

The Auditor-General  
Audit Report No.31 2000–2001  
Performance Audit

# **Administration of Consular Services**

**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

Australian National Audit Office

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Canberra ACT  
29 March 2001

Dear Madam President  
Dear Mr Speaker

The Australian National Audit Office has undertaken a performance audit in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in accordance with the authority contained in the *Auditor-General Act 1997*. I present this report of this audit, and the accompanying brochure, to the Parliament. The report is titled *Administration of Consular Services*.

Following its tabling in Parliament, the report will be placed on the Australian National Audit Office's Homepage—  
<http://www.anao.gov.au>.

Yours sincerely



P. J. Barrett  
Auditor-General

The Honourable the President of the Senate  
The Honourable the Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT

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# Contents

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Abbreviations/Glossary	7
<b>Summary and Recommendations</b>	
Summary	11
Consular services	11
Audit objective and approach	12
Conclusion	12
DFAT response	14
Key Findings	16
Improving Access to Consular Services (Chapter 2)	16
Advice to Travellers (Chapter 3)	17
Case Management Systems (Chapter 4)	20
Performance Management (Chapter 5)	21
Contingency Planning (Chapter 6)	22
Recommendations of the 1997 Senate Committee Report (Chapter 7)	23
Recommendations	25
<b>Audit Findings and Conclusions</b>	
1. Introduction	31
Consular services	31
Recent reviews	35
The audit	36
Report structure	37
2. Improving Access to Consular Services	38
Number of overseas consular service points and range of services	38
Expanding the number of service delivery points	39
Expanding global access to 24-hour consular assistance for more countries	43
Consular services are a high priority at overseas posts	44
Providing the skills and support to deliver quality service	45
Conclusion	46
3. Advice to Travellers	47
Introduction	47
Developing a client communication strategy for consular services	47
Gauging the penetration and effectiveness of travel advice	49
Conclusion—Client communication	49
Travel warnings	50
Travel advisories on issue	52
Issuing travel advisories	53
Clarity of travel warnings	56
Conclusion—Travel warnings	59
Improving consular publications and other information for clients	60
Improving client access to travel advice and consular information	64
Conclusion—Improving client access to advice and information	66

4.	<b>Case Management Systems</b>	67
	Introduction	67
	Limitations of existing case management systems	68
	Improving system support for case management and data collection	70
	Conclusion	72
5.	<b>Performance Management</b>	74
	Performance information	74
	Consular caseload statistics	79
	Performance feedback to posts	81
	Client service quality and client satisfaction	82
	Complaint handling	85
	Conclusion	86
6.	<b>Contingency Planning</b>	88
	Post contingency plans	88
	Conclusion – Post contingency plans	93
	Registration of Australian citizens abroad	94
	Warden systems	96
	Evacuation of the Solomon Islands	97
7.	<b>Recommendations of the 1997 Senate Committee Report</b>	99
	Introduction	99
	Action to implement recommendations	100
	<b>Appendices</b>	
	Appendix 1: Consular assistance for Australians overseas	104
	Appendix 2: Audit criteria	106
	Appendix 3: Agency action to implement recommendations of the 1997 Senate Committee Report	107
	Appendix 4: Main destinations of Australians travelling abroad	120
	Appendix 5: Selected DFAT travel advisories	122
	Appendix 6: Consular publications, websites and other communication channels	124
	<b>Index</b>	126
	<b>Series Titles</b>	127
	<b>Better Practice Guides</b>	130

# Abbreviations/Glossary

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Austrade	Australian Trade Commission
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
CMIS	Case Management Information System
COC	Consular Operations Centre
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
ERP	Emergency Response Program
IDETF	Interdepartmental Emergency Task Force
Senate Committee	Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee





