



Ombudsman to address criteria for immigration detention

Federal Parliament's Joint Migration Committee will examine the Ombudsman's review role in overseeing immigration detention decisions at a public hearing on Wednesday, 17 September in Canberra. The hearing is part of the Committee's current inquiry into immigration detention in Australia.

In reforms to immigration detention policy, announced by the Minister earlier this year, the responsibility of the Commonwealth Ombudsman was enhanced to include review of all cases where a person has been detained for six months or more. Under these reforms, people will only be held in detention until they have passed a health check, had their identity established and been deemed not to be a risk to the Australian community.

The Ombudsman has proposed that, under the new detention values, unless there is a reasonable suspicion of risk to the community, then a person should be released into community detention.

Committee Chair, Michael Danby said, "The inquiry aims to ensure that Australia has a humane and compassionate approach to immigration detention policy. The length of time any person spends in a detention centre should be kept to a minimum and controlled by stringent criteria".

He added that, "The Ombudsman has an essential role in oversight and in investigating cases where detainees are held for a substantial length of time. The Committee is anxious to ascertain that review processes are effective and that the Ombudsman's office has the appropriate resources and powers to fulfil this important role".

The hearing is part of an inquiry into shaping Australia's immigration detention policy and infrastructure for the future. As part of this inquiry the Committee will be releasing its first report before the end of the year, which will comment on the criteria that should be applied in determining how long a person should be held in immigration detention.

The second and third reports will address issues of transparency and service provision available in immigration detention, and options for expanding community and alternative forms of detention.

Details of the hearing:

Date: Wednesday, 17 September 2008
Time: 12.15 pm – 1.45 pm
Location: Committee Room 1R3, 1st floor, Parliament House, Canberra
Lead witness: Professor John McMillan, Commonwealth Ombudsman

Members of the public are welcome to attend the hearing or to listen to the discussions which will be broadcast on **FM 98.3** in Parliament House, and via webcast on the APH website:

<http://webcast.aph.gov.au/livebroadcasting/>

For media comment, please contact the Committee Chair, Michael Danby MP, on (02) 6277 4520 (Canberra).

For background information, including the full terms of reference, please visit the inquiry website at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/reports.htm> or contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 4560 or jscm@aph.gov.au.