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# Activist lawyers should stop fighting to keep criminals in Australia: Alex Hawke

The Immigration Minister has dropped a bombshell on activist lawyers who pursue “hopeless” cases to keep serious violent and sexual criminals from being deported.



**James Morrow**

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**National**

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Hundreds of people have rallied across Australia to protest the possible deportation of a Tamil asylum seeker family.

Immigration Minister Alex Hawke has dropped a bombshell on activist lawyers who pursue “hopeless” cases to keep serious violent and sexual criminals from being deported despite “very high community risks”.

Mr Hawke’s comments on Wednesday came just a day before Labor acted to shut down consideration of the Morrison government’s proposed legislation to strengthen character test provisions for migrants, making it easier to boot out foreign criminals.



Alex Hawke MP during Question Time at Parliament House in Canberra. Picture: NCA NewsWire / Martin Ollman

Speaking at the Law Council’s Immigration Law conference, Mr Hawke also said the government was frustrated by how “an increasing number of lawyers and activists are encouraging their clients to lodge appeal after appeal after appeal, even in the most hopeless cases involving the most serious violent and sexual offenders.”

Taking aim at his audience, Mr Hawke added: “Some of these lawyers and activists are here with us today.”

“Unfortunately, a fringe element of the legal profession is increasingly bringing your profession into disrepute by advancing unmeritorious cases with very high community risks,” Mr Hawke said.





Protesters sit outside the Department of Immigration building during a march through central Brisbane.  
Picture: NCA NewWire/Dan Peled)

“These risks are often self-evident to me and should be to the lawyers involved as well.”

In his address, Mr Hawke pointed out that more than 87 per cent of immigration detainees had a criminal record, and that despite activist lawyers trying to drag matters out the Government wins in 90 per cent of immigration and citizenship matters before the courts.

“Some lawyers need to do a better job in managing their clients’ expectations in character matters. Too many litigants are spending too much time in detention centres hoping for a longshot win which never comes,” he said.

“By vainly trying to defeat these odds repeatedly, some lawyers are contributing to and profiting from their own clients’ misery.

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“Again, a small number of lawyers are repeatedly putting self-promotion first, and their clients’ best interests second,” he said.

Mr Hawke’s comments were not immediately welcomed by everyone in the legal profession.

The lively and often anti-Morrison government Twitter account of Sydney’s Marque Lawyers said Wednesday that Mr Hawke “attacks lawyers for invoking the rule of law on behalf of asylum seekers by daring to challenge his decision.”

The Greens meanwhile, cheered Labor’s blocking of the character test legislation.

“This was unnecessary, harmful legislation from a Government that has deliberately sought to divide and demonise people,” said Greens Immigration and Citizenship spokesman Senator Nick McKim.

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