

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 20 OCTOBER 2009

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(6) Program 1.1: Visa and Migration – Office of the MARA

Senator Fierravanti- Wells (L&C 24) asked:

Provide a progress report on what is happening in the area of consumer protection.

Answer:

Consumer protection is provided through an integrated approach to registration, complaints management, professional development and communication. The Office of the MARA has reinforced the consumer protection measures that were put in place by the former MARA, including:

- ensuring the integrity of the repeat registration process, by requiring evidence of a client account separate to the business operating account, evidence of a professional library and evidence of professional indemnity insurance prior to any application for repeat registration being approved; and
- maintaining service standards to ensure that consumers receive timely action on their complaints. Where a complaint does not warrant a sanction the Office of the MARA requires corrective action by an agent to reduce the risk that poor practices may impact on consumers.

Additional measures are being put in place, including:

- increasing the English language standard IELTS 7 (academic) as a requirement for initial registration. This requirement will be implemented on 1 January 2010 and will greatly contribute to increasing the standards of service and quality of advice provided to consumers; and
- establishing a monitoring regime of registered migration agents to ensure they are complying with their obligations under the Code of Conduct. This will ensure that preventative steps are taken to correct the practices of migration agents prior to consumers being adversely affected and lodging a complaint.

An independent review of the Office of the MARA's communication activities is also being conducted. This review will aid the development of a new communication strategy, with a key emphasis to be placed on informing the consumer of the protection that is available to them.