

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE ORGANISATION

Question No. 65

Senator Trood asked the following question at the hearing on 18 October 2010:

- a. How many security assessments has ASIO conducted in the year-to-date for asylum seekers? How does this compare with previous years?
- b. What is the average processing time for assessments? How does this compare with previous years?
- c. How many asylum seekers are waiting because ASIO has been unable to decide their security status? Where are these asylum seekers from?
- d. How many ASIO officials are involved in security checks on asylum seekers?
- e. In May, David Irvine stated "we've had to rationalise our activities in other areas." Is ASIO still intending to "rationalise" to undertake the volume of assessments necessary?
- f. Has ASIO requested extra resourcing to combat this issue? Have those resources been provided?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- a. Since January 2010, ASIO has completed 2460 security assessments for irregular maritime arrivals (IMAs). ASIO completed 1093 security assessments of irregular maritime arrivals in 2009.

For onshore protection visa applicants, in the first three quarters for 2010 ASIO completed 580 assessments. This compares with 974 completed assessments for 2009.

- b. ASIO aims to complete security assessments as quickly as possible. The time taken to complete a security assessment varies in accordance with several factors, including:
 - the security environment;
 - the circumstances of each individual's case;
 - whether checking with other agencies and foreign liaison partners; and
 - external factors such as other agency priorities and processes.

In conducting its assessments, ASIO carefully balances security considerations with facilitating the timely provision of assessments.

ASIO currently completes security assessment of IMAs in an average 57 days from receipt of the referral from DIAC. During 2009, ASIO completed security assessments of IMAs in an average of 37 days.

For onshore protection visa applicants, in the first three quarters of 2010 the average time to complete assessments was 185 days from receipt of the referral from DIAC. This compares with 128 days from receipt from DIAC for completion of assessments for 2009.

- c. As at 27 October, 330 IMAs remained in detention solely awaiting ASIO security assessment before DIAC can finalise consideration of their visa suitability. This represents 6% of all IMAs in detention.

As at 27 November 2010, there were 1421 security assessments for onshore protection visa applicants with ASIO for security assessment.

For security reasons, it is inappropriate to provide specific details on which nationalities ASIO is assessing for security purposes.

- d. ASIO regularly reviews and revises the allocation of resources to security assessment of IMAs, as required. For security reasons, it is inappropriate to provide specific details of ASIO's resources dedicated to the provision of security assessments for IMAs or onshore protection visa applicants.
- e. ASIO will continue to regularly review and revise the allocation of resources to security assessment of IMAs and all other visa security assessments, as required. This may not always be a straightforward matter, as security assessment requires appropriate skills and expertise.
- f. ASIO is currently managing the workload within existing resources.