

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARINGS: 11 February 2013

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(AE13/0252) PROGRAM – 1.1: Visa and Migration

Senator Cash (Written) asked:

What is the turnaround time for tourist visa applications by post for (a) individuals and (b) groups? How does this turnaround time compare internationally with, for example, countries such as the USA, Singapore and the UK.

Answer:

Generally the Department does not process group applications. Each visa application is usually processed individually. It is therefore difficult to provide turnaround for groups. However, the Australian Government does have some special arrangements that allow for quicker processing of large groups of visitors from the People's Republic of China through the Approved Destination Status (ADS) Scheme.

Through the ADS, the Department is able to provide streamlined travel arrangements for organised tour groups. The tour groups are able to apply for Australian visitor visas through 59 Australian migration agents and 88 Chinese travel agents participating in the scheme.

In the latest published quarterly report, 94% of tourist visa applications (Subclass 676) finalised from July 2012 – December 2012 were processed within 8 days. For all other visitor visa applications, 93.8% of applications finalised during the same quarter were processed within the service standard. This figure does not account for subclasses 459 and 488. Visa processing times vary by visa product, processing location, and citizenship of the visa applicant. Statistics on Australia's Visitor visa processing times are published quarterly on the Department's Website at <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/statistics/pdf/visitor/visitor-visa-quarterly-report-dec12.pdf>.

The large majority of visitors to Australia enter on an Electronic Travel Authority (ETA) which is generally granted upon electronic application. In the period from July – December 2012 there have been over 1 million ETAs granted.

It is difficult to compare visa processing times against other countries as this information is not held by the Department. Additionally, different countries will have different visa products that will not necessarily align with Australia's.