

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARINGS: 21 FEBRUARY 2011

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(297) Program 4.3: Offshore Asylum Seeker Management

Senator Cash asked:

How many members were on the Independent Merits Review panel before it was renamed? How many additional members of the Panel have been appointed during 2010? Who employs them? Who are they accountable to? What are the terms and lengths of their contracts? How much are they paid? Has the department provided serviced offices or other accommodation for them? Where? At what cost? Are their decisions overseen or scrutinised by anyone? The Secretary? The Minister?

Answer.

There were 91 reviewers as at 28 February 2011.

62 reviewers were appointed in 2010, including a Senior Reviewer.

Reviewers are employed by Wizard People Pty Ltd.

Reviewers are accountable for their work quality, professional conduct and performance to the Chief Executive Officer of the Independent Protection Assessment Office (IPAO), formerly known as the Head of the IMR Office. The CEO is assisted in these respects by the Senior Reviewer.

Reviewers are appointed for two-year terms and are contracted to Wizard People Pty Ltd for the duration of their term of appointment.

Apart from the Senior Reviewer, whose terms and conditions are the same as a Senior Member of the Refugee Review Tribunal, reviewers are paid a per diem fee of \$782. Both the Senior Reviewer and reviewer remuneration rates are in line with rates set by the Remuneration Tribunal for a Refugee Review Tribunal Senior Member and a part-time Member respectively.

An IPA office is located in Sydney CBD (321 Kent Street) and Belconnen, Canberra (5 Chan Street). Reviewers have access to case management support and office facilities at these offices. Except when conducting interviews at detention centres, most reviewers perform duties from home.

The Sydney premises' rental cost is \$440,000 p.a., with a set rent increase of four per cent in forward years 2011 and 2012. The rent for the Canberra office is \$140,000 p.a., with a set rent increase of four per cent in forward years 2011 and 2012.

There is an MOU with the Refugee Review Tribunal for the provision of legal and country advice. In particular, there is a legal advisory service that examines and advises on draft reports of reviewers.

Additionally, quality assurance of reviewer reports is undertaken by the CEO and the Senior Reviewer. The Senior Reviewer's responsibilities include performance managing reviewers, counselling and advising, mentoring, professional development and quality assurance of their recommendations.

A professional development and mentoring program has been established, through which experienced reviewers assist, advise and counsel new reviewers on professional issues concerning conduct of reviews.

Representatives of the Canberra Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees are consulted from time to time on reviews and reviewer report quality issues.

Judicial review is available to refugee claimants. Reviewer reports have been scrutinised by the High Court.