

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 24 FEBRUARY 2009

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(32) Output 2.3: Australian Citizenship

Senators Fierravanti-Wells and Barnett (L&CA 89) asked:

Regarding the promotion of the value of Australian citizenship, how are we going with encouraging people to become Australian citizens? I know we keep statistics in relation to those things about having lots of people who have been here for years and years, but what is the trend? Are we seeing more people becoming citizens?

How many are eligible but have not taken up Australian citizenship? Provide a breakdown by nationality.

Answer:

The Department continues to strongly promote the value of Australian citizenship through public relations activities, special citizenship ceremonies, sponsorship of Australia's Local Hero through the Australian of the Year Awards, and provision of educational resource materials to primary and secondary schools.

Prior to 2007 estimates of the number of people residentially eligible to apply for Australian citizenship were extrapolated by the Department from census data based on the number of people permanently resident in Australia for two years or more.

The 2006 census data indicates that more than half of the permanent residents who were eligible to acquire Australian citizenship, but who had not, were from the UK and New Zealand.

With the commencement of the Citizenship Act 2007 on 1 July 2007, the residence requirement for applicants for Australian citizenship changed to four years lawful residence, including 12 months as a permanent resident in Australia prior to application. The level of detail now needed was not captured by the 2006 census and it is therefore not as reliable an indicator of the possible number of permanent residents who may be eligible for Australian citizenship.

2006-07 saw a record number of people applying for Australian citizenship. There was an expected downturn on numbers in 2007-08 following changes to the residence requirements and the introduction of the citizenship test. It is expected that application numbers will continue to steadily increase over 2008-09 and beyond.

As at January 2009, the current average monthly application rate for 2008-09 is 8740 as compared to 7767 in 2007-08.

The top ten source countries of new citizens conferred in 2007-08 were:

- the United Kingdom (27 369)
- India (9053)
- China (8402)
- New Zealand (6806)
- South Africa (5490)
- Iraq (4216)
- Philippines (3827)
- Afghanistan (3174)
- Sudan (3017)
- Sri Lanka (2921)