

# Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

## ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES – 9 FEBRUARY 2010 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

### Human Services Portfolio

**Topic:** Reviews of Centrelink Decisions

**Question reference number:** HS62

**Senator:** SIEWERT

**Type of question:** Written

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 26 March 2010

**Number of pages:** 2

#### **Question:**

In light of the fact more than 1 in 2 Centrelink decisions were changed because the agency got its facts wrong or did not understand the legislation underpinning entitlements worth \$66.5 billion (Data from the 2008-09 Social Security Appeals Tribunal Annual Report) what is being done to provide better resourcing for appeals, improve training for Centrelink staff, and ensuring more care is taken when making decisions?

#### **Answer:**

In 2008-09, Centrelink's 6.84 million customers received \$86.8 billion in payments made on behalf of policy departments. Over 6 billion transactions on customer records were made, and potentially millions of decisions were made by Centrelink regarding customer entitlements.

The 2008-09 Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT) Annual Report shows that of the 13,429 SSAT appeals lodged in 2008-09, 26.4 per cent resulted in the decision being changed; that is, less than 3,600 of the millions of decisions made were changed. The SSAT affirmed 50.7 per cent of the Centrelink decisions put before them. A further 22.9 per cent were not changed as the decision was not within the SSAT's jurisdiction, the appeal was withdrawn, or was dismissed.

SSAT decisions may be changed for reasons other than errors on Centrelink's part, for example where the applicant produces further information in support of their case which was not available to the Centrelink decision maker.

Centrelink decision makers and review officers are well trained and have a genuine interest in the well-being of customers. Centrelink has a strategy of ongoing training to ensure staff have access to the most up-to-date information and processes to assist them in the decision making process.

All Customer Service Advisors receive training that provides them with legislative and technical knowledge to support the accurate delivery of Centrelink services.

Customer Service Advisors also receive “Customer Focused Decision Making” training which assists staff to ensure that appropriate consideration of customer circumstances is applied during the decision-making process and that discretion is also appropriately applied.

Centrelink’s Authorised Review Officers are experienced, senior officers whose role is to conduct reviews of disputed decisions. Authorised Review Officers receive training in all aspects of the decision making process including:

- lawfulness;
- natural justice;
- evidence, facts and findings;
- providing reasons for the decision; and
- accountability.

Authorised Review Officer staffing numbers were increased throughout 2009 and have been retained at this increased level.