

**Home Affairs Portfolio
Department of Home Affairs
Additional Estimates Hearing – February 2025**

KEY BRIEF

Topic: Regional Processing

Responsible Deputy: Dr Emma Cassar PSM, Associate Secretary Immigration

Key Top Lines

- Regional processing is a key pillar of Operations Sovereign Borders (OSB).
 - o The Governments of Australia and Nauru signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for an enduring regional processing capability in Nauru on 24 September 2021, committing to long-term regional processing arrangements.
- Nauru remains ready to receive and process any new unauthorised maritime arrivals (UMAs), future-proofing Australia's response to maritime people smuggling.
- As at 31 December 2024, there were 93 UMAs under regional processing in Nauru.

Handling Notes:

- Mr Joe Feld, A/g First Assistant Secretary Regional Programs, will be the lead witness on the topics contained in this brief.
- Any questions relating to Operation Sovereign Borders and or on-water operations, Rear Admiral Brett Sonter, Commander JATF will be the lead witness on the topic.

Key Points

- From 05 November 2024 to 31 December 2024, 15 UMAs have transferred to Nauru for regional processing.
- Since September 2023, a total of 136 UMAs have been transferred to Nauru for regional processing:
 - o Less than 5 UMAs were transferred in December 2024;
 - o 13 UMAs were transferred in November 2024;
 - o Less than 5 UMAs were transferred in October 2024;
 - o Less than 10 UMAs were transferred in September 2024;
 - o Less than 5 UMAs were transferred in July and August 2024;
 - o 37 UMAs were transferred in June 2024;
 - o 10 UMAs were transferred in April 2024;
 - o 39 UMAs were transferred in February 2024;
 - o 12 UMAs were transferred in November 2023;
 - o 11 UMAs were transferred in September 2023.
- Returns assistance is available for UMAs seeking to voluntarily return to their country of origin or a country to which they have right of entry.

- Between September 2023 and 31 December 2024, 43 UMAs have returned home voluntarily from Nauru.
- As at 31 December 2024, less than 5 UMAs are engaged in Assisted Voluntary Return process to return to their country of origin.

Claim of Public Interest Immunity on questions from the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs: material related to assisted voluntary returns and details of individuals in regional processing in Nauru.

- The requested information refers to the individual characteristics of transferees and operationally sensitive information.
- The Department considers the public disclosure of this information would not be in the public interest on grounds it would, or could reasonably be expected to, cause damage to Australia's national security and international relations.

Regional Processing Funding and Service Delivery Contracts

- Australia bears all costs associated with regional processing arrangements.

Regional Processing costs related to PNG and Nauru to 31 December 2024.

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25*	Total \$ (m)
	\$ (m)	\$ (m)	\$ (m)	\$ (m)	\$ (m)	\$ (m)	\$ (m)	\$ (m)	\$ (m)	\$ (m)	\$ (m)	\$ (m)	\$ (m)	
Totals \$ (m)	358.8	1,306.9	1,313.2	1,138.9	990.4	1,037.6	939.3	815.1	601.9	607.2	421.0	329.7	191.2	10,051.2

* Year to date costs to 31 December 2024

Note: Inclusive of departmental, capital and administered expenditure for Nauru and PNG regional processing capability. The 2024/25 YTD cost includes a payment to PNG for the continued support in its management of the former Regional Resettlement Arrangement (RRA) caseload. Totals may vary due to rounding.

Regional Processing Policy & Operations

- There has been no shift in the Government's maritime people smuggling policies.
 - The Department remains committed to maintaining the Government's objective of an enduring regional processing capability in Nauru as a key pillar of OSB.
 - Nauru remains ready to receive and process any new UMAs.
- The Government of Nauru (GoN) is responsible for the administration and implementation of regional processing arrangements in Nauru. This includes management of UMAs and consideration of any protection claims raised.
 - Australia supports the GoN to implement arrangements, including through the provision of contracted service providers.
- Transferees who require clinically indicated medical treatment not available in Nauru may be temporarily transferred to another country, including Taiwan and Australia.
 - A Memorandum of Understanding between Taiwan and Australia is in place to support the transfer of non-urgent medical treatment of transferees.

If Asked: Management of UMAs with communicable diseases

- The GoN is responsible for managing individual UMAs in Nauru.

- The Minister for Home Affairs has claimed Public Interest Immunity (PII) over information related to the individual circumstances of transferees in Nauru.

If Asked: Medevac transfer to Australia

- Transfers to Australia for a temporary purpose may occur on a case by case basis depending on individual circumstances where necessary medical treatment is not available in Nauru or to support engagement with third country migration options.
- Transitory persons do not have a settlement pathway in Australia.
- International Health and Medical Services delivers health services through a multi-disciplinary team, including general practitioners and nurses at the Regional Processing Centre Medical Clinic and in conjunction with the Republic of Nauru Hospital.
 - These services may be supplemented by visiting healthcare practitioners or, where clinically indicated, medical treatment in another country, including Australia and Taiwan.
 - Transfer decisions have always been guided by medical professionals and with approval from the Government of Nauru and a departmental delegate.
- For privacy reasons, the Australian Government will not provide details of transfers to Australia.

If Asked: Average time to process Refugee Status Determination (RSD) Applications

- Assessment of any transferee protection claims is the responsibility of the Government of Nauru (GoN) under its domestic legislation.
 - As this is a legislated process in Nauru, Australia is not directly involved.
 - The Department does not comment on Nauru's sovereign processes.
- If UMAs seek asylum, their application will be assessed by the GoN.
- UMAs have access to a number of appeals processes if they receive a negative RSD.

If asked on United Nations Human Rights Committee complaints

- Australia has 180 days from the date of publication of the adverse views on 9 January 2025 to provide a response.
- The Australian Government's response to the Committee's views will be coordinated by the Attorney-General's Department in accordance with usual practice in United Nations individual complaint processes. Any questions relating to the response should be directed toward their Department.
- It has been the Australian Government's consistent position that Australia does not exercise effective control over Regional Processing Countries.

Consultation

- The Chief Statistician has cleared the statistics contained within this brief.
- Finance Division has cleared financial data contained within this brief (through External Budgets and Revenue Branch).