



29th January 2015

Matthew Flavel
General Manager
Budget Policy Division
Department of the Treasury
Langton Crescent
PARKES ACT 2600

Dear Mr Flavel,

SCOA 2015-16 Pre-Budget Submission

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) is pleased to provide this submission to the government on the forthcoming Federal Budget. SCOA represents over 80 agencies in the settlement sector, which comprise the majority of agencies involved in funded settlement programs including Settlement Grants Program (SGP), Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS), Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) and Complex Case Support (CCS). SCOA members are involved in providing settlement support to recently arrived migrants and people of refugee background across Australia. SCOA members receive a wide range of funding from government departments at federal, state and local levels, as well as grant funding from philanthropic foundations. SCOA's consultation with members and our research into the area have informed the preparation of this submission. SCOA's members represent a significant range of agencies, which provide world class settlement support throughout Australia.

Key issues of concern and note in preparing the forthcoming Federal Budget from the settlement sector are:

- Security and continuity of funding and services
- Investment in the settlement sector
- Supporting regional resettlement of migrants and refugees
- Increasing the Humanitarian Program
- Red tape reductions and cost savings

Security and continuity of funding and services

Security and continuity of funding is essential for successful effective provision of services. The settlement sector has supported the move of services to the Department of Social Services, however the delays currently being experienced during 2014-15 in announcing the current round of grants have been a significant concern to many agencies, complicating planning and making consistent provision of services more difficult. Although extensions have been granted in some cases the overall level of uncertainty surrounding funding has been problematic.

The combining of funding rounds provided some benefits in relation to the capacity of agencies to apply for additional, related and complementary programs and projects, however the

oversubscription of funding applications indicates that it is unlikely that many agencies will be successful in their applications. It has been difficult to get a clear picture of the nature, level and type of funding that is being provided, which is also a complicating factor.

SCOA recommends for future funding rounds that application times for different grants be staggered, so that agencies and DSS can focus on one program area at a time. SCOA also highlights the need for timely announcements of funding rounds, with full details, to provide certainty for agency planning.

Wherever possible funding programs and grants should be geared to multi-year funding. Provision of funding across multiple years provides many benefits for agencies in their capacity to plan, provide security for their staff, and most importantly build upon and strengthen their work in the community. It is also resource efficient for government administration of this funding and critical for using resources to continually build sector expertise.

Investment in the settlement sector

SCOA recommends ongoing investment in the settlement sector be oriented to provision of settlement support to migrants and refugees arriving in Australia. Early provision of support to new arrivals can provide significant longer term dividends in relation to settlement, health and well being and employment outcomes and community connectedness.

The settlement sector as a whole is also a key employer for bi-cultural workers, with a wealth of job pathways that can assist migrants and recently arrived refugees gain exposure and experience in Australia. Their cultural and language skills add considerable value to government settlement funding. The settlement sector's coordination of opportunities for work experience for thousands of volunteers is an additional flow on benefit, adding considerable value to government funding.

Supporting regional resettlement of migrants and refugees

The settlement sector has long contributed to strengthening regional areas in Australia through fostering regional resettlement for migrants and refugees. This support will remain important during the coming year as it is likely many people on Temporary Protection Visas or potential Safe Haven Enterprise Visa holders move to regional areas. Supporting migrants and refugees in regional areas, be they permanent or temporary residents, as outlined above, is cost effective and can pay strong dividends.

Australia has areas of identified regional resettlement, with appropriate support services in place. It is important that these services are maintained and strengthened, and new areas explored to maximise the benefits and capacity of regional resettlement programs.

Increasing the Humanitarian Programme

SCOA welcomes the projected increase in the Humanitarian Programme between now and 2019. The settlement sector is well able to provide support to the larger program, and given the complexity and difficulty of international refugee and asylum seeker trends it is worth considering additional increases in the program (to 20,000 or 25,000 people).

Red tape reductions and cost savings

All involved in service provision and delivery have welcomed red tape reductions and the associated savings they bring. Examining the impact of the current uncertainty of funding on agencies and programs providing continuity of funding would result in efficiencies and savings at a program and project level. It is hoped that the greater access to information and reports projected through the new DSS reporting structure will result in efficiencies and savings over time for the settlement sector.

SCOA thanks you for the opportunity to make a submission. Should you have any questions or require clarification on any points raised please contact the Executive Officer, Sky de Jersey, on 02 8065 5225.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dewani Bakkum", is written over a horizontal line. The signature is enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Dewani Bakkum
SCOA Chairperson