghan asylum seekers.

If re-elected, the Government will pursue legislative changes to further strengthen penalties for people smuggling ventures that result in deaths.

This package of measures is designed to remove incentives for people to risk their lives

travelling on boats across dangerous oceans to get to our shores.

While the Opposition trades in simplistic, shallow slogans, Ms Gillard said the Government was taking a serious long term approach to the challenge of dealing with irregular migration in the region.

SYDNEY

6 JULY 2010

PRESS OFFICE (02) 6277 7744

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