

DIMA response to HREOC Report on Annual Visits to Immigration Detention Centres

“HREOC Summary of Observations Following the Inspection of Mainland Immigration Detention Facilities”

The department welcomes the HREOC report which provides positive feedback on detention service reforms established since the Palmer and Comrie reports. We note HREOC’s recommendations several of which are consistent with DIMA’s ongoing improvement programme.

It is very pleasing to note that HREOC has detected a positive change in attitude by both staff who manage or deliver client focused services at immigration detention centres (IDCs). The efforts by DIMA and detention service provider staff to deal fairly and reasonably with clients in an open and accountable manner have been recognised.

Improvements to the physical environment within IDCs - especially the recent renovations at the Maribyrnong IDC - and the establishments of the new Sydney Residential Housing Centre for low risk clients, have also been highlighted in the Report.

As part of the department’s on-going improvement programme, a number of additional initiatives have already commenced and will be fully implemented in 2007. These measures address several of HREOC’s recommendations and include:

- **A new method for determining placements for people in detention.**

A new risk-based method for determining where detainees are best accommodated is being developed and will be rolled out in mid 2007. Under the new model a greater range of options including immigration detention centres, residential housing centres, immigration transit accommodation centres (once established) and alternative detention arrangements in the community will be available. Placement decisions will also be reviewed regularly, taking into account a client’s individual circumstances and health professional advice.

- **Further enhancements to case management services**

All people taken into detention are being actively case managed from the commencement of their detention period. This initiative will assist DIMA to ensure people are held in immigration detention centres for the shortest practicable time and that durable immigration outcomes are obtained for clients - either the grant of a substantive visa or departure from Australia. As part of this initiative, Case Managers will work closely with clients and their representatives to resolve each client’s immigration status as quickly as possible and reduce the periods of time for which detention is necessary.

- **Improvements to health and mental services**

Significant improvements to the delivery of health and mental health services to IDCs have been made since the Palmer and Comrie reports. The department will continue to monitor the health and mental health care needs of clients accommodated at all immigration detention centres to ensure that models of health care and health resources reflect client needs. An independent review is to be undertaken by a mental health expert into the system for identifying and managing people who are at risk of suicide or self harm while in immigration detention. The review will examine the assessment tool and protocols for mitigating suicide and self harm risks at immigration detention centres.

- **DIMA's bridging visa review**

The department issues bridging visas to clients (protection visa applicants) consistent with the requirements of the *Migration Act 1958* and *Migration Regulations 1994*. An extensive review of the bridging visa regime has been completed following consultation with community groups and other interested parties. The results of the review are under consideration by the government.

- **Illegal Foreign Fishers post-apprehension review**

The department is conducting an extensive review of detention arrangements at the Northern Immigration Detention centre, as part of a "Whole of Government" post-apprehension review of illegal foreign fishers (IFFs). The review will examine alternative detention options for IFF juveniles (average age is 16 years) who are presently held in alternative detention, in motel accommodation, under supervision by the detention service provider. In Northern IDC, all IFF juveniles no longer visit their crew members in adult compounds and all voluntary visits are held in the visits area of the detention facility. DIMA is also implementing an expanded program of recreational and educational activities for both adult and minor IFFs in Darwin.

- **Other relevant client-focused initiatives.**

The following additional improvement programmes and reviews are to be progressed:

- a further expansion of recreational opportunities for detainees at all IDCs, including educational programs additional to English language classes;
- a policy review of access to legal and migration agent assistance arrangements for people held in immigration detention, and
- a review of the effectiveness and adequacy of the Purchasing Allowance Scheme (PAS) which currently provides clients with a mechanism to purchase incidentals items at IDCs.

DIMA is committed to the on-going improvement of accommodation, health and other services for people held in detention and to obtaining a durable immigration outcome as quickly as possible for all clients. We welcome further HREOC visits to immigration detention centres and other detention service accommodation as part of our on-going improvement programme.

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