

Nauru asylum seeker announcement: no additional aid and no resettlement?

By Ashlee Betteridge
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Hot off the heels of signing an agreement with Papua New Guinea on asylum seekers (see all our coverage [here](#)), PM Kevin Rudd announced Saturday that Nauru was the latest country to join up to his 'regional solution' to process and resettle asylum seekers arriving by boat.

[The new deal](#) not only allows for the processing of asylum seekers on Nauru, it would also accommodate resettlement in the tiny nation, which has a population of just less than 10,000 people. Also, unlike the recent agreement with PNG, it provides explicitly for community-based detention on the island. The full text of the new agreement is available [here](#). The new agreement supersedes [the MoU](#) signed between the countries last year.

However, only two days after the initial announcement, Nauru has [denied](#) that asylum seekers would be permanently resettled there. (Immigration minister Tony Burke has since [conceded](#) they won't be granted citizenship but has suggested they might live there for 'decades', like the phosphate miners of old.) Fr Frank Brennan has [questioned](#) the legality of the arrangement and other refugee activists have [slammed](#) it.

Whatever might actually happen on the resettlement front—and it's important to bear in mind that nobody can be forcibly resettled in either Nauru or PNG—the explicit references to resettlement and community-based detention in the new MoU could cost the aid program money. They [already have](#) in PNG, where the price tag is currently estimated at \$236 million over four years. At this stage, no specific price tag has been attached to this aspect of the new agreement with Nauru. Aside from the resettlement and community detention elements, the deal adds little to the previous MoU covering arrangements already in place in Nauru—there are some 500 asylum seekers in immigration detention there (who recently [grabbed headlines by rioting](#)).

The other part of the deal that appears to have been misreported, or simply just confused, is that Nauru is set to get additional aid in return for signing up to the Rudd plan. [Numerous reports](#) have implied that Nauru was set to benefit from \$29.9 million in aid, and Rudd himself implied in his announcement (though never explicitly stated) that this aid contribution was Australia holding up its end of the new deal. However, [according to the AusAID website](#), this figure of \$29.9 million is exactly what Nauru was already set to receive

in 2013-2014. This figure is drawn [from the announcement of the budget in May](#)—it was not altered in the August Economic Statement last week. It is also in line with previous aid allocations to Nauru. Aid to Nauru for 2012-2013 is estimated to be \$34.1 million, and in 2011-12 Nauru received \$28.7 million.

However, Rudd did [state](#) that on top of the \$29.9 million in aid, Nauru would be provided with \$17 million to rebuild its prison. Where is that money coming from? Is it aid or not? Will it come from AusAID's budget or elsewhere? As with the PNG agreement, things seem very unclear.

About the author/s

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