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Migration expert calls for higher accreditation to prevent visa fraud

Adelaide migration expert Mark Glazbrook is calling for Australia to introduce a new industry-partnership model with the Department of Immigration to reduce the level of program rorting present within the industry.

The recommendation follows a string of recent media reports surrounding various program rorting allegations, which has seen an inquiry launched by the Minister of Immigration.

The partnership would be similar to model recently proposed in New Zealand, which would see responsibility for visa application processing shared between Government and approved Industry representatives.

According to the proposal, migration agents that meet the necessary criteria set by the INZ would be granted a higher level of accreditation than their peers, and extended streamlined processing rights that make it more attractive for applicants to engage their services.

Sydney-based migration lawyer Nigel Dobbie says it would cost the Australian government \$500 million to restore the Department of Immigration's operational effectiveness.

However Mr Glazbrook says a more effective first step would be to work from the top down, by restricting the ability for unregistered agents to fool applicants into entrusting them with their applications.

"The prevalence of these migration rackets in Australia is what makes this issue so difficult to solve," he said.

"The industry is awash with unregistered and unqualified people posing as legitimate migration agents, and who are more than willing to provide false and misleading information to the Department in return for payment from applicants.

"For applicants that speak English as a second-language, it is especially difficult for them to know a legitimate migration agent from a fraudulent one.

"They are also less likely to report being exploited for fear of getting in further trouble for having done an under-the-table deal."

Mr Glazbrook says a clearer measure of accreditation and priority processing rights for approved agents would encourage applicants to seek migration assistance from legitimate sources, and limit the number of fraudulent applications being presented to the Department.

"An industry-partnership model like the one currently being considered in New Zealand would result in improved information flow between Industry and government, something that is sorely needed in Australia right now," he said.

“It would also reduce Department processing times by outsourcing assessment tasks for application types which are typically lower risk and received in higher volumes by the Department.”

Mr Glazbrook says he frequently hears first-hand from applicants who have been scammed by illegitimate agents, often handing over thousands of dollars before finding out their application never had a chance of success.

Many spurned applicants then go on to be affected by Public Interest Criterion (PIC) 4020, preventing them from applying for an Australian visa for three years for providing false and misleading information.

“Right now, there aren’t enough measures in place to help applicants distinguish genuine migration agents from those that are corrupt or unqualified,” he said.

“It’s not always as obvious as someone operating out of their living room and asking for an up-front cash payment. The spectrum of expertise among Australian migration agents is extremely broad, and a more sophisticated classification system is definitely needed.”

For further information, quotes or images please see contact details below.

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Media Contact

Mark Glazbrook (Managing Director)

T: +61 400 990 772 **W:** (08) 8211 8597 **E:** mark@migrationsolutions.com.au

Lachlan Sellar (Social Media Coordinator)

T: +61 418 434 449 **W:** (08) 8211 8597 **E:** lachlan@migrationsolutions.com.au