



Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

The Administration of the Immigration and Citizenship Program

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Purpose of this background paper

1. This paper has been produced to help external stakeholders understand how the Department of Home Affairs administers Australia's Immigration and Citizenship Program, complementing existing publicly available sources. The paper outlines how the combined factors of **large scale growth in the movement of people across borders** and the **changing threat environment** over the past two decades have necessitated a shift in approach to the administration of the Immigration Program to ensure it continues to support Australia's security, economic and social cohesion objectives now and into the future.

Introduction

2. Immigration is central to our national story. From a population of around 7 million people after the Second World War, Australia has grown to a nation of more than 25 million people in 2019. The Immigration Program has played a core role in that nation building. The Immigration Program comprises Temporary visas, the Migration and Child Program, and the Humanitarian Program and is closely aligned with the Australian Citizenship Program.
3. Effective administration of the Immigration and Citizenship Program is central to maintaining Australia's sovereignty, economic prosperity, community safety and its place as one of the most peaceful, united and culturally diverse countries in the world. Our people-to-people links provide tremendous opportunities and benefits to Australia and help to shape the perception of Australia around the world.
4. Since the dismantling of the White Australia policy in the early 1970s, Australia's Immigration and Citizenship Program has been based around a universal, non-discriminatory visa system, which focuses on the contribution a person can make to Australia rather than their ethnicity, gender or religious beliefs. Australia enjoys high levels of social cohesion and broad public support for its Immigration Programs. This is in part based around confidence in well-managed non-discriminatory migration.
5. Administration of the Immigration and Citizenship Program involves dual, but equally important and complementary, objectives:
 - to facilitate the entry and stay of those who legitimately seek to visit, study, work (in roles that aren't able to be filled locally, or which would build our national capability and increase competitiveness) or migrate; and
 - to prevent entry or stay by those who disguise their true identity or intentions or otherwise pose a risk to the security or safety of our community, or to our national interest.
6. The systems, processes and capabilities required to achieve effective facilitation, counter threats and mitigate risk must be as dynamic as the changing global environment in which the Department of Home Affairs operates.

Responding to Australia's increased connection to the world and the movement of people

7. The department of state responsible for the administration of the Immigration and Citizenship Program—which has existed in various guises since 1945—has long had to manage volume growth as the number of people seeking to come to Australia has increased. Innovation and technology have become increasingly important for the Department to expand its capacity to process the large numbers of migrants and travellers to Australia and respond to increased public expectation of digital government service delivery.
8. In response to pressure to make international travel easier, in 1996 the Department introduced the Electronic Travel Authority (ETA) system. This system removed the need for paper application forms and visa labels, and allowed an electronically stored authority to immediately issue visas permitting entry to Australia for visitors from 33 eligible nationalities deemed to be 'lower risk'. This system collected very little information about applicants and relied on a watch-list of persons and travel documents of concern called the Movement Alert List (later Central Movement Alert List). Provided the individual had a valid passport from an eligible nationality, fell within pre-determined parameters and did not adversely match to the Movement Alert List, an ETA was automatically system-granted.
9. The risk environment has changed significantly since the ETA was introduced. While the ETA has been highly effective in facilitating high-volume low risk travel, the level of assurance it provides in relation to potential security threats needs to continue to be enhanced in response to the evolving threat environment.
10. Building upon previous enhancements to the ETA system, the 2017-18 Budget included funding of \$5.077 million over three years, for measures to further strengthen the integrity. Enhancements include deployment of advanced analytic capabilities and improved data capture.
11. Since that time, the Department has continued to innovate to enable greater and more facilitated client access to visa services. This has included rolling out service delivery partner (SDP) arrangements that provide assisted visa application lodgement services in many locations around the world. Currently, SDPs manage Australian Visa Application Centres in 99 locations across 55 countries, with biometrics collected in 76 locations across 45 countries. SDPs also perform administrative tasks on behalf of the Department. These arrangements have been a key driver of client service improvements and departmental business process efficiencies.
12. Over the last two years through the *Visa and Citizenship Operating Model 2020* program (an initiative under the *Blueprint for Home Affairs*) immigration and citizenship program management has been actively improved through increasing process standardisation, consistent procedural instructions and training, as well as the deployment of new systems and risk capability.
13. As part of this change program, the Department has expanded online visa and Australian citizenship application lodgement channels. Individuals and businesses can access services and tools that enable them to lodge, track, manage and pay for a wide range of visa and citizenship applications online. The Department has implemented a range of enhancements including automated reminders for clients, improved document upload, mobile device optimisation, verification of email addresses and improved processes for clients to identify the next actions required in the application process. More recent online applications have collected more information from applicants where needed, and have referenced expanded risk systems to support better risk assessment.
14. In 2017-18 the Department surveyed more than 35,000 clients around the world to understand the context in which they used the Home Affairs Portfolio website. In 2018-19, based on this

extensive user research, the Department redesigned, simplified, and split its internet presence into three new websites: homeaffairs.gov.au, immi.homeaffairs.gov.au and abf.gov.au. As at 30 June 2019, almost 10.2 million online accounts had been created, with 2018-19 seeing a 15 per cent increase in applications lodged through our digital front-door, ImmiAccount, compared to 2017-18.

15. A new appointment-only model, introduced for those clients who need to be seen by a departmental officer, has significantly reduced client wait times. For 2018-19, the proportion of calls answered by the Global Service Centre has increased significantly, leading to a 68 per cent reduction in abandoned calls and a 52 per cent reduction in call centre-related complaints compared to 2017-18.

