

## **DON'T BE TEMPTED TO USE UNREGISTERED MIGRATION AGENTS**

Did you know it is illegal for anyone to give immigration assistance without being a registered migration agent?

The reason it is illegal is to protect unsuspecting people from being given incorrect advice or losing their money to unscrupulous operators posing as migration advice professionals.

In Australia, migration agents must be registered with the Office of the Migration Agents Registration Authority (MARA). Unregistered people who give immigration assistance (even without charging a fee) are breaking the law and penalties of up to 10 years' jail can apply.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) is committed to discouraging the use of unregistered migration agents. The sentencing last year of an unregistered migration agent serves as a warning to illegal operators that the risks are high and they will be caught. This man received a sentence of two years' jail for falsely taking money to represent people in migration matters when he was not a registered agent.

Over the past few years Australia has been welcoming record numbers of people to Australia to live, visit, study or work. Our immigration programs are among the best in the world, however the requirements for visas are strict and the rules can be complex.

It is understandable that people may sometimes feel the need to use a migration agent to assist them but they must be careful not to be taken advantage of. If people use a migration agent, make sure they are registered.

Remember that anyone can apply for their own Australian visa and a migration agent cannot influence the outcome of an application. However, if you don't feel confident or if your case is complex, you may wish to get help from a registered migration agent. Before choosing a migration agent, do your research. The strongest protection you have as a consumer is choosing carefully from the large number of registered migration agents.

In choosing a migration agent:

- check they are registered and able to practise lawfully in Australia. See the Office of the MARA website [www.mara.gov.au](http://www.mara.gov.au) or contact the Office on 1300 22 62 72
- don't be afraid to ask questions – do not assume anything
- get two or three quotes before deciding
- check out the Migration Agents Code of Conduct ([www.mara.gov.au](http://www.mara.gov.au)).

Also ask the agent questions such as:

- how long have you worked in the industry?
- what is your experience in the area where I need help?
- what services will you provide me with?
- how much will it cost?

If you have any problems with your registered migration agent, you can make a complaint to the Office of the MARA. For serious offences, the Office can take away their registration.

If you need more proof of the dangers of using an unregistered agent, look at what happened to an unsuspecting client who did use one, on the department's video "*Don't get caught out!*" at IMMI tv on [www.youtube.com/watch?v=RacpuZ3NQ0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RacpuZ3NQ0)