

Law to stop rip-off agents

SIMON KEARNEY

UNSCRUPULOUS migration agents are ripping off hundreds of prospective migrants by charging non-existent fees for a host of free services such as meeting with MPs or filling out standard forms.

The Federal Government is preparing to crack down on the dubious operators with legislation which passed the House of Representatives last week.

Multicultural Affairs Minister Gary Hardgrave said he had discovered some migration agents were charging potential migrants to visit him when such visits were free.

He said his department had found evidence that one migration agent had charged a client \$100,000 to fill out a basic immigration form that cost nothing to lodge.

The crackdown will give the Migration Agents Review Authority the capacity to investigate complaints about agents who have left the industry to escape prosecution.

One of the industry's biggest problems is fly-



Gary Hardgrave

by-night agents with few legal qualifications who set up after a four-day course and operate for a short time before leaving the industry.

Industry statistics show that most of the 2500 migration agents in Australia will quit the industry within four years after charging individual and business clients as much as \$25,000 each for filing immigration forms. Only 150 agents have been in the industry for longer than eight years.

Two-thirds of migration agents, who are supposed to advise clients about Australian migration law, do not have legal qualifications.