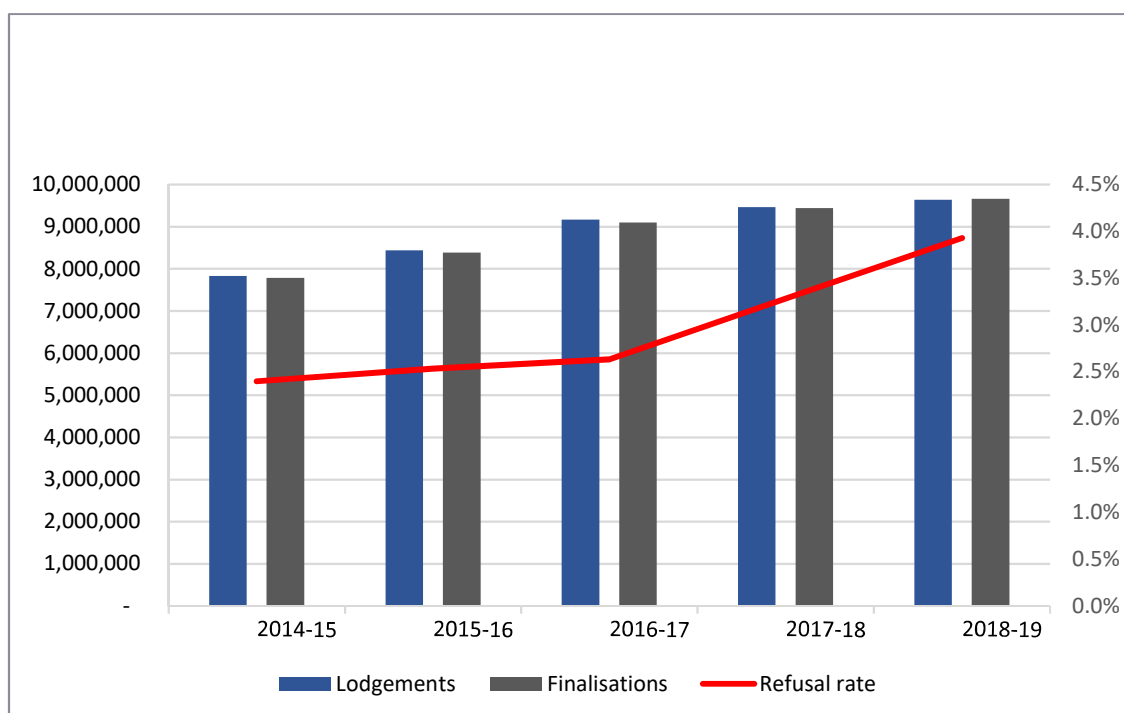
Net Overseas Migration

16. Net Overseas Migration (NOM) is the net gain or loss of population through immigration to Australia and emigration from Australia. NOM is based on an international travellers' duration of stay being in or out of Australia for 12 months or more over the 16 month period. 'International travellers' include visa holders, New Zealand citizens and Australian citizens. NOM varies continually and can be difficult to forecast accurately as it is affected by many complex domestic and international variables. Between 2008 and 2018, it has generally remained between 172,000 and 315,700.
17. NOM is forecast to increase in the short term due to continuing strong international student demand, the resumption of growth in demand for temporary skilled workers, and increasing arrivals from migrants that first travel to Australia on a visitor visa
18. However, this is only a temporary effect and 2019 is the peak. As set out in the budget papers, NOM is anticipated to be lower in 2020, and lower again in 2021 and 2022, mostly due to changes in student numbers.
 - The growth in student numbers is expected to peak in 2020, with falls in this cohort due to a slower growth rate and strong growth in the number of international students departing Australia.
19. More information about NOM is available on the Australian Bureau of Statistics website.

Managing growth

21. The total number of non-humanitarian visa applications lodged by people seeking to enter or remain in Australia has continued to grow. From 2014-15 to 2018-19, visa application lodgements in the Temporary and Permanent visa programs have increased by more than 1.8 million or 23.0 per cent. In 2018-19, the Department received more than 9.6 million visa applications ([Figure 1](#) refers).
22. All applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis in line with Government priorities and visa criteria. The Department strives to assess applications as efficiently and effectively as possible. Factors that impact the processing of applications include the volume of applications received, the quality and completeness of those applications, applicants' responsiveness to requests for information, and the complexity involved in assessing genuineness, character, health and security requirements.
23. Processing times have also been affected by the demand for certain visa categories and the number of places available if the category is capped. The *Migration Act 1958* (the Act) allows the Minister, by way of legislative instrument, to 'cap' or limit the number of certain visas that may be granted in a program year which ensures that the planning levels decided by the Government each year are not exceeded.

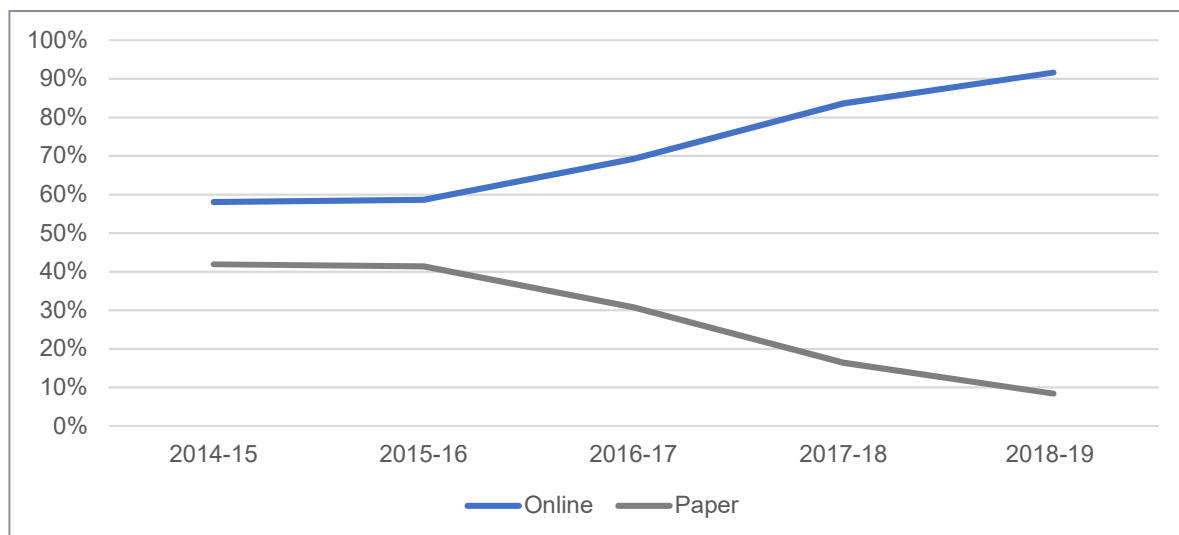
Figure 1: Total non-humanitarian visa program trends: 2014-15 to 2018-19



24. Heightened levels of risk and caseload fraud have been a feature across most programs and have led to an increase in refusal decisions ([Figure 1](#) refers). Since 2014-15 to 2018-19, the average refusal rate across the Temporary and Permanent visa programs has increased from 2.4 per cent to 3.9 per cent. This is an increase of 62 per cent.

25. This has involved a commensurate increase in work effort and time for the Department to appropriately assess and decide applications.
26. Despite this growth in volume and risk, the Department has achieved greater levels of productivity, finalising more applications each year by:
- encouraging the up-take of online lodgement (which reduces manual data entry and enables the Department to fully utilise processing capacity across its global delivery network);
 - continually improving systems and processes; and
 - increasingly consolidating visa processing into 'hubs' that are able to achieve improved efficiency, consistency and integrity outcomes.
27. As at 30 June 2019, more than 95 per cent of all visa applications were lodged electronically. The Temporary visa program has seen online lodgement increase from 58 per cent in 2014-15 to 92 per cent in 2018-19 ([Figure 2](#) refers) and the expansion of online lodgement to China and India, two of Australia's largest tourism and international education markets.

Figure 2: Online lodgement growth for the Temporary visa program 2014-15 to 2018-19



28. The sections that follow, provide additional information on some of the key visa programs and the Australian Citizenship Program administered by the Department.

