



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs**

**DIMA-NGO Dialogue on Humanitarian Issues**  
**Sydney, 28 July 2006**

**Our agenda for continuing reform and improvement in the**  
**Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs**

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**Secretary, Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs**

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to speak to you today. My department and I value highly this twice-yearly dialogue with peak non-government organisations, which has now been going for some years.

This sort of gathering is very much in line with our firm commitment to be a more open and accountable organisation and it is perhaps a model that we could introduce for some other areas of the department's work.

At the outset, I wanted to reaffirm our strong commitment to the humanitarian programme and to effective protection processes.

Australia has a long and proud record in resettling refugees and others in need of humanitarian assistance, with around 13 000 people a year coming to Australia under our Humanitarian Programmes. But, as you know, this result is not achieved by DIMA alone – it is the result of close cooperation between Government, our international partners such as UNHCR and IOM, NGOs and volunteers as well as the broader Australian community.

Earlier today, you heard about developments in our humanitarian programme, global resettlement needs and international protection processes. Later this afternoon I note there will be presentations on current initiatives by the department to improve detention services and to develop a holistic case management service.

These developments are part of the department's broader reform and improvement agenda, which we are delivering while continuing to run our very large complex business.

But first I think it's always useful to look at the kind of organisation the department is. We are both a policy and programme agency as well as a significant service delivery organisation. Staff numbers are currently just over 6000 and we have a presence in every State and Territory as well as in some of the most remote parts of

**people** our business

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Australia. We deliver the government's Migration, Refugee, Humanitarian, Settlement, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs programmes.

About half of our DIMA staff work in the State and Territory network and more than 160 Australian based staff work with about 700 locally engaged staff in our overseas network in more than 60 countries.

In the financial year just ended, DIMA staff facilitated the migration to Australia of 142 930 people - against a programme planning figure for the year of 143 000. This was an excellent outcome, especially as it was the biggest programme for decades with a skill stream of almost 100 000 places – 20 000 more than in the previous year.

On a typical working day, our staff in Australia and around the world will:

- receive more than 12 000 visa applications – or more than 4.5 million a year;
- grant around 11 500 temporary visas and 500 permanent migrant visas, the latter including about 35 humanitarian visas;
- grant citizenship to around 375 people;
- handle nearly 7000 calls to our general and citizenship enquiry lines;
- meet around 560 clients face-to-face at scheduled interviews;
- process more than 60 000 people across the border at air and sea ports – or about one person per second; and
- provide accommodation, meals, activities, health care and other services to around 750 detainees.

The department holds a monopoly over the granting of permission for foreign nationals to enter and stay in Australia.

And every judgment and every decision made by our staff - and for that matter any advice they give – has the potential to cause significant and long-term impacts on the lives of people in any one of the above client groups.

Our current programme of reform and improvement is aimed at ensuring that we make well informed decisions based on the following strategic themes and objectives which are enunciated in The DIMA Plan, which I launched on 18 July:

- an open and accountable departmental culture
- fair and reasonable dealings with clients
- well trained and supported staff.

All of the reform work we have undertaken during my first year as Secretary of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs is inextricably linked to these strategic themes and our operational tagline – people our business.

I completed my first year as Secretary exactly 10 days ago.

When I took on the position, I did not do so with any intention of implementing change for the sake of change. Nor did I have some preconceived change blueprint in my backpocket.

But I did have a firm sense of the broad direction we needed to take.

I felt it was imperative that while we had to recognise the best of DIMA, we also had to acknowledge – and rectify – the grave mistakes that had been made in the past and which had been identified by Mr Mick Palmer in his inquiry into the Cornelia Rau case and the later Comrie Report on the Vivan Alvarez case.

Both reports expressed concerns that some areas of the department had an assumption-based, unquestioning culture; one that was overly self-protective and defensive; a culture largely unwilling to challenge organisational norms or to engage in genuine self-criticism or analysis.

The criticisms were not limited to the specifics of the individual cases. They focused more broadly on issues relating to leadership, governance, training, systems support, the relationship between policy development and implementation, client service delivery and records management.

The Government accepted the findings and recommendations in both reports and gave the department the resources and support to implement a substantial reform and improvement programme to address the problems that had been identified. Almost \$780 million has been committed in new and redirected funding.

We have made significant progress and a great deal has already changed. But clearly this is a longer-term process of reform that will continue for some time - we are, after all, in the process of re-engineering the way we do much of our work, and how we lead and govern the department.

