

Introduction | Review by the
Secretary

REVIEW BY THE SECRETARY

The key role of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) is to manage and provide advice on migration and humanitarian policy, border control, Australian citizenship, multicultural affairs, settlement services and Indigenous affairs. The department's Indigenous responsibilities will change very substantially from 1 July 2004.

MIGRATION PROGRAM

The Migration Program continued the trend in recent years of strong growth and a focus on matching skilled migration outcomes with the expressed population and skill needs of each state/territory/region. The final outcome of 114,360 visa grants was the highest in over a decade, contributing to the objectives of:

- developing a strong skill base for Australia (62 per cent of the program was visaed on the basis of skills)
- harvesting the opportunities provided by Australia's export industry. Some 15,000 overseas students holding an Australian qualification were granted a visa within the Skill Stream in 2003-04. This was an increase of approximately 30 per cent on the previous year and comprised 55 per cent of all principal applicant grants in the Skill Stream
- expanding the opportunities for parent migration, with some 4,930 visas being granted to parents, a significant increase on the 500 in the previous year.

A total of 12,730 visas were issued under state-specific and regional migration mechanisms. This was an increase of 60 per cent and some 18 per cent of the total

Skill Stream. This outcome reflects the impact of a range of initiatives to support state and territory governments to more directly influence the number and skill level of migrants settling in their jurisdictions.

In an interview on ABC Radio, Professor Sue Richardson recently said that:

"I think Australia's actually got an excellent migration program, evaluated in terms of its value to Australia's residents ... Australia has been doing better than any other migrant country ... whereas the OECD countries are worried that their migrant experiences are getting worse, in Australia it seems to be getting better."

HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM

The department continued to focus effort on improving the operation of the humanitarian resettlement program. In 2003-04, 13,851 humanitarian visas were granted under the offshore and onshore components of the Humanitarian Program. This exceeded the 12,891 available places by 559 refugee grants and 401 Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) grants, with these places being brought forward from the 2004-05 program. Key source regions were Africa, the Middle East and South West Asia.

SUPPORTING TOURISM AND INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Departmental arrangements continued to contribute to sustainable growth in Australia's tourism and international education industries. Tourism grew strongly, recovering from the many setbacks of the previous year. A total of 3,461,841 visitor visas were granted, an increase of 7.1 per cent. A record 98.4 per cent of visa

applications were approved, up from 98.05 per cent in 2002-03. At the same time, the non-return rate continued to decline to the historically low rate of 1.47 per cent compared to the previous three years of 1.6 per cent, 1.83 per cent and 2.15 per cent. The department, through its international events coordination network – which provides a coordinated and streamlined visa delivery service – supported some 406 international events, double the number of events the previous year.

New working holiday agreements were signed with Italy and France, bringing the total number of agreement countries to 16. A record 93,845 working holiday visas were granted during the year, an increase of 5.7 per cent. Working holiday makers not only support the tourism industry, but as a young, mobile and adventurous cohort of travellers, work and live in many parts of regional Australia where they experience hospitality and make a real contribution to the economy and social life.

There was a growth of 5.6 per cent (171,618) in overseas student visa grants. This continued the trend of past years but can also in part be attributed to the number of students in low-risk countries who are increasingly taking advantage of the new electronic lodgement system for visa applications. Most sectors of the overseas student program recorded positive growth trends. Of note were the 40 per cent increase in the Non-Award sector and an increase in Study Abroad students.

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

The department worked to strengthen the enabling environment for international cooperation on migration issues. The threat of terrorism increased the urgency and priority of this work.

An active and integrated program of bilateral, regional and multilateral engagement promoted ways to achieve more managed migration, reduce irregular movement, combat people smuggling and trafficking, and strengthen the system of international protection.

The department managed a program of capacity building to enable selected countries to strengthen border and visa systems and to detect and prevent illegal movements. It pursued more effective information sharing, as well as cooperation to verify the identity and nationality of illegal migrants, and to return people with no right to remain in Australia.

Within the region the department worked closely with other government agencies to foster an integrated response to managing people movement and to facilitate business mobility. The department initiated and participated actively in activities flowing from the Regional Ministerial Conference on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime (Bali Process), co-chaired by Australia and Indonesia. The department continued to lead Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) initiatives to improve immigration processing, passenger safety and border security. This complemented its other work to support whole-of-government negotiation objectives in relation to trade in services.

The department continued to promote comprehensive and innovative approaches to the management of refugee and asylum seeker flows. It sought the development of appropriate guidance for UNHCR engagement in the return of failed asylum seekers and the development of comprehensive responses to refugee caseloads.

BORDER SECURITY AND COMPLIANCE

The department continued its role in chairing the high-level people People Smuggling Task Force, which is a whole-of-government group looking at people-smuggling issues.

Eighty-two persons sought unauthorised entry by boat to Australia; 53 of whom landed within the migration zone. This compares with none in 2002-03 and over 4,000 per year in 1999-2000 and 2000-01.

