



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

**Keynote address to the
Policy Development, Implementation and Evaluation Forum**

**Mr Andrew Metcalfe
Secretary
Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

**Tonkin Corporation
Mantra on Northbourne, Canberra
23 March 2009**

Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen.

It's a pleasure to speak to you about policy development, implementation and evaluation from a public sector perspective.

For those managing public programs, I believe the questions we need to ask are:

- are we doing enough of each of policy development, implementation and evaluation?
- are we doing the right policy development, implementation and evaluation?
- and if resources are limited, as they clearly are in this time of global economic crisis, are we getting the balance right between each of these elements?

Critically, we need to make sure there is an evidence base available to support each of these stages and the evidence we gather is robust.

As a starting point, we tend to think of evaluation as providing the evidence that kicks off another round of policy development, decision-making and then implementation of those decisions, but there are subtler considerations.

In policy development, we need to consider evaluation results, but we also need to be mindful of government direction and stakeholder views. We often need to develop options which may fit within a broader framework suggested by the recommendations of an evaluation so there is some flexibility in decision-making.

In designing a program and its implementation, we need to be aware of best practice efficiencies provided by information technology and the capacity and resilience of our workforce to deliver the program. We should not be shy about seeking to bolster our evidence base through a performance audit to get an independent view on getting the best outcomes from available resources.

One of the issues we face in a rapidly evolving strategic and operational environment, is that the potency of evaluations and reviews can be significantly weakened by frequent policy changes, which make past evaluations less relevant.

people our business

6 Chan Street Belconnen ACT 2617

PO Box 25 BELCONNEN ACT 2616 • Telephone (02) 6264 1111 • Facsimile (02) 6225 6970 • Website: www.immi.gov.au

A further consideration relates to timing. The budget process in government often involves a review of programs and a re-justification of existing programs, so it can be prudent to time evaluations to feed into this review process.

Then again, our stakeholders may appreciate hearing about an evaluation at a major conference where they can take the time to hear a variety of perspectives on the matter.

As an example, in my department we are currently examining our resourcing levels to take into account lower demand for overseas temporary skilled workers from Australian industry and reductions in the permanent migration program flowing from the exceptional economic conditions we are experiencing.

I have accordingly commissioned two internal reviews which will support decision-making on the allocation of resources for next financial year and beyond. If there had been sufficient time, I would have used the results of the reviews to feed into the government's budget process, but instead the reviews will report by the end of May, still giving enough time to influence final internal budget allocations for next year.

With the global economic crisis starting to impact on the public sector and rapid responses being developed and implemented by governments around the world, we need to be mindful of how we might maintain the evidence base in this shifting environment. Money is being spent quickly by governments to provide an economic stimulus, and as public administrators we need as much as possible to target that spending appropriately and understand the impacts of that spending.

How that money affects the economy will be important in setting targets for future arrival numbers under our permanent and temporary migration programs. I've recently appointed a Chief Economist to provide the minister and myself with guidance on just these matters and to strengthen the economic evidence base for our planning and operations.

Before I move on, I should also mention the Proust review I commissioned last year. Many of you will be aware that since 2005 my department has been undergoing one of the largest business and cultural transformations the public sector has seen in its history. We are now four years into that transformation and I felt it was appropriate to benchmark our progress by commissioning an independent review from Elizabeth Proust, a well-known and well-respected expert in public and private sector administration. The review was very positive and was a valuable piece of evidence in confirming the department is much closer to our goal of being a high-performing, responsive and forward-looking organisation.

Last year, I established a Policy Innovation and Research Unit which reports directly to me and promotes a department-wide culture of evidence-based research to underpin policy settings and our forward thinking and planning.

They are also charged with promoting a culture of critical thinking and a debate of ideas across the organisation.

It is perhaps fair to say that my department has for many years had a culture of measuring outputs rather than outcomes, most notably in highlighting the number of visas we grant rather than measuring the impact of our programs on society.

We currently lack the evidence base in some areas to draw well-researched conclusions on outcomes and this is a key preoccupation of our new Policy Innovation and Research Unit.

That said, one of the clear benefits of our overall work is in helping to build the Australian nation by adding around seven million people since 1945. This growth and integration has been achieved with very little social disharmony and has provided very substantial employment and economic benefits.

The offshore humanitarian and settlement programs in DIAC

Today, I want to explore a number of the concepts mentioned above by discussing as a case study, the offshore Humanitarian and Settlement Programs administered within my own Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

One of the aspects of the work of my department I find particularly satisfying is that we have high levels of vertical integration within a number of our programs, by which I mean we are responsible for policy advising and implementation, program management and service delivery.

