



INTEGRATED HUMANITARIAN SETTLEMENT STRATEGY Adjournment Debate 19 October 2006

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (4.39 p.m.)—I rise to draw attention to a government discussion paper released this week entitled *Measures to improve settlement outcomes for humanitarian entrants*. Having spoken in this parliament on at least four other occasions about the shortfalls in the administration and delivery of Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy services in general and in the Newcastle and Hunter Region in particular, I welcome the government's belated acknowledgment of the need for vastly improved settlement outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants, particularly because we told them so.

The new arrangements for delivering IHSS services—arrangements that this government put in place in October 2005—have consistently failed to meet the needs and expectations of refugees and the wider Newcastle community alike, and this new discussion paper recognises that fact. I remind the House of just some of the concerns that have been raised by me in this chamber and with the then Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs prior to the introduction of the new model, which came into effect on 1 October 2005.

I noted that the tender process had highlighted a number of worrying features, not least of which was the fact that local community based organisations were effectively excluded from being able to bid in their own right for work in their own community. Regional organisations were particularly disadvantaged in this regard. I noted with regret that the local MRC and their long established community networks and volunteers would no longer be involved in the provision of IHSS services in the Newcastle and Hunter Region and expressed my dismay that a consortium led by ACL, a Sydney based business with no operational experience or reputation in the region, was the successful tenderer.

I also sought assurances then from the minister that current and future refugees and humanitarian entrants would not experience a reduction in the quality or range of services in the Newcastle and Hunter region. Despite ongoing disasters with the new model, the minister continued to express full confidence in those services provided to refugees and described these services as world class. In truth, they have been far from world class. Indeed,

they have consistently failed to meet targets and key performance indicators as detailed in the IHSS contracts. Even more alarming is the apparent inability of the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and her department to insist that contractual obligations are met. Why doesn't this government enforce the terms of its contracts? The IHSS contract in the Newcastle and Hunter region is worth \$27.5 million, yet this minister has no idea if service providers are providing what they are supposed to provide under the terms of the contract.

According to the government's own discussion paper, the main features that are not being delivered are the provision of specialised case management assistance; support and assistance to clients in crisis situations; advice and support to settlement service providers and other service delivery agencies; strengthening of the integration of services provided to humanitarian entrants across agencies through effective networking and information sharing; and monitoring the access and appropriateness of services provided.

These are not new features of the IHSS program; they are services that were supposed to have been provided all along at a considerable cost to the Australian public. Instead of enforcing the terms of the contract, however, this government simply proposes to insert another layer of bureaucracy, another layer of money to try to make sure that the IHSS is delivered properly; hence, the proposal for a new complex case support network. This network will apparently provide specialised case support. Curiously, IHSS services used to provide complex case management and support to refugees and humanitarian entrants with complex needs.

In my area, these needs have not been met; they have been passing them onto other providers like the MRC and asking them to fix the problem. If the minister is seriously considering this new proposal, I would hope that she and DIMA would consider integrating this new program into the existing Settlement Grants Program rather than just giving more money to the failing IHSS service providers. The outsourcing of intensive human services to large corporate entities has a dismal track record and should cease. As the new IHSS model demonstrates, this is a model that has failed Australia and failed the refugees that we invite to live in our country.

I condemn the Howard Government for its failure to enforce the terms and conditions of the IHSS contracts, for its failure to hold IHSS providers to account and - most importantly - for its failure to deliver on its promise of "world-class" services for refugees and humanitarian entrants in Australia. The Auditor-General's Office is now considering a formal inquiry - a move which I support wholeheartedly.