There were around 18.6 million air and sea passenger and 1.1 million aircrew arrivals and departures, compared with around 16.6 million passenger and 1 million aircrew arrivals and departures in 2002-03.

A key element of Australia's secure and streamlined border processing is the Advance Passenger Processing (APP) system used to check passengers before they travel to Australia. By June 2004 the department had achieved APP coverage of some 96 per cent of all air arrivals, which included transit passengers for the first time.

In another first, APP was extended to the maritime industry, with all crew and passengers arriving on scheduled passenger cruise liners processed under APP. Since November 2003, sea crew have also been required to carry a passport and an identity document. This will assist the future extension of the APP system to cargo vessels.

The department continued to strive for improved border management systems in the Asia-Pacific region with the promotion of Advance Passenger Information (API) systems. Measures such as these help strengthen regional border control processes, which in turn enhance Australia's capacity to manage its own borders effectively.

The Migration Legislation Amendment (Identification and Authentication) Bill 2003 was passed by the Senate on 10 February 2004.

This Bill amends the *Migration Act 1958* to provide clearer and more comprehensive powers for the collection of identity information.

A number of measures were taken to help fight sex trafficking. A new visa regime was introduced to facilitate sex trafficking prosecutions and to provide for stay in Australia where there has been cooperation and there is a continuing need for protection. A compliance officer was placed in Thailand as a regional resource to focus on sex trafficking issues. General awareness training for the department and the Australian Federal Police (AFP) was conducted and AFP/DIMIA and inter-agency protocols for victim support initiatives were refined.

A Migration Agents Task Force was established to spearhead efforts against agents committing offences under the *Migration Act 1958*. The Task Force operates closely with other law enforcement agencies as well as compliance staff from the Australian Tax Office and Centrelink.

In February 2004 a national Immigration Dob-in Line was set up to enable the community to report suspected unlawful non-citizens, illegal workers and people breaching immigration laws.

DETENTION

The department continued to pursue formal arrangements with state authorities on education, policing, corrections, child welfare and health issues.

The year saw a marked reduction in the number of women and children held in detention and significant practical improvements to the arrangements for children.

Alternative detention options that helped reduce the number of children in detention included the establishment of further Residential Housing Projects (RHPs) for women and children and foster care arrangements for children with state child welfare authorities. In addition to this, bridging visas were granted to enable community care placements for children with special needs.

The majority of children in detention by 30 June 2004 had come to the attention of the department as the result of compliance activities; for example, their parents are visa overstayers. These children are normally in immigration detention only for a short period of time. They are detained only as a last resort where, for example, their parents are not cooperating with efforts to remove them from Australia.

The department made substantial submissions to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention, which was tabled in Parliament on 13 May 2004.

GSL (Australia) Pty Ltd (Group 4 Falck Global Solutions) replaced Australasian Correctional Management as the detention services provider at all immigration detention facilities. A greater level of reporting and clarity of service delivery expectations from the detention services provider was built into the contract with GSL.

SETTLEMENT

The budget delivered a major increase in funding for settlement services. Approximately \$268 million over four years, commencing in 2004-05, will be made available to DIMIA and other Commonwealth agencies, including some \$100 million to improve settlement services. These funds will deliver an increase in the existing array of settlement services and meet the demand for settlement services that will be generated by the larger humanitarian intake.

DIMIA programs that will benefit from these funds include: the Special Humanitarian Program; the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy; and the Special Preparatory Program of the Adult Migrant English Program.

CITIZENSHIP

The department continued to implement the Australian Citizenship Promotion Campaign. The twin objectives of the campaign were to promote the acquisition of Australian citizenship among eligible non-citizens and to enhance the profile, value and significance of Australian citizenship.

All indicators point to the continuing success of the campaign, with 91,233 people being granted citizenship. This was an increase of 9.8 per cent compared to 2002-03. There was a 396 per cent increase in media coverage of Australian Citizenship Day on 17 September 2003, compared to 2002. During the campaign period, 1 August to 30 September 2003, there was a 21 per cent increase in applications for citizenship compared to 2002.

MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

The department continued to promote the benefits of cultural diversity and community

harmony at a time of ongoing international tensions. It fostered numerous links within the broader community, with business and across governments. These links aimed to enhance community harmony and the sense of inclusiveness that is an essential element of Australia's multicultural society.

Some of the strongest media favourability ratings ever recorded for Harmony Day were reported in 2004. Governments, community organisations, schools and other educational institutions and the 19 Harmony Day partners sponsored a record number of events. Independent media monitoring advice suggests that Harmony Day has come to symbolise Australia's cultural diversity, inclusiveness and successful inter-community relations.

