

CHAPTER 1

IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO

Introduction

1.1 This chapter summarises areas of interest and concern raised during the Committee's consideration of the Budget Estimates of the Immigration and Multicultural Affairs portfolio for the 2006-2007 financial year.

Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA)

1.2 The committee sought updates of information on the Cornelia Rau and Vivian Solon matters. In relation to the Cornelia Rau matter, officers advised the committee that DIMA is currently awaiting a response from Ms Rau's lawyers regarding an issues raised by one of the potential parties to her compensation claim.¹

1.3 In relation to the Vivian Solon matter, officers advised the committee that there has been a series of hearings before the arbitrator and there are further hearings due fairly soon.²

1.4 Officers from DIMA were asked a range of questions relating to visa subclass 457. Officers informed the committee that the most common users of the subclass 457 visa are government organisations who employ doctors and nurses.³

1.5 The committee also heard that the total number of visas issued this financial year had increased. In 2004-2005, 50,000 visas were issued compared to an estimated total of 70,000 for 2005-2006.⁴

1.6 The committee also sought information about alleged breaches and complaints relating to subclass 457 visas and were informed that, to 30 April 2006, 31 notices of intention to consider cancellation were issued, two sponsorships were cancelled and one sponsorship bar was imposed. Officers also informed the committee that at the time of the hearing, DIMA was investigating 33 separate complaints, including allegations in relation to underpayment, or payments that do not match what originally was promised.⁵

1 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 22 May 2006, p. 9.

2 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 22 May 2006, p. 9.

3 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 22 May 2006, p. 34.

4 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 22 May 2006, p. 36.

5 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 22 May 2006, pp 38-40.

1.7 Officers from DIMA were asked a series of questions relating to the status of sanctions against particular Canberra restaurants. Officers advised the committee of ongoing investigations and considerations of sanctions that may be imposed in these matters.⁶

1.8 The committee sought information on the review and costing of detention centres. Officers advised the committee of an additional \$4.9 million in the current budget for the Baxter Immigration Detention Centre to address improvements in catering and medical services. The committee was also advised that transit centres are currently being set up in Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide.

1.9 Officers informed the committee that, to date, the only confirmed location is for the Melbourne centre. The Department has allocated budgets of \$2.6 million each for Melbourne and Adelaide, and \$5.4 million for Brisbane.⁷

Migration Agents Registration Authority (MARA)

1.10 Officers were questioned about increases re-registration fees. The committee was advised that the fee was increased from \$1,050 to \$1,595 to address a number of areas such as complaints processing and communications. The Authority also felt it needed additional resources to be able to perform effectively in its role as a consumer protection organisation.⁸

Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) & Migration Review Tribunal (MRT)

1.11 Officers of the RRT were asked questions relating to the role of the tribunal in the offshore refugee determination process. The committee was advised that the RRT only has a role in reviewing applications that are made onshore and that are refused. The applicants then have a right to apply to the RRT for a review of that decision. The RRT provided the committee with figures from the period 1 July 2005 to 12 May 2006, advising that 2,519 cases were received and 2,940 cases were finalised, representing an increase from the previous year.⁹

6 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 22 May 2006, pp 75-76.

7 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 22 May 2006, pp 110-112.

8 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2006, p. 3.

9 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2006, pp 7-8.

1.12 The committee asked officers of the MRT for a breakdown of statistics relating to visa subclass 457 in review. Officers advised the committee that in the period 1 July 2005 to 30 April 2006, 211 temporary business refusal cases were received, 242 temporary business refusal cases were finalised, and in relation to those, 35 per cent were set aside.¹⁰

10 *Proof Committee Hansard*, 23 May 2006, p 10.

