



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

*Improving program delivery and policy development
in the current environment*

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Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to be with you today. Before I begin, I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on today, the Ngunnawal people. I wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this region. I would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

As you may be aware, I have talked to a number of your colleagues on three separate occasions since late last year. Each time I noted that both of our departments share a long standing tradition and history of public service.

Your department was born out of necessity in April 1918 to deal with the needs of injured and sick veterans returning from World War I. My grandfather fought in World War I and was gravely injured at Hamel in France ninety-three years ago, in mid 1918. My father fought in Syria, Papua New Guinea and Borneo in World War II, and was badly affected by malaria and other illnesses. As a result my grandmother was, and my mother is a war widow and clients of your department over many decades.

My department was also born out of necessity, though much later in 1945. The creation of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship marked a turning point in the nation's history as we embraced migration in a bid to enrich and expand Australia. Last year we celebrated our 65th anniversary as a department—a proud history of nation building.

Our department's share similar characteristics in some of our clients, as like yours, some of ours are particularly vulnerable. Both of our departments have responded to the complex needs of these clients with a more tailored service delivery approach.

I understand that your department calls this a case coordination approach—we refer to a case management approach. Both are aimed at ensuring that the complex needs of our clients are managed carefully, appropriately, efficiently, and compassionately. As I noted last year, it is very apparent that we are both in the 'people' business.

Let me give you a sense of the scale and breadth of what my department does.

Our job as a department is to help build our modern Australian nation – we do that through managing the movement of people in and out of our country, and through the settlement of people here for our inclusive, yet diverse society.

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What began as a department with 24 officers – six in Canberra, six in Melbourne and 12 in London – has grown to a global organisation with more than 8000 people across 80 offices around the world. In the current financial year the department will administer a permanent migration program of 185 000, we will issue more than four million visas, facilitate at least 28 million crossings of the Australian border by passengers and crew, welcome 14 750 refugees and humanitarian entrants, and around 120 000 people who have migrated here will take the final step in their journey and join us as Australian citizens in the coming year – that is over 2000 new Australians every single week!

Since the establishment of my department 66 years ago, we have facilitated the migration of more than seven million people and the conferral of citizenship upon more than four million people. We have been extremely well-served by our migration programs. Our orderly and well-managed programs, week after week, bring doctors and nurses to regional areas, engineers and construction trades workers to new resource projects, IT workers to major financial centres, and help re-unite families.

Economically, our migration program has been, and continues to be, a backbone to many of our industries. But we are also a compassionate country, one that has a long tradition of accepting and resettling refugees. Since 1945 we have taken more than 700 000 refugees.

Our department is involved with our economy, our society, and our national security. We do this through providing policy advice to our government, and providing services to our millions of clients; either directly or indirectly.

In some way, the work of my department has directly touched over half of the population. For example, nearly one in four of the population was born overseas, and around two in four of our population was either born overseas or had a parent who was.

It could be argued that we have an impact on every Australian's life through our interest and work in Australia's future workforce needs, and our future population.

The importance of the immigration portfolio is evident in our statement of purpose- *Build Australia's future through the well-managed movement and settlement of people*. We have a key nation-building role that requires us to collaborate and share leadership with other portfolios. We play a critical role in the government's sustainable population and productivity agendas.

We have responsibility for key aspects of border security policy and operations, visa compliance, law enforcement functions and immigration detention.

We administer policy for migration and temporary visas; refugee and humanitarian entry; for settlement; Australian citizenship; and policies to enrich our multicultural society.

Many of the decisions we make are very sensitive. They relate to refugee applications, identity and character considerations for visa and citizenship applications, as well as matters of national security.

Our decisions, and indeed our programs, can be the subject of great public interest and also generate discussion in the Parliament, the media and in the community. On a daily basis you can read articles commenting on our business in some form or another—sometimes positively!

Despite this, when discussing these issues we should not lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with individual people—each of whom has hopes, needs and aspirations for themselves and their children.