The department continued its work with private sector partners and stakeholders to promote the economic and business benefits of Australia's cultural diversity. This culminated in the launch of the "Productive Diversity National Business Consultation Report" and the "Diversity Training Kit" in March 2004. This work served to promote the different ways businesses can invest in diversity to their competitive advantage and manage diversity effectively.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

On 15 April the government announced substantial changes to Indigenous affairs arrangements, including the way in which services would be delivered to Indigenous Australians from 1 July 2004.

The changes included the proposed abolition of ATSIC, new arrangements for ministerial oversight of Indigenous affairs, the dispersal of programs to a range of departments and the establishment of a new Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination within the department.

IMPROVING OUR BUSINESS PROCESSES

The department continued to examine ways of improving the way it does its business. A review of DIMIA's business processes and costs demonstrated that we are an efficient organisation which continues to strive for improvement.

The progressive repatriation to Australia of much of our migration and temporary entry work under the department's Global Working arrangements continued to realise customer service, efficiency and integrity gains. The department continued to enhance its electronic visa lodgement processes, with the aim of facilitating travel into and out of Australia for genuine travellers, overseas students and other temporary entrants.

Refurbishment of detention centres continued to facilitate better management of the centres. The department implemented an extensive contract-monitoring regime for the new detention centre management contract.

IT remained an important tool in supporting effective delivery across DIMIA business, as well as improving integrity, client services and global working. Investment in IT will be a priority in the next few years. In June 2004, Cluster 3 (a group of Australian Government Agencies receiving IT infrastructure and telecommunications services from Computer Sciences Corporation Limited and Optus) signed a two-year extension with Optus valued at around \$51 million for 2005-07. The Cluster will receive a significant reduction in pricing per annum under the extension arrangement whilst continuing to receive quality and flexibility in telecommunication services.

THE YEAR AHEAD

A new Skilled Independent Regional visa will commence on 1 July 2004 to support the entry of skilled migrants committed to living and working in regional Australia. A Regional Outreach Officer network will be established in all states and territories to promote opportunities to sponsor skilled migrants.

As part of the department's Global Working strategy, we propose to trial a new electronic lodgement facility for students in China, India and Thailand as well as for visitors from EU accession countries. Onshore eVisa student take-up rates will be monitored to gauge the success of the introduction of automatic student visa grants.

A focus in 2004-05 will be on major issues of identity. The department will look, along with other border agencies, at enhancing border detection technologies and will also examine measures to better identify applicants applying for visas in Australia or those held in detention. This will build upon significant developments in the use of biometrics at the border during 2003-04.

Helping those in the community who offer employment or services to identify the rights of non-citizens will be another major focus. The Entitlements Verification Online System is being piloted and provides the basis for people to use the Internet to check the visa class and conditions of those seeking employment or services.

2004-05 will also see greater use of data verification and data sharing to identify and locate those living or working in Australia unlawfully or unlawfully accessing services. In particular, greater data sharing with the Australian Tax Office and Centrelink will be pursued.

The Migration Agents Taskforce's investigations should also see a number of its investigations culminate in prosecutions and visa cancellations.

The department's maritime presence will be significantly increased, with nearly 20 additional specialist staff at the border and an additional eight staff to assist with maritime policy, training and referral. These maritime staff will, in particular, be directed at helping the Australian Customs Service increase the scrutiny of fraudulent documentation and identity. They will enhance the capability of seaport officers to conduct profiling of travellers and to deliver national seaport training.

The number of places in the Humanitarian Program will increase to 13,000 and within it the Refugee category will increase from its current level of 4,000 places to 6,000 places – an increase of 50 per cent. The 2004-05 Refugee allocation of 6,000 is the highest Refugee component of the Humanitarian Program since 1985-86.

Changes in the Humanitarian Program will see an increase of up to 2,000 in the number of refugee entrants eligible for Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) services. SHP entrants will also be able to access a wider range of IHSS services and a range of new initiatives will provide additional settlement support to humanitarian entrants.

We will also expand the number of regional and rural locations where humanitarian entrants are settled.

The department will improve the efficiency and amenity of existing detention centres in Sydney (Villawood Immigration Detention Centre) and Melbourne (Maribyrnong

Detention Centre). The department will continue to pursue community-based alternative detention arrangements with community groups and non-government organisations.

As part of the whole-of-government approach to Indigenous affairs, 22 Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) will be established in rural and remote locations and will be headed up by a DIMIA ICC manager. Staff from a number of APS agencies will work together in the ICCs and with local communities to deliver programs to Indigenous communities. The OIPC will also have offices in each capital city. The OIPC will provide the government with policy advice, coordinate Indigenous policy development and service delivery across the government, oversee relations with state and territory governments on Indigenous issues, monitor the performance of mainstream agencies, and manage a number of small programs.

Finally, I pay tribute to the dedication and professionalism of my colleagues in DIMIA. The diversity of languages, culture, background and skills which they bring to the organisation is an invaluable resource, as are their professionalism and commitment. These qualities have been, and will continue to be, directed to serving successive governments and, through them, the people of Australia.