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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

Reference: Review of state-specific migration mechanisms

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

Monday, 5 March 2001

Members: Senator McKiernan (*Acting Chair*), Senators Bartlett, Eggleston and Tierney and Mr Adams, Mr Baird, Mrs Irwin, Mrs May and Mr Ripoll

Senators and members in attendance: Senators McKiernan and Tierney and Mr Adams and Mrs May

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To review and report on the suite of State-specific Migration Mechanisms and the extent to which these meet the needs of State and Territory governments for skilled and business migrants with particular reference to:

- The adequacy of consultations with States/Territories on the mechanisms that have been developed;
- The level to which State and Territory Governments have utilised these mechanisms;
- Steps that might be taken to increase take-up; and
- Other mechanisms that might be developed

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SMITH, Mr Christopher Vivian, Assistant Secretary, Migration Branch, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.....463

Committee met at 11.03 a.m.

GREENUP, Mr John Alfred, Director, Migration Program Section, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

JOB, Mr Peter, Director, Business Employment, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

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SMITH, Mr Christopher Vivian, Assistant Secretary, Migration Branch, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

ACTING CHAIR (Senator McKiernan)—I declare open this public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on the review of State Specific Migration Mechanisms. This review was referred to the committee by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. The purpose of the review is to examine and report on the range of state-specific migration mechanisms and the extent to which these meet the needs of state and territory governments for skilled and business migrants. The terms of reference focus on the adequacy of consultations with states and territories, the mechanisms that have been developed, the level to which state and territory governments have utilised these mechanisms, steps that might be taken to increase the take-up and other mechanisms that might be developed.

At the conclusion of the review, the committee will table its findings, conclusions and recommendations in the parliament in a report which will be made publicly available. The committee has received 92 submissions from state, territory and local governments, and also from migration agents and people with an interest in these issues. It has also visited and taken evidence in a number of towns outside the major metropolitan areas. The committee normally authorises submissions for publication and they are placed on the committee's web site.

I welcome the witnesses from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. Although the committee does not require witnesses to give evidence under oath, you should understand that these proceedings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the parliament itself. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. It is some time since we received the submission from the department. Are there any corrections or amendments you would like to make to that submission?

Mr Rizvi—There are no corrections or amendments, but we would like to take this opportunity to update the committee on developments that have occurred since we lodged that submission.

ACTING CHAIR—You pre-empted the first question I was going to ask you. Please proceed, and at the conclusion of your remarks I will invite your colleagues to make opening statements. I will then invite members of the committee to address questions to you.

Mr Rizvi—DIMA provided a submission to the review on 3 September 1999. Since then, we attended a short briefing session with the committee on 19 October 1999. We also provided a summary of comments received from DIMA offices to the committee in response to the discussion paper that the committee distributed to business centre managers. We provided a submission from the DIMA business centre at Tasmania on 8 September 2000, and we have appeared as witnesses before a number of hearings of the committee, in particular the hearings in Darwin, Brisbane, Hobart and Adelaide.

As the committee is aware, the State Specific Migration Mechanisms were developed in consultation with state and territory governments to address skill shortages that may exist in their jurisdictions, attract overseas business people to establish new or joint ventures and to encourage a more balanced dispersal of Australia's skilled migration intake. We have continued to work closely with the states and territories through the Commonwealth/State Working Party on Skilled Migration. There have been a number of meetings of that committee since our submission was lodged.

Also, since we lodged our submission, there have been a number of policy developments relevant to State Specific Migration Mechanisms. I will outline the changes. Firstly, the skilled-regional sponsored category relies on an applicant having a sponsor in a designated area. On 1 July 1999, on the basis of a suggestion from the South Australian representative to the Commonwealth/State Working Party on Skilled Migration, a concessional English language requirement was introduced for this category. Prior to 1 July 1999, applicants under this category had to demonstrate that they had vocational level English, which resulted in some applicants being refused on this basis.

Under the concession, the English language requirement may be met where the applicant has been assessed as having functional level English—the level immediately below vocational level—and the applicant's sponsor lives in a state which has put appropriate upgrading arrangements in place and has been gazetted for the purpose by the minister, and the applicant has paid the required amount to the designated service provider for English language tuition before the visa is granted. Tasmania, which was gazetted on 23 August 2000, and Victoria, which was gazetted on 18 October 2000, have now joined South Australia as the states gazetted for this purpose.

From 1 July 2001, this category will undergo a name change from skilled-regional sponsored to skilled-designated area sponsored category. I will provide some background to the reason behind this name change. The Commonwealth/State Working Party on Skilled Migration was concerned over the gazettal of Melbourne as a designated area. It was perceived by some states and territories as contradictory to the original policy intent of regional migration. Designated areas are currently used for two visa subclasses: firstly, in the skilled-regional sponsored category, the family related sponsor must have lived in a designated area for at least one year; and, secondly, in the regional established business in Australia category, where concessions are given if the business is established in a designated area. Once the proposed reform package for the independent executive and regional established business in Australia category is agreed and implemented, the designated area concept is likely to apply to only the skilled-regional sponsored subclass. That is, there will be only one category where the concept is still used.

The working party agreed that its concerns over designated areas and regional migration would be resolved if references to 'regional' were removed from the skilled-regional sponsored category in recognition of the fact that Melbourne, Hobart, Canberra, Darwin and Adelaide are all designated in this category. Accordingly, from 1 July 2001, this subclass will be renamed skilled-designated area sponsored. We believe that those two measures will address most of the concerns of the states.

There is also a new measure being introduced for overseas students applying for permanent residence in Australia. As part of its Innovation Action Plan, the government plans to introduce, from 1 July 2001, onshore versions of the skilled independent, skilled-Australian sponsored and skilled-regional sponsored visas for overseas students who attended an Australian tertiary institution and apply within six months of finishing their studies. The measure will encourage highly qualified students with immediately useable skills and some experience in Australia's labour market to remain in Australia. The working party strongly supported the proposal, as it provides opportunities for students who have studied in regions and less populated areas to remain in those areas more readily. It also provides an opportunity for the relevant states and regional authorities to promote themselves, both in terms of the overseas student industry and in terms of attracting highly skilled migrants to their jurisdictions.

As part of the arrangements for New Zealand citizens announced on 26 February 2001, a new skilled onshore points tested visa class that includes the skilled onshore regional sponsored New Zealand citizen category has been created. That will enable New Zealand citizens who settle in designated areas to be sponsored by their relatives in Australia.