By and large Australia does a great job in settling and integrating migrants, and reaping the additional benefits as the next generation moves into adulthood. Take for example one of Australia's most successful businessmen, Czech-born Frank Lowy, founder of the Westfield Group, whose family fled Europe to escape persecution during the second world war and eventually migrated to Australia. Frank got a job in a factory in Sydney and learned to speak English, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Or more recently the contribution made from persons who arrived by boat. For example the guest speaker at our Annual Address on Immigration and Citizenship this year, Mr Hieu Van Le AO, who arrived in Darwin as a Vietnamese 'boat person' in 1977.

Since arriving Hieu has had a long and distinguished career with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC), and has been the Patron or Honorary Member of a number of multicultural based organisations. These contributions have been recognised by being awarded an Order of Australia and also the Centenary of Federation Medal among other awards. In 2007 Hieu became the Lieutenant Governor of South Australia.

In Government we have seen the impact and contributions of migrants or refugees on Australia, and need only look at several members of Cabinet, including our Prime Minister.

Despite these success stories, it is important to note the complexity of managing Australia's immigration program. Change in one area can flow on to others, sometimes in ways that can be hard to predict.

Our departmental programs occur within a much broader environment. The movement of people internationally is a defining characteristic of today's world. It is characterised by diversity and complexity.

We are increasingly seeing people move due to a range of factors-including labour markets; political instability; the environment; demographics; technology; perceptions about the distribution of opportunities; and individual aspirations and capacities.

How we meet these wide-ranging challenges feeds public perceptions about immigration. Many academics and researchers in this field agree that it is not unreasonable to state that public confidence in the integrity of the immigration program is a prerequisite for its ultimate success and for maximising harmony in our multicultural society.

I note that the Scanlon Foundation's *Mapping social cohesion summary report* for 2011 has found that there is a general community negativity towards the arrivals of irregular maritime arrivals, or boats, whereas in comparison there is a very positive community attitude towards the admission of refugees who have been assessed overseas under our humanitarian program.

In essence, this research indicates that the Australian community is more comfortable with a program that selects its own caseload, rather than being driven by other factors that may be out of our control. I look forward to the release of the Scanlon Foundation's report which will be released tomorrow, and will detail findings of surveys undertaken on these issues.

Of course in managing our programs the visa system is the critical tool for controlling people movement into and out of Australia. Its evolution reflects many of the complex policy demands we face as a department.

Within this environment, client expectations are changing rapidly, and on a range of fronts the Australian Government is responding to the convergence of a range of strategic, demographic, economic, environmental, socio-cultural, societal and technological trends with extensive policy and service delivery reform strategies.

As the public sector, we must be flexible and innovative in order to meet the Government and the community's expectations in this regard. Our agencies need to ensure our business operating models, systems and processes are capable of meeting these challenges, while we place ourselves on a strong financial footing for the future.

Up until 2009, my department's business operating model had been largely unchanged for 65 years. It had a strong geographic focus, and was built on legacy systems and what had become expensive delivery channels. Over that time Australia had consistently been recognised by other countries as setting the standard in many areas of immigration policy and related service delivery; however it is essential that we always seek to improve our ability to respond to changing demands. And like you, as both a policy and service delivery agency, we face some specific challenges in doing so.

The way forward in responding to these challenges has involved a major transformation of our business operating model, building on many of the changes we have made over the last six years to embed a positive culture based on strong shared values of teamwork, service excellence, respect, openness and commitment.

There are three main foundations for what we call the department's 'transformation':

- a new enterprise architecture
- strategic changes, and
- enhancing our organisational capabilities.

Enterprise architecture and strategic changes

The implementation of these changes has involved an enormous effort by my department over the last 18 months, including the development and implementation of a simpler organisational structure with clearer lines of accountability—a vital step in our transformation.

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Our new structure is designed to better focus our core functions and better position us as a client service delivery organisation. We now consist of four groups, each led by a deputy secretary. These are:

- our Business Services Group, which support the rest of the organisation to undertake their business
- our Client Services Group, which focuses on the delivery of our programs
- our Immigration Detention Services Group, which given the increasing scope and responsibility associated with this work, focuses on managing this very difficult issue, and
- our Policy and Program Management Group, which focuses on the ongoing development and enhancement good government policy and programs.