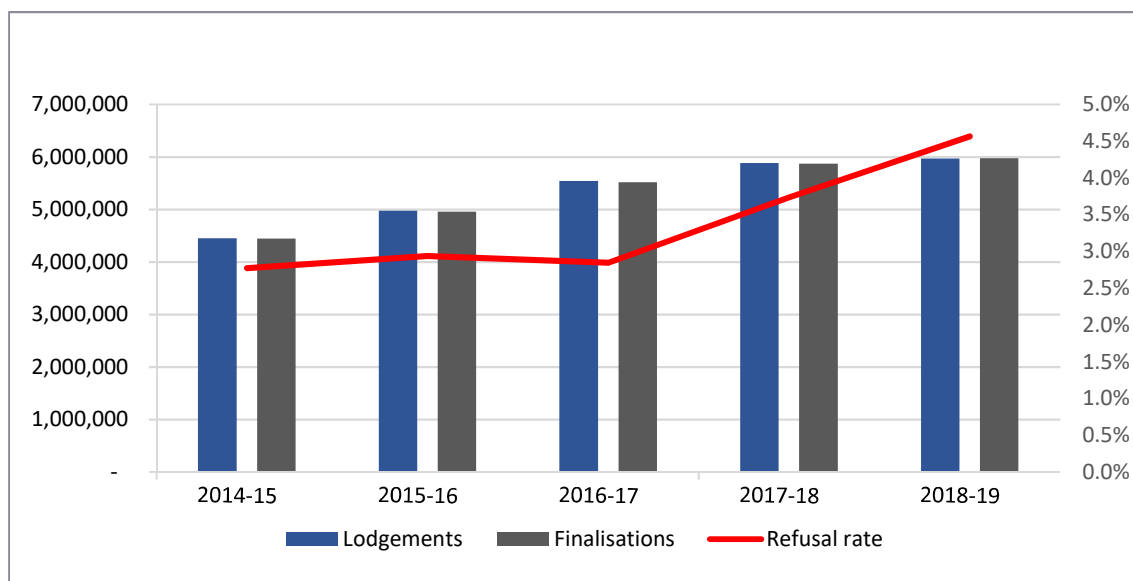
Temporary visas

29. Australia's Temporary visa program is designed to allow overseas people to come to Australia for specific purposes that benefit Australia, including temporary activity or work, international relations, study/training and to visit.
30. A proportion of Temporary visa holders apply for a further Temporary visa, such as Working Holiday Makers applying for a second year, and students wanting to continue their study in Australia or who apply for a Temporary Graduate visa after completing their study. Some people also apply to stay permanently under the Migration Program.
31. On 30 June 2019, there were approximately 2 million people in Australia on Temporary visas, an increase from 1.7 million on 30 June 2015 (not including bridging visa holders). Of the 2 million there were approximately 553,000 international students (an increase of 48 per cent in five years), and 316,000 visitors (an increase of 40 per cent in five years).
32. While the collective number of Temporary visa holders in Australia has grown, skilled temporary work visa holders are a small component of this total figure. As at 30 June 2019, temporary skilled work visa holders make up 6 per cent of Temporary visa holders in Australia.

Visitors

33. Australia's economy benefits significantly from tourism, generating jobs, investment and growth in communities throughout Australia. Tourism is a key export sector which is projected to grow. International visitors spent a record \$44.3 billion in the year to March 2019, with tourists from China contributing \$11.5 billion—well above their pro-rata share (source: *Tourism Australia's International Tourism*, www.tourism.australia.com). For these reasons, the Department places a heavy focus on working across Government to position Australia's tourism industry at the forefront globally. Our work to keep processing times low, without compromising on integrity or community safety, is critical to this effort.
34. In 2007-08, the Department finalised 3.7 million Visitor visa applications. By 2018-19, this had grown to 5.9 million, an increase of more than 60 per cent, with a 20.5 per cent increase in finalisations from 2015-16 to 2018-19 (Figure 3 refers). This growth has been managed while responding to changing patterns of caseload risk and maintaining competitive processing times.
35. The Department has continued to focus on integrity, with refusal rates for Visitor visas increasing from 2.8 per cent in 2014-15 to 4.6 per cent in 2018-19 as a result of better information being available to our decision makers. This is an increase of 64 per cent.
36. The Department monitors integrity indicators for all visa programs, such as Protection visa application rates, including the provision of inconsistent information and fraud. It continues to implement a range of initiatives to detect and prevent entry by those who may be seeking to enter Australia for purposes outside the intent of the visa for which they applied. More information about the capabilities the Department has invested in to achieve these improved outcomes are detailed in the Detecting Threats in the Immigration Program section of this paper.

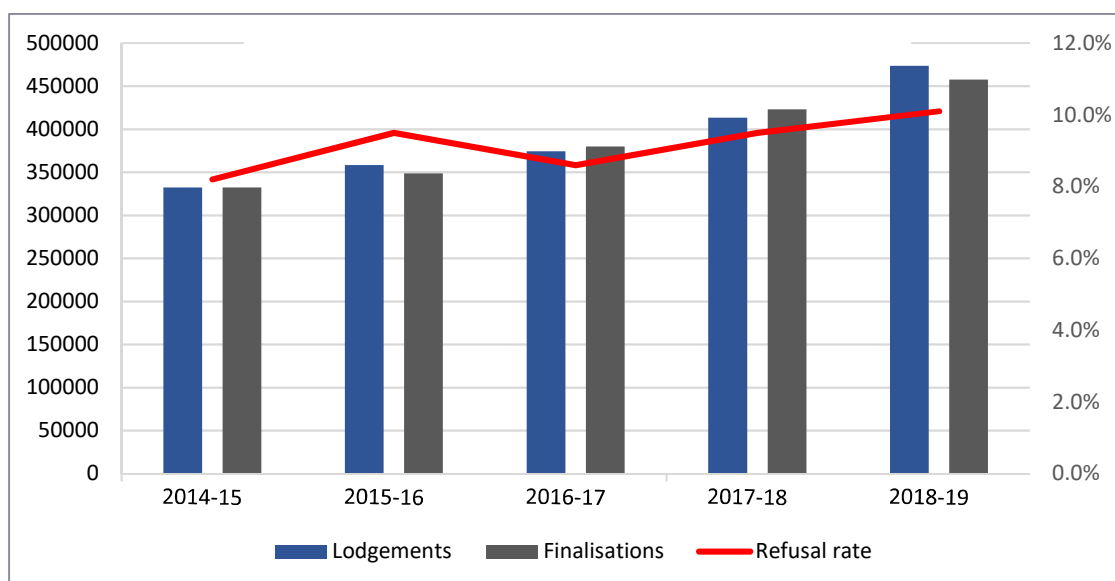
Figure 3: Visitor visa program trends: 2014-15 to 2018-19



Students

37. Australia's international education, training and research sectors also make a significant economic, social and cultural contribution to Australia, to our foreign policy interests and to individual communities. In 2018-19, this industry generated approximately \$37.6 billion for the Australian economy and is estimated to support more than 240,000 jobs (source: ABS statistics).
38. In 2018-19, a record 405,742 Student visas were granted, with grants to applicants outside Australia reaching 243,740. The Department has supported continuing growth in the international education sector, and the Student visa program has been growing steadily and sustainably since 2014-15 (Figure 4 refers).