Exceptional circumstances provisions have been introduced in the regional established business in Australia category. Through the working party, some of the smaller states expressed their concerns in relation to instances where businesses which they regarded as being of considerable benefit to their region were unable to meet the eligibility requirements for REBA. In this context, from 1 November 2000 the migration regulations have been amended to provide flexibility in the application of the REBA points test by allowing the sponsoring state or territory government to put forward exceptional circumstances where an applicant should not have to meet the pass mark under the REBA points test. That arrangement is now in place.

In our submission we indicated that we were looking at reforms to the independent executive and REBA categories. Consultations on these are ongoing with stakeholders and, in particular, state and territory governments, the Minister's Business Advisory Panel and the Migration Institute of Australia. A key objective of the reforms is better dispersal of business migrants throughout Australia and better post-arrival services, including links to permanent residents, and a higher level of successful business activities throughout Australia. The reforms were developed initially for implementation from 1 July 2001. However, further consultations now indicate that implementation will occur later in the year. We are hopeful that the reforms will be implemented from 1 November 2001.

An information sheet on Independent Executives and Permanent Residents has been developed to address the need for better information for clients on the pathway to permanent residence. With the committee's indulgence I will table the information sheet.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you, that would be helpful.

Mr Rizvi—Migration regulation changes will come into effect on 1 July 2001 to enable states and territories to directly sponsor business skills visa applicants without an initial assessment against the unsponsored subclasses. These changes will allow the states to market themselves offshore to prospective business applicants and gives them a more effective means of encouraging potential applicants to establish their businesses in regional Australia. The committee may have noticed that an article in this morning's edition of the *Mercury* highlighted some of the recent efforts of the Tasmanian government in that regard.

At the time of DIMA's submission to the JSCM in September 1999, only South Australia was using the State/Territory Nominated Independent scheme. Since then, both Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory governments have started using the schemes, although unfortunately the numbers remain small. The National Institute of Labour Studies at Flinders University, South Australia, recently undertook a national evaluation of the regional sponsored migration scheme on behalf of the department. Their survey found that the scheme has received positive endorsement from employers, with four out of five rating their sponsored migrant's job performance highly and the same proportion assessing that the migrant had a positive effect on the organisation.

Nearly all migrants—96 per cent—were in full-time jobs and nearly all were in highly skilled, professional, managerial or skilled trades jobs. There is evidence, however, that some Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme migrants are leaving their employer within the first six months of their approved employment. Legislative amendments were introduced to the parliament in November 2000 so that visa cancellation could be implemented if the visa holder has not made a genuine effort to fulfil the contractual conditions with the sponsoring employer. This will ensure that the integrity of this visa class is maintained.

As at June 1999, there were 29 regional certifying bodies operating in all states and territories. In August 2000, additional bodies were gazetted by the minister, bringing the total to 44 certifying bodies. The coverage of certifying bodies extends to all of South Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory and most regional areas of other states. RSMS does not apply to Melbourne, Perth, Sydney, Wollongong, Newcastle, Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast.

A ministerial direction was issued, with effect from 1 February 2001, to all immigration decision makers to give immediate processing priority to ICT professionals applying under the temporary business long-stay visa and the skill stream of the migration program. Under this direction, applications under REBA and RSMS are to be given equal priority to applications from ICT professionals. This highlights the priority that the government attaches to the state-specific migration mechanisms.

The new sponsored visitor visa class, introduced on 1 July 2000, includes two new visas for short-stay visits to Australia—the sponsored family visitor visa for people visiting family members in Australia and the sponsored business visitor for people visiting Australia on business. They are designed to enable the entry of more family and business visitors while at the same time reducing the non-return rate of these visitors. For both visas, a sponsor can be an elected government representative, a government agency or a local government mayor. Some mayors have already started to use this scheme. For the sponsored family visitor visa, sponsors can also include a close relative of the applicant.

On the issue of promotion and awareness raising, both onshore and offshore, DIMA conducts a range of State Specific Migration Mechanism awareness raising activities. We recognise that the provision of information to meet the needs of the client or potential client, whether in Australia or overseas, is vital to the success of our programs. Accordingly, we have developed a targeted promotional strategy to attract potential business entrants as well as skilled migrants to meet demands in Australia. Key elements of the State Specific Migration Mechanism component of this strategy which are being progressively implemented in order to increase awareness of these mechanisms include: development of a comprehensive information package for distribution to appropriate organisations; establishment of a network of key stakeholders in DIMA and state/territory government organisations; development of strategic partnerships with business stakeholders to improve awareness of the schemes; and reporting by DIMA and states and territories on a six monthly basis on State Specific Migration Mechanism awareness raising activities to the Commonwealth/State Working Party on Skilled Migration.

DIMA officers in both Australia and overseas attend international trade fairs and also targeted business seminars and workshops where information and assistance on business and skilled entry options is provided. Cooperative activities with other federal agencies such as DFAT, Austrade, Invest Australia and the Australian Tourism Commission, and with state and territory government agencies, are also undertaken offshore. Around Australia, DIMA conducts regional information seminars and outreach programs to employers and business and local government organisations. We also use paid advertising and advertorials in publications overseas to promote Australia as a destination for business and skilled migrants. Within Australia, various publications are used to enhance awareness raising of State Specific Migration Mechanisms.

Finally, on the issue of statistics: we can provide updated tables on visa grants that were included in the earlier submissions. They show that from 1996-97 to 1999-2000, visa grants under the States Specific Migration Mechanisms have steadily increased to a total of 3,309 in 1999-2000 and are likely to grow further this year with about 2,200 visas granted in the first seven months of the financial year. We can provide a table with a breakdown by states and territories for each year from 1997-98 to 1999-2000 and for the first seven months of 2001.

ACTING CHAIR—If you could provide those tables it would be helpful to the committee. The committee has recently discussed this inquiry and formed the view that we are coming to the concluding stages of it. It is hoped that this will be the last hearing of the committee before the preparation of and deliberation on a report to be presented to the parliament. However, as the previous chair has moved on we do not have a permanent chair, and when a new chair is appointed to the committee—subject to what the committee determines at the time—we might need to call the department back for clarification. After today's hearing, we also might need to address some further questions and we will endeavour to do so in writing rather than go to a further hearing. In the future, the committee will deliberate on that and make decisions, and we will be in touch. Thank you very much for your cooperation so far.

