



# Refugee Council of Australia

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## **Detention of children no longer a last resort**

The Australian Government is walking further away from its commitment to use detention as a last resort for minors by confirming plans to send children to immigration detention facilities at Wickham Point near Darwin and the remote Curtin facility in Western Australia.

Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) chief executive officer Paul Power said he was appalled by the Government's decision to designate part of the Wickham Point centre as an alternative place of detention (APOD) and to consider similar arrangements at Curtin.

"In 2008, the Government declared that immigration detention should be used only as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time. Two years later, the Government committed itself to moving most of the children in its immigration detention network out of closed facilities and into community arrangements by June 2011," Mr Power said.

"Faced with an increasing number of asylum seekers arriving by boat, the Government's response has been to increase the capacity for the detention of children when its focus should be releasing children into the community at a faster rate in line with its own policy.

"The time being spent by asylum seekers in closed detention facilities is increasing. Between 31 October 2012 and 28 February this year, the average length of time spent by adults and children in closed facilities grew from 74 days to 141 days."

In recent months, the numbers of children detained in closed facilities in Australia have been higher than ever before. The total of 1221 children detained as at 31 December 2012 was significantly higher than the two previous records – 990 children detained as at 4 September 2011 and 842 children detained as at 1 September 2001.<sup>1</sup> At 28 February, 1062 children were in closed detention facilities.

"The devastating psychological impacts of detention on children have been well-known and widely discussed for more than a decade," Mr Power said.

"Living in an environment where adults are involved in acts of self-harm damages a child's mental health and sense of well-being. The Government does not need to be told this because its own staff members, on countless occasions, have been left to deal with the consequences of children becoming depressed and harming themselves.

"RCOA cannot accept the suggestion that deactivating electronic detection systems somehow converts a secure Immigration Detention Centre detention facility into a family-friendly Alternative Place of Detention (APOD). This highlights how disingenuous the Government is in claiming that APODs are somehow different to secure detention centres and therefore more suitable for children.

"Millions of Australians object to our Government locking up children. Even within its current policies, the Government can find better ways to manage the arrival of child asylum seekers than creating more detention facilities for them."

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<sup>1</sup> See RCOA's March 2013 Policy Brief on detention of children – [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/pb/PB1303-Children.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/pb/PB1303-Children.pdf)