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April 8 2019 - 9:39AM


No visa privatisation until after election

- Daniel McCulloch

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 Home Affairs boss Michael Pezzullo says visa privatisation plans will be decided after the election.

A controversial plan to privatise Australia's visa system has been put on ice until after the next election.

Home Affairs boss Michael Pezzullo said the Morrison government would not make any decisions on the tender process until after voters go to the polls.

"The decision in relation to automating our visa system will not be taken by government until after the election, just to give assurance," he told a Senate estimates hearing on Monday.

"However, the funding that we require to both look at how market-based solutions might be provided, but also in terms of how certain back-office functions and certain intelligence functions can be provided, were further funded in this budget."

Labor has opposed the privatisation plan since it was announced last year.

A decision on whether or not to proceed with a tender is expected to be made in October, meaning it will fall well within the term of whichever major party wins government.

Mr Pezzullo is not especially fussed about whether the visa platforms are privatised.

"Whether delivered in the end by public or private means is almost a secondary consideration," he told the committee.

But as the number of visa and citizenship applications continues to grow rapidly each year, he is worried about the knock-on impacts.

"Our current systems and our current staffing levels will come under challenge," Mr Pezzullo said.

At the moment, many people submit paper application forms to come to Australia.

Home Affairs officers then input their names, addresses and other details into departmental databases.

Mr Pezzullo wants to automate these manual processes so his officers can be freed up to do "higher value-add" roles.

"We want to focus our staff on decision-making, risk assessment and complex case engagement," he said.

"If I can convince the next government - whichever hue and stripe it is - to not only fund a major capital upgrade of our system, but also to have the same number of officers engaged on some of those higher-value tasks, then I will be very pleased."

Australian Associated Press



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