I seek clarification of the new skilled-designation area sponsored visa class to address some of the criticisms of the inclusion of not only Melbourne but also other larger capital cities into the program of designation. For example, will the new visa class leave Melbourne on the same footing as a city like Griffith in terms of advantage or disadvantage in attracting a migrant to that area?

Mr Rizvi—In terms of that particular category, yes, it will.

ACTING CHAIR—Who determines what areas are designated?

Mr Rizvi—I will go to the history of the determination of designation. When the notion of advantaging particular areas in this fashion was first developed, the advice we were provided was that the Commonwealth cannot unilaterally determine what areas of a particular state should or should not be designated. We are not in a position to favour one state over another. We must be guided by the views or the advice of the relevant state government as to what area will be designated. We have strictly abided by that approach, and we are advised that we are not able to do anything other than that.

Mr ADAMS—Have you obtained legal opinion to that effect?

Mr Rizvi—There was a legal opinion obtained in the early 1990s when this category was initially developed. I do not have a recent legal opinion but we can obtain one. Essentially, it goes to the issue of whether the Commonwealth can favour one state over another, or indeed overrule a particular state government in terms of its views on what area of that state should be designated.

Mrs MAY—I am particularly interested in Ipswich in Queensland. I have the Gold Coast, but we also heard evidence from Ipswich Council, and Ipswich is not a designated area. Are you saying that the state government has to put them forward as a designated area?

Mr Rizvi—Yes. In 1998, the Commonwealth/State Working Party concluded that there should be a review of designated areas and, as part of that review, each state and territory government examined which areas of their state or territory were designated. As an outcome of that review, all of New South Wales, other than Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong, was designated. At that point, the Victorian government indicated to us that they wished to have Melbourne designated. The Queensland government did not indicate that they desired any change to the areas that were designated in Queensland at that time. If the Queensland government were to indicate to us a desire to change, I am sure that the minister would respond quickly.

ACTING CHAIR—During the course of the inquiry, it was one of the contentious issues that arose, and it came particularly from those smaller regional development bodies and smaller cities around Australia who felt that there ought to be advantage given to the smaller places to attract these migrants. These places, for example, were Kalgoorlie and, as I have mentioned, Griffith, and, although the whole of South Australia is part of a designated area, Mount Gambier was raised on a number of occasions. The scheme could be brought undone if every state was to do the same thing as Victoria is doing. Surely that would make a bit of a mockery of the scheme.

Mr Rizvi—I agree with that view. The successful operation of this arrangement depends on the goodwill of each of the states. What I would say, however, is that, after the changes to REBA that are proposed, this advantage will apply in only one category. It will only relate to a category where the sponsor lives in a designated area and is sponsoring someone to come to Australia. And, in that sense, the extent to which competitive advantage is an issue is, I do not

believe, as significant as it is an issue in other categories, and we have made sure in those other categories that we do not use the designated area concept. It should also be noted that, even if a person who lives in Kalgoorlie sponsors a relative to come to Australia, there is absolutely nothing that prevents that relative from moving into Melbourne and residing in Melbourne.

ACTING CHAIR—Why would they want to if they have lived in Kalgoorlie?

Mr Rizvi—I cannot comment, Senator—I have never been to Kalgoorlie.

ACTING CHAIR—Is there anything further on the designated area?

Mrs MAY—I find it really enlightening to know that we have to work with the states or have some sort of ruling or support from the states.

Mr ADAMS—There has never been a situation that I can see where, if we were looking at human rights issues or whatever, we would have come up with a legal position to be able to take a case to the High Court. We have not decided to do that so that we can populate areas of Australia which are losing population; that has not come across—or is that a political decision that the department would not take on?

Mr Rizvi—I am not sure about taking these things to the High Court, Mr Adams, but certainly our view is that the best way to progress these matters is in close cooperation with the states, and it does require the goodwill of each of the states. I think if we get into an area where we are taking things to the High Court, I am not sure that that leads us to a very constructive outcome.

ACTING CHAIR—You mentioned during the course of your opening comments here this morning, Mr Rizvi, the survey that has been done by Flinders, I think it was, about the success or otherwise of the scheme so far. Has that been published and, if so, is it possible for the committee to receive a copy of it?

Mr Rizvi—I understand the minister has written to the chair of the committee providing a copy, but we can provide further copies. In terms of actual publication, we produced it as an in-house bound copy, we have made it available to the relevant states and to anyone who is interested, and we are happy to provide further copies to the committee.

ACTING CHAIR—I think that would be useful.

Mr ADAMS—Has the idea of having a regional visa with subclauses it been abandoned in the department's thinking or in discussions with the states?

Mr Rizvi—A regional visa in the sense that the person would be confined to living in the region to which the person was visaed?

Mr ADAMS—That is right.

Mr Rizvi—All of the legal advice that we have received on that concept, Mr Adams, has led us to the view that it just cannot be made to work. In order to make it work we would have to effectively create borders and boundaries which would have to be enforced and that raises, I think, significant complexities and issues that I suspect would go far beyond just immigration matters.

Mr ADAMS—Right. It could just say, ‘If you do not stay within your visa requirements you will be deported.’ That is pretty simple, I would have thought.

Mr Rizvi—I can see where you are coming from. The danger always is that where we have granted someone permanent residence on a particular condition and they, for example, then move to another area of Australia and are successfully living in that area, deporting them in those circumstances is a fairly significant step and a step that I think governments would be wary about taking.

Mr ADAMS—We have had this inquiry and your department has set up state working groups—one in 1996 and one in 1998. We have the New South Wales state government saying they do not want any more people coming into Sydney basically because of the population group there and the pressure that is applying to that city and whatever. We have had evidence, as the chair has alluded to, around this country of where there are great gaps. Last week we had the mayor of Griffith saying that they will want 1,000 process workers in the next few years in the food processing area. We have had evidence like that, but we are still really only scratching around the edges about specifically trying to meet some of these obligations in other parts of Australia. There is nothing that you have said this morning that reassures me that we have moved very far forward.

Mr Rizvi—The issues that we are trying to tackle are very substantial issues for Australia—they are very big issues.

Mr ADAMS—Yes, I do not deny that.

Mr Rizvi—They are not issues that I suspect immigration can solve on its own. They go to much wider issues about our regions, about our regional towns and how they can be sustained in the longer term. Immigration can play a supporting role in that regard, but I very much doubt that immigration can play the lead role in those sorts of issues.

Mr ADAMS—Okay.