# **Summary and Recommendations**



# Summary

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## Consular services

1. The number of Australians travelling and residing overseas has increased substantially in recent years. In 1999–2000, Australians made 3.3 million overseas trips and an estimated 0.8 million Australians were living abroad. Although Australians travelling overseas are encouraged to make adequate preparations for their trip, some Australians will encounter problems during their stay in overseas countries.
2. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) provides consular services to Australians travelling and living overseas and to their next of kin in Australia. It issues travel warnings (advisories) on dangers in visiting particular countries; provides general advice on how to avoid trouble overseas; and assists Australians in difficulties abroad, when they cannot resolve consular problems through their own resources. Consular services range from replacing a lost or stolen passport to providing substantial consular assistance following the hospitalisation, arrest or death of an Australian abroad. Some 21 000 Australians were provided substantial consular assistance overseas in 1999–2000.
3. The Government accords consular work a high priority and is committed to providing comprehensive and high-quality consular services. This is reflected in assistance to Australian travellers and residents overseas being one of DFAT's five key corporate goals. The 2000–2001 Budget allocated an additional \$1.1 million a year to maintain the level of consular service in the face of an expected increase in demand, bringing the total amount of funding for consular services to \$39 million a year.
4. Consular services are provided overseas through Australia's network of diplomatic missions and honorary consuls, as well as through special arrangements with consular partner countries. In Australia, the Consular Branch in Canberra is the main service delivery point. It includes a Consular Operations Centre, staffed 24-hours a day to provide emergency consular assistance.
5. The Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee tabled a major review of consular services in June 1997. The inquiry addressed a broad range of issues relating to consular assistance and examined DFAT's handling of a number of difficult consular cases. The Committee made 23 recommendations for improving consular services. The Government accepted 18 of the recommendations in whole or in part, with three others requiring further consideration or consultation.

## Audit objective and approach

6. The objective of this audit was to form an opinion and report to the Parliament on the adequacy of DFAT's administration of consular services. To achieve this objective, the audit focussed on DFAT's:

- travel advice to alert Australian travellers and residents abroad and the Australian travel industry to potential travel risks;
- case management systems to record and monitor action on more complex consular cases;
- the development, collection and use of performance information for the management of consular services; and
- contingency planning for major consular incidents.

7. The audit sought to identify areas where DFAT can improve its management, administration and delivery of consular services to Australian citizens.

8. The audit also reviewed action taken by DFAT and other agencies to address those recommendations by the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee which the Government accepted, or indicated, would be further considered.

## Conclusion

9. The ANAO concluded that most aspects of consular services are satisfactorily administered. DFAT is focussed on providing responsive consular services to Australian travellers, residents overseas and to their next of kin in Australia. There have been improvements in the provision of services in recent years, particularly in terms of improved accessibility. Accessibility has been enhanced mainly through the establishment of a centre that monitors and responds to consular developments 24-hours a day.

10. In addition, DFAT has strengthened its efforts to prevent Australians from experiencing difficulties overseas by, for example, increasing the number and coverage of travel advisories and public information brochures. There is also an increased importance attached to the provision of consular services at overseas posts. For example, Heads of Mission take an active interest in significant consular cases and the staffing resources devoted to the provision of consular services have grown. This strengthening is partly in response to the Senate Committee finding that DFAT did not devote enough attention to the prevention of problems overseas.

11. Notwithstanding the improvements that have been made, there remain some weaknesses in the management processes and administrative systems supporting the provision of consular services. In particular, the ANAO identified the following areas where the management of consular services would benefit from improvement:

- the arrangements for the provision of travel advice and information should be strengthened to ensure that all travel information is underpinned by an effective communication strategy; warnings are highlighted and clearly explained; and the processes that lead to the issuance of travel advisories are systematically applied and the assessment appropriately documented;
- there is a need for an effective case management system to support the monitoring and review of case progress and the collection of consular performance information—a need which DFAT has recognised and plans to address through the implementation of a new case management information system;
- strengthening of performance management arrangements would help ensure that management, staff and clients are focussed on the requirement to deliver prompt and responsive services. The establishment of appropriate service performance targets, the systematic measurement and/or assessment of client satisfaction and structured complaint handling are key areas to address; and
- contingency planning should be based on a systematic risk assessment, updated regularly, and more focussed on the protection of Australian travellers and residents overseas.

12. DFAT has itself recognised that further work needs to be undertaken. During the course of the audit and following the provision of additional funding for consular services in the 2000–2001 Budget, DFAT has continued to improve aspects of its delivery of consular services and has developed plans for further improvements.

13. DFAT and other agencies have taken action to address partly or wholly 17 of the 21 Senate Committee recommendations which the Government accepted, or agreed to consider further. One recommendation—relating to counselling referral arrangements—has not been actioned; DFAT advised that it has now commenced a review of procedures in this area. The Government's response to the remaining three recommendations required DFAT to further pursue possible changes to the production of a key brochure and in relation to certain consular debts. There have been no changes implemented in these areas. There was no documentary evidence that these matters had been further pursued. DFAT advised that it had given these matters due consideration and judgements were made not to proceed, but has undertaken to consider the recommendations afresh.