Figure 4: Student visa program trends: 2014-15 to 2018-19

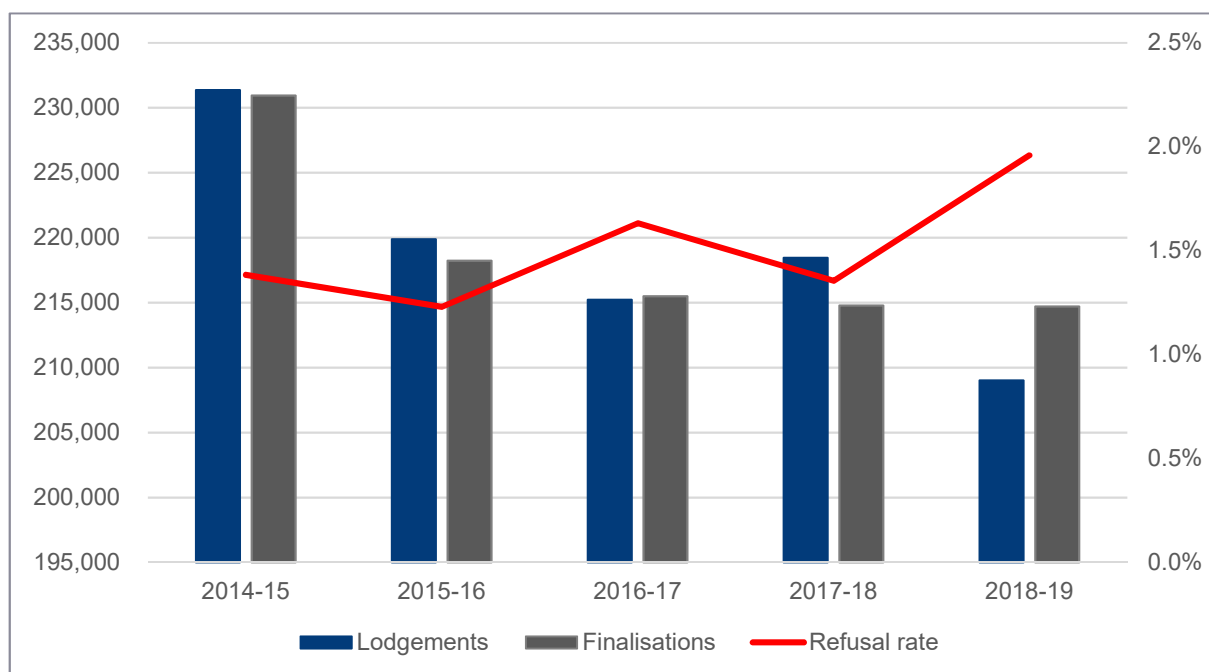


39. There is no cap on Student visas and the demand for visas depends on a number of factors; including education sector quality and reputation, cost of Australia's international education, marketing, and value of the Australian dollar. Increasing refusal rates largely reflect changing patterns of risk within cohorts applying for Student visas. Performance of individuals and institutions subsequently informs the risk framework, evidentiary requirements and assessment of applications.
40. Evidence levels are reviewed every six months, having regard to a range of adverse outcomes including refusals, cancellations and Protection visa application rate.

Working Holiday Maker

41. The Working Holiday Maker (WHM) program encourages cultural exchange and closer ties between arrangement countries and allows young adults to have an extended holiday in each other's country, during which they can engage in short-term work and/or study.
42. The International Visitor Survey reports that for the year ending March 2019, there were 306,400 WHM arrivals who spent \$3.2 billion while in Australia, with WHM holders travelling further into regional areas than most other visitors to Australia.
43. As at July 2019, there were 19 Working Holiday (subclass 417) and 25 Work and Holiday (subclass 462) visa arrangements in effect with partner countries and regions.
44. First WHM visa holders are eligible to apply for a second WHM visa if they have completed three months of 'specified work' in designated regional areas of Australia. From 1 July 2019, second WHM visa holders who complete six months of 'specified work' will be eligible to apply for a third WHM visa from the end of December 2019.
45. The number of second WHM visas granted increased by 20 per cent from 2017-18 to 2018-19, playing an important role in supporting regional areas.

Figure 5: Working Holiday Maker visa program trends: 2014-15 to 2018-19



Bridging visas

46. Bridging visas have been in use since the Migration Regulations 1994 commenced on 1 September 1994.
47. Bridging visas are an important tool that enables the Department to maintain a non-citizen's lawful status while they stay in Australia for a range of legitimate purposes. This includes maintaining lawful status in the community while a person is:
 - applying for a visa in Australia, or where they seek to temporarily travel overseas during the visa application process;
 - appealing a decision made to refuse their visa application, either at merits review or by a court; and
 - making arrangements to depart Australia.
48. Where a person cannot be granted a Bridging visa through normal visa application processes, it is open for them to seek Ministerial Intervention.
49. The number of Bridging visa holders in Australia has increased from 102,220 as at 30 June 2015 to 205,649 as at 30 June 2019.
50. As total Temporary visa holder numbers increase, more applications are received from individuals seeking to stay in Australia for a longer period and a Bridging visa is granted while they await a decision. Of the Bridging visa holders in Australia on 30 June 2019, approximately 41 per cent had applied for permanent migration, 32 per cent had applied for a Protection visa, 21 per cent had applied for a Temporary visa and 6 per cent were granted for other reasons. Illegal maritime arrivals awaiting assessment of their protection claims are also generally granted an associated Bridging visa.
51. An increasing number of people are seeking merits review of the Department's decisions about visas, including decisions to refuse to grant and to cancel visas. A Bridging visa enables these people awaiting a decision to remain lawfully in the community.
52. Most applications for review are dealt with in the Migration and Refugee Division of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT). At 30 June 2017, there were 24,462 cases awaiting review in the AAT's Migration and Refugee Division. This increased to 59,718 by 30 June 2019.
53. Of the applications finalised by the AAT between 1 July 2018 and 30 June 2019, the Department's decision was unchanged in 74 per cent of cases with the AAT overturning 26 per cent of cases under review—an indicator of the Department's ongoing strong focus on quality decision making.

Migration Program

54. The permanent Migration Program has three primary programs: a Skilled program, a Family program and a Special Eligibility program which are managed within a ceiling. The program also includes the Child program which is demand driven and does not have a ceiling. Becoming a permanent resident of Australia is a significant step and provides access to many services and benefits.
55. The planning level for the Migration Program is set by the Government each year. Notably, since 2015, the planning level has been treated as a ceiling rather than a target. This ensures that standards are not lowered to meet an overall number. Migration Program planning levels are available on the Department's website.
56. The 2018-19 permanent Migration Program delivered 160,323 places, against a planning ceiling of 190,000. This was down slightly on the 162,417 places delivered in 2017-18.
57. The Government has for the first time allocated 23,000 places for regional skilled migration under the 2019-20 Migration Program. The Department is currently on track to deliver on this commitment. As at 30 September 2019, the Department was 10.3 per cent above pro rata. The program will be met through existing pipelines and uptake of new provisional visas.
58. The Global Talent Independent program commenced in July 2019 and aims to identify high calibre candidates for up to 5,000 permanent migration places in 2019-20.
59. Integrity concerns continued to be identified in most migration categories in 2018-19. The Department focused on ensuring high levels of integrity, with similar refusal and withdrawal numbers to 2017-18. Refusals in 2017-18 were 46 per cent up on the previous year.
60. Overall, the Department finalised a slightly lower number of applications in 2018-19 compared to 2017-18 due to shifting risks and an increased focus on older, more complex cases.

Skilled Program

61. There are a range of visa products in the Skilled program which are designed to improve the productive capacity of the economy and fill shortages in the labour market, including those in regional Australia that cannot be filled by suitable skilled Australians. The majority of the places in the Migration Program are in the Skilled program, currently set at approximately 70 per cent of the program.
62. Legislative reforms were implemented in 2017 and 2018 to strengthen the quality of skilled applications. Enhancements to legislation included tightened labour market testing, lowering of the qualifying age, and the introduction of higher qualifications and experience requirements.
63. The Department has implemented a range of initiatives to improve Skilled visa program outcomes, including triaging and streamlining low-risk applications and establishing a priority processing team to focus on skilled regional applications, accredited sponsors and applications under Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMAs). As a result, grants in the Employer Sponsored category increased by 18.2 per cent or 6,530 visas in the 2018-19 program year. The 2018-19 Migration Program outcome for the Skilled program was 109,713 places.
64. Demand for the Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) visa was strong in 2018-19 with 35,274 primary visa lodgements. For more than 2,500 accredited sponsors most TSS nominations are processed in less than five days.

