

Quarterly Essay 53: That Sinking Feeling

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Synopsis

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In the first Quarterly Essay of 2014, Paul Toohey searches for the solution our politicians have been unwilling or unable to find, and asks whether, amid the diplomatic turmoil, we've now missed our chance. Tony Abbott promised to stop the boats. With the help of Kevin Rudd's "PNG solution", he has. But at what cost? Visiting the Indonesian departure points, Toohey tells the dramatic stories of asylum seekers heading from Java to Australia, investigates people-smuggling and witnesses the aftermath of a sinking at sea. He examines the individual policies and outcomes of the Howard, Rudd, Gillard, and now Abbott governments. He also interrogates Australian attitudes to boat people, and what politicians have made of these.

This engaging, powerful essay provides the untold personal stories of those waiting to make the dangerous journey, and the long view of this fraught issue. That Sinking Feeling is an unflinching look at people at their worst and best - and most ruthless and most vulnerable - by one of Australia's finest reporters.

Reader's comments

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