

**OPENING STATEMENT  
ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES, FEBRUARY 2006**

**ANDREW METCALFE  
SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND  
MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS**

I would like to take the opportunity today to bring the Committee up to date on progress the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs has made in implementing the responses to the Palmer and Comrie Reports and our broader reform and improvement agenda.

When we last appeared before this Committee, I provided you with an overview of the implementation plan to achieve the three key objectives identified as necessary to respond effectively to the criticism that had been directed towards the Department and its operations. To remind you briefly, in order to meet the expectations of the Government, the Parliament and the wider community, we believe that DIMA must:

- be an open and accountable organisation;
- deal fairly and reasonably with clients; and
- have staff that are well trained and supported.

The Department has been conscientious in acknowledging recent mistakes. With the Minister's very strong support and that of the wider public sector, we have developed a strong framework to respond and to put in place those changes which are clearly necessary to achieve our three objectives.

Much has been said about the Department's culture and aspects of it have been subject to deserved criticism. Of course, in any large organisation, it is unrealistic to talk of one culture. Mr Palmer and Mr Comrie both had concerns that certain areas of the Department had an assumption-based, unquestioning culture, that led to the unfortunate outcomes in the Cornelia Rau and Vivian Alvarez cases. That should not detract from the reality that elsewhere in the Department, there is generally an exceptional culture of great commitment and service delivery, which acts on the basis of known facts and is committed to excellence.

I have stressed to staff on many occasions, and will continue to stress, the requirement that all DIMA officers act fairly, reasonably and lawfully. I have asked them to be vigilant and to quickly escalate any issues of concern to senior levels so that they can be dealt with in a timely and

appropriate way. Underpinning all of this are our three objectives and a strong positive view that people *are* our business.

Much has been done since the Government committed \$231 million in October last year and over the next few minutes I would like to update you on our activities and seek agreement to table and have incorporated in Hansard a more detailed account of that progress.

### **Being more open and accountable**

Since the Palmer and Comrie Reports, the Minister has twice directly and personally addressed all DIMA staff on the Government's expectations of the reform agenda. She continues to encourage staff to share ideas for change and improvement.

I have continued my practice of communicating twice weekly with all staff in the Department and delivering keynote addresses, updating staff on current issues and achievements and seeking their input and ideas. I have travelled to all of our capital city offices in Australia and a number of our overseas posts to discuss the reform agenda and hear first hand the impact it is having on our state and territory and overseas operations.

We have continued to engage with our clients, critics and other organisations, particularly those who have a role in scrutinising the activities of the Department. We have very constructive relationships with the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office and the Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner and their feedback is highly valued. A privacy training strategy has been developed and training has commenced.

The restructure of our National Office is complete and new and stronger governance arrangements are in place. A whole range of appointments have been made to Senior Executive Service and State Director positions. I am particularly pleased that the new Values and Standards Committee is up and running. With its three external members (from the Ombudsman's Office, the Australian Public Service Commission and the community), it is well placed to ensure the Department is meeting community expectations. An expanded Audit and Evaluation Committee, with an external chair, is providing rigorous oversight of the enhanced internal audit programme.

For the first time in many years, there has been a comprehensive staff survey to assess the views of staff and to provide a benchmark for monitoring change. The report will be available shortly and I and the

Department's executive will be taking a strong personal interest in developing the responses to staff ideas and concerns.

### **Being more fair and reasonable with clients**

Improving client service must be a key focus for our efforts. Client satisfaction surveys and Value Creation Workshops, where DIMA staff must actively listen to the views and concerns of clients, will be conducted in the early part of this year. These will allow us to better understand the differences between client groups and their needs and will allow us to respond to systemic concerns that clients raise. DIMA's National Office in Canberra is a long way from the service counters where we interact with our clients. I have therefore also asked all of the senior executives in DIMA to spend some time in operational or service delivery parts of the Department in the first half of this year to get first-hand experience in client service.

The draft Client Service Charter released last year for public comment is being finalised at the moment to take account of the largely positive feedback. It will set out clearly the expectations for both clients and DIMA staff. Better arrangements are being put in place for handling client feedback and providing clients with choice about how they connect with the Department. Every month I recognise a member of staff or team through the Secretary's Award for Service Excellence (ASCE) on the basis of positive client feedback.

We have further built on improvements made last year to health service delivery for immigration detainees, in particular at Baxter with other centres to progressively follow over coming months. All detainees are screened for mental health problems using two internationally recognised screening tools on admission and they are routinely and regularly screened after that. Mental health plans are developed for any detainee who screens positive. We are currently finalising the membership of the Detention Health Advisory Group which will provide expert professional health advice on health service standards and research projects to improve health outcomes for people detained.

Physical improvements at Baxter and other immigration detention centres have been made, well beyond the recommendations made in the Palmer Report. The Baxter Plan, launched by the Minister in September 2005, included development of the Interim Visitor Processing Centre, which opened in December, and sporting facilities. Self-catering options have improved and further design options to open up the closed compounds, develop a new primary health care facility and a new central cafeteria have been developed.