Now I want to share with you some of our achievements.

Just 10 days ago, I launched The DIMA Plan as a living, dynamic document that provides clear direction and support for DIMA staff as they run what is a large and very complex business. Many of you would have already seen The Plan, which is now available on the department's website.

The Plan underpins our ongoing reform agenda by providing cohesion and giving staff and other stakeholders a common understanding of the things we need to do and how we need to do them.

A very large part of our reform agenda revolves around improving the client service focus in DIMA. This is enshrined in The DIMA Plan, which focuses on developing a service philosophy that integrates policy, programmes and delivery. Values and leadership behaviours are key planks of The Plan, underlining that we are working

together as a department to develop the kind of culture that delivers excellent client service as a matter of course.

One of the department's strategic priorities this year was to implement a Client Service Improvement Programme (CSIP), a key element of which is a departmental Client Service Charter. The CSIP was launched by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Senator Amanda Vanstone, on 2 June 2006.

The Client Service charter is an example of how we have listened and committed ourselves to a client-focused culture. We have summed up our responsibilities to our clients as the need to be fair and reasonable with them. It's all about treating people professionally and with respect.

Excellence in client service does not, of course, mean that clients will always achieve their desired outcomes – usually a visa to come to or stay in Australia. We also have a strong legislative framework, so we need to make decisions that are also lawful.

Another element of our new approach is to ensure that when there are exceptional circumstances in a particular case, this is recognised quickly because the standard processing approach – which works in the big majority of cases – may not lead to the most appropriate outcome in such cases.

We have therefore developed and put in place a new case management framework that is characterised by early identification of clients with exceptional circumstances so that we can manage their cases individually and proactively – in other words, an early intervention model of service delivery.

But you will be hearing much more about this later this afternoon.

One of the shortcomings identified by Mr Palmer in his report was our technical systems, which did not allow us to examine a client's entire history quickly. We accepted this as a serious shortcoming and I was gratified that the Government in May announced a major \$494.6 million information technology strategy, known as Systems for People, which will deliver a client-focused perspective through our systems.

Through this new system, we will have better data quality, a single view of our clients' dealings with us, less fragmentation of information, more flexible systems and better support for staff. Ultimately, this will mean better decision-making and better client service.

Soon after I was appointed Secretary of the department, I said that I wanted to see future planning being informed by comprehensive client surveys and feedback. One of the first things I did, and continue to do, was to engage with a wide range of external stakeholders. I seek their feedback on our activities and I continue to keep them updated on our progress and 'invite' them to judge whether DIMA is changing.

Since July last year, we have also made it easier for our direct clients to give us their feedback through our Global Feedback Unit, which receives, records and tracks feedback received via email, the telephone and normal mail.

From the very beginning of our development of the reform and improvement agenda for the department, I have placed a good deal of emphasis on ensuring that we have the right governance frameworks in place, as well as a strong implementation plan.

I have established an Executive Management Committee which meets weekly and comprises myself, my three Deputy Secretaries and four key division heads – in strategic policy, national communications and the Chief Lawyer.

The committee is supported by a number of other governance committees that have a key role in the change process, including an expanded Audit and Evaluation Committee and a recently established Values and Standards Committee.

I have also placed a high priority on implementation planning to make sure we achieve our objectives.

I want to also mention the efforts we have made to ensure that our staff are well trained and better equipped to undertake the challenges of the future. As Mr Palmer pointed out, DIMA officers have extraordinary powers under the Migration Act – including the power to deprive people of their liberty. Our officers must therefore be well trained, well supported and well led.

In addition to its commitment to systems improvement, the Government has also made a substantial contribution to the establishment of a College of Immigration and I'm very pleased to inform you that on 3 July the college started its first course - the Compliance Officer Pilot Training Programme. This course provides staff with knowledge and skills to undertake a range of compliance roles and to understand the environment within which DIMA compliance activities operate.

I hope that I have been able to at least give you something of the flavour of what has been happening in the department and what we see happening in the future.

For me it has been a challenging but rewarding period and I am pleased with the progress we have been able to make so far.

However, I have no illusions. There will be more criticism over coming months when the Commonwealth Ombudsman reports on more cases of detention where people have later been found to be 'not unlawful'.

And we still have a significant reform agenda ahead of us.

But I am confident that DIMA staff have the capacity and the commitment to deliver high quality outcomes for the Government and our clients.

Thank you