

## QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

### ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 21 FEBRUARY 2011

#### IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

#### **(78) Program 1.1: Visa and Migration**

Senator Cash asked:

To what extent are locally engaged staff in DIAC's overseas posts involved in the processing of visa applications, and if they are involved, what supervision is there of their work by Australian immigration officers?

*Answer:*

The approximately 1000 locally engaged employees (LEE) working alongside the Department's Australia-based (A-based) staff posted overseas are an integral part of DIAC's workforce.

LEE are employed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and Austrade to undertake work for the department. Most are delegated to make visa decisions under the Migration Act 1958, but the ability to use these delegations is usually administratively restricted (eg in higher risk countries, some LEE make no visa decisions, whereas others only make decisions regarding temporary entry to Australia). Some LEE (mostly expatriate Australian citizens) hold designated positions and may make decisions on some permanent visa applications. In addition to routine visa processing, LEE primarily undertake client service and administrative tasks. LEE provide local knowledge and language skills at relatively low cost.

DIAC A-based staff supervise LEE and ensure departmental programs are implemented overseas in line with Australian Government expectations and priorities, including relevant legislation. Where there are no DIAC A-based staff located at the overseas post, daily supervision of DIAC LEE is undertaken by DFAT A-based staff on DIAC's behalf. DIAC A-based staff at the supervising post continue to provide ongoing support and supervision. All DIAC LEE are provided with formal and informal training including training on ethical behaviour. The balance of A-based staff and LEE is reviewed regularly to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of offshore operations within resource constraints.

The department has global visa processing. Some visas are processed where the client is located, including at an overseas office, while other visas are processed by specialised centres in Australia. An increasing number of decisions on overseas visa applications are made onshore as clients either apply for visas directly to the processing centres in Australia or over the Internet. Generally the department continues to process caseloads offshore where there are significant benefits to integrity (for example in making decisions in light of specialist knowledge, proximity to the client, need for face to face interviews) or client service.