Mrs MAY—I might just take that a bit further. In your submission you have a report from Access Economics on how skilled migration does advance our country and technology, and also how their take-up of employment is very strong in the skilled stream. We are competing against New Zealand, Canada and the US for those skilled migrants. We talk about lowering the bar. Do you expect some of these changes you have talked about this morning to help us increase that skilled migration intake? Then I take up Mr Adams’s point: we have identified areas where we need unskilled people. There are jobs there, and I guess there is a balance there that we have to meet.

Mr Rizvi—Yes.

Mrs MAY—How would you see the changes that you are talking about lowering, maybe, the bar—although I do not imagine it is lowering it that far—for the take-up of skilled migration? Will we see an increase there to meet what we need?

Mr Rizvi—There are two dimensions to that question. There is an aggregate national level dimension to that question. At the aggregate national level we know that unemployment rates amongst people who are skilled, for most occupations, are currently around one per cent. For some occupations they are less than one per cent and for some occupations slightly more. For unskilled persons, Australia's unemployment rate is still above seven per cent and often around eight per cent. It is that disparity that I think is the key to running a successful skilled migration program. That is, we need to be attracting people in areas where, effectively, the unemployment rates suggest to you that there are issues that need to be dealt with.

At the unskilled level, it is not clear that that would be of aggregate benefit to Australia, in that unskilled persons would be competing with a large volume of people who are themselves finding it difficult to obtain employment. We do not want to create competition for those people, whereas competition at the skilled end is something that would actually be of substantial long-term benefit to Australia. That is what all the economic studies are showing us.

The second level of that question I think was about regions. There are some regions which are experiencing difficulties in obtaining both skilled workers and unskilled workers. Given that those regions would find it difficult to get skilled workers just the same as many other parts of Australia are finding it difficult to get skilled workers, we do need to assist them in that regard.

If we were to argue that we should also be assisting the regions in terms of unskilled workers, I think that opens up a more difficult policy dilemma. Should we be trying to assist those unemployed Australians who are perhaps in regions where there are high levels of unemployment to be attracted to areas where they can get jobs, or should we be going overseas? Up till now, I think the government's view has certainly been—and there is no indication, that I am aware of, that it would be changing that view—that that should continue to be our policy approach. For unskilled jobs, we have a substantial unemployment rate and our first priority should be to assist unskilled Australians to get those jobs.

Mrs MAY—One step further on the skilled migration: we had evidence given to us where we may have had a 45- or 50-year-old migrant, highly skilled, who met all our criteria, then we ran into the problem of dependent children. We had, for example, a case where someone had already invested in business in this country and the stumbling block was that he had a 20- or 19-year-old son. He was not prepared to split the family. That child may not have been fully dependent but wanted to be included as part of that family migration. Have you had any feedback on that yourselves? Are there any plans to relook at that? What happens if a family unit wants to migrate to Australia, invest in our country and bring their dollars here? Do we say, 'We do not want over 18-year-old non-dependents, and so you cannot bring the children here'?

Mr Rizvi—That goes to the definition of dependency. As a general rule, the definition of a dependant is a child who is 18 or under. But it is possible for children who are over 18 to be visaed as dependants. That depends on a subjective assessment of dependency. It goes to questions like whether the child has remained with the family throughout, been married or not, moved into full employment or not and any other psychological, health or other dependencies

that the child may have on the parents. Those are judgments that are made according to the current definition of dependants.

Mrs MAY—It is not very clear cut when you can talk about other dependencies like psychological. A family is a family. There is always that bond there. Whether or not someone is in full-time employment as a 20-year-old, there is still a very close bond of family. To leave that child behind is a huge upheaval for that family and it seems strange for us to say no because of a child to someone who might want to invest \$1 million or \$2 million in a business here.

Mr Rizvi—It is a difficult one. At the end of the day the line has to be drawn somewhere in terms of dependency. It is a question of whether we have drawn the line in the right place or not. I believe the government has drawn the line in a reasonably generous way. If there is a view that it should be more generous on that, that is something that can be examined.

ACTING CHAIR—It does give a degree of uncertainty for a family coming in when the children are under 18. When applying for a permanent residency, when they are over 18, they may not then be considered to be part of the family unit. What we would be looking for—I am pre-empting the committee's report—is some degree of flexibility to take those contingencies into account, remembering also that families in this instance where the child goes off to tertiary education are paying full fee students rate, which is much more than the Australian rate. That again is a significant investment by the family in Australia and in the future of Australia. Could something be built in to take account of that when a final decision is being made on permanency for the family?

Mr Rizvi—There are two issues there. The first is that we need to be more transparent about the transition from temporary to permanent—and we do need to work at that. The leaflet that we have just circulated is an initial attempt at that and we need to do more. The other question that you have asked is a more direct policy issue; that is, whether we should have more flexibility in the definition of dependence in respect of persons who have settled in regional Australia. That is a judgment that governments can make. There would be a question of net economic benefit, and perhaps there are trade-offs there that need to be looked at.

Mr ADAMS—Two issues that have been raised with business migration that make it more difficult for some people to stay and meet their obligations are the full cost of tertiary education and the full cost of health cover. If that person is bringing half a million dollars to Tasmania, there is an economic benefit, whichever model is being used. Those considerations need to be taken into consideration, and I hope that this report will reflect that.

Senator TIERNEY—I have just come from the rural health conference this morning. One of the things we learnt was that there are 600 people to every doctor in the cities and 1,200 people to every doctor in the bush—and that does not include the support services that the city doctors have and the rural doctors do not have. I believe there are some difficulties in recruiting legal practitioners under the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme. What is being done or what do you think can be done to make RSMS more accessible, particularly for doctors?

Mr Rizvi—The key barrier that we often run into with doctors is: do the qualifications of the doctor who is presenting meet the requirements of the Australian Medical Council? In respect of regional Australia, the key issue that we consider is: does the person meet the standards to be a

doctor in Australia? If they do, they can readily obtain an RSMS visa. If they do not, that is where we run into issues. It is in that regard that Minister Wooldridge announced—I think it is now a couple of years ago—some added flexibilities whereby a doctor who came to Australia under a temporary arrangement and remained in regional or rural Australia for a period of five years would then be able to convert to permanent residence on the basis of having met a more flexible regime in terms of registration and those sorts of things. As long as the relevant states were prepared to come to the party on that, the state medical boards were prepared to come to the party on that. They would not be required, in those circumstances, to go through the normal AMC examination processes, but would need to be considered by the relevant health board to make sure that they met the requirements of that health board.

