

Family First dents PM's hopes on asylum Bill

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THE Federal Government's tough asylum-seeker legislation faces defeat after an early announcement of opposition from Family First Senator Steve Fielding.

Senator Fielding, whose vote was being courted by Prime Minister John Howard as a replacement for a possible dissident Government senator, scotched such hopes by announcing he would not support the Bill when it is voted on, probably tomorrow in Canberra.

"Family First opposes changes that would see Australia no longer play by the rules," he said.

The Government's Migration Amendment (Designated Unauthorised Arrivals) Bill passed the House of Representatives with a majority of 16 votes last week.

Five Coalition MPs failed to support the Bill, with three defying Mr Howard by crossing the floor.

At least two Coalition senators have indicated they have major problems with the Bill and could cross the floor or abstain.

With Family First's vote now counted with the Opposition, the legislation would be defeated if one Coalition senator crossed the floor or if at least two abstained.

Senator Fielding said he arrived at his decision after wide-ranging dis-

cussions. "I needed to make sure that I considered all of the issues, all of the arguments, and that's the reason why I've said right up until now Family First hasn't made up its mind and I don't understand why people don't believe you," he said.

He said the primary issue was the international obligations of Australia. "These rules are accepted generally around all countries in regards to not booting people off to a foreign land. Imagine if every other country did what Australia is proposing. It would be chaos," he said.

Immigration Minister Amanda

For a full transcript of Senator Fielding's comments, go to:

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Vanstone rejected a compromise suggestion that unlawful arrivals be sent to Australian-administered Christmas Island rather than to a third country, such as Nauru.

"That wouldn't have the same effect in terms of lack of access to Australian law. That is, the long and lengthy appeal process," she said.

Victorian Senator Judith Troeth has previously indicated she was unlikely to support the Bill and as many as three others, including Queensland Senator Barnaby Joyce, may also vote against it.

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