Regional Migration

65. As part of the Skilled program, two new skilled regional provisional visas will commence from 16 November 2019. These visas are:
- Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) visa: for people sponsored by an employer in regional Australia, and
 - Skilled Work Regional (Provisional) visa: for people who are nominated by a State or Territory Government or sponsored by an eligible family member to live and work in regional Australia.
66. Skilled migrants settling in regional Australia have a diverse range of available occupations to match their experience, skills and qualifications. There are more than 650 eligible occupations available to migrants willing to work in regional Australia. These occupations are consistent with skill needs in regional areas, including agricultural occupations, trade occupations and professional occupations.
67. The Department has appointed six Regional Outreach Officers who are undertaking an engagement program over the next 12 months, assisting regional businesses to understand what visas are available to them when can't find Australian employees.
68. DAMAs provide access to more overseas workers than the standard Skilled program visas. DAMAs operate under an agreement-based framework, providing flexibility for regions to respond to their unique economic and labour market conditions. There are currently seven DAMAs in place with:
- Northern Territory
 - The Goldfields, Western Australia
 - Great South Coast, Victoria
 - Adelaide City
 - Regional South Australia
 - Orana, New South Wales
 - Far North Queensland

Global Talent Independent

69. There is intense competition internationally for global talent, and Australia seeks to be at the forefront in attracting the best and brightest to help grow a stronger economy and a more prosperous Australia.
70. The Department has deployed six Global Talent Officers to key overseas locations: Berlin, Santiago, Washington DC, Singapore, Dubai and Shanghai. These officers are working with the world's top universities, professional associations and other institutions to identify and market the Global Talent Independent program to exceptional candidates who are at the top of their field.

Family Program

71. The Family program is predominantly made up of Partner and Parent categories, enabling Australian citizens and permanent residents to reunite with close family members. The Family program comprises approximately 30 per cent of the Migration Program.
72. The Department processes visas in line with the legal framework under the Act and Regulations, and policy parameters and priorities set by Government. Where demand is higher than the available places, processing times lengthen.

73. Under section 85 of the Act, the Minister has the power to 'cap' or limit the number of visas which can be granted each year in particular subclasses, covering Parent and Other Family categories.
74. Pressure for visits and family reunion is eased through the Visitor visa program and the new Temporary Sponsored Parent visa.
75. The Family program outcome was 47,247 places within a planning level of 57,400 places, which accounted for 30 per cent of the Migration Program.

Special Eligibility Program

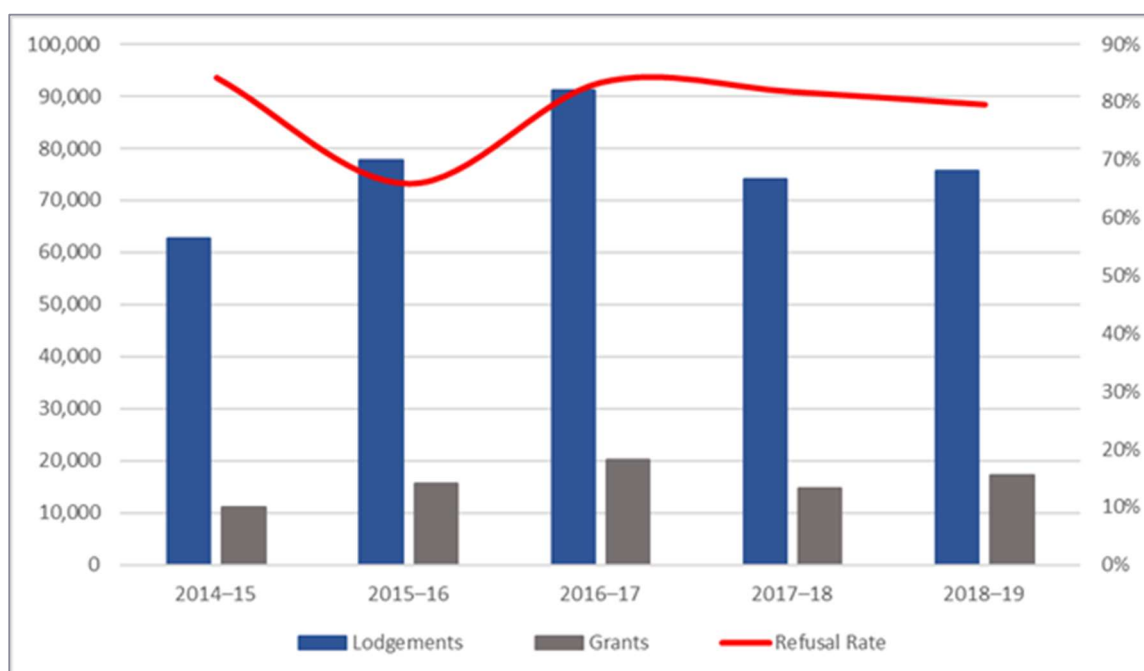
76. The Special Eligibility program outcome for 2018-19, which mostly represents cases approved under Ministerial Intervention powers, was 115 places within a planning level of 565 places.

Humanitarian Program

Humanitarian Program - offshore

77. Australia is one of the world's most generous contributors to international refugee resettlement efforts, successfully settling more than 900,000 refugees and others in humanitarian need since the end of the Second World War. At present, about 30 countries offer permanent resettlement places to people in humanitarian need through managed and annual programs.
78. Australia is consistently ranked among the world's top permanent resettlement countries. The number of applications for offshore Humanitarian visas the Department receives each year is far greater than available visas, even though the base program has grown by more than 36 per cent in the past few years and a special additional program of 12,000 places for people displaced by conflict in Iraq and Syria was delivered between 1 July 2015 and 21 March 2017 (Figure 6 refers).
79. The composition of the offshore Humanitarian Program is decided by the Government on an annual basis, taking account of changing patterns of global displacement and humanitarian need, risks to the Australian community and the capacity to facilitate the successful settlement of humanitarian entrants in the community. The Department has continued to deliver the Humanitarian Program in line with planning levels set by the Government each year.

Figure 6: Offshore Humanitarian Program trends: 2014-15 to 2018-19



Humanitarian Program - onshore

80. In line with Australia's international non-refoulement obligations, any non-citizen who enters Australia can seek Australia's protection by lodging a Protection visa application. There has always been a small proportion of people who arrive on Temporary visas who subsequently seek Australia's protection.
81. Of the some 40 million Temporary visas granted between 1 July 2014 and 30 June 2019, around 92,000 protection visas were subsequently applied for in Australia, representing approximately 88,000 applicants. This equates to approximately 0.23 per cent of total Temporary visa grants, which is low in the context of the changing pattern of arrivals to Australia (Threat and risk environment section of this paper refers). More than 93 per cent of the individuals who applied for protection in the five year period have either departed Australia, been granted a visa, or remain lawfully while they have ongoing matters before the Department or at merits or judicial review. Less than seven per cent do not have a valid visa and have no matters ongoing. These individuals can either return home voluntarily, or they will be subject to removal from Australia by the Australian Border Force.
82. Maintaining the integrity of Australia's protection system is of utmost importance to the Department. Individuals have different motives for claiming protection. In the Department's experience, and that of a number of other western countries, while some claim protection because they genuinely fear they will face significant harm if they were to return to their home country, many make applications for other purposes, such as to prolong their stay to access the labour market, or because of the better life opportunities our country affords comparatively.
83. More than 89 per cent of Protection visa decisions made in 2018-19 were refusals. The Department works to detect, disrupt and respond to fraud, pattern claims and other attempts to undermine the integrity of the Immigration Program. More information on the methods and tools deployed to address integrity issues are detailed in the Detecting threats in the Immigration Program section of this paper below.
84. Based on information currently available, unmeritorious applications for protection appear to largely involve individuals opportunistically seeking entry to Australia and have a relatively low level of organisation. However, the Department has also detected some individuals who have sought to 'facilitate' entry to Australia or act as labour hire intermediaries.