It is certainly true that the volume of temporary resident doctors coming to Australia over the last three or four years has increased significantly. A very significant portion of those temporary resident doctors are going to regional Australia. And, hopefully, over time, as more state health boards adopt a flexible approach to the recognition of their skills, they will convert to permanent residence. The key, once they have got their permanent residence will be: will they stay?

Senator TIERNEY—Was it 1997 when that came in?

Mr Rizvi—I would have to take that on notice and get you the precise date.

Mr ADAMS—Could you also give us a list of what states have not?

Mr Rizvi—Yes.

Senator TIERNEY—If we could also have what has happened state by state since that scheme has come in. For example, do you happen to know the total number of doctors that have come in and gone to rural Australia as a result of that scheme in the last four years?

Mr Rizvi—We have total numbers of temporary resident doctors. We would need to take on notice whether we can get you the data on the numbers that went to rural Australia.

Senator TIERNEY—If you could do that. And, if there is a breakdown by state, could we also have that.

Mr Rizvi—We do know that the entry of a temporary resident doctor to Australia must require the relevant state health authority to attest that that person is going to an area of need.

Senator TIERNEY—Outside the capital.

Mr Rizvi—Most states tend to focus on regional Australia as the greatest area of need, although some states are also bringing doctors in to larger cities.

Senator TIERNEY—I would be intrigued if there is anywhere outside the capital cities that would be not an area of need in terms of ratio.

Mr Job—If I can just add to that, one of the difficulties we have heard about, particularly in Queensland and New South Wales, for doctors applying to remain in Australia under the RSMS, the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme—or, as most tend to in fact do, under the employer nomination scheme, because they can equally meet those conditions as well—and who are going to a single doctor practice is who in fact will be the sponsor. Because the basis of both of these schemes is they are sponsored by the employer and there is a great reluctance on the part of the state health authorities to sponsor the doctors to go to these quite often single doctor practices.

Mrs MAY—Could a council sponsor?

Mr Job—If they are the employer. The whole basis of the program is linked to who is the employer, keeping in mind also that the Commonwealth Department of Health has the main supervisory role to ensure that the doctors stay in rural Australia through the provision of these provider numbers which allow them to in fact work in those regional medical areas and areas of need. A lot of that control, in fact, is done by the provider number scheme that the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care administers. But in terms of the permanent residence of a medical practitioner in rural Australia there is quite often the difficulty of who is the employer, who will sponsor.

Senator TIERNEY—So the very nature of a Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme could be creating difficulties just by its structure.

Mr Job—By the employer.

Senator TIERNEY—Yes, because of the way it is set up. Is there any other scheme or any other way that doctors could come in?

Mr Job—Certainly the temporary residence is the major area that the doctors do in fact come in on. At any time in one year we have in the order of 1,300 doctors in Australia under that temporary arrangement, and they are sponsored by, again, the employer. Quite often the health authorities are prepared to assist in the sponsorship of those provisions but not for the permanent entry ones where they might be going to a single person practice.

Senator TIERNEY—Do people have to be sponsored? For example, if someone met all the medical requirements and, say, is coming out from England and they want to go and set up in Cootamundra, provided they get through all the normal hurdles, is there anything stopping them from doing that?

Mr Rizvi—There would be nothing stopping a person coming to Australia if they met all of the relevant AMC requirements.

Senator TIERNEY—And they sit the AMA exam.

Mr Rizvi—They would have to sit the exam.

Senator TIERNEY—But just say they came from England, as an example—

Mr Rizvi—That is right. The question always relates to are they genuinely going to Cootamundra and are they going to stay there and what have you got to hold them there, the danger being that, as we know, in most of the major metropolitan capitals we have an oversupply of doctors.

Mrs MAY—Wouldn't the provider number keep them out there for a period?

Mr Rizvi—If you could design the provider number in such a way that it confined them to Cootamundra you could do it that way.

Mrs MAY—Or even a regional area then?

Mr Rizvi—It is a question of whether you wish to use provider numbers in that sort of geographically confining way.

Senator TIERNEY—In my example the doctor came from England, met all the requirements and wanted to go to Cootamundra voluntarily. Is there any block to people doing that?

Mr Rizvi—You would need the sponsorship from an employer.

Senator TIERNEY—I am not saying 'under this scheme'; I am just saying could a doctor go out, provided he met the requirements, and just set up practice independently?

Mr Rizvi—No.

Senator TIERNEY—He cannot? Why is that?

Mr Rizvi—Because doctors are in fact identified as an occupation which in Australia is in oversupply.

Senator TIERNEY—But not in regional and rural Australia.

Mr Rizvi—The question is how do you ensure in those circumstances that doctor will go to Cootamundra.

Senator TIERNEY—I see, you let them all in, and—

Mr Rizvi—How do you know they will not all go to the North Shore of Sydney?

Senator TIERNEY—You would have to do it by a provider number provision in some way.

Mrs MAY—The provider number would be the key.

Mr Job—That is the beauty of the sponsorship arrangement: it links the employer with a location that is in need. It then links in the state health authorities that are looking to ensure registration requirements are met, and the Commonwealth department that then provides the

provider number. For permanent residents, it is restricted to five years provider number in that location on the basis of the sponsorship.

Mr ADAMS—The River company, the medical company not the shoe company—a WA company, I think—sets up in Tasmania, with agreement with local councils, and provides maybe a car or whatever and strikes rates, to that effect. It has been successful in formalising to have doctors in some of the regions where we are unable to attract ones from the cities. That has been a success. Have you come across that? It is similar to what Peter said about the sponsorship—you have an employer, et cetera.

Mr Job—They are all involved in the temporary entry side—the 422 visa. There are a number of those types of arrangements, particularly in Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania, as you say. But they do not want to go into the area of permanent entry because their commission and their income comes from the ability to farm out the doctors to the needy areas.

ACTING CHAIR—I want to move on to some other categories because we are limited by time.

Senator TIERNEY—I brought this up earlier at another hearing but I will bring it up again. The presence of Melbourne as a state specific migration mechanism spot—

ACTING CHAIR—We have addressed that here today.

Senator TIERNEY—Okay. I will read the *Hansard* transcript.

ACTING CHAIR—There is a new visa designation class coming into being.

Senator TIERNEY—Thank you. Regarding migrants who move out to these regional areas on particular programs, are there any figures on how many of them stay beyond a designated time, or do they then go back to the cities? The idea is to get more people into regional Australia, but are they sticking?

