

**Principal Member's Opening Address**  
**Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee**  
Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing

October 2012

**Opening statement**

The Migration Review Tribunal and the Refugee Review Tribunal last appeared before the committee in May this year. This is my first appearance before the committee since commencing as the Principal Member of the tribunals on 20 August. By way of opening, I would like to highlight the more significant developments since May:

**Caseload statistics**

The tribunals' workload continues to increase. Senators may be aware that the tribunals had an overall increase of 30% in applications in 2011-12. That trend is continuing with lodgements up 51% in the first three months of this financial year. The categories of cases experiencing significant increases in lodgements are the skill linked refusal, permanent and temporary business refusal, and partner and family refusal cases in the MRT. For the RRT, significant increases in lodgements are by applicants from Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Iran and Pakistan.

The tribunals have in place and are developing further mechanisms to deal with the increase in workload. These include various case management strategies to streamline hearings and additional member and staff resources. To date this financial year the tribunals are keeping up with the incoming workload and are on track to complete significantly more cases than in 2011-12.

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2012, 15 & 16 October 2012

Tabled Document 1

By: Ms Kay Ransome, MRT-RRT

Date: 15/10/12

## **IPAO and IMA transition**

As you are aware, the Independent Protection Assessment Office, or IPAO, became a part of the tribunals on 1 July 2012. This followed the Minister's earlier announcements that a single protection visa process would apply to offshore and onshore applicants, and that the reviews for offshore entry applicants who had not had their primary interview by 24 March would be undertaken by the RRT.

The tribunals took over management of the remaining IPAO caseload from 1 July. The number of cases still with IPAO reviewers has reduced from 659 on 1 July to 220 as at 8 October. We anticipate that the caseload will be finalised by end of November.

Since 24 March 2012 the RRT has received applications from 451 irregular maritime arrivals seeking review of decisions to refuse a protection visa. These cases are treated as priority matters and as at 30 September 68 cases had been decided with 87% being decided within 90 days. The primary countries of origin of applicants are Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

## **Lavarch Review**

You will recall that the Minister commissioned the Hon. Michael Lavarch, AO in December 2011 to undertake an internal review of the efficiency and operations of the tribunals, and to recommend strategies to implement the new arrangements relating to the revised processing for irregular maritime arrivals.

The report of the Lavarch Review was released on 29 June 2012 and the tribunals are at present implementing the recommendations contained in that report. In particular:

- We have implemented a model of specialisation in case allocations whereby members located in Sydney and Melbourne are assigned to specialist teams led by a senior member who acts as a practice leader for their caseload. Members in Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth are part of a mixed team and specialise in particular types of cases depending on the available caseload.
- We have implemented a new operational structure in the New South Wales and Victorian registries to support member specialisation and end-to-end case processing. The registries are developing nationally consistent procedures and our country advice service has adopted a national structure.

### **New members**

In order to help respond to the continuing increase in lodgements, the introduction of complementary protection, and the irregular maritime arrival caseload, an additional 34 members were appointed to the tribunals in July this year. These members are located across Australia. An extra two members are now located in Perth, with an extra three in Brisbane and four in Adelaide. Melbourne has an additional twelve members and Sydney an extra thirteen.

An induction program for the new members (including senior members) was delivered in July, and new members have been allocated to teams specialising in caseload streams, led by a senior member.

My colleagues and I are happy to elaborate on any of these matters or answer any questions the committee may have.