Case study

In May 2019, the ABF stopped an organised group of eight Malaysian nationals from entering Australia with the intention of working illegally. Six males and two females, aged between 23 and 59 were stopped in Perth. During questioning by ABF officers the group provided inconsistent accounts of their intended purpose of travel. It was established they had come to Australia with the intention of working despite only holding tourist visas. Seven in the group had paid the group's leader to facilitate their travel. The entire group was removed from Australia.

Case study

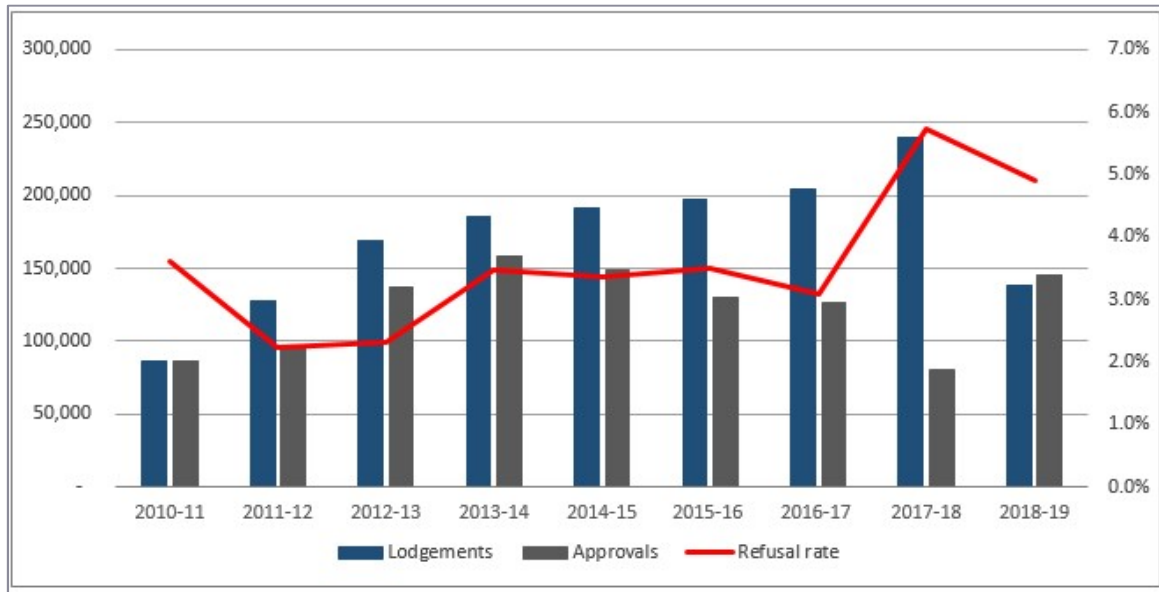
In May 2019, 35 Taiwanese nationals were stopped from entering Australia after the ABF linked them to boiler rooms where they would undertake phone scams trying to fleece large amounts of money from Australian victims. Nine of the individuals arrived into Brisbane airport on 11 May 2019, and another six arrived the following day (all from Taipei). ABF airport officers located evidence that they had travelled to Australia to work in a boiler room. As a result of this, the ABF placed border alerts on an additional 20 people offshore who were intending to travel to Australia. Investigations into the organisers of the boiler room scam are ongoing.

85. The Department is focusing on identifying new methods and tools being used by facilitators and responding to the changing threat profile. Response strategies have included increased intelligence threat assessments of Protection visa facilitators, criminality and the exploitation of workers, and deploying targeted, agile risk profiles for emerging hot-spots and trends. Where onshore facilitators are identified, action is being taken to investigate these individuals for potential prosecution.
86. Protection visa applicants who choose to work in Australia have the same workplace rights as Australian citizens. They are able to access information about these rights in a range of languages and can report potential workplace issues/breaches anonymously to the Fair Work Ombudsman.
87. Strategies for preventing the exploitation of the Protection visa program by people seeking to prolong their stay and employment in Australia have dampened growth of Protection visa lodgements, with applications reducing by 12 per cent in the 2018-19 program year compared to 2017-18.
88. Based on individuals identified by law enforcement activity focused on Labour Hire Intermediaries (LHIs) and others that might be involved in exploiting vulnerable onshore foreign workers (including unlawful non-citizens) there is no evidence to support that a large volume of air arrivals are claiming protection and being subsequently exploited. For example, of the number of Temporary visas granted in the 2018-19 program year (more than 8.8 million), only 0.28 per cent claimed protection (24,566) during the same period, only 0.00078 per cent (69) were identified as suspected victims of human trafficking, slavery, or slavery-like practices and referred to the Australian Government's Support for Trafficked People Program by the Australian Federal Police. Of these, 10 had claimed protection.
89. It should be noted that those who arrive on Temporary visas and subsequently apply for protection have arrived with identity documents and been through a visa application process including system and risk checking. In contrast those who arrive via boat commonly have little or no identity documentation and have not been subject to health and risk checks pre-arrival.

Australian Citizenship Program

90. There is no greater privilege than Australian citizenship. The 70th anniversary of Australian citizenship was celebrated on 26 January 2019. On that day 70 years earlier the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1949* came into effect, creating the new status of Australian citizen. Every year a significant number of people seek to become Australian citizens so that they can increase their sense of belonging in our community and share in the responsibilities and privileges afforded to citizens.
91. Applications for Australian citizenship generally fall within four categories: conferral (this represents approximately 80 per cent of all applications), descent, adoption and resumption.
92. In the eight years from 2010-11 to 2017-18, there was a 177 per cent increase in applications for citizenship by conferral. While demand declined by 34 per cent in 2018-19, the effect of sustained high lodgement rates over previous years continues to be a factor in the citizenship processing pipeline. Increased applications resulted for a range of reasons, including flow on applications from Immigration Program intakes over these and earlier years, increases in Humanitarian Program applications, and proposed changes to eligibility requirements that resulted in eligible permanent residents deciding to lodge their applications before the proposed legislative changes were implemented. Unlike Permanent visas granted under the Migration Program, there is no ceiling on the number of citizenship by conferral applications that can be approved each year. This creates additional pressure on the program when application rates increase.

