

**Senate Standing Committee on Economics**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Treasury Portfolio**

**Budget Estimates**

1 June – 3 June 2010

**Question: BET 265**

**Topic: Definition for immigration and emigration**

**Hansard Page: Written**

**Senator Eggleston asked:** What was the justification behind changing the definition for immigration and emigration?

**Answer:**

The ABS has not changed the definition of immigration and emigration. However the method of measurement has changed.

During a reconciliation of 1996-2001 intercensal population growth estimates (including measures of immigration, emigration and net overseas migration) with the results of the 2001 Census of Population and Housing, the ABS identified that inconsistent results were arising from a 1998 passenger card processing change and the measurement of temporary visitors' duration of stay in Australia, or Australian residents' temporary duration of absence from Australia.

The ABS noted that the precise measurement of duration of stay in Australia or absence from Australia using a comparison of border crossing transactions may lead to a misleading categorisation of frequent travellers to short-term, when their overall period of stay or absence in a broader context was long-term punctuated by short journeys. For example, an international student in Australia for a 3 or 4 year course of study, who leaves Australia briefly each year for holiday or other reasons, would incorrectly not be added to estimates of Australia's population. This was because after the passage of time, they did not spend a continuous period of 12 months in Australia during their long-term period of stay in Australia (the previous method of measurement). This was inconsistent with the intention behind the definition of a long-term migrant as set out in the *United Nations Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1* (1998, 18) and the ABS Estimated Resident Population conceptual definition. The use of single continuous periods of stay as the criteria for classifying travellers into the non-permanent migration categories (e.g. short-term visitor, long-term visitor) was seen as a major shortcoming in the measurement of net overseas migration and consequently estimates of Australia's resident population.

Further, there were some travellers such as permanent immigrants and emigrants who were not asked their intended duration of stay or absence on Australian passenger cards, yet it was observed that after a passage of less than a year, some permanent immigrants departed Australia and some permanent emigrants returned to Australia. The ABS also identified a need to convert individual border movements information for frequent travellers within a reference period (whether that be a calendar quarter or a year) to person estimates together with their travel history over time to avoid double counting.

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The methodology and estimation system adopted by the ABS from September Quarter 2006 for measuring immigration and emigration, net overseas migration and the contribution to estimates of Australia's resident population (Australian residence of at least 12 months in a 16 month period) more closely aligns with the international definitions set out by the United Nations. The statistical conceptual definitions have not been changed.

Changes to the method of measurement of international migration by the ABS which were introduced from September quarter 2006 were widely discussed with key stakeholders in Australia and at relevant international conferences before the changes were introduced. There was widespread support for the changes made.