## DFAT response

14. DFAT agreed with the six recommendations in the report and advised of action taken or under way to implement the report recommendations.

15. In responding to the report, DFAT commented:

*The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has found this performance audit to be a useful exercise. The audit took place at a time when further significant enhancements to the Department's delivery of consular services had been made possible by the Government's allocation, in July 2000, of additional funding to this important function. The reforms the Department has been able to introduce in the consular area during the period of the audit have flowed directly from this decision, but only represent the latest step in the Department's well-established approach of continuous improvement in the consular field. This approach, dating back to the mid-1990s in particular, is recognised in the ANAO report, and reflects the great importance attached by the Government to the delivery of services to Australians overseas and their families in Australia.*

*Each of the ANAO recommendations has the Department's full agreement, and many have in fact been implemented, as part of this independent process of reform, since the 'snapshot' taken by the ANAO during 2000. It has been very helpful to have specific comments and suggestions from the ANAO as we proceeded. Details of the Department's approach to the four broad areas identified in the ANAO's conclusions may be found in our specific responses to the ANAO's recommendations. In summary:*

- the arrangements for the provision of high-quality travel advice and information have been strengthened by the introduction of new performance standards ensuring that all advice is less than three months old and that warnings are very clear. Travel advice is now underpinned by a fully-funded communication strategy introduced in October 2000. Following further consultation with DFAT staff overseas, the travel industry and broader public, and suggestions from the ANAO, we are currently refining further the presentation of travel advice and our systems for ensuring the Department has identified appropriately all potential risks that may require travel advisories;*
- the Department has made significant progress in the testing of software applications for a new Consular Management Information System (CMIS) since the provision of funding for this purpose in*

*July 2000. Detailed technical testing procedures were finalised in February 2001, and at the time of writing the Department was considering options for a pilot trial involving a number of overseas posts. It is hoped that the CMIS will enhance significantly the Department's capacity to service the steadily increasing consular workload;*

- the Department is committed to ensuring that the CMIS will have a sophisticated capacity for the automatic collection of relevant and useful performance information, and is taking this into careful account in examining potential applications. This will enhance the Department's approach to the collection and analysis, for management and accountability purposes, of performance information in the consular area; and*
- in January 2001, the Department completed a review of its contingency plans for managing crisis situations overseas. The review led to the introduction of a Contingency Planning, Crisis Management and Evacuation Manual. This manual, which has been distributed to posts, is designed to provide updated guidance on preparing contingency plans, responding to crisis situations overseas, and evacuation procedures. Central to these new guidelines is the principle that contingency planning should be focussed squarely on protecting Australians overseas.*

*The ANAO has also commented helpfully on the Department's records of its implementation of the agreed recommendations of the 1997 Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Review of Consular Services. DFAT will report shortly to the Committee on its implementation of all agreed recommendations.*

# Key Findings

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## Improving Access to Consular Services (Chapter 2)

16. The overseas consular network now comprises 137 Australian posts and an additional 16 Canadian posts which assist Australians in designated countries under a consular sharing agreement. This represents a 6 per cent increase since 1997. The network covers the main travel locations for Australians, with one or more consular service point in the 34 countries and territories which are the main destinations of Australians travelling overseas.

17. Part of the expansion of the consular network has been due to increased consular sharing with Canada. The agreement with Canada is Australia's only formal sharing arrangement, with the United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States of America providing consular services to Australians on an informal basis. DFAT indicated to the Senate Committee that it might be advantageous to Australia to pursue opportunities for consular sharing arrangements with some other countries, such as Germany and the Scandinavian countries. This has not happened; suitable additional sharing arrangements would extend the reach of Australia's consular services to some of the more remote parts of the world. DFAT advised that it considers that its existing consular network meets current needs, but that it will continue to explore opportunities to expand the network through sharing arrangements with other countries on a case-by-case basis.

18. The number of honorary consuls has also increased, from 31 at the time of the Senate Committee inquiry to 42 in 2000. The increase has been less than DFAT identified as would be desirable in a 1998 review, and less than some comparable Western countries, but DFAT has advised that funding for additional appointments had not been available in its Budget. Honorary consuls represent value for money in the delivery of consular services—at an average cost per consul of \$7500 annually. Given the cost-effectiveness of such appointments, there would be merit in DFAT re-assessing its ability to further expand the honorary consul system. DFAT advised that, following the provision of additional funding for consular services in the 2000–2001 Budget, it expects to establish a small number of additional honorary consul positions shortly.

