

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 21 FEBRUARY 2011

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(136) Program 3.1: Border Management

Senator Trood (L&CA 40) asked:

- 1) Did you, having changed the rules, seek to advertise the fact that you had changed the rules?
- 2) Explain why, when you changed the rules you did not advise peak councils that the rules had changed.

Answer:

(1) Yes. The Department sought to notify prospective clients, including existing cardholders, through a range of mechanisms. This included highlighting the new eligibility criteria on both the APEC Business Mobility Group website and the Department's own website to enable applicants to self-assess their eligibility for the card before lodging an application.

The Department also published a new application form for the APEC Business Travel Card (ABTC), which not only included an introduction to the revised eligibility requirements but also asked applicants to answer additional questions and provide further information relevant to assessing claims against the new requirements.

Applicants whose cards were due to expire within six months of the changes being introduced were automatically notified by letter of the new requirements to be satisfied in the application process. A renewal is not automatic and all applicants are required to satisfy all eligibility criteria that apply at the time.

Significant effort was also made to ensure that, where applicants were refused an ABTC, they were given a clear explanation of the reason/s for this decision. For example, refusal letters emphasised that:

- the eligibility requirements reflected the objectives of the ABTC scheme and the need for Australia's approach to be more consistent with other participating economies;
- the requirements aimed to preserve existing benefits to cardholders which would be diminished if a more liberal approach to eligibility was adopted by all economies;
- a refusal does not inhibit, in any way, their ability to travel to other economies for business provided they satisfy the immigration requirements of another economy in the usual manner; and
- a refusal in no way diminishes either the legitimacy of their business interests or the value of the economic benefit their business brings to Australia.

(2) The Department considered that the most effective way of reaching relevant stakeholders was through the public information available on the website of the Department and APEC's Business Mobility Group and also contained within the ABTC application form itself. The Department recognises the value that peak bodies and councils may bring to promulgating any future changes to eligibility requirements and has already made considerable effort to involve such organisations in the current review of the eligibility arrangements.