So for our Humanitarian Program, we advise the Executive Government on the number and source regions for program each year following extensive consultation with stakeholders. We identify refugees in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other international agencies, we offer pre-departure orientation and health support, and then when they arrive, we assist with settlement issues such as housing, income support, learning English, translating and interpreting and so on.

The fact that people we assist can tell us about their experiences, means we can get useful performance evidence at pretty much any point in their migration journey. There are also some quite direct linkages across the program to support our evidence base. For instance, if the government decides to increase the intake for a specific nationality in next year's Humanitarian Program, we know we will need more interpreters for that language when the new settlers arrive, and we may wish to identify settlement areas where there are arrivals from the same country who have formed an existing and supportive community.

As part of our evidence base, we also keep data on settlement patterns across the country. This helps us to keep track of any shifts in settlement, for example, new humanitarian communities that are establishing in regional areas, and target our settlement assistance to areas of greatest need.

Now I would like to tell you about Roselin and her family.

Roselin was 19 years old when she was granted a humanitarian visa to come to Australia and arrived in Goulburn in December 2007 with her father and step-mother.

In the past three years Goulburn has welcomed a number of ethnic Chin families from Burma, who had been living in refugee camps in India for some years.

The Chin have fled from Burma to neighbouring India to escape ongoing abuse and severe repression carried out by the Burmese army and government officials, including religious repression as many are Christians.

Roselin and her father, a Baptist pastor, escaped to Mizoram when she was a child. She spent several years in Mizoram and fortunately was able to continue her schooling. They then moved to Delhi for a further four years and were accepted to resettle in Australia.

Roselin is now resigned to the fact that she may never see her country of birth again.

Australia is now her home.

It's good news that she was appointed as a teacher's aide at Goulburn South Public School — a school with students from varied nationalities such as Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Burma, many of whom have recently settled in Goulburn after coming to Australia through our Humanitarian Program.

The school is proud of its specially tailored English as a Special Language program which helps students to bridge the education and language gap with the other students in the school.

As a teacher's aide Roselin was asked to help the children with their reading. As someone who had also made the difficult physical and emotional journey to settle in a new country, she could provide empathetic support to the children as they and their families faced the challenge of rebuilding their lives.

Since then, Roselin's family have moved to Melbourne to take up employment and study opportunities. Moves such as this are invariably a positive sign as they show the family has settled well in Australia and is confident enough to move from a supportive environment to a new location with broader opportunities.

I expect you might all agree with me that the courage and resilience of the refugees we resettle in Australia is inspiring. Many refugees have lost family members, they may have been tortured or suffered severe trauma and they have often had their employment, education and basic needs such as nutrition severely compromised over many years living in refugee camps or away from their home country.

It's important that we recognise the duty of care we owe to the people who come to Australia under our Humanitarian Program. This duty is of course not to entrench the disadvantage they have suffered but to encourage them to build a new and positive life by making the most of the world-class education, employment, entrepreneurial, healthcare and other opportunities and services that we have in this country.

I am delighted that at the whole-of-government level, the Australian Government has recently recognised the importance of including humanitarian arrivals and some migrants under the auspices of their agenda for advancing social inclusion.

And we shouldn't forget that as they settle into life in Australia, our humanitarian entrants add a vibrancy and diversity which invariably makes us richer and stronger as a society.

The scope of the challenge

The global population of concern to the UNHCR is more than 30 million people — equivalent to one and a half times the population of Australia.

The Humanitarian Program administered in my department goes well beyond our international obligations and reflects the desire of successive Australian governments to assist vulnerable people around the world who are in need of resettlement.

For example, Minister Evans recently announced a further increase in funding for UNHCR to support its important work in our region and globally.

At the time he said:

‘Australia will continue to resettle refugees from the region referred by UNHCR, to fund projects which provide assistance to displaced populations and to seek to provide alternatives to asylum seekers risking their lives by engaging people smugglers.’

Australia is one of around 10 countries operating a well established and successful resettlement program, and we consistently rank within the top three countries in terms of the number of persons resettled.

In 2007-08, 13 000 visas were granted under the Humanitarian Program, and this is typical of our annual intake over the past decade and more. Overall, my department has supported around 700 000 humanitarian and refugee entrants in its six decades of operation to find safety and freedom from persecution or oppression.

There is what we call an 'onshore' component of the program where we support people who are already in the country. Today, I would like to focus on the larger offshore component where we actually identify and bring people to Australia from other countries.

Approximately, four out of every five humanitarian visas granted were to applicants under the offshore component in 2007-08.

In 2008-09, the planning target for the Humanitarian Program has increased to 13 500 places, with a one-off increase of 500 places to assist people affected by the conflict in Iraq. In addition, we also have a special program for those Iraqis that have supported recent Australian activities there.

