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UNACCEPTABLE SKILLED MIGRATION DELAYS

Recent changes to Australia's General Skilled Migration (GSM) program treat existing applicants unfairly and have resulted in many unintended consequences.

The Migration Institute of Australia has written to the Minister for Immigration expressing concerns about the priority processing of General Skilled Migration (GSM) applications. It is an issue of grave concern for 180,000 individuals and their families (on and offshore) who have paid for and lodged applications with DIAC and now find themselves languishing in a bureaucratic limbo.

The current priority processing regime creates numerous serious problems, including:

- Damage to Australia's reputation - Thousands of people, who in good faith paid visa application charges with the quite reasonable expectation that the applications would be finalised within published service standard times, will be waiting indefinite lengths of time for a decision to be made about their GSM visa applications.
- Unreasonable additional costs – Tests and checks to support visa applications can cost up to \$1300 and need to be repeated to ensure validity at the time of processing.
- Difficulty of Employment on Bridging Visas – applicants consigned to waiting years pending visa decisions may find it difficult to work professionally as employers prefer a potential employee to hold permanent residence.

Some GSM applicants were only weeks away from having visas approved after being in the system 18 months already. The Institute believes it is particularly important to give priority processing exemptions to those applications which were about to be finalised and for which further health and police checks had been requested.

The MIA suggests that it is reasonable for the Department to refund fees for applicants who suddenly face up to three years before their application will be processed and now wish to withdraw their application. When speaking to *The National Interest* (Radio National 13/11/09), Senator Evans dismissed the prospect of refunds and said the Government would continue taking applications even though the system was under review.

We hope the Minister will agree to meet with representatives from the Institute to discuss options to redress the current impasse. (see the MIA's submission at www.mia.org.au)

Available for Interview:

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