

## QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

### SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 20 OCTOBER 2009

#### IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

#### (17) Program 4.1: Visa Compliance and Status Resolution

Senator Fierravanti-Wells (L&C 54) asked:

I noticed an article in the Age recently on 10 October which referred to foreign agents 'targeted in black market probe'. The first paragraph says:

AN UNDERGROUND network of labour agents is procuring illegal workers in Asia and India to supply Australia's growing blackmarket for contract labour.

Could you take that on notice and comment in relation to that.

*Answer:*

- The Department plays a key role in a whole of Government approach to addressing illegal work and associated issues in Australia through its administration of the Migration Act and its employer sanctions provisions.
- The Department has formal structures in place to facilitate liaison and joint operations with key stakeholders, such as the Australian Taxation Office, Centrelink, Australian Federal Police, Australian Crime Commission, State and Territory Police and the Fair Work Ombudsman.
- As part of its response to serious non-compliance within the Australian primary industry sector and to target the organisers of illegal labour hire rackets the Department is developing program integrity and safeguards measures. Where appropriate it is liaising with overseas posts and foreign governments to disrupt and dismantle identified criminal syndicates.
- Several persons and companies of interest in Australia have been identified and investigations are ongoing. Where identified, joint-agency investigations and prosecutions will be undertaken as a deterrent to organised and serious non-compliance.
- An example of this was the successful execution of Operation Maple in March 2009. This operation was a multi-jurisdictional DIAC operation which targeted an organised illegal labour hire syndicate operating within the Meat processing Industry in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. This was the largest DIAC operation of its kind and with the cooperation of the Meat processing Industry, resulted in the location of 84 persons working illegally and the seizure of considerable amounts of evidence.

- The Department has referred several cases in relation to the organised illegal employment of foreign workers in Australia to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions for consideration of prosecution under employer sanctions provisions of the Migration Act.
- The Department is also undertaking an ongoing national employer and fraud awareness campaign within Australian primary industry sectors in cooperation with several Commonwealth agencies.
- A network of industry, union and regional outreach officers are engaged to assist with the process of identifying and responding to serious non-compliance with work entitlements and organised illegal labour hire.
- The Department provides a range of services for employers to check work rights, including the Employers' Immigration Hotline, Visa Entitlement Verification as well as the Visa Entitlement Verification Online service.