The offshore component of the program for this year will be split evenly between refugees from the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Under the Refugee category of our Humanitarian Program we assist people who are subject to persecution in their home country.

Of the Refugee component, more than 800 visas were granted last year under our Woman at Risk category to recognise the special circumstances and vulnerabilities of some female applicants.

The other category is our Special Humanitarian Program where applicants must demonstrate some connection with Australia.

This year the government has increased the Refugee category to 6500 places and the Special Humanitarian category will be 7000.

Last year we considered around 50 000 applications under both these programs.

I must mention that applicants have to pass mandatory health and character checks, as with any permanent entrant to Australia.

These requirements are set by other Australian Government agencies on the best advice of the medical profession and our security agencies, and all entrants, including refugees, must meet these requirements.

In the case of humanitarian entrants, we do recognise their special circumstances, and can provide Pre-departure Medical Screening to ensure they are well enough to make the trip to Australia safely and then be linked to appropriate medical services when they arrive.

Pre-departure and settlement

The individual journey of a refugee to Australia is clearly a life-changing period for the person involved.

To be effective, the support to settle in Australia must be centred around the individual needs of the person making this enormous transition, and this support must unite across traditional boundaries of government, service providers and the community.

So at the Australian Government level, we see ourselves as part of a wider team, working towards a successful outcome for the entrant. We work closely with a range of partners including other levels of government and contracted service providers, as well as specialist and mainstream community organisations.

Settlement assistance begins with the provision of pre-embarkation information to new humanitarian entrants through the Australian Cultural Orientation Program known as AUSCO. By starting the process of acculturation as early as possible, this program enhances settlement prospects and creates more realistic expectations of life in Australia. The program also prepares people for what for most will be their first trip in an aeroplane.

A typical five-day AUSCO program covers many things we in this room may take for granted: basic facts about Australia, what the physical journey will involve, cultural adjustment, healthcare, education, finding a job, money management, housing and so on.

Nearly 26 000 people in more than 25 countries have benefited from AUSCO since it began in 2003.

We then reinforce the information provided through AUSCO on arrival in Australia, such as by giving African settlers a DVD available in a number of their own languages.

Our Settlement Grants Program funds service providers to help people to become self-reliant and participate equitably in Australian society as soon as possible after arrival.

This can be used for everything from information sessions and casework for newly arrived settlers, to sporting activities to foster links to mainstream sporting organisations, and projects with a highly practical focus such as driver education and homework clubs.

One of our most successful general activities to support all migrants is the Adult Migrant English Program or AMEP, which provided services to more than 50 000 migrants in 2007-08.

The basic assistance is 510 hours of tuition, with humanitarian entrants eligible for up to 400 additional hours depending on their circumstances.

Last year's federal Budget announced the Employment Pathways Program and Traineeships in English and Work Readiness, which are offered to AMEP participants. Gaining employment is one of the critical factors in successful settlement so this initiative provides extra English language support to those clients with the greatest need as well as offering vocationally oriented support.

In 2007-08, we also provided more than 126 000 free telephone and on-site interpreting services through our Translating and Interpreting Service.

Our Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy or IHSS is the major program which provides initial, intensive settlement assistance for humanitarian entrants in the first six months after arrival — nearly 10 000 people received assistance last financial year.

This assistance is tailored to the individual's needs and can include case coordination, information and referrals to other service providers and mainstream agencies, as well as meeting entrants on arrival, taking them to accommodation and meeting any emergency needs for medical attention or clothing and footwear

These services are contracted out. There are also many volunteers who work with service providers to support entrants and assist them to settle into their local community. The volunteer component is an essential element of supporting new humanitarian entrants as it often involves people of similar cultures or backgrounds.

There is also a range of other settlement assistance provided by other Commonwealth agencies, state, territory and local governments and community organisations.

This support often centres around finding employment or celebration of our cultural diversity through events such as Harmony Day which occurred on Saturday. There were 4250 scheduled Harmony Day events nationwide, offering important community recognition for people who have arrived as refugees and humanitarian entrants.

We also fund ongoing specialised support through state welfare authorities for over 500 children, known as unaccompanied humanitarian minors. These children are clearly very vulnerable in not having a parent to look after them.

The evidence base supporting the Humanitarian and Settlement Programs

The key decision-making process for the Humanitarian Program is the minister's annual submission through the budget process. A range of matters are canvassed in that submission and our minister will take further submissions to Cabinet as he feels they are warranted.

Once the planning target and the expected intake from each area of the world is known, the whole range of government agencies at all three levels of government, contractors, community groups and volunteers can make plans for that year's intake.

I have already mentioned the two key factors which bolster our evidence base to support the development of policy options and also support the implementation and administration of each year's program.

