

## **QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**

### **ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 21 FEBRUARY 2011**

#### **IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO**

##### **(60) Program 1.1: Visa and Migration**

Senator Cash (L&CA 44) asked:

What was the policy rationale behind the changes to the IELTS test requirements announced on 14 September 2009?

*Answer:*

The ability of a foreign worker to be able to communicate clearly in English is a cornerstone of the subclass 457 program reforms and the Worker Protection Act.

The department considers that sound English language ability in all facets of communication – writing, speaking, reading and comprehension – is critical to guarantee the workplace safety and prevent the exploitation of overseas workers.

This is consistent with the findings of Subclass 457 Integrity Review (Deegan Review) which determined that workers with English language skills are less vulnerable to exploitation.

This underpins the rationale to raise the IELTS score in September 2009 from an average of 5 to 5 in each component of the test.

This level was also chosen in order to align the subclass 457 visa with the Employer Nomination Scheme (ENS) which is a pathway to permanent residence sought by many subclass 457 visa holders. In the 2010-11 program year to 31 January 2011, 66 per cent of ENS visas were granted to persons whose previous substantive visa was a subclass 457. Were the English language requirements for these two visas not aligned at IELTS 5 in every component of the test, this important pathway to permanent residence for some 25,000 skilled workers every year would not be accessible.