Considerable progress has been made in developing a new, holistic, case management framework for the case management of clients with exceptional circumstances. In conjunction with case management, DIMA is developing a “community care” pilot in Sydney and Melbourne to trial and evaluate a model where case management is supported by access to additional community services to vulnerable clients. Appropriately skilled and qualified case management staff have been recruited, trained and are now working in our Sydney and Melbourne Offices.

Our compliance activities have been properly criticised and will continue to be criticised in those cases which come to light where people have been improperly determined to be unlawful and detained. Clearly, DIMA officers exercise extraordinary powers and we have to be extraordinarily careful in our decision-making where the outcome can be the deprivation of liberty. We are making committed efforts to ensure decisions to detain are only made where there is no realistic alternative, that they are lawfully and fairly based, and that they are subject to ongoing review. We will continue to place a strong focus on training for staff in these operational roles, and in ensuring there are strong accountability mechanisms in place. This is especially the case where we are faced with people who are not easily identified, either because they do not wish to cooperate, have mental health issues or for other reasons. These difficulties do not release us from our obligation to make each decision on the basis of law and the facts and to review those decisions regularly.

### **Having well trained and supported staff**

Enhanced training for staff is a centrepiece of the reform agenda for DIMA. Plans for the new College of Immigration, Border Security and Compliance are on track to commence training in mid-2006. In the meantime, specialist technical training is being provided, addressing areas such as making decisions on the basis of “reasonable suspicion”, using all available methods to identify people, issuing search warrants and case management. These courses will ultimately become part of the College curriculum.

Enhanced training in ICSE, DIMA’s main processing system, was rolled out in November and December last year and further modules in this e-learning programme are being delivered in 2006.

Leadership, values, standards and management skills were also areas of concern identified by both Palmer and Comrie and a new National Training Manager was appointed in early December to develop and lead the new department-wide training programmes in these areas. The

Executive Leadership Programme commenced delivery in September last year. All DIMA executive level staff will undertake this course. A development programme for lower-level managers, a fundamentals of leadership programme and enhanced induction training are all being delivered to staff.

The significant systems issues identified by Palmer and Comrie are being addressed. Independent reviews of DIMA's business information needs, systems governance, the IT platform and records management arrangements have been finalised and their recommendations are currently being considered.

Pilot projects to better support DIMA staff in the field have also been completed, including using Blackberry technology to connect remotely to the ICSE system and trialling a field office. These pilots have shown acceptable results and will be considered for further development.

### **Next steps**

2006 will be a year in which DIMA continues to build on the reforms introduced last year and implements many of the projects commenced as a response to the Palmer and Comrie Reports. It is, if you like, the second chapter of this particular story and I will be reporting through the Minister to the Parliament later this year on our progress.

Our reform agenda is very, very important. But our agenda in relation to achieving our migration and settlement, multiculturalism, community harmony and citizenship objectives do not take a back seat.

Like any large public organisation, we will continue to face challenges. As you know, we are administering large and complex migration and refugee programmes. We are working with Customs and other agencies to effectively manage the movement of people. To give you a sense of scale, in addition to the 43 per cent of Australians who were either born overseas or had at least one parent born overseas, Australia is host to very large numbers of temporary entrants – in December 2005, there were around three quarters of a million temporary entrants present in the country. In the ten minutes or so that I have been speaking, DIMA has considered and granted around 90 temporary and permanent migrant visas, including electronically. Around 550 people entered and left our country during those ten minutes, that is, almost one every second. Getting those decisions right every time is something that we regard as of the upmost importance.

I have said before that we have an ambitious reform agenda ahead of us. The DIMA executive and its staff are firmly committed to continuing the work we commenced in 2005.

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**ATTACHMENT  
PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTING THE PALMER PROGRAMME**

**100 day deliverables**

<b>Initiative</b>	<b>Status</b>
<i>Being more open and accountable</i>	
New National Office structure and appointments to key positions	Complete. Three new deputy secretaries and 43 new SES appointments provide strong leadership and accountability. The new structure has provided more people and new staff in areas most criticised by Palmer and Comrie.
National Communications Manager	Appointed and focusing on development of the national communications strategy.
Chief Internal Auditor	Appointed and focusing on delivery of the enhanced internal audit programme.
Chief Lawyer	Appointed.
Review of the detention services contract	Report finalised and recommendations being considered.
New structure and expanded membership of the Immigration Detention Advisory Group	Revised terms of reference have been agreed and expanded membership is being considered.
Detention Review Managers and the Detention Review Committee	DRMs are in place, reviewing all cases of persons taken into detention. The DRC has been restructured to better focus its operations.
New departmental governance arrangements	Established. The new Values and Standards Committee includes three external members and the enhanced Audit and Evaluation Committee has an external chair and external members.
Relationships with external scrutineers	Strong strategic relationships have been built with the Commonwealth Ombudsman, the Privacy Commissioner and the Australian Public Service Commissioner. Secretary and other executives continue high level engagement with organisations that have an interest in DIMA operations.
<i>Fairer and more reasonable dealings with clients</i>	
New Client Service Division	Established.
Client satisfaction surveys	Preliminary research is complete. Surveys will commence in March 2006.
Centralise client feedback mechanisms	The Global Feedback Unit has been established in the Melbourne Office – recording all feedback received via the Client Service feedback line, email and mail. Further enhancements are planned.
Integrated email enquiry management system	Implementation of the infrastructure is well underway with the system on track to be fully operational in April 2006. The new system will make it easier for clients to contact the Department.

