

OFFICE OF THE M  
SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ES

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By: Office of the MARA  
Ms Christine Sykes  
Date: 19/10/10

**Christine Sykes, CEO, Office of the MAR.**

Thank you Madam Chair and members of the committee.

### **Operations**

The Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (MARA) has been operating for over fifteen months and I would like to update you on progress.

At the end of June 2010 there were 4482 registered migration agents compared to 4097 on 1 July 2009. This is an increase of over nine percent.\*

There were 857 who were in their first year of registration as a migration agent, and 3625 who were re-registered migration agents.

Just over one quarter (1185) of registered migration agents are Australian Legal Practitioners and 246 are non-commercial migration agents.

A total of 499 complaints against registered migration agents were received in the same period and disciplinary action was taken against 8 agents. Two agents were cautioned. Two agents were suspended (for 1 year and 3 years respectively); 1 agent was suspended until they meet certain conditions and 3 former agents were barred from re-registering for the maximum period of 5 years.

At the end of June there were 626 approved Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities through 47 providers. The majority (368) of activities were seminars, conferences, workshops and lectures. For re-registration agents have to complete 10 points of CPD, which in most cases is the equivalent of 15 hours of tuition.

### **Probity**

During our first year of operation, to address any concerns about DIAC's role in administering the MARA function, an independent probity advisor, Professional Service Integrity Asia Pacific Pty Ltd (PSI), undertook a comprehensive review of potential and perceived conflicts of interest. Independent probity audits were carried out quarterly by PSI.

The final quarterly audit, completed in June 2010, found that all mitigation strategies had been successfully implemented. This was subsequently reviewed by Sir Laurence Street AC, who found that all relevant probity requirements had been addressed.

### **Reform Agenda**

The Office of the MARA has worked closely with the Advisory Board to implement recommendations from the *2007-08 Review of Statutory Self Regulation of the Migration Advice Profession*.

At Budget Estimates in May I spoke about the increase in English language requirements for people seeking to register for the first time as registered migration agents. The implementation has gone smoothly.

Today I would like to mention the development of our communications strategy. The strategy has a focus on consumer protection and we will actively engage with stakeholders, including the not for profit sector, to convey our key messages effectively.

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To support this we are developing a suite of user-friendly material for our culturally and linguistically diverse consumers. One recent product is a consumer guide, which will form the basis of translated brochures of key information for different ethnic groups.

In addition, I was pleased to be part of the video titled *Don't Get Caught Out*, which is part of the *Protect Yourself from Immigration Fraud Information Kit*, announced by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship on 6 October 2010.

While much has been achieved in the first fifteen months of operation, we have a significant forward program of work. We are well placed to take the work program forward in partnership with the Advisory Board.

I am happy to answer questions from members of the Committee.