



Administrative Appeals Tribunal

Acting Registrar's opening statement

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee

Budget Estimates hearing

5 April 2022

Thank you, Chair.

The AAT offers individuals and organisations the opportunity for independent review of decisions made under more than 400 pieces of Commonwealth legislation. This includes decisions relating to Australian citizenship, child support, family assistance and social security, migration and refugee visas, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, taxation, workers' compensation and veterans' support. The AAT is committed to providing a mechanism of review that is accessible to our users as well as fair, just, economical, informal, proportionate and quick.

Last week, on the first of April, we welcomed the appointment of Fiona Meagher as a Judge of the Federal Court and President of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, taking effect that day. Prior to Justice Meagher's appointment, the Hon Justice Berna Collier, Judge of the Federal Court of Australia, acted as the AAT's President. On behalf of the AAT I would like to take this opportunity to thank Justice Collier for her leadership during this time.

I continue to act as Registrar of the Tribunal providing support to Justice Meagher, assisted by a Senior Executive Group.

Following a fall in the number of applications received in 2020–21, primarily as a result of factors relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, applications to the AAT have grown steadily in 2021–22. Lodgements continue to grow significantly in the NDIS Division and there is a return to higher lodgement levels in the migration caseload of the Migration and Refugee Division.

Our on-hand caseload remains large, particularly in the Migration and Refugee Division. While we were able to make some inroads in 2020–21, there remains a substantial backlog of cases due to the significant growth in lodgements in that Division over time.

There has been a small decrease in the AAT's overall base appropriation in the 2022–23 financial year announced in the recent Federal Budget. Addressing our large and ageing backlog within existing resource constraints represents a significant challenge for the AAT in 2022–23 and the forward years. We will continue to engage with the Government regarding our ongoing resourcing needs.

We welcome the approval to progress our work to replace our legacy case management systems with a single, contemporary solution. This will offer enhanced service options for our users and improve productivity for the Tribunal.

Finally, I acknowledge the publication last week of an interim report of the Inquiry into the performance and integrity of Australia's administrative review system. The AAT looks forward to continuing to assist the Inquiry over the coming months.

Thank you and I welcome questions from the Committee.