Overseas call handling arrangements	The new London contact centre has been operational since November 2005. Expansion of the Ottawa centre is on track for completion in June 2006.
Single entry client search facility	The proof of concept was completed in December 2005 and results are currently being assessed.
Training in effective name searching methods	The instruction manual is complete and training will commence early in 2006.
Community care model	Consultations have been held within DIMA, with service delivery agencies and the community sector. The pilot is scheduled to commence shortly.
Case management	Work is well-advanced in developing the framework to manage clients with exceptional circumstances, including systems support. Skilled and qualified case managers have been recruited, trained and deployed to the Sydney and Melbourne offices, with further staff to be deployed in the remaining states over coming months.
National Identity Verification and Advice Section (NIVA)	NIVA has been expanded to better monitor, analyse and report on cases when they are first referred and to handle a wider range of referrals from across the Department.
Long term detention strategy	Proposals have been developed for consideration by the Government. In the meantime, improvements have been made to detention infrastructure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an interim visitor processing centre has been operational at Baxter since December 2005</li> <li>• new sporting facilities have been constructed at Baxter – a grassed, floodlit sports oval, with soccer and hockey pitches, a basketball hard court and a volleyball turf court.</li> <li>• partial opening up of the compounds at Baxter will commence shortly</li> <li>• razor wire has been removed from Villawood and other detention centres.</li> </ul>
Liaison with states and territories on detainee health issues	An MOU has been signed with the SA Department of Health.
Detainee management procedures at Baxter	New procedures have been finalised in line with Mr Palmer's recommendations.
Arrangements for detainee food services at Baxter	Improved arrangements are in place, including commercial sized gas barbecues to allow in-compound cooking.
Client service strategy and charter	The draft charter was released for public comment in September 2005. It is currently being finalised in light of this feedback and will be launched shortly.
24/7 hotline for police and consular inquiries regarding immigration status	The new Immigration Status Service will be up and running this month so law enforcement agencies, embassies, high commissions and consulates can check the immigration status of people at any time.
Long term detainee health services strategy	Improvements have already been introduced: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mental health screening of detainees, with those screening positive referred for development of a specific mental health plan</li> <li>• increased staff with psychiatric training</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a multidisciplinary health team at Baxter</li> <li>• arrangements for detainee access to private psychiatric facilities have been made in some states</li> </ul> <p>Further proposals have been developed for consideration by the Government.</p>
Advice on Muirhead standards at Baxter	An independent consultant was engaged to provide this advice and has reported with recommendations to the Department.
<i>Well trained and supported staff</i>	
New National Training Manager	Appointed and focusing on development of the national training strategy.
College of Immigration, Border Security and Compliance	Development work is well underway, with the College on track to commence delivery of training to new and existing staff in mid-2006.
Interim specialist training	<p>Being delivered to compliance staff in the key areas of “reasonable suspicion”, identity investigations, SREY case management and s251 search warrants.</p> <p>A training needs analysis has been completed for detention staff. A pilot mental health awareness training course was delivered at Villawood in December and pilot cross-cultural awareness training will be delivered early in 2006.</p> <p>A training package has been developed for police officers, detailing their role as “migration officers” under the Migration Act.</p>
Leadership and values training	The Executive Leadership Programme commenced in September 2005. All DIMA executive level staff will complete the course by mid-2007. The DIMA Development Programme for middle managers was piloted in 2005 and will commence again in 2006. Fundamentals of Leadership training and enhanced induction training are being delivered to staff across the Department.
Systems training	Enhanced training in ISCE (DIMA’s main processing system) commenced in November, with further modules in this e-learning initiative to commence in 2006.
Key Migration Series Instructions	Key instructions to assist compliance and detention officers in establishing identity and visa status have been published.
Compliance Coordination Helpdesk	The Helpdesk was established in January 2006 to provide better support to compliance staff.
Systems reviews	Independent reviews of DIMA’s information business needs, IT platforms and governance and records management arrangements have been completed and their recommendations are being used to develop a clear road map for our future IT directions.
Usability evaluation	This project tested the way systems are used in a variety of processing areas in DIMA.
Supporting DIMA staff working on field operations	ACT and Regions Office is trialling a mobile office for compliance field teams and the NSW Office has trialled a new portable wireless Blackberry device for use in the field to access client data.
Passport readers trial	The Perth Office trialled passport reader technology to examine whether data could be recorded with greater accuracy. Accuracy was improved and processes times were reduced, increasing DIMA’s ability to detect passport fraud.

Staff surveys	An all staff survey was conducted in December 2005.
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