The structure allows the groups to essentially manage their core business within a broader umbrella. For example, whereas in the past our policy and program management group also focussed on the delivery of these programs, this function is now focussed on by our Client Services Group. This does not mean that each group works in isolation—far from it. In fact as they now work more closely together, however the new structure allows each group to focus on what they do best and operate as effectively as they can within a continual improvement environment.

Organisational capabilities

To support our ongoing reforms, it is essential that we continue to focus on building upon and improving the organisation's capabilities. We have focussed very deliberately on structuring the department to best support our transformation, and also on employing the right people to enhance our capabilities.

In approaching our transformation, we took a realistic look at our department's capabilities and skill sets. We identified that while the department had good policy capability, we could do more to build upon this. I also observed that while our policy areas were very focussed on supporting the government to deliver its immediate and medium-term policy agenda, this often limited the department's ability to develop longer-term policy options to inform government decision-making.

This challenge is one that faces many departments, particularly those departments with a service delivery as well as a policy role. The immediate operational needs can often mean longer-term strategic analysis is delayed.

To address this I have established Principal Advisor policy positions. These principal advisors focus on areas such as migration, economics, citizenship, humanitarian and border strategies, as well as whole-of-portfolio approaches to issues such as the management of children.

I have also established a policy innovation, research and evaluation unit, with the specific aim of ensuring we build the capacity not only to create innovative policy, but also to evaluate the effects of these policies, and support our policy development with research. I have also established a division entirely dedicated to risk, fraud and integrity, which has begun to have a positive impact on the department.

On our business services side we have continued to focus on professionalising and standardising our business processes—such as information technology, legal services and learning and development. The aim of this focus is to drive efficiencies and provide better support and service to our staff.

We are continuing to build our capabilities in workforce planning and human resource management. We have implemented a Reconciliation Action Plan and a Workplace Diversity Plan, and are currently finalising a People Strategy Plan. These will better place the department to support our staff for future challenges.

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This brings me to our client services transformation strategy. The case for the transformation was urgent and compelling, with many forces reshaping the way government services are designed and delivered.

The transformation is positioning the department to be better prepared for emerging challenges, particularly with regard to integrity and security, and have in place adequate risk mitigation strategies. The multi-year strategy will deliver globally integrated and enhanced services to our clients, maintain and enhance the integrity of migration programs, and contribute to Australia's economic growth and prosperity.

A significant enabler for our transformation is new technology. The ever-increasing use of online service delivery allows government to engage people more directly than ever.

The new form of client engagement through social media provides a further layer of accountability for government service delivery, with new insights into the behaviour of clients, and informs decision making to underpin more timely evidence-based policy making.

We have made enormous progress in our Client Services Transformation Strategy.

Our new organisational architecture supports this. Significantly, this includes our move to a global operation structure for managing our major visa caseloads and client service activities. This includes thirteen global managers situated in various departmental offices across Australia, each responsible for the end-to-end accountability of a global business line.

When we looked at the challenges we were facing in creating a global operating model with consistent global services, it became obvious we had to move from a geographically-based model.

So we adopted a global operational structure for managing our major caseloads and put all our client service activities together, thereby improving and streamlining end-to-end management of our client operations. This structure is an important element in supporting our objective of providing consistency in decision making and client experience.

Our experience to date of the shift to a global operational structure has been positive. We have seen some real efficiencies—both for the bottom line as well as for improved client service delivery.

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The global manager positions are key leadership roles for ensuring a more integrated approach between policy development and service delivery. Similar to the DVA role of the national manager, the global manager in my department manages the delivery of a single business line, regardless of where that service is delivered.

The global manager structure has provided an immediate feedback loop at the intersection of policy and service delivery that ensures issues encountered in implementation are fed straight back into the policy cycle.

Our global managers are generally SES positions, often based in our state offices and are local state directors who retain responsibility for engaging with stakeholders and supporting staff at a local level. For example, our Global Manager, Skilled and Family visas is also our State Director for Queensland. Introducing the dual role of global manager and state director was an important recognition that while teams may work under ‘global’ lines, they were nonetheless part of a broader state-based network, separate to this ‘global’ line.

The transformation involves every aspect of the department's client service continuum, and has many benefits including:

- the provision of faster and more effective services
- improved consistency of decision making, information management, and greater integrity within our programs, and
- easier to use client products and interfaces.