These are firstly, the fact we have much corporate knowledge built up as we have administered a substantial program for many years and secondly, we have the ability to collect evidence at every stage to fine-tune the next year's program to take account of changes in our environment or other matters.

So we fuse together our general knowledge and expertise in the hundreds of thousands of people who have settled successfully in the past, together with our knowledge and understanding of specific nationalities as they settle. We consult frequently with service providers and community groups on the needs of humanitarian entrants, including particular cultural groups.

Nevertheless, some needs become apparent only after arrival in Australia. So we have built in flexibility to address emerging issues through special grants or the like. There is a welcome awareness throughout the different levels of government, our service providers and community groups of the importance of settling humanitarian arrivals quickly and well.

For example, we have the National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security, set up some years ago. The Plan focuses on four key areas of education, employment, integration and security to foster connections and understanding between Muslim and non-Muslim Australians and reduce the social isolation experienced by many Australian Muslims.

We've also taken some fairly innovative initiatives to encourage specific groups to settle in regional areas through a consultative and collaborative approach that involves state and local government and key local stakeholders.

This has included pilot programs to resettle about 50 Burmese refugees in Mount Gambier in South Australia and 10 families from the Republic of Congo in Shepparton in Victoria.

Evaluations confirmed both settlements have been successful and this pilot process provides a positive platform for future settlement in both regions.

One of the benefits of using pilot programs is that they offer a way of managing risk by learning lessons without expending significant resources. A recent evaluation of a similar initiative to settle 12 Togolese family groups in Ballarat from 2007 found the experience has not been quite as positive as the other regional settlements, with a number of 'teething' problems encountered.

While the evaluation indicates Ballarat has potential as a site for further humanitarian settlement, a period of consolidation is required, in which the key lessons and recommendations of the evaluation report are considered and implemented.

It's a reminder that there are many factors which influence the success of a settlement process and that one size does not 'fit all'. We have to work responsively and in the best interests of the people to whom we owe such a strong duty of care. We are currently working towards implementing the recommendations in the report in concert with the other stakeholders. I hope very much that we can move forward cooperatively and effectively so we can continue further humanitarian settlement in the region.

A few years ago we consulted widely with interested parties on ways to improve settlement outcomes for humanitarian entrants.

One result was a publication called 'Empowering Refugees: A Good Practice Guide to Humanitarian Settlement'. This showcases 29 successful projects from around Australia in key areas such as health, education, employment, law and community harmony.

We have also introduced some fine-tuning of the program such as providing complex case support services for some recently arrived refugees, covering the rent and utility costs for the first four weeks after arrival and a one-off income support payment through Centrelink on arrival.

In the past decade or so, there have been a number of performance audit reports conducted by the Australian National Audit Office which have assisted us in refocussing or fine-tuning the delivery of these programs. These reports have also given assurance that our basic approach is sound to the parliament, media and taxpayers.

I should mention finally that because of the sensitive issues involved in our Humanitarian Program, we hold regular dialogues with NGOs, including one just concluded in Melbourne. It's important that we make sure we work with high levels of accountability and strong community support for this work.

In this regard, I am pleased the Refugee Council of Australia has acknowledged that whilst there is always room for improvement, they believe that Australia is a world leader in its approach to refugee resettlement...

'RCOA appreciates DIAC's support and its openness to receiving honest feedback from the community about the refugee and Humanitarian Program and government policies and practice which impact on refugee and humanitarian migrants.

This openness contributes significantly to building public confidence in the national refugee program.'

And I was pleased by the comments made by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres when he visited Australia a few weeks ago. During a visit to Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre in Sydney he said that:

'Australia has one of the best refugee resettlement programs in the world'.

Conclusion

There will always be challenges in resettling people who are experiencing oppression and are very vulnerable for a range of significant reasons. I hope it is clear that we have reduced many of the potential risks associated with our Humanitarian Program through a careful process of fine-tuning and refining our approach with each successive year's intake, as well as being responsive when unexpected challenges emerge, such as through the use of pilot programs and stakeholder engagement.

Evaluations have played a key role in this refinement process, both for informing policy development and designing and implementing the administration of each year's program.

And for our relatively high levels of refugee resettlement compared to other countries, we have had remarkably little discord or social unrest as a result.

It's important that I leave you with the understanding that the success of this Program is the work of many individuals, organisations and businesses in our community as well as the three levels of government, all working together with the needs of the client being paramount.

Having said that, I must say that the Humanitarian Program we administer is a source of great pride for many of my staff and for myself as secretary. It is wonderful to be using our skills and expertise in public administration to make such a practical and positive difference to the lives of very vulnerable people.

Thank you.