Figure 7: Citizenship by conferral program trends: 2010-11 to 2018-19



93. It is important that only people who can meet the legislative requirements for Australian citizenship are accorded this privilege. Once citizenship is conferred it can be revoked only in extremely limited circumstances. Citizenship by conferral applicants must meet residential and other eligibility provisions to apply. They must satisfy the decision maker of their identity and be of good character. Depending upon circumstances such as their age, applicants must also possess a basic knowledge of the English language, and demonstrate knowledge of Australia and the responsibilities and privileges that come with Australian citizenship.
94. The changing threat environment (Threat and Risk Environment section of this paper refers), the risk of un-detected migration fraud within the Immigration Program, along with a number of citizenship applications requiring complex identity assessments, has necessitated a strengthening of integrity measures in the Citizenship Program. These measures have been introduced to help ensure any adverse information is identified and appropriately dealt with, and to ensure that the identity and character considerations of a person have been resolved to the best extent possible before they are approved for Australian citizenship.
95. Robust program integrity is imperative in meeting community expectations and in ensuring the protection of the Australian people (*Delivering improved immigration integrity and community protection outcomes* section of this paper refers).
96. Refusals of applications for citizenship by conferral increased from 3.4 per cent in 2014-15 to 4.9 per cent in 2018-19. Where appropriate, applications that present integrity concerns are referred for consideration of visa cancellation. From July 2014 to September 2019, 30 individuals have had their Australian citizenship revoked for criminal conduct or for citizenship or migration fraud.
97. The Department has implemented a range of initiatives to respond to growth and improve processing times, without compromising on integrity. These include an enhanced capability to triage applications according to risk, identifying cases with similar characteristics to harness processing consistency and efficiency, automating business processes and expanding online lodgement capability.
98. These initiatives have led to excellent outcomes in the Citizenship Program in 2019-20, with many more people acquiring Australian citizenship and thereby contributing to our great nation. More than 93,000 citizenship by conferral applications were finalised in the first quarter to 30 September 2019, a 177 per cent increase when compared to the corresponding period in

the previous year. In addition, there has been a substantial reduction in the on-hand caseload, from the peak of 247,659, in July 2018 down by 83,733 cases to 163,926 as at 30 September 2019, representing a 34 per cent decrease.

99. In just three months, the Department has finalised more than half the total number of applications finalised in the entire 2018-19 financial year (160,117), and almost as many applications as were finalised in the entire 2017-18 financial year (101,422). The Department expects to build further on these outcomes over the course of 2019-20.

Threat and risk environment

100. The threat and risk environment as it applies to the Immigration Program has changed dramatically over the past 20 years.
101. The growing middle classes in emerging economies are increasingly travelling. For example, visitors from the UK, Japan, USA, South Korea and Germany made up around 51 per cent of total visitor grants in 2007-08. By 2017-18, this had dropped to 36 per cent. In contrast, China, India and Indonesia grew from 11.4 per cent of the total visitors to 23.6 per cent—914,089 more visa grants—over the same period. This has changed the risk profile and processing required within the visitor caseload.
102. While the increasing movement of people globally brings with it many benefits to Australia, it also brings with it new threats to our security.
103. Approximately 70 per cent of significant serious and organised crime targets that impact Australia are either based offshore or have strong offshore links. Transnational organised crime networks continue to seek to embed themselves into legitimate supply chains to obfuscate their activities or to exploit visa arrangements for activities such as, drug or weapons importation, illegal labour, human trafficking and exploitation and other nefarious purposes. Their methods continue to evolve, including the masking of activities using encrypted communications and use of professional facilitators.
104. The constantly changing face of extremism presents a paramount concern. Terrorist actors, ideologues, financiers, recruiters, and on-line supporters—to name but a few of the entities within this ever-evolving matrix—all seek to take advantage of easier international travel arrangements and streamlined visa processes.
105. There have been growing attempts by some foreign governments or their proxies to engage in foreign interference to undermine Australia's sovereignty, values and national interests, through covert, deceptive and clandestine means. Our institutions of democracy, research and education sectors, the media and our culturally and linguistically diverse communities are all at risk from this type of activity.
106. The world is facing the highest level of forcibly displaced people ever, generating continued border risks as people seek to travel both legally and illegally to destinations where they can live in peace and safety, like Australia. A proportion of these individuals carry no reliable documentation that can be used to verify who they are or deliberately falsify identity.

Detecting threats within the Immigration Program

107. While facilitating growth in important Temporary and Permanent visas that support the economy, and managing strong Humanitarian and Family Programs, the Department is maintaining a proactive posture that assumes some individuals looking to enter Australia—or their facilitators—will attempt to exploit vulnerabilities within the immigration system, for individual benefit or to do harm to Australia.

108. The changing threat and risk environment for the Immigration Program has made broad, nationality based assessment of risk with very limited pre-border risk assessment for certain cohorts—the historical ETA model—no longer appropriate.
109. More granular and nuanced assessment of the risk posed by individual visa applicants—irrespective of nationality—is required, supported by targeted intelligence and greater checking capability. This approach is not only intended to respond to the emerging threats and risks we face today but also underscores the non-discriminatory nature of Australia's Immigration Program.

Lifting of intelligence capability support to the Immigration Program

110. Prior to July 2015, Australia's immigration intelligence capability was immature, split across a range of agencies and dispersed individual teams, and did not inform a joined-up response to risks across the apply, decide, travel, stay, and depart continuum. Visa decisions were made within segments of different organisations predominantly through the prism of assessing the risk of immigration non-compliance with the Migration Act 1958; in the absence of a joined up threat lens and without, in many cases, the benefit of intelligence held by other intelligence and law enforcement agencies. For example, decision-making by former Immigration officers overseas, former Customs officers at the border, and Immigration visa and compliance officers in Australia was undertaken on different systems, and lacked a coherent approach to an individual. The Department lacked robust mechanisms to detect and assess individuals who may present a threat to Australia.
111. Today, the Department is developing a full-spectrum border intelligence capability to support the management of the Immigration Program. Intelligence enables operational outcomes including individuals being refused immigration clearance at the border, offshore interdictions, and offshore visa cancellations. For example, intelligence analysis supports the Airline Liaison Offshore network—through profiles, alerts and assessments—to manage threats and treat risks daily, before they reach the Australian border. This has contributed to the detection of more than 200 impostors from source countries such as the People's Republic of China, Malaysia and Sri Lanka during the 2018-19 program year.
 - At the strategic level, intelligence capability assesses migration-related threats and systemic vulnerabilities that threaten the integrity of the Immigration Program, including in relation to visa fraud and non-compliance, criminality, exploitation of labour, and human trafficking.
 - At the operational and tactical level, intelligence directly supports the Immigration Program through a network of intelligence analysts integrated with operational teams and specialist enforcement and investigative capabilities. This intelligence is particularly focused on targeting serious and organised crime and serious and deliberate non-compliance.
 - An increasing spectrum of risks and proposed treatments are captured within visa and border processing systems and provided to relevant decision-makers for consideration and action.

Case study

Convergences of threat manifesting in one domain are now leading to discoveries in other domains. Recently, the discovery of a traveller suspected of importing illicit drugs across the border led to the immediate discovery and disruption of a large, sophisticated imposter syndicate exploiting multiple Temporary visa programs through identity and passport fraud to conceal adverse immigration histories. Agile responses by the Department and the Australian Border Force led to pre-border profiles being deployed quickly in both the visa and traveller domains. This level of immediate cross-domain analysis, threat identification and response would not have been possible previously, which focused immediate efforts on specific domains, and demonstrates the power of a more robust and joined up border-intelligence effort.

