

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 19 OCTOBER 2010

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(140) Program 1.1: Visa and Migration

Senator Cash asked:

How has the creation of Centres of Excellence strengthened DIAC's back-office processing for temporary skilled migration visas and Labour Agreements? In what way?

Answer.

The creation of Centres of Excellence (COEs) was designed to ensure:

- 1) greater consistency in decision making by having similar processing work done in larger centres of excellence where best practice could be shared for particular business lines more readily, training and mentoring conducted more frequently by experts in the COEs;
- 2) streamlined business processes leading to greater efficiencies, more timely and responsive client service, and reduced backlogs;
- 3) an increase number of applications finalised within service standards; and
- 4) improved program integrity.

With the creation of Centres of Excellence a new business model was introduced that facilitated the finalisation of "decision-ready" applications within 24 to 48 hours of receipt. This initiative contributed to the number of applications finalised within service standards increasing substantially. In 2007-08, 68.2% of Temporary Business (Long Stay) (subclass 457 visa) including visa applications resulting from Labour Agreements, were finalised within the published service standard of 2 months for 'low risk' applications and 3 months for "high risk" applications. In 2008-09, this rose to 82.78%. In 2009-10, 82.26% of applications were finalised within the published service standard.

The improved performance of the program occurred at a time of considerable change. Amongst the changes were the 14 September 2009 reforms aimed at further enhancing the integrity of the program, and ensuring it continued to provide industry with the necessary skills, while not undermining local training and employment opportunities.

Centres of Excellence have also been able to reduce the number of unfinalised subclass 457 visa applicants from 28,890 as at 30 June 2007 to 5,707 on 30 June 2010.

In addition, the centralisation of subclass 457 caseload processing has enhanced integrity of decision-making. Centres of Excellence have delivered a consistent approach to managing risk by allowing patterns in caseloads to be considered through sound evidence-based processing models, rather than being obscured in caseloads split between multiple locations. This has resulted in resources that were devoted to processing, being directed to targeted integrity checking.