

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 21 OCTOBER 2008

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(69) Output 1.2: Refugee and Humanitarian Entry and Stay

Senator Hanson-Young asked:

I refer to the people who are being released into the community. We know that we have now done away with temporary protection visas. There is still a lot of concern by people working in a direct relationship with refugees in the community that some of the categories of bridging visas in particular are quite restrictive in terms of people's work rights, access to Medicare and other social services. Does the Minister have a plan for perhaps dealing with these restrictions into the future?

Answer:

Yes.

The Minister has stated that he shares community concerns about those people on Bridging visas with no right to work and no access to Medicare and recognises the burden this places on community groups and the individuals concerned.

The Department has provided advice to the Minister on possible options to provide fairer and more appropriate access to work rights for asylum seekers. These options aim to strike a better balance between making a reasonable allowance for people to work to support themselves while their claims to remain in Australia are considered, and encouraging claims to be made in a timely way.

A set of public policy principles have been developed that would underpin the proposed approach to providing work rights to asylum seekers. These principles are designed to reflect relevant international obligations as well as reasonable expectations upon clients, including that they should generally remain lawful while going through immigration processes, and actively and genuinely pursue resolution of their claims.

The Minister is conscious that changes to work rights and associated access to Medicare raise complex issues which require careful consideration to avoid unintended consequences. The Minister has asked the Department to consult with a range of stakeholders on this issue, and consultations commenced in November 2008.