

## Department response to the Ombudsman's draft Report into Referred Immigration Cases: Data Issues

The department agrees with the recommendations of this report, and is already addressing them in its established program of reform. As part of its business transformation process, steps being taken to address the recommendations include the following:

- As discussed in responses to previous reports, the department has commenced implementation of its extensive information management environment - *Systems for People*. Major system enhancements that are being progressively released between now and 2010 will build the department's capacity to improve data management and quality. The requirement to map business rules as a part of the design process will aid the development of systems designed to capture accurate and relevant information.
- As part of its commitment to dealing fairly and reasonably with clients, DIAC has made a major commitment to strengthening staff competence in responsible management of client information. In addition to department-wide initiatives highlighted in other responses to recent Ombudsman reports (eg, the revision of the Recordkeeping Policy and Guidelines, and the distribution of a Managing Records booklet) further measures have been implemented to reinforce timely and accurate data recording among DIAC staff, including:
  - the current development of a departmental *Record Keeping Strategy*;
  - comprehensive Compliance Quality Assurance guidelines for compliance managers overseeing the information management practices of staff;
  - instructions for Compliance Officers ensuring the timeliness and quality of data recording; and
  - the departmental Secretary, on several occasions, reinforcing with all staff the importance of good record-keeping practices, and the serious outcomes for clients of poor record-keeping.
- DIAC also recognises that the rigorous and responsible checking and review of data is important, particularly in relation to the application of s189 of the *Migration Act 1958*. Revised procedural guidance will reinforce the need for compliance officers to retrieve and examine in detail all relevant files and information held on departmental databases, before planning compliance activities. Compliance officers are also required to check systems in the process of establishing reasonable suspicion while completing the Compliance Field Interview Form. The department's *s189 Training Package*, incorporating practical case examples and problem-solving, is regularly updated to better enable officers to understand the significance of thorough data checking in the context of forming and maintaining a reasonable suspicion. College of Immigration training also emphasises the importance of compliance officers accessing all available sources of information when making a decision to detain.
- The department is also continuously improving its data relationships with other key agencies. For example, DIAC's Central Processing Office receives daily notification of all review applications that are lodged with the Tribunals that day, so that departmental records can be promptly updated. Protocols have been negotiated with the Tribunals to improve timeframes for file and decision-record transfers. Arrangements have also been introduced for the Federal Court and Federal Magistrates Court to provide copies of all judicial review applications to the department daily, so that client records can be updated within a working day.
- The department's instruction - *Bridging Visa Overview* - has been revised to provide clear guidance on the continuation of bridging visas during court appeals. It also broadens the types of information that DIAC takes as evidence of a client's involvement in judicial proceedings. As a further measure, procedures are being revised to ensure that where a client indicates they are involved in judicial review, but there is no departmental record of this and the client has no documentation, the department will still contact the Courts to confirm whether an application has been received.
- In the past two years, the department's training strategy has focussed on strengthening training for compliance and detention officers. The department has considered the base level training needs of new staff more generally. As a result of this, for example, the department has recently strengthened the induction programme to include a core module of Record Keeping and Information Management.