

\$2 million in claims settled

CLAIMS against immigration consultants amounting to about \$2 million have been settled, the Consumer Council said last week.

A total of 57 complaints have been lodged against immigration consultants since April, up from 32 during the 1989-90 financial year.

A council spokesman said the claims were lodged after consultants failed to get visas for clients who had paid between \$30,000 and \$40,000.

The spokesman refused to name the consultants involved but said a number of the 57 complaints were lodged against one particular consultant.

"People who go to consultants are not always fully qualified to emigrate; they are borderline cases, so not all get visas," the spokesman said.

"As part of the contract, consultants

are obliged to refund payments to clients who do not get visas.

Most of the complaints about consultants were that people were never told they would not qualify for a visa after their initial approach, the spokesman said.

"Consultants would then delay the repayment by urging clients to apply to emigrate to other countries or wait until a country changed its immigration laws."

The spokesman said complaints to the Consumer Council against consultants had not yet reached serious levels, "but that is not to say these will not reach serious levels in the future".

"It is easy for fly-by-nighters to operate in this area because many are from overseas. They can go home, taking their clients' money with them."