

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 1 November 2005

IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURAL AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO

(32) Output 1.1: Non-Humanitarian Entry and Stay

Senator Bartlett asked:

There has been a marked decrease in the number of PV lodgments from India from 403 in 2003-04 to 164 in 2004-2005 (date – from OnPro report to NASRF at 16 August 2005), has there been any change in the offshore visa application process for people applying to visit/business/student from India?

Answer:

As at 30 September 2005, the total grant rate for initial PV applications lodged by Indian nationals which were fully determined in 2003-04 was around 0.5 percent. In 2004-05, the total grant rate was around 2.6 percent. Given the general situation in India, very few protection visa applicants can demonstrate a well founded fear of persecution.

DIMIA has introduced a number of initiatives in recent years that may have, both directly and indirectly, led to the reduction in the number of PV lodgments from India. These include:

- Student visa reforms introduced in 2001 have continued to impact positively on the integrity of the student visa program. These include visa subclasses specific to each education sector with evidentiary requirements tailored to meet the requirements of each sector and to gauge the genuineness of the intention to study. Assessment levels are assigned to each country and education sector based on objective data pertaining to the degree of immigration risk presented and visa evidentiary requirements are set according to these assessment levels. In addition, analysis of data on PV and other integrity risks by our Visa Office in New Delhi has contributed to improved information and tools for visa decision making staff. The rate of protection visa applications from Indian students has fallen from 2.72% (149) in the 2001-02 program year to 0.11% (15) in 2004-05.
- In July 2004, the Migration Agents Integrity Measures legislation came into effect. This legislation introduced sanctions against migration agents who engage in vexatious activity, including through the lodgment of unmeritorious PV applications. This appears to have had a significant deterrent effect as there has been a marked fall in the number of registered migration agents lodging large volumes of unsuccessful PV applications.
- Since April 2005, all applications for Sponsored Family Visitor visas (subclass 679) are lodged in Australia by the sponsor. The new processing arrangements have resulted in improved communication between DIMIA and sponsors, including an increased emphasis on providing information to sponsors about their sponsorship obligations and the possibility of the forfeiture of any bond associated with the visa.
- Improved arrangements with tourism agents (particularly Aussie Specialists) and service delivery partners for visa lodgments have allowed decision-makers to focus more on visa integrity issues.