Mr Rizvi—Yes, to a degree, up to the first two years. This evaluation tries to address that. We do not have any data, at this stage, beyond the two years. Hopefully, we may get some data on that in the second longitudinal survey of immigrants to Australia, but I suspect the sample sizes may be too small. We are looking at alternative mechanisms to get that data in the future, and we will see what we can do. As far as the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme is concerned, there is a reasonable proportion of those people sticking it out.

Mr ADAMS—Regarding the list of authorised groups, you mentioned 44 groups. Can you give us a copy of that list?

Mr Rizvi—Yes, we can provide a copy of that list.

Mr ADAMS—You mentioned that the department goes to trade fairs around the world and sets up its boards. How does that connect into what fairs it goes to? Do you speak to the states about that, or to regional areas about that? Is that a coming thing?

Mr Rizvi—We have done that in the past. When we do that sort of work, we do promote the State Specific Migration Mechanisms but we do not promote any particular state. We do, however, often work in partnership with a state which may be, for example, going to a particular country wishing to do some promotional work. We work with them to help them with their invitations and those sorts of things, and to set it up and deliver it. But, at the end of the day, the responsibility for promoting a particular state is the particular state's, and our promotional responsibilities are national.

Mr ADAMS—We have been talking about doctors, but it is now starting to become evident that other health professionals are needed as well, from chemists and nurses right through the range of professional groups, in some areas, and in Tasmania, to fill the need of agencies out of Melbourne to supply needs in some regional centres. What is the department's experience with health professionals other than doctors?

Mr Rizvi—It is certainly true that there is a shortage of nurses, and there are a number of other health professionals listed in the migration occupations in demand list. There are essentially two to three ways in which we pursue that occupational shortage issue. The first is to list them on the migration occupations in demand list, which gives them additional points under the points test and means that it is much easier for those people to migrate. The changes the government has made in terms of linking successful overseas students to migration is also helping in that regard. The focus of those mechanisms is on occupations that are in the migration occupations in demand list. We are seeing increasingly that students have an eye to that list as almost determining what kinds of courses they do in Australia.

Mr ADAMS—That goes with our endeavouring to give onshore students opportunities of applying onshore to stay?

Mr Rizvi—That is right. We are finding that states and regional bodies and the education providers in those regional bodies are using that to promote themselves overseas. We also have what is known as our skill matching database. I will table for the committee's benefit the latest monthly report on that. The skill matching database is a group of people who have applied to migrate to Australia. They have either been visaed but have not decided where they wish to settle, have not met the pass mark for migration but are just below it, or have not actually applied to migrate but have indicated an interest in migrating and have had their skills tested and assessed. We put the whole list of those people on the skill matching database. It is put on the Internet. We circulate, on a monthly basis, to all certifying bodies and to state and territory governments, the list of the people on the database. I will read off some of the people who are on the database. These are people who came on the list in the last month: medical scientists, a pharmacist, about eight or nine registered nurses, two registered developmental disability nurses, one hospital pharmacist, a couple of physiotherapists and so on. They are all the health professionals that I can see. People have the opportunity of nominating those people if they suit their needs.

Mr ADAMS—That is a very good idea. When I first came across that my first concern was that the distribution of that list was not very wide. We need to get out with the business groups. Not very much work is done in your department with business groups in my state in promoting the new way we are doing things. There is a need to get out there and do some work with that

and speak to a range of groups. This is just restricted to states, authorising bodies, and state government departments—

Mr Rizvi—No, the skill matching database is on the Internet. For example, in the last month we had almost 45,000 hits on the database. There is some interest there. You are absolutely right: we can always do more in raising awareness. It is something we do press ahead with to see what we can achieve. There is a real challenge in getting out to regional employers. That is the real difficulty.

Mrs MAY—I would like to explore a little further the link between the RCBs and DIMA. On a number of occasions during the inquiry the assumption was that the RCBs had the authority to tick off on an application. Very often that was overturned. You talked this morning about increasing the number of the RCBs to 44 bodies. Regions are saying to us that they have worked with the RCB, the certifying body, and they have put this application together only to find that DIMA overturns it. What is the link there and how do you build that link? Are they the decision makers? We were finding they were not the decision makers and very often their decision was turned over. Can you just explore that a little more for me: how do they work together or not work together?

Mr Rizvi—There are two dimensions to that question. The first is: who is the decision maker? The decision maker legally is the DIMA officer in these matters. There are instances where the recommendation or the certification of a certifying body does not meet the remaining legal requirements we have for the visa grant to proceed and in those instances—

Mrs MAY—Can I stop you there? Why are they not aware? Or are they aware and they just ignore those legal requirements?

Mr Rizvi—They are aware of the legal requirements. Fundamentally the legal requirements relate to English language ability, age and skill. Those are clear-cut. Where it is less clear cut is where a certifying body wishes to nominate a person who does not meet those requirements; the body wishes to use what is known as the exceptional circumstances provisions to allow the person entry. In those circumstances, there is an element of judgment involved and this is where people's judgments can differ. Where the person is particularly old or does not have the formal skills that are relevant to the job, those issues will need to be taken into account and there are judgments made.

We do work with the regional certifying bodies. We do provide training programs for them and assist them through those sorts of things. For example, in Tasmania and in South Australia, we also have regular meetings with the certifying bodies where we actually go through the exceptional circumstance cases to see what judgment should be arrived at. We encourage DIMA decision makers to take a flexible attitude to those things. In some instances, however, what is being proposed is considered to be too significant a dilution of the skills or the skill and age requirements, where a different view is formed on those and the case may be overturned. The case may also be overturned if the person, for example, does not meet health and character requirements.

Mrs MAY—So are you saying that maybe we need more training for those RCBs?

Mr Rizvi—I think training must continue. We provide training now and that must continue.

Mrs MAY—As an ongoing—.

Mr Rizvi—To the extent that we can work on those matters jointly, as we do in South Australia and Tasmania. The more we can do that the better; that is probably the best outcome.

Mrs MAY—Where there is an overturn of a decision, is there a debriefing afterwards so that they are aware of why this has happened?

Mr Job—There are two points, if I may. The certifying body is associated with the nomination stage. The nomination stage is where they are determining that yes, this company does operate in the region, secondly that there is a vacancy in the company, and thirdly that they cannot be filled locally. In the six months from 1 July to 31 December 2000, only five nominations were refused by our officers.

Mrs MAY—Nationally?