19. The Senate Committee report addressed limitations in after hours access to consular assistance and the costs borne by clients in contacting DFAT. Since then DFAT has greatly enhanced telephone access to consular



services. A Consular Operations Centre provides emergency consular assistance 24-hours a day to Australians overseas. The service covers 57 overseas posts and further expansion is planned. DFAT also has a free telephone call service within Australia.

20. A wide range of services is provided by the consular network, including welfare guidance and assistance, inquiries on behalf of next of kin into the whereabouts of missing family members, and assistance following the hospitalisation, death or arrest of Australians abroad. A 1999 joint DFAT-Department of Finance and Administration international benchmarking study reported that Australia's consular services are both comprehensive and uniformly available across the network. The ANAO found that consular service delivery is an important function at overseas posts, with a strong focus on quality service and Heads of Mission taking an active interest in the handling of significant consular cases and being kept informed of consular operations.

21. The provision of quality consular service depends in large measure on having well-trained professional consular staff. Consular training for Australia-based staff is provided prior to their overseas posting. Training for locally-engaged staff and honorary consuls delivered through regional seminars had been curtailed in recent years due to limited DFAT funds, but DFAT has now taken action to redress this. A series of regional training seminars commenced in 2000 and is continuing. Counselling support is available for consular staff, and training is provided in stress management.

## Advice to Travellers (Chapter 3)

### Client communication

22. Notwithstanding the importance of travel advice and information in reducing the likelihood of Australians encountering problems overseas, at the time of audit fieldwork DFAT did not have an overall communication strategy to underpin this role. The desirability of such a strategy is illustrated by some Australians continuing to have unrealistic expectations about consular services which DFAT can provide.

23. Research has not been undertaken to profile consular clients and the particular information needs of client groups, which would be a usual part of effective management and targeting of client communication. Further, DFAT does not have adequate, systematic information on the effectiveness of its travel advice and consular information in reaching clients who require this information and in helping them to avoid trouble while overseas. Such information would help DFAT to assess the outcomes achieved and identify means of improving its communications.

24. At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it now has a public communication strategy. DFAT also advised that it is proceeding with surveys of the penetration and effectiveness of its major consular publications, and plans to extend this approach to include its travel advice.

### **Travel warnings**

25. DFAT travel advisories alert Australian travellers to dangers in visiting particular countries or parts of the world. The number of travel advisories has increased from 47 in 1997 to 77 in 2000. This improved coverage of potential trouble spots reflects the increased priority given to consular activities by the Government and also responds to the Senate Committee's 1997 concern that DFAT did not devote enough attention to the prevention of problems overseas.

26. At the time of audit, DFAT was close to achieving its target of updating travel advisories at no more than six monthly intervals. Some 96 per cent were less than six months old and 67 per cent less than three months old. DFAT advised the ANAO at the conclusion of the audit that it had introduced a new performance benchmark that no travel advisory be more than three months old and had reduced the age of travel advisories so that all are now less than three months old.

27. The procedure for issuing a travel advisory involves two key steps. The first is the identification of a potential risk to Australians in visiting a particular country or region. DFAT undertakes this by monitoring potential dangers to Australian travellers as part of the routine review of current affairs overseas. However, it does not undertake an ongoing, systematic assessment and documented analysis of the general level of travel risk in overseas countries. This weakens the assurance for DFAT that it has appropriately identified those potential risks which may require travel advisories. Periodic reporting by posts on potential dangers would help strengthen the travel advisory function. At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it would task overseas posts to review periodically the need for a travel advisory for those countries where one is not on issue.

28. The next step in the procedure is to decide whether it is necessary to issue a travel advisory in response to an identified potential risk to Australian travellers in a particular country. DFAT guidance specifies that six separate factors are to be considered in assessing the need to issue travel advisories, along with any other relevant factors. The Consular Branch, overseas post and geographic branch consult on the need for a warning and contribute to the proposed travel advisory, drawing on their in-country and consular knowledge and experience and exercising their professional judgement regarding the risk to Australians.

The ANAO considers this approach is sound, and it is similar to that of DFAT's consular partners.

