

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 21 FEBRUARY 2011

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(321) Program 4.3: Offshore Asylum Seeker Management

Senator Cash asked:

With regard to the Commonwealth Ombudsman's recommendations, what are the plans for a thorough review of the non-statutory Refugee Status Assessment (RSA) process? What is the timeframe for the completion of this report?

Answer:

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship is not currently proposing to undertake a review of the Refugee Status Assessment (RSA) process. It is assumed that this question relates to the last paragraph attached to the Department's response to Recommendation One of the Commonwealth Ombudsman's recommendations, which is as follows:

"We appreciate that RSA processing and security clearance processes are two separate processes and that the time taken to complete each process in respect of each person will differ. The Ombudsman welcomes DIAC's response that is suggestive current RSA processing standards are at least being maintained, if not improved. However, this will count for nought if there is no corresponding improvement in timeliness of security clearances. For this reason we remain of the view that it can be instructive to periodically undertake a holistic review that considers both processes."

This is a paragraph which was added to the response by the Ombudsman, rather than forming part of the Department's response.

The RSA process has been replaced by the Protection Obligations Determination (POD) process, which will allow for a faster initial assessment by a departmental officer. The new process is being monitored by the Department. It is anticipated that RSA cases will be incrementally finalised over the coming months and the RSA process will therefore no longer be in place. There is little merit in a review of the RSA process as all irregular maritime arrival clients who arrive on or after 1 March 2011 are being processed under the POD process.

In relation to the timeliness of security clearances, the Department is working closely with the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) on this.