

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING: 13 February 2006

IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO

(63) Output 1.3: Enforcement of immigration law

Senator Nettle asked:

The Ombudsman was very critical of DIMA in a recent report regarding 501s. Particularly about the use of wrong or incomplete information for long-term permanent residents.

1. How far does the DIMA computer system records go?
2. How far does the DIMA paper record go?
3. If DIMA was researching the background of a potential deportee who arrived in Australia many decades ago, would all the records be available to the officer?

Answer:

1. We understand “DIMA computer system records” to refer to the computerised records of Australian visas and movements across Australia's borders. DIMA maintains this type of information using a broad collection of mainframe computer systems, known as TRIPS (Travel and Immigration Processing Systems). TRIPS operates to facilitate the clearance of passengers entering and leaving Australia and also provides access to information about Australian and New Zealand passports.

TRIPS provides computerised records of:

- all persons issued a visa or permit since 1/1/1980 (42.5 million records)
- all non-visaed persons since 1/1/1980 (4.6 million records)
- all persons who have arrived/departed Australia since 1980 onwards (300 million records)
- all persons who hold/held a current NZ Passport since 1989 (6.1 million records)
- all persons who hold/held a current Australian Passport since 1989 (12.1 million records)

Visa information held prior to 1989 is not complete because IRIS (Immigration Records Information System), the system from which international electronic client records are obtained, was not operational in all posts until after 1989. Travel information prior to 1989 was captured from passenger cards and automated provisions are not available to reconcile incomplete and missing data.

2. We understand “DIMA paper records” to refer to the paper records covering international arrivals and departures. DIMA holds records of ship arrival information from 1898 to 1965 and lists of passenger arrivals including ship and aircraft manifests from 1942 to 1965.

The Department's international movement records for the period between 1965 and 1981 are kept on microfilm and microfiche, and additional information relating to arrivals and departures between 1/1/1973 and 31/12/1979 is archived on magnetic cartridges.

The Department also maintains a variety of other paper records and these are sentenced according to General Disposal Schedules (prior to 2000) and, for administrative records, the Administrative Functions Disposal Authority. Immigration specific records, such as client migration and citizenship files are sentenced under Records Disposal Authorities approved by the National Archives of Australia under the *Archives Act 1983*. The retention periods for such paper records differ depending on file contents and the outcomes of application processing.

3. Case officers can access a client's movement records and visa status using the computerized and paper records referred to in Questions 1 and 2, above. However, changes in law and procedures over the years have resulted in some gaps in the available information.

Following the Palmer and Comrie reports, the Department has undertaken a number of measures aimed at improving record management practices, including engaging the National Archives to conduct a strategic review of record-keeping systems and practices. In addition, concerns regarding record-keeping are being actively addressed through the Records Management Improvement Program and *Systems for People* (a strategic move towards client-focussed IT system solutions to provide DIMA staff with all the information they need to make good decisions).

New section 501 procedures are currently being developed that will emphasise the importance of locating relevant DIMA information and referring any unclear information for expert legal or policy advice. The Department will also be working with the Ombudsman's office to develop guidelines for sourcing appropriate and relevant information from external agencies, such as criminal justice authorities, which may substantially enhance our section 501 decision-making processes.