29. However, some strengthening of these arrangements would increase the assurance that procedures have been appropriately applied in support of desired outcomes. In cases examined by the ANAO where travel advisories were issued in recent years, the information available to the Consular Branch in relation to the danger in particular countries generally covered only some of the six factors. Moreover, there was not a systematic documented analysis against the six factors in support of the decision. This weakens the assurance for DFAT management that risks have been appropriately assessed and factors addressed in a disciplined way. Systematic application of procedures and documentation of assessments would help provide such assurance, without diminishing the exercise of professional judgement by DFAT officers. DFAT has advised that it will introduce systematic written reference to the six factors in the future.

30. Four levels of warning are employed in travel advisories, with each level indicating a particular course of action that travellers should take in response to the threat in the country concerned. DFAT's general travel advice and website do not expand upon, nor indeed refer to, the four warning levels. In practice, it is difficult to distinguish between two of the warnings, and some advisories have contained two warning levels, risking confusion among travellers. DFAT does generally place the essential message or warning in the first paragraph of the advice; however, the warning is woven into the text rather than being highlighted. Clarification and highlighting of warnings would further strengthen the effectiveness of travel advice. At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it was moving to adopt these changes.

### **General travel advice and information**

31. DFAT's key publication on general travel advice and consular services, *Hints for Australian Travellers*, is comprehensive and easy to read. A copy is provided with each new passport issued. However, DFAT has not evaluated whether *Hints* is widely read and valued by travellers.

32. DFAT has increased the number of its consular brochures, in line with the Senate Committee recommendation to consider the need for additional publications. These provide advice and information on a wide range of specific topics relevant to travellers. There remain some significant groups of Australians who may be at risk while abroad, including elderly travellers, adventure travellers and Australian residents overseas, who were not targeted by these brochures at the time of audit.

33. DFAT requires overseas posts to maintain lists of lawyers that may be provided to Australians in need of legal assistance. The lists for most countries were brought up-to-date during the audit. The Senate Committee recommended the lists indicate whether the lawyers practise in a particular court jurisdiction. Some of the lists do not include this information.

34. DFAT has arrangements for disseminating travel advice and information to Australian travellers and the travel industry, through the computerised reservation systems used by travel agents and its consular publications and websites. However, there would be benefit in exploring possible ways of improving industry access to travel advisories, as well as examining more innovative ways of disseminating advice to the travelling public. These include communicating key messages through commercial travel trade publications and promotional material at airports.

35. DFAT advised that client feedback on the value of *Hints* is now being sought through a broader passports survey. It has recently issued a separate brochure for elderly travellers and tasked overseas posts to include details of the court jurisdiction of lawyers in their lists of lawyers.

## Case Management Systems (Chapter 4)

36. Effective case management systems can make a significant contribution to the provision of responsive consular assistance. However, DFAT's systems to support the management of consular cases and collect performance data have significant limitations. DFAT does not have an integrated case management system. The paper-based systems used at overseas posts do not adequately support case actioning and monitoring. The Consular Branch in Canberra, which may be required to urgently contact next of kin in Australia regarding consular incidents affecting family members abroad, does not have immediate, shared access to case information held at posts.

37. In the absence of a single case management information system, posts have a variety of different systems for collecting statistics on consular caseload and for preparing estimates of staff resource usage on consular cases. These systems are resource-intensive and do not capture case information that would support sophisticated caseload analysis for performance management purposes.

38. DFAT has been aware of the limitations of its existing case management arrangements since 1997. The 2000–2001 Budget provided funding for a new case management information system which has the potential to provide the system support needed for efficient and effective

case management and data collection. DFAT has advised that the project is now well-advanced and that the testing of one software application for the new system has been completed.

## Performance Management (Chapter 5)

### Performance information

39. DFAT's effectiveness indicators for consular services cover the accessibility, quality and responsiveness of consular assistance and, as such, address planned outcomes for major aspects of the consular function. However, some of these effectiveness indicators are not supported by quality and quantity indicators needed to effectively assess and report on the achievement of planned outcomes.

40. DFAT presented performance information indicating improved consular performance in its 1999–2000 Annual Report. While DFAT reported against each consular indicator, there was only partial reporting in some instances. For example, travel industry satisfaction was not specifically reported as part of client feedback on consular services and advice, as had been intended. The absence of key performance information weakens the assurance DFAT is able to provide that it is achieving planned outcomes for consular services.

