QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 24 FEBRUARY 2009

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(36) Output: Portfolio Tribunals (MRT-RRT)

Senator Hanson-Young asked:

1)   Since the federal budget was handed down, the Migration Review Tribunal and Refugee Review Tribunal have lost $2.278 million from their budget – can you advise whether this is the case, and what the reasoning behind the cut is?

2)   I am concerned that the cut in funds for these agencies, could potentially reduce their effectiveness to process applications, given the probable increase in their workload – can the Minister advise how many cases the tribunals have reviewed in the current financial year, and whether this is above or below expectations?

Answer:

1)   Further to information provided to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs on 24 February 2009, and consistent with the Tribunal's funding arrangements settled in 2004, the reduction of $2.278m shown in the 2008-09 additional estimates statements reflects an adjustment to the 2007-08 appropriations based on the actual number of cases decided by the Tribunals in 2007-08.

The appropriation for the Tribunals in 2007-08 was $40.313m, based on the Tribunals deciding an estimated 8,100 MRT cases and 3,050 RRT cases. The Tribunals decided 5,219 MRT cases and 2,318 RRT cases in 2007-08. An increased complexity in decision making and Members taking on new caseloads following cross-appointment had an effect on the total number of cases decided. Funding was adjusted accordingly.

2)   The Tribunals are funded to decide 7,500 MRT and 3,050 RRT cases in 2008-09. For the period from 1 July 2008 to 28 February 2009, the Tribunals decided 3,852 MRT cases and 1,541 RRT cases. This is respectively 17% and 6% higher than for the same period the previous year. The capacity of the Tribunals to finalise a greater number of cases is being enhanced through additional Member resources as well as efficiency strategies employed by the Tribunals.