



# Administrative Appeals Tribunal

**Registrar's opening statement**  
**Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee**  
**Budget Estimates hearing**  
**7 November 2022**

I welcome the opportunity to draw the Committee's attention to points made in the AAT's annual report which was tabled on 25 October 2022, including to identify some of the challenges we face as an organisation.

First, as the Committee will be aware, there has been change in our leadership. The Honourable Justice Fiona Meagher commenced as President on 1 April 2022, and I commenced as Registrar on 14 April 2022.

The President and I are conscious that, at 45 years of age, the AAT has a long history of working to achieve its statutory objective of providing a mechanism of review which is accessible, fair, informal, quick and proportionate, which promotes public trust and confidence in our decision making. We provide many tens of thousands of people each year a voice and an opportunity to challenge decisions made by the Australian Government that impact them.

We make decisions on issues that have a significant impact on individuals and businesses. This is important work that must be carried out impartially, efficiently and independently, and with respect for the personal significance of each individual decision made.

Since commencing in this role, I have observed an organisation (including over 600 APS staff and 300 members) that is committed to providing accessible justice to all who seek it.

We strive to ensure the best 'user experience' for the people who apply to us for review of a decision. We do this well, as is evidenced in the recently tabled annual report, where we reported a user satisfaction rating of 74% for the reporting period against a target of 70%. We finalised over 43,000 applications in 2021-22, with a clearance ratio of 95%. This is a strong result in the circumstances but, even with finalisation levels this high, the AAT will continue to struggle to meet the ever-increasing demand for its services across several caseloads.

I am conscious of interest, including from this Committee, on appointments to the Tribunal. While the AAT is responsible for ensuring that each member appointed is provided with the support they need to do their important work, I note the appointment of members is a matter for the Government of the day.

The AAT provided more than 6,000 hours of professional development in 2021-22 to assist our members to make the correct or legally preferable decision in each case. With the

proportion of AAT decisions on appeal set aside by the courts being under 2%, I am confident in the decision-making ability of our members.

With all our strengths, we currently face a few challenges.

- We have a difficult financial operating environment due to decreasing revenue and increasing costs. Budget repair is one of our highest priorities.
- While demand is high in many of our caseloads, there is a significant backlog of about 58,000 applications within the AAT's largest division which deals with migration and refugee cases. This backlog cannot be addressed without additional resources from Government, including additional members.
- We inherited 3 legacy systems from the amalgamating tribunals which are now well past their end of life. We are now without vendor support for 2 of these systems. It is an imperative for the AAT to have a modern single case management solution to support the business and achieve greater efficiencies. Additional investment by Government will be needed to deliver this solution.

The President and I will address these challenges. We are committed to ensuring the AAT operates in an efficient and effective manner, striving to exceed the expectations of its users moving into the future and ensuring public confidence in our decision-making.

Michael Hawkins AM  
Registrar, Administrative Appeals Tribunal.