

Steve Ingram, CEO, Office of the MARA.

Thank you Chair and members of the committee. The OMARA's last appearance was in February. You asked me last time to shorten the introductory statement – so I will be brief.

Profile

The number of registered migration agents as at 30 June 2014 was 5,212 - up from 4,899 at the end of the previous financial year. As at 30 September 2014, numbers have increased to 5,329.

I bring these figures to the Committee's attention because it represents a continuing strong growth of about five per cent a year in net numbers in the profession – even though about 400 agents left the industry last financial year.

About 14 per cent of agents are in their first year of practise.

Registered migration agents are still most active in the lodgement of 457 Temporary Work, Employer Sponsored, Business Skills and Protection visas.

Ensuring only suitable persons are registered

As the Committee is aware, in its role of regulating the sector, the Authority is charged with protecting consumers and ensuring only qualified agents are registered.

We are meeting that obligation:

- 13 applications for registration were refused in the 2013 - 2014 financial year;
- That compares with 10 in 2012 – 2013; and
- In the July-to-September period three registration applications were refused.

Complaint Handling

I can assure the Committee that the Authority's sanction decisions against agents breaching their obligations continue to withstand scrutiny. The AAT has dismissed two appeals and upheld significant sanction decisions in three cases in 2013-14. In the same period, the Federal Court has heard and dismissed an appeal arising from an AAT decision.

As at 30 September 2014 the Authority had 220 complaints on hand and finalised 398 in the 2013 - 2014 financial year. In the July to September quarter 138 complaints were finalised.

I would like to qualify those figures by saying the majority of agents have never come to the Authority's notice and most agents who are the subject of complaints, work constructively with us to resolve those matters without the need for sanction.

There has been an independent review of the OMARA's operations and the report from that review is under consideration.

I am happy to answer questions from members of the Committee.