



Answer to question: 01

PARLIAMENTARY JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

MIGRATION, PATHWAY TO NATION BUILDING INQUIRY

QUESTION:

Dr WEBSTER: My question is very direct. Would you support the re-standing of an immigration department, given that a lot of the issues that we've discussed around difficulties have, I believe, arisen since the loss of the immigration department as a standalone ministry that historically developed expertise, had permanent staff, had research capacity and was able to at least provide a more substantive and comprehensive long-term picture of our migration program? Do you think that that is feasible? If not, is there a more modern or contemporary version of something like that department within Home Affairs that could assist not only with the day-to-day processing of visas but also with the manner in which our migration program is informed and executed for the long term—collecting data, looking at fault lines and having real-time responses to issues and problems that arise?

Ms Wallace: ... I don't necessarily feel in a position to provide a definitive answer as to whether there should be a separate immigration department and whether the merging of the departments should be undone. I don't feel in a position to be able to answer that. **We could perhaps provide a more elaborate answer later on, but I think that would involve consultation at many levels—certainly with staff.** I agree that there has been a renewed focus on those immigration aspects of the department and on ensuring that the resources are better aligned with the demands of the immigration arm of the department. But, yes, I don't feel in a position to necessarily give a definitive view on that one way or the other at the moment.

ANSWER:

Historically, Immigration functioned effectively as a standalone department and its merger with the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service in 2015 was divisive and difficult for workers, with the potential for diminution of immigration functions being a key concern.

The claimed benefits and efficiencies of the integration have not been delivered and civil society advocacy groups have detailed the cultural issues of combining the two departments.

While there are good arguments to support the re-standing of an immigration department, it is a decision that would require careful consideration and genuine consultation with workers, their representatives, and the broader community.

The CPSU maintains that the Government's priority should be ensuring appropriate resourcing of the Department and investment in necessary infrastructure and services, including more permanent staff and an in-house upgrade of ICT systems.



Answer to question: 02

PARLIAMENTARY JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

MIGRATION, PATHWAY TO NATION BUILDING INQUIRY

QUESTION:

Dr WEBSTER: Could I get your thoughts regarding some of the evidence that we've heard that looks overseas to some of the more efficient digital platforms and systems for immigration and portals where people can make an application, which is far more seamless than going through some of the lengthy delays that people experience now? Plus I noted your comments, Brooke, that there was a 500-person increase flagged. How many people have actually been employed? And is the department short-staffed at this point in time?

Ms Muscat: Teresa, do you want to go to the process questions first, and then I'll go to the numbers?

Ms Muscat: In terms of the numbers, the 500 nonongoing that were budgeted for, we know there has been recruitment over the last two months into the department, but we don't actually have the exact numbers. That might be a question for the department, but we could certainly try and take that on notice and get back to you. It is something that we have been grappling with in terms of how many of those positions have been filled. Anecdotally, our members are saying that there is still more to be done in terms of bringing on those staff, and they are still feeling the pressure, although there has been some reprieve. But, like everywhere across the economy, getting people into these roles and into jobs has been tricky. So there is definitely more work to be done. We just don't have the numbers at this point in time.

ANSWER:

The CPSU does not have the current number of staff that have been employed to meet the 500-person increase. We recommend that this question be put to the Department for response.



Answer to question: 03

PARLIAMENTARY JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

MIGRATION, PATHWAY TO NATION BUILDING INQUIRY

QUESTION:

Dr WEBSTER: Just before you do, Theresa, can I ask you to provide evidence of the underfunding and the cuts, in particular, please? It is frequently said but I think that we need evidence of those cuts that have been made for us to look at. Ms Muscat: Absolutely. We can take that on notice and can we provide details of the cuts over the last nine years. We have the numbers there that are available to us to do that.

ANSWER:

As the CPSU said in submissions and evidence, the Department of Home Affairs suffered substantial cuts and underfunding under the Coalition government. We provide two sources of evidence to support this; the Proximity Report into Home Affairs' budget outcomes, commissioned by the Department, and the Department of Home Affairs' Average Staffing Level in the Federal Budget.

1. The February 2022 Independent Review into Home Affairs budget outcomes by Proximity details the large gap between funding and operational requirements¹. We understand the Department could provide the Committee with a copy of this report.

Findings in the Report include:

- The Department's Budget appropriations over time have not grown or kept pace with the changing environment, service delivery volumes, increased functions and outcomes expected.
- Cumulative efficiency dividends and required savings of \$3.9 billion since 2008 have forced the Department to make trade-offs between risk tolerance, service delivery quality, and cost, particularly on the operational side. Increased demand on the operational side means significant activities have been underfunded and under resourced.

¹ Paul Sakkal (31 March 2023) 'Home affairs underfunded, overstretched and set up to fail says leaked report', Sydney Morning Herald. Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/home-affairs-underfunded-overstretched-and-set-up-to-fail-says-leaked-report-20230330-p5cwlm.html>

- The baseline budget situation for the Department has become misaligned with its core and far-reaching activities related to keeping Australia safe. Delivery is based on what can be done with the funding available, rather than to the level needed.
 - The underlying funding model for the ABF is not for fit purpose in that it has not evolved to account for this increased operating tempo or responsibilities. In addition, the ABF struggles to establish and maintain core, foundational training capabilities that are critical for officer tradecraft and the sustainability of front-line functions.
 - ICT is old, reliant on expensive contractors and outsourcing – and while there are clear efficiencies available they cannot be realised due to lack of Capital Expenditure, and the Department of Finance's approach.
2. As outlined in the table below, prior to the May 2023 Budget Average Staffing Levels (ASL) for the Department of Home Affairs remained consistently below 2013-14 levels irrespective of increased functions or service delivery volumes.

Table 1. Average Staffing Levels from 2013-14 to 2023-24 from the Budget Papers.

Financial Year	Department of Home Affairs ASL
2013-14 *	14,304
2014-15	13,730
2015-16	13,750
2016-17	14,000
2017-18	13,950
2018-19	14,120
2019-20	13,751
2020-21	14,072
2021-22 (March)	13,612
2021-22 (October)	13,199
2022-23	14,179
2023-24	14,430