

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING : 27 June 2017

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(BE17/304) - Reduction in workforce in VCSG - impact on visa grant waiting times - Programme 2.3: Visas

Senator Pratt, Louise (L&CA 48) asked:

Senator PRATT: What has been the impact on waiting times? How do waiting times compare from 2015-16 to 2016-17 relative to the staffing levels?

Mr Pezzullo: I would have to take on notice the attribution, if you will, per capita as to FTE, because there are two factors at play there. The per capita rate in one year might have been set, but the same number or, indeed, fewer officers have had to be even more productive to deal with the volumes that are going up. So it is a three-way equation. It is resourcing—and you are drawing attention to that—it is streamlining of your processes and the application of technology, and it is the volume growth in the size of the business area. Those three variables operate together; you cannot isolate one.

Senator PRATT: I appreciate you cannot isolate them, but you have said you are only at the early stages of implementing technology.

Mr Pezzullo: Yes.

Senator PRATT: Therefore, in the main, your number of staff should be relative to the number of applications—

Mr Pezzullo: Why? Sorry—

Senator PRATT: and should have a correlation to the processing times.

Mr Pezzullo: Perhaps I need to be clearer. That assumes we are a department for visa management and that is all we do. I have just drawn attention to—

Senator PRATT: No, for this part of the—

Mr Pezzullo: I am sorry. It would be irresponsible of the commissioner and I, when we set our priorities, to say, 'That's a discrete part of our business. We are sort of nominally a Department of Immigration and Border Protection, but each silo or fragment or element of the business is self-contained.'

Senator PRATT: I understand there have been considerable changes to a wide range of visa policies which would affect a wide range of things.

Mr Pezzullo: Sorry, I am not just drawing attention to visa policies; I am talking about counter-narcotics, counterterrorism and exploited migrant workers, and the deliberate shift in resources—I am not sugar-coating this—whereby some areas are impacted more heavily than other areas has been a conscious decision on the part of the commissioner and I in responding to the direction of government to bolster certain areas that have got nothing to do with visas.

Senator PRATT: I understand that. Please provide on notice the number of staff in that particular unit relative to the number of applications and the waiting time.

Answer:

There is no data currently available that would enable comparison of visa grant waiting times from 2015-16 to 2016-17 relative to staffing levels. The Department considers the production of the information an unreasonable diversion of resources at this time.