Mr Job—Nationally.

Mrs MAY—We must have heard from all five of them.

Mr Job—And certainly four were in South Australia, so that was where the majority—

Mrs MAY—And Tasmania I think was another one that we heard from.

Mr Job—That may have been last year, but Tasmania is not on this list at the moment. In South Australia, the practice is that they sit as a group. They go through each case and discuss why this nomination should or should not be accepted. So the numbers overturned are not huge. And they do that only where there are clear concerns about it. In the South Australian practice where four of the cases were overturned, they do that in a group with the state department that is the certifying body for South Australia.

Mrs MAY—Okay. So you see them as playing a very integral role really, doing the ground work, so to speak, before DIMA comes in, but the end result is that DIMA is the final decision maker overall?

Mr Rizvi—That is the nature of the act at the moment. Legally, we are the decision maker, but to the maximum extent possible we encourage our state officers to work very closely with the relevant state government people and the certifying bodies.

Mrs MAY—Thank you.

ACTING CHAIR—Do the certifying bodies, the 44, now cover the whole of Australia? If not, which areas are missing out?

Mr Job—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—During the course of the inquiry we came across a couple of unusual circumstances. When talking about the RSMS, we were aware that the positions had to be skilled, there were various qualifications for it and it had to be proven to be a genuine full-time vacancy. But we heard of a number of occupations which led us to question them. Let me go through them briefly: child-care worker—I think that was in the Northern Territory—the saw doctor and what became colloquially known as the duck plucker. Chicken sexers again came up last week from the Riverina and there was a specialist four-wheel drive mechanic. There was a link between all of these, we believe, or an undercurrent regarding all of them. But what checks and balances are in place to make sure that the schemes that are in place are not being abused? I think there was some anger, certainly in the Territory about the child-care worker who was brought in from overseas and stayed less than a fortnight. Why would a child-care worker come under the scheme anyway?

Mr Rizvi—Child-care workers at a national level are not in shortage. In that particular circumstance—and I am not familiar with the particular case—a judgment must have been made that, in the view of the certifying body, the employer was finding it difficult to fill that position. I am not aware of the particular case.

ACTING CHAIR—We are not exploring individual cases, but using all of them together as instances that perhaps the scheme is being taken advantage of.

Mr Rizvi—I think you will find that if you look through the nature of the skills that people are entering in under the RSMS, they will often appear unusual. At the same time, we are being pressed by the relevant states and certifying bodies who are telling us, ‘Regional Australia is quite different to the cities and you should not apply the same template to regional Australia that you apply to a major city.’ You are right: as a result we are getting some unusual looking cases. Those are the sorts of things that we need to examine when we scrutinise the nomination and then go through with it. It will always be difficult to maintain the right balance between being flexible to assist regional Australia and, at the same time, not allowing the integrity to be undermined. As a general rule, we do encourage our people to be flexible in this area rather than take a rigorous approach.

The cover that we have got, in terms of accountability, is perhaps the two-year contract. The most recent proposal, or the now proposed legislative amendment, will enable us to cancel a visa where clearly a person entered on the basis where they did not intend to remain with the employer, but was merely using a ruse to enter Australia. If that is the case, then with the additional amendment that has been put to parliament, we would have the ability to cancel their visa.

ACTING CHAIR—What about the other side of the argument? We could get an employer who will not employ Australian labour, but wants that labour to come from overseas. The evidence came through that there were a number of countries being targeted.

Mr Rizvi—That goes to the question of assessing the genuineness of the vacancy and whether there is a local labour market shortage in that area. We do in that regard rely quite extensively on the states and certifying bodies, but where we believe that their judgment in regard to the genuineness of the vacancy, or in terms of the situation in the local labour market is not one we can support, we will move to reject. As Mr Job has pointed out, we do not reject

very frequently and we would do it with a great deal of care, given that we are actually rejecting a decision of another government body.

Mr ADAMS—It seems to have arisen that there has been a link with one religious sect or church of people coming into regional Australia who seem to have been able to gain access in some areas—saw doctors was one situation, and a pumping expert in another regional area. Some of us found it a bit hard to believe that you could not get a pumping expert in some regional areas or a saw doctor in Victoria, I think it was. I would have thought that the timber industry would have had a few saw doctors floating around. But there seemed to have been a link coming through in that area which I think the committee had some concerns with. Not that there was anything against that church or whatever, but it seems that the link was between the church in the country where they were coming from and the church here and they were working an immigration situation for the members of that church. I do not think there is anything wrong in that sense, but we found that there may have been an opportunity there that did not apply to other people.

Mr Rizvi—I think you will find circumstances where various organisations, whether they be religious or otherwise, do try to assist people who belong to their organisations to migrate. That will happen from time to time. That is not illegal. Whilst you may look at it with some concern, it in itself is not of concern to Immigration. So long as in each individual case they meet the legal requirements we will visa them, irrespective of their religious or other affiliations.

ACTING CHAIR—But if the job description has been written summarily as to only attract that individual, surely that is not market testing in the strictest sense of the word. One of the instances was for a specialist four wheel drive mechanic for one particular brand. That seemed to me to be a bit outrageous. Sure, you might have a better chance of attracting somebody to regional Australia if you are, firstly, advertising for a mechanic or if you were, secondly, advertising for a four wheel drive mechanic, rather than merely looking for a specialist whatever it was—it may have been Toyota—four wheel drive mechanic.

Mr Rizvi—You are absolutely right. Perhaps if the person had advertised in a city, or had that case been in a capital city of Australia, it may well have been rejected. But where regional Australia is concerned we do take a more flexible approach.

Mr Job—Can I just add some figures. On this question of qualifications and the number of times that we override the qualifications factor, as you are aware, every applicant must have the equivalent of two years qualification, or diploma level, to be eligible under the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme. We can set aside that requirement in exceptional circumstances. We looked at 150 cases, and of those 150 cases in only 35 cases were there exceptional circumstances where the criteria of qualification, age and language were overruled or approved. Each of those three criteria was used about an equal number of times. So the age factor, the language factor and the qualification factor were used for about one-third of that 35, so it does not indicate that that practice is widespread where we are approving qualifications as exceptional in the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme.

