AVAILABILITY OF STATISTICAL INFORMATION

The range of available statistics is restricted due to several factors including the development of systems over many years, the locations for processing requests and the slightly different processes for s417 and s351 caseloads (para 180 of the submission).

Statistics since 1990 have been compiled manually from reports provided by the different processing areas. Legal requirements have been met by the tabling of statements to the Parliament.

Background

The Department has recorded movements in and out of Australia electronically since 1982. However, it was not until the 1989 introduction of the Immigration Records Information System (IRIS) system that visa application lodgement, processing and outcome details were recorded in a computer system. The IRIS system was specifically developed to support the processing of visa applications at Australia's overseas posts. Available technology was limited and the hardware infrastructure was extremely costly to implement. The Department focused its resources where it would achieve the greatest cost benefit in light of the volume of applications offshore and the potential for fraud involved in the manual processing and production of visas to travel to Australia.

In 1990 the Travel and Immigration Processing System (TRIPS) was introduced to support the border processing of passengers arriving and departing from Australia providing access onshore to the records of visa grant recorded in the IRIS system. The Client Services System and Client Status Management System were introduced in the early 1990s to record the receipt of visa applications onshore and to issue visa labels onshore. However, these systems did not act as a case management system and did not record detail on various processing stages.

As technology improved and became more available and affordable the Department moved to introduce case management systems onshore. From the mid 1990s until July 1999 a range of computer systems recorded application processing details including the Residence and Residence 2 systems, the Protection Visas system, the Sponsorship and Temporary Entry Processing System and a range of Microsoft Access Databases.

In July 1999 the Department replaced these non-year 2000 compliant systems with the Integrated Client Services Environment (ICSE). It should be noted that with the implementation of ICSE the data contained in many existing systems was converted and migrated to the ICSE format. While mechanisms were put in place to ensure, as far as possible, the quality of the migrated data the differences in the data collected between the various systems resulted in a high level of inconsistency and some inaccuracy in the data once the migration process had been completed. As a result there is a continuing requirement to manually interrogate migrated records to validate them.

Availability of statistical information relating to the exercise of the Minister's power under sections 351 and 417 of the Act

Instances where intervention powers have been used are manually maintained in relevant State and Territory processing offices and information has been provided regularly for manual compilation of reporting pending the development of systems enhancements to facilitate automated reporting.

Information relating to the Minister's public interest intervention powers is recorded in a range of separate Departmental systems including: the Department's Parliamentary Correspondence Management System (PCMS,); the superseded Parliamentary Correspondence System (PLUTO); Integrated Client Services Environment (ICSE); and a number of Access databases and Excel spreadsheets.

ICSE captures some correspondence information and information relating to the processing and outcome of requests. The PCMS system contains details of correspondence that has been received since its introduction in October 1999. Correspondence that had not been finalised as at October 1999 is also stored in the PCMS system. PLUTO, the mainframe based Ministerial Correspondence system that preceded PCMS, was in use from 1991 until October 1999 and some data is able to be extracted from this system. The PCMS and PLUTO systems usually flag where letters relate to a s417 or s351 matter if this information is provided, but in many cases sufficient information to identify the relevant case records in ICSE has not been identified nor, therefore, captured.

Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and Microsoft Access databases have also been used at various times to collect and store information relating to requests, their processing and outcomes. However, in light of progressive system enhancements, there is limited consistency in the type of information collected and the way that details have been recorded. There are significant difficulties with reporting Ministerial Intervention information from these systems without considerable manual interrogation and analysis.

There has been limited functionality to support the recording of Ministerial Intervention requests and processing in the ICSE system in a manner that is easy to use and is readily reportable. There have also been a number of progressive system enhancements which have led to variation in the recording of information relating to Ministerial Intervention requests and processing. These factors have limited the capacity to obtain reliable consolidated system generated reports relating to the number of requests in a particular case or the action or outcomes relevant to particular requests.

To address this, improvements to the ICSE system are due to be implemented on 1 November 2003 to enable much of the information to be captured in future on electronic systems.

Possible Scope of Statistical Information

The Department is in a position to provide from its electronic records the following statistical information:

- Details of cases where the Minister intervened under s417 or s351 over the period 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2003 (obtained through manually interrogating and crosschecking the PCMS and ICSE systems and the ACTRO Access database);
- Caseload statistics and trends in cases where the Minister intervened over this same period (obtained through manually interrogating and crosschecking the PCMS and ICSE systems and the ACTRO Access database);
- Caseload statistics and trends over this period on cases where the Minister declined to exercise or consider the exercise of his power (based on PCMS reports, the ACTRO Access database, manual statistical records and previous briefing material);
- Activity information such as the number of requests and number of interventions per financial year for the 1996/97 to 1999/2000 (through a combination of PCMS reports, the ACTRO Access database, manual statistical records and previous briefing material);
- Targeted detailed reports on the processing and outcome of cases involving particular correspondents who wrote after 1991. However, this would necessitate manual interrogation of the ICSE and PCMS systems which would be particularly resource intensive and time consuming.

Detailed information in relation to cases in which the Minister did not intervene is not available without undertaking a manual check of many thousands of case files or system records.

Detail in relation to representations outside of the Ministerial correspondence framework may be able to be obtained through manual searches of every client file where a request for intervention has been made (an estimated 27,000 files). However, it is not clear how many client files would be available for such a process to be undertaken because of the disposal of large numbers of case files in accordance with standard archive procedures. In any event, a manual check of available case files and hard copy records would be extremely resource intensive and time consuming and involve considerable cost.

National Archives Records Disposal Authorities (RDA) 902 and 1032 respectively provide for the disposal of files relating to decisions taken onshore and offshore and Departmental records are retained or disposed of in accordance with the requirements of those RDAs. Those requirements are:

- Onshore where permanent entry approved - retained as national archives;
- Onshore where permanent entry refused or withdrawn - destroy 5 years after action completed;
- Onshore where temporary entry approved and no further action has occurred - destroy 2 years after departure is confirmed;
- Onshore where temporary entry refused or withdrawn - destroy 2 years after departure is confirmed;
- Offshore files where permanent entry approved - retained as national archives;

- Offshore where permanent entry refused or withdrawn - destroyed 1 year after refusal has been finally determined or after any appeal has been finalised ;
- Offshore approved or rejected temporary applications - destroy 2 years after the recommended period of temporary entry has expired or the rejected determined.