

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING: 24 March 2017

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(AE17/258) - Citizenship Ceremonies - Programme 2.3: Visas

Senator Pratt, Louise (L&CA) written:

Can local MPs hold citizenship ceremonies and what is the process for doing that?

Please provide a breakdown of the number of approved citizenship applicants waiting for a pledge/ceremony by LGA and the number of citizenships granted in the last financial year by LGA.

Does the Department have a strategy to address the backlog of citizenship ceremonies? How many citizenship applications were awaiting assurances on a year-by-year basis since 2011?

Are assurance checks undertaken offshore or in Australia?

How many staff are allocated to undertaking assurance checks?

Answer:

The Instrument of Authorisation 2015 (Subsection 27 (5)) provides standing authorisation for Federal MPs to preside at citizenship ceremonies. Federal Members of Parliament may be approached to preside at a ceremony by the Minister or a community organisation hosting a ceremony, or may make a request to the Minister to host and preside at a ceremony.

In 2015-16 a total of 196,392 applications for citizenship by conferral were lodged by primary and secondary applicants, compared to 86,526 in 2010-11. This represents an increase of 127 per cent.

The number of clients eligible to attend a citizenship ceremony as at 30 April 2017 is 46,322. Of these 18,989 have been allocated to a ceremony. The provision of information on approved citizenship applicants waiting for a pledge/ceremony by LGA would be an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources.

The number of clients conferred in the 2015-2016 financial year was 133,126. The provision of information on the number of clients granted citizenship by LGA would be an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources.

The Department continues to work closely with local government councils and other stakeholders to provide an appropriate number of ceremonies.

The Department is implementing a number of short and longer term strategies to reduce the number of clients waiting for a citizenship ceremony as part of our efforts to reduce waiting times. These include:

- working with councils to identify more opportunities to hold ceremonies;
- holding additional department ceremonies; and
- considering individual requests by Federal MPs and Senators to hold official citizenship ceremonies.

In June 2015, the Department received a report from the Australian National Audit Office, *Verifying Identity in the Citizenship Program* (ANAO Report no 47 2014-2015). In response to one of the recommendations from that report, 21.3 full-time-equivalent officers were deployed to support and assess complex applications with higher identity risks (referred to as the *assurance caseload*). A range of routine checks are conducted on applications by officers in Australia or overseas posts.

From 1 February 2015 to 28 February 2017, a total of 18,439 citizenship-by-conferral applications were identified as requiring assurance checking. This included 6802 applications in 2015, 11,048 applications in 2016 and 589 applications in 2017 (to 28 February).