41. Notwithstanding the limitations of case management information systems noted above, some useful statistics are collected from overseas posts on consular caseload and staff resource usage. However, this information is not routinely analysed, or used for performance management purposes. Consular caseload and other information could be better used to inform management of emerging trends in service needs of clients, identify major trouble spots for Australians travelling abroad, and support and inform decisions on consular staffing requirements at overseas posts.

42. DFAT advised that it would institute quarterly reviews of consular statistics to take more careful account of statistical information and trends in the management of consular services, and to identify points of staffing pressure across the consular network.

### Client service quality

43. DFAT has a strong focus on, and professional approach to, client service quality in the delivery of consular assistance. This was evident across the range of services provided to clients, with cases observed during the audit addressed promptly and responsively. Appropriate customised service was provided to assist individual clients in need.

44. DFAT's commitment to providing quality consular services is reflected in its Consular Service Charter. However, DFAT statements in the Charter regarding service responsiveness are very broad and are not underpinned in the Charter or elsewhere by explicit service targets for the delivery of consular services. The specification of meaningful and measurable indicators and targets is recognised better practice in client-focussed service organisations.

45. DFAT's Annual Report reported 'strongly positive' client feedback regarding consular services during 1999–2000. This was based on a small client service questionnaire and unsolicited letters from clients received in Canberra. The questionnaire, however, had limitations in its representativeness and methodology which undermine the confidence in DFAT's assessment. Better performance information on whether clients are satisfied with consular services and what improvements clients would like to services would both assist in planning for service improvement and strengthen accountability for the delivery of consular services.

46. DFAT does not have a structured approach to consular complaint handling. There are local, ad hoc procedures for dealing with individual complaints. Consular complaints received across the consular network are also not systematically recorded, to help identify and address any underlying service quality problems.

47. DFAT acknowledged that it would be beneficial to explore more structured ways to gauge client satisfaction. It also acknowledged the need for a more systematic approach to recording and reporting of client complaints and compliments.

## **Contingency Planning (Chapter 6)**

48. Posts are responsible for preparing contingency plans to meet potential threats to the security of missions and to protect Australians in their country of accreditation. Contingency plans examined by the ANAO had a predominant focus on the protection of mission staff and families, with insufficient attention given to identifying arrangements for contacting and assisting Australian travellers and residents overseas in the event of a crisis. The quality of contingency plans varied across posts in terms of the consistency of planning information and the coverage of risk.

49. Posts are required to revise their contingency plans whenever conditions change and, in any event, to undertake an annual review and update of plans. While the process for reviewing risks at posts visited employed some elements of an effective risk management approach, it did not involve a rigorous and systematic assessment of risks using a standard risk management framework.

50. Many posts did not review their contingency plans annually or provide updates to DFAT Canberra, as required. Only 20 per cent of plans held by the Consular Branch were less than one year old and some 20 per cent were more than five years old. DFAT has not consistently and actively monitored post contingency plans to ensure that they are up-to-date. Further, DFAT guidelines governing contingency planning arrangements were promulgated in 1987 and are now out-of-date and not user-friendly, making them of limited use to posts.

51. DFAT acknowledged that there are problems with the quality of plans and at the time of audit had commenced a review of contingency planning arrangements. At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it had completed the review and issued a new manual addressing contingency planning, crisis management and evacuation procedures, and that all posts would be required to update their contingency plans annually.

52. Australians travelling or residing abroad may register their presence with the relevant post, to facilitate later contact for consular purposes, particularly in an emergency situation. DFAT classifies posts into three categories for registration purposes, with posts in higher risk countries being required to actively register Australians. In practice, some posts in the lower risk categories pursue registrations more actively than is expected of them. A review of the categorisation of posts for registration purposes to ensure that posts are appropriately classified would be timely.

53. There is no monitoring or analysis undertaken by DFAT across posts to determine the success or otherwise of post registration efforts. Such monitoring would facilitate the identification and sharing of better practice in registration arrangements.

## **Recommendations of the 1997 Senate Committee Report (Chapter 7)**

54. In June 1997, the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee completed a report entitled *Helping Australians Abroad—A Review of the Australian Government's Consular Services*. The report addressed a broad range of issues relating to consular assistance and examined DFAT's handling of a number of difficult consular cases. The Senate Committee made 23 recommendations for improving consular services. The Government accepted 18 recommendations, with three additional recommendations requiring further consideration or consultation.