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We have made considerable gains since beginning our transformation, and having bedded down a number of the organisational changes, we are now proceeding to harness our improved capabilities and move to enhance the strategic focus of our services and programs.

A transformation phase two so to speak.

This will involve us thinking strategically about our place as a significant revenue raising organisation for the government, and how we can better utilise this to assist firstly in streamlining the delivery of our services, secondly in improving our organisational capabilities, and lastly in influencing client behaviour to better serve the priorities of our programs and the government.

In developing such strategies we are thinking flexibly about the delivery of client service, and how we as an organisation can do things more efficiently, with better integrity.

For example, over coming years we are looking to move a large part of our visa application platform to an 'e' platform-broadly speaking this will cut down data entry by the department, be cheaper and quicker for visa processing, allow us to request more information to assist with better integrity outcomes, and mean that we are offering a world class system. In doing this there will, we hope, be significant cost savings and also revenue generation that we can channel into our service delivery to ensure ongoing improvement. It is a large and complex process, but one that is built upon our solid gains made through the transformation thus far.

To give further context to the far reaching nature of the transformation, I would like to discuss four major initiatives underpinning the strategy.

Firstly, there is the department's focus on service centres as a core client service delivery mechanism. This provides more efficient and effective service to the department's clients via phone and online channels. To support this, the department has appointed a Global Manager Client Service.

A **second** major initiative is the expansion of our service delivery partner network to provide a wider range of services in more locations, onshore and offshore, at a lower cost.

To support this, the department has fostered relationships with overseas immigration departments to develop an expanded service delivery partner network.

The **third** initiative I would like to discuss has been to focus on our *placement of work strategy*, including increasing the department's ability to receipt and allocate work electronically. This will give the department greater flexibility, and allow better utilisation of our operational network to manage the processing of visa applications globally, through fluctuations in demand.

Lastly, the department's eBusiness initiatives have expanded considerably and underpin a range of departmental initiatives, and a Global Manager eBusiness was appointed in May last year. The department has made considerable improvements to key eBusiness channels such as the eVisa application system, and our departmental website and other online self service systems. Further, the eBusiness strategy will considerably increase the rate of client self service and electronic lodgement over the next 12 to 24 months.

In fact, recently the department took a major step forward in our use of technology with the deployment of our Generic Visa Portal (GVP). This is the final component of our *Systems for People* program which began a few years ago, and will provide consistent work processes for visa processing globally, a more complete client search function, and will enable much more sophisticated risk criteria to be applied to our visa processing work.

While the new GVP technology platform will initially be used for processing subclass 457 visas, it is progressively being rolled out over the next few years to all visa classes and will ultimately replace our legacy IT systems.

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The transformation is a long-term strategy, but the early indications are that it is having a positive impact on the department's operations. Client attitudinal research that is regularly conducted by the department has consistently shown a high degree of client satisfaction from our services and importantly, the surveys have also shown an increasing preference by our clients to contact us using electronic channels, and to use our online application facilities. These positive results affirm the direction taken by the department, to build stronger migration and visa services.

So, in summary, I have talked to you today about how our departments are not dissimilar—we are both in the 'people' business, and we both face similar environmental pressures.

As both policy and service delivery agencies, the challenges we face can be complex.

One such challenge is the importance of remembering that people are central to our work, and people find themselves in a diverse range of often unpredictable circumstances. Our approach to client service, policy and programs must meet the broader need, but we must be flexible in our approach.

As service delivery agencies, we must meet the challenge of analysing and managing risks, to ensure the intention of our programs is achieved and fraudulent activity is detected or deterred.

Our programs and policies have real effects on people's lives. Therefore, engagement and collaboration with the community and our many stakeholders is vital.

Finally, we cannot forget that the staff in our respective departments are the key to meeting these challenges. They are also stakeholders in our business, and need to be engaged as drivers for effectiveness, through support, training and recognition for their work.

In closing I'd like to comment that as a department it is essential that we remain open to amending our strategies to take account of emerging and new challenges. However, I am confident that by building our capability, supporting our staff, taking advantage of technology and retaining this flexible approach we will be well equipped to respond to the many policy and service challenges which face us in the future.

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Thank you.