Biometrics and integrity screening in the Immigration Program

112. Over the past 10 years, the Department has increased its use of biometrics to facilitate legitimate trade and travel, and protect our border and our community from threats, including criminal activity and terrorism. Australia collects biometrics from visa applicants residing in Australia and in 48 countries to detect persons of concern. The millions of biometrics collected from applicants are checked against Departmental holdings—with higher risk cohorts checked against law enforcement data holdings, and against the data holdings of our Migration 5 (M5) partners (Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and United States) using a Secure Real Time Platform.
113. Intelligence sharing with law enforcement agencies and M5 has strengthened since the establishment of the Department of Home Affairs resulting in more than 3,000 individuals confirmed or suspected of transnational serious and organised crime being added to watch-lists to ensure any visa applications by these individuals are individually scrutinised. The Department works with domestic and international law enforcement partners to ensure an effective response to transnational crime and the prosecution of offenders, including through extradition.
114. Over the past three years, the Department has established new integrity capabilities that are increasingly leveraging new information sources previously not available to visa and citizenship decision-makers to detect individuals who are involved in activities that are of national security concern or against the law. The capabilities which have been built enable us to hone our focus on individuals of concern, and intensively research their history and behaviour to assess whether they may present a threat.

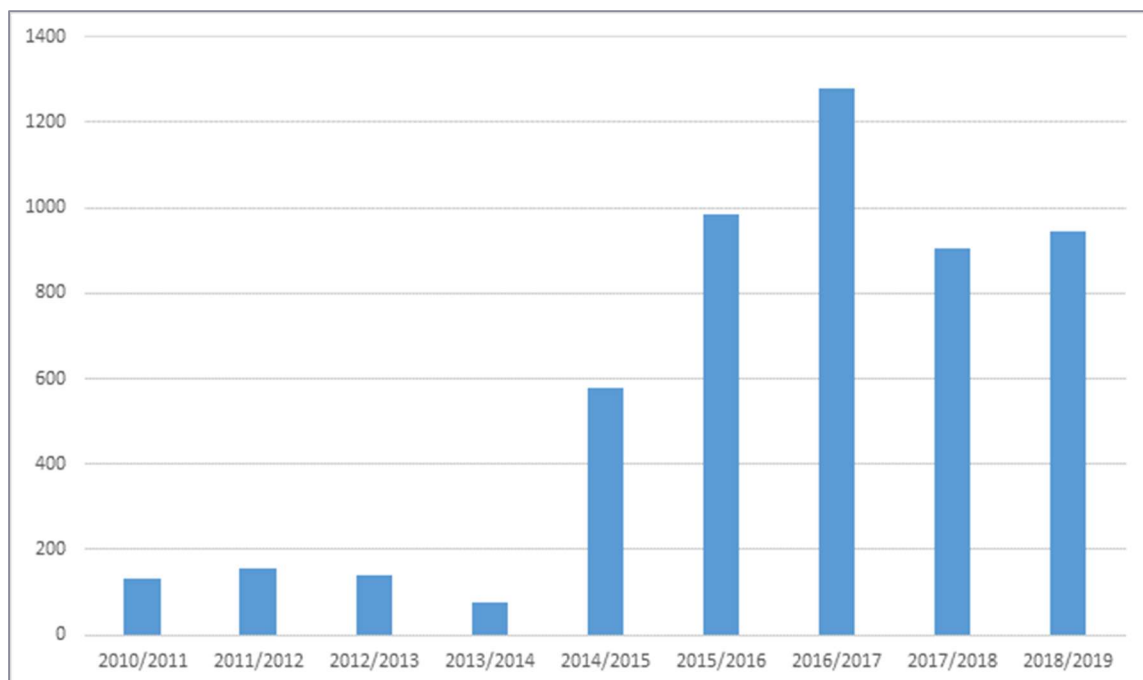
Delivering improved immigration integrity and community protection outcomes

115. As a result of the greater use of biometrics, the leveraging of intelligence and other new information sources domestically and internationally, and through the deployment of new capabilities and tools, the Department has successfully detected and responded to thousands of cases of visa and identity fraud, as well as serious criminality and security concerns. These outcomes are reflected in the increased visa refusal volumes depicted in Figures 2, 3 and 4 above).
116. At the other end of the Immigration Program, 1,440 instances of potential identity fraud were detected between August 2016 and December 2018 among Permanent visa holders applying for Australian citizenship. Within the same caseload, 144 individuals were detected who didn't disclose serious criminal conduct. These cases will now be considered for

possible visa cancellation. Between 2012-13 and 2018-19, 2,541 visas were cancelled in circumstances where the non-citizen provided incorrect information or bogus documents (for example, failure to declare criminal convictions, fraudulent documents).

117. The Department's first priority is ensuring the safety and security of Australians. All non-citizens granted a visa must meet, and continue to meet, the character requirements set out in the *Migration Act 1958*. There are strong provisions under the Act to refuse or cancel a visa where a person is found not to be of good character. All visitors to Australia are expected to obey Australian laws and satisfy the character requirements of the Act, and applicants who have been convicted of a crime of a violent nature against women or children should generally expect to be denied entry or forfeit the right to live in Australia.
118. Through increased collaboration with law enforcement and intelligence partners and the introduction of mandatory cancellation powers, the Department has also cancelled more visas on character grounds than ever before. From December 2014 to 30 June 2019, visa cancellation decisions under section 501 of the Act increased by more than 700 per cent when compared to the previous four year period with around 4,630 visas cancelled, including 88 murderers, 202 rapists, 367 child sex offenders and 146 Outlaw Motorcycle Gang members, associates or organised crime figures ([Figure 8](#) refers). Non-citizens who have had their visa cancelled are subject to immigration detention and removal from Australia.

Figure 8: Cancellations under section 501 of the *Migration Act 1958*: 2010-11 to 2018-19



119. In April 2019, strengthened provisions were introduced to enable certain visa holders to be considered for visa cancellation where there has been a breach of the *Biosecurity Act 2015*, including concealing prohibited goods or providing false or misleading statements on entry to Australia. In addition, visa holders that have been found to have imported objectionable goods without permission may have their visa considered for cancellation.

Maturing of the administration of the Immigration Program in the years ahead

120. The number of people crossing Australia's borders is expected to grow to reach nearly 50 million by 2020. In the decade ahead, we anticipate the threats and risks we face today will continue to evolve. In administering the Immigration and Citizenship Program going forward, the Department will continue to develop and advance the systems, processes and capabilities required to achieve effective facilitation while also enhancing our threat and risk mitigation as the environment changes.
121. Over the short to medium-term, the Department anticipates a continued focus on building its capabilities, through working closely with industry, domestic agencies within and beyond the Home Affairs Portfolio and international partners, in the following areas:
- Identification of emerging threats and vulnerabilities at the earliest point possible and using this information to develop and deploy predictive models and profiles that support visa decision makers to prevent the entry of those who would seek to undermine the intent of the Immigration Program or cause harm to our community, and our national interests
 - Further automation of manual processing activities and consolidation and connection of fraud, criminality risk and security threat information from an expanded range of sources to support timely decision making and recurrent risk checking
 - Biometrics collection to anchor identity at the earliest possible point, together with advanced matching and validation capabilities
 - Increasing quality and consistency of decision-making through enhanced vocational training for visa decision makers, a single global approach to processing, better real time reporting for Immigration Program managers, an integrated model of quality assurance and regular operational practice reviews
 - Other initiatives to improve the client experience for genuine travellers and migrants.
122. Importantly, we apply a 'golden rule' of accountability: no adverse visa decision is ever made by a machine. Decisions regarding visa refusals, cancellations or other activities which otherwise take away a right, privilege or entitlement will continue to be made by departmental officials. The officer might be prompted and assisted by the latest technology and automated analytical tools, but it is a person who will be the decision-maker.