

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE ORGANISATION

Question No. 98

Senator Trood asked the following question at the hearing on 22 February 2011:

- A. How many staff from ASIO are currently working directly and indirectly on processing security assessments for asylum seekers (including illegal maritime arrivals and others)?
- B. Is a specific section within ASIO responsible for the processing of these assessments? What is that section?
- C. In Senate estimates hearings in May 2010, Mr Irvine acknowledged that in order to deal with the processing of security assessments “We have had to rationalise some of our activities in other areas.” Is this still occurring?
 - a. What other areas/programs have had to be rationalised?
- D. Has ASIO received complaints from DIAC with regards to the length of time it is taking to process security assessments?
 - a. How has ASIO responded?
- E. Is ASIO able to manage the workload of processing security assessments with existing resources?
- F. Has ASIO requested extra resourcing to combat this issue? Have those resources been provided?
- G. How many security assessments has ASIO conducted in the year-to-date for asylum seekers?
 - a. How does this compare with previous years?
- H. What is the current average processing time for assessments?
 - a. How does this compare with previous years?
- I. To-date, how many asylum seekers are waiting in detention to decide their security status?
- J. How many cases are there where a negative security check has been provided by ASIO who has already been granted refugee status?
- K. Why have these cases occurred? Is the usual practice to grant refugee status after the security assessment has been completed?

The answer to the honourable senator’s question is as follows:

- A. ASIO regularly reviews and revises the allocation of resources to Security Assessment. This may not always be a straightforward matter, as Security Assessment requires appropriate skills and expertise. For security reasons, it would be inappropriate to comment publicly on the resources dedicated to specific ASIO work.

B. ASIO has quarantined resources within its Security Assessment Branch to undertake Security Assessment of asylum seekers, including irregular maritime arrivals.

C. ASIO regularly reviews and revises the allocation of resources to Security Assessment.

During 2009-10, ASIO diverted resources to undertaking Security Assessment of irregular maritime arrivals (IMA) for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). Consequently, the resources available to assess protection visa assessments and other refugee referrals were limited and this caseload experienced delays. In response, ASIO implemented new measures, including establishing a dedicated team responsible for protection visas and other complex non-IMA visa cases.

D. ASIO endeavours to provide Security Assessments to DIAC as expeditiously as possible, but assessment times for applicants vary depending on individual circumstances. To ensure that all applications are treated fairly ASIO processes these cases in the order in which they are received, unless they are given a particular priority by DIAC. However, even if a case is given a high priority, the time taken to process a Security Assessment will vary based on individual circumstances.

Until recently, for the IMA caseload, DIAC priorities directed how ASIO resources were dedicated to Security Assessment of IMAs. ASIO and DIAC are currently working closely to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the security checking process as part of the overall immigration process for IMAs.

E. The increase in IMAs has placed pressure on ASIO's Security Assessment system and has resulted in prolonged processing times. ASIO regularly reviews and revises the allocation of resources to Security Assessment. Until recently, DIAC referred all adult IMAs to ASIO for Security Assessment. Since late 2010, ASIO has worked with DIAC to ensure only IMAs who are found to be refugees, and therefore required Security Assessment, are referred. This initiative aims to ensure ASIO resources are appropriately utilised.

See also response to C.

F. ASIO has not requested extra resources to assist with security assessment work..

G. ASIO publishes figures in relation to Security Assessments in our Annual Report.

In the current financial year to 8 April 2011 ASIO has completed 1284 security assessments of irregular maritime arrivals (IMA) and 538 of non-IMA protection visa applicants (294 Refugee and Humanitarian, 244 Protection).

In the financial year 2009-2010, ASIO completed 2822 security assessments of IMAs and 2784 (1795 Refugee and Humanitarian, 989 Protection) security assessments of non-IMA protection visa applicants for DIAC.

In 2008-09 ASIO completed 1466 assessments for protection visa applicants, (including 372 temporary protection visa holders applying for resolution of status visas).

In 2007-008 ASIO completed 1311 assessments for protection visa applicants.

H. ASIO aims to complete Security Assessment of IMAs as quickly as possible. The time taken to complete a Security Assessment varies in accordance with several factors, including the circumstances of the particular case, what investigative action is required and other more urgent organisational priorities.

ASIO currently completes Security Assessment of IMAs in an average of 66 days.

I. As at 8 April 2011, DIAC has referred 355 IMAs in immigration detention to ASIO for Security Assessment.

J. As at 8 April 2011 and since December 2009, ASIO has provided DIAC with Adverse Security Assessments in relation to 33 IMAs.

K. DIAC seeks ASIO Security Assessments in relation to issuing an Australian visa; IMAs must have refugee claims recognised in order to be eligible to apply for an Australian visa.