ACTING CHAIR—But if the department could nip it in the bud before it became widespread—if, indeed, it was going to be—that would be providing a service. A related issue, and it was raised last week in our hearing with I think the Riverina Regional Development body,

is the cost of proving that there is a vacancy. The Job Network provider in the region had put a charge of \$550 for merely providing a letter to say that this was indeed a genuine vacancy, which of course was a real inhibitor to the scheme. We could provide you with a copy of the transcript when it becomes available. Do you have anything in an overall sense to say about that? It seems to me that that is a great barrier to making the various schemes work, because it really is an additional cost to the sponsor in the first instance.

Mr Rizvi—It is. Under the RSMS scheme, our requirement is that the relevant certifying body has indicated that there is a genuine vacancy that cannot be filled from the local labour market.

Mrs MAY—And you accept that?

Mr Rizvi—If a certifying body was to come forward to us and say, ‘Our assessment is that there is a genuine vacancy,’ and if what they presented to us seemed a plausible and reasonable representation, yes, we would accept that.

Mrs MAY—Without any further labour market testing or advertising?

Mr Rizvi—If what they were presenting to us seemed reasonable, we would accept that.

Mrs MAY—There was conflicting evidence during the course of the inquiry on that.

Mr Rizvi—Where we would pursue the issue is where we had doubts. If the kinds of doubts that you are raising were in our mind then we would pursue it. It is always a question of judgment as to which case you are prepared to accept as reasonable and which case you are inclined to view with some suspicion.

Mr ADAMS—What about the job agency then charging? The sponsoring body goes to the job agency and the job agency says, ‘We certify that what you are saying is right in our region from our figures, but it is \$500 for the piece of paper.’ That is what had occurred. The sponsoring body was saying that they have to carry that \$500. If they did 20 or 30 of those, there is a substantial amount of money being met by the sponsoring body.

Mr Rizvi—We would like to think that they really only needed to do that sort of thing where there were real doubts in their own minds or they expected us to query it. Where it is a straightforward case, there is no need for that.

Mrs MAY—The relevant form actually indicates that for RSMS the Regional Certifying Body can say yes or no.

Mr Rizvi—The legal requirement is that the certifying body has certified that there is a genuine job vacancy that cannot be filled from the local labour market.

Mrs MAY—But if you felt that needed to be questioned, you could still step in?

Mr Rizvi—At the end of the day we are the decision maker. We can question all stages of that. That is an important integrity cover for the scheme that needs to be there. What we need to do is make sure our people are applying it carefully and flexibly.

Mrs MAY—I still feel there was some confusion out there. We certainly felt that during the inquiry, about those genuine vacancies.

Mr Rizvi—Those things we need to continue to pursue through our training efforts. We probably need to do more of the kinds of trips that were done in the Northern Territory. We went jointly with the Northern Territory government people through the Northern Territory promoting and talking to people about these schemes.

Mr Job—We do have a newsletter for certifying bodies. The second newsletter has just gone out. We can make sure that that is an item on the next newsletter and remind them further about that process more clearly in the future.

ACTING CHAIR—In regard to the newsletters, the distribution of material to local councils was an issue with a couple of the councils who are very keen to promote their own area. It was stated—the transcript is available to the department—that they were not aware of the schemes. That came through loud and clear, certainly in one of the hearings. Do you circulate that newsletter to local authorities as well? I am particularly thinking of regional areas.

Mr Job—The newsletter is going to all the certifying bodies. We have had regular contact with the state coordinating department, which is the department that nominates the certifying body for their particular state. We have in fact provided a number of articles to the state magazines and one national magazine on this whole Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme. We have invited them to let us know if there are any other publications that we can provide articles to. We are more than happy to do so. We do go out and meet with the certifying bodies. Two weeks ago we went out to Cootamundra and met with a group there. These processes are the processes by which we will endeavour to make sure that they are more informed about the options. More importantly, we have asked the certifying bodies to let us know of opportunities by which we can support them in promoting the availability of the scheme within their areas. We will provide that material as they want. We have had a couple of responses that they would like a little kit, and we are now designing a kit that can be useful for them to distribute as they want to in any of their local activities.

ACTING CHAIR—Some local councils—Ipswich comes to mind—have their own web site, and there can be links built on to that.

Mr Job—Absolutely, and a number of these web sites have links directly to the DIMA web site, where those schemes exist. That is an option for any of the local councils to look at.

ACTING CHAIR—I have one question on the REBA scheme. I note in the updated figures you have given us that there were 13 applicants in 1999-2000 and 15 so far this year. One of the disappointing aspects of this is that only Tasmania, South Australia and Queensland—there was one to there—are utilising the scheme. What is the problem with the other states? Why are they not getting into it?

Mr Rizvi—The other states, of course, have access to the Established Business in Australia scheme, which is a much larger version of that. REBA has existed since July 1997 and requires a two-year period of actually having operated the business before you can start lodging and processing applications. REBA is starting to pick up in numbers, and we think that within a year or two we will start to see larger numbers flowing through, including from the other states. I am told that two or three people are about to be visaed under REBA in Western Australia.

Ms Niblett—I can give you some information on the application rates by states, if you like. I note that in WA this year until 31 January there have been two REBA applications, which are about to be visaed. One of them is a case in the Margaret River region and the other is a case in Mandurah. They are about to get their visas in the next week or two, we understand. There is also a case which is close to finalisation in the Northern Territory. So there is a slightly better distribution across other states. This year we have two cases lodged in WA, another two in Tasmania, another two in Adelaide, one in Victoria and four in our office at The Rocks in New South Wales. So there is a total of 11 cases lodged this year, covering 32 people. We have 15 people who have been granted REBA visas this year to date.

ACTING CHAIR—Excellent, thank you very much for giving us that information. The committee will need to discuss where we are when a new chair is appointed, and we may need to come back for further information and a further public hearing. In the interim, we might direct further questions to you. Have you got any final comments you wish to make?

Mr Rizvi—No.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs May**):

That the submission tabled by DIMA on the skill matching monthly report and the visa grant data be accepted as evidence to the inquiry and authorised for publication, and that the document tabled by DIMA on the Independent Executives and Permanent Residence class be accepted as an exhibit and received as evidence to the inquiry.

ACTING CHAIR—Thank you very much for your attendance here this morning. If there are any matters we need additional information on, the secretary will write to you. You will be sent a copy of the transcript of your evidence, to which you can make editorial corrections. Indeed, if there is anything from those earlier transcripts that come to your attention that you want to bring to our attention, we would be pleased to receive those as well.

Resolved (on motion by **Mrs May**):

That, pursuant to the power conferred by section 2(2) of the Parliamentary Papers Act 1908, this committee authorises publication of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 12.24 p.m.