55. Overall, DFAT and other agencies have taken action to address partly or wholly 17 of the 21 Senate Committee recommendations that the Government accepted, or indicated, would be further considered.

56. DFAT has not taken action to implement one recommendation—referral of grieving next of kin to coronial counselling services and the maintenance of a list of private counsellors (Recommendation 12). DFAT has advised that it does attach importance to counselling for clients, and it is common practice for consular officers to suggest to distressed family members or victims of tragedy that they seek counselling. However, it has acknowledged the need to adopt a more systematic approach to counselling referral and advised that it has now commenced a review of procedures in this area.

57. The Government's response to the remaining three recommendations required DFAT to further pursue: producing a key brochure in languages other than English and sponsorship of its production (parts of Recommendation 6); impounding passports of certain consular debtors (Recommendation 8); and voluntary arrangements for certain consular debts to be registered against existing government entitlements or added to the recipient's future tax liability (Recommendation 9). There have been no changes implemented in these areas. There was no documentary evidence that these matters had been further pursued. DFAT advised that it had given these matters due consideration and judgements were made not to proceed, but without a written record being made. DFAT has undertaken to consider the recommendations afresh.



# Recommendations

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Set out below are the ANAO's recommendations aimed at improving DFAT's administration of consular services. Report paragraph references and abbreviated DFAT responses are also included. More detailed responses are shown in the body of the report. The ANAO considers that DFAT should give priority to Recommendations 2, 3 and 5.

**Recommendation  
No. 1  
Para 3.17**

**Client  
communication**

The ANAO recommends that DFAT:

- develop a client communication strategy to assist in the production and distribution of information to target client groups; and
- develop methods to assess the penetration and effectiveness of travel advice to ensure that client information needs are met and the risks to their safety and welfare are minimised.

*DFAT response:* Agreed.

**Recommendation  
No. 2  
Para 3.59**

**Travel warnings**

The ANAO recommends that DFAT strengthen its management of travel advisories to ensure that it is able to provide adequate assurance that Australians are appropriately advised of travel risks, by:

- systematically applying procedures for assessing the need for travel advisories, and appropriately documenting the assessment; and
- ensuring that travel warnings in travel advisories are highlighted, and their severity clearly explained.

*DFAT response:* Agreed.

**Recommendation  
No. 3  
Para 4.27**

**Case  
management  
information  
system**

The ANAO recommends that DFAT ensure that it has a case management information system that:

- enables the recording and transmittal of sufficient information to facilitate the actioning and monitoring of cases at both the post and in Canberra;
- overcomes weaknesses in existing case management and data collection systems, that were identified by the ANAO in the course of the audit; and
- facilitates the collection of consular caseload and other performance information.

*DFAT response:* Agreed.

**Recommendation  
No. 4  
Para 5.42**

**Performance  
management**

The ANAO recommends that DFAT strengthen performance management for consular services by:

- specifying a wider range of performance information that can be used to readily assess and report on planned outcomes for the consular function;
- making more effective use of information on consular caseload for performance management purposes;
- establishing service performance targets for high-volume, more routine consular services and the initial stages of more complex casework;
- systematically measuring and/or assessing client satisfaction; and
- establishing a consular complaint handling system to deal with client complaints in a timely and effective manner and to capture information to facilitate appropriate performance improvement.

*DFAT response:* Agreed.

**Recommendation No. 5**  
**Para 6.30**

**Contingency planning**

The ANAO recommends that DFAT ensure that its management arrangements for post contingency plans provide for appropriate coordination, monitoring and review. In particular, DFAT should ensure that:

- post contingency plans protect the interests of Australians travelling and residing abroad as well as those of the mission;
- posts undertake regular, systematic analyses of their risks;
- post contingency plans are kept up-to-date; and
- guidelines on the preparation of post contingency plans are kept up-to-date.

*DFAT response:* Agreed.

**Recommendation No. 6**  
**Para 6.40**

**Registration of Australians abroad**

The ANAO recommends that DFAT review the categorisation of posts for registration purposes to ensure that posts are appropriately classified and that it monitor the effectiveness of post registration efforts.

*DFAT response:* Agreed.



# **Audit Findings and Conclusions**



# 1. Introduction

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*This chapter provides an overview of consular services and recent reviews of the consular function. It also outlines the objective, focus and methodology of the audit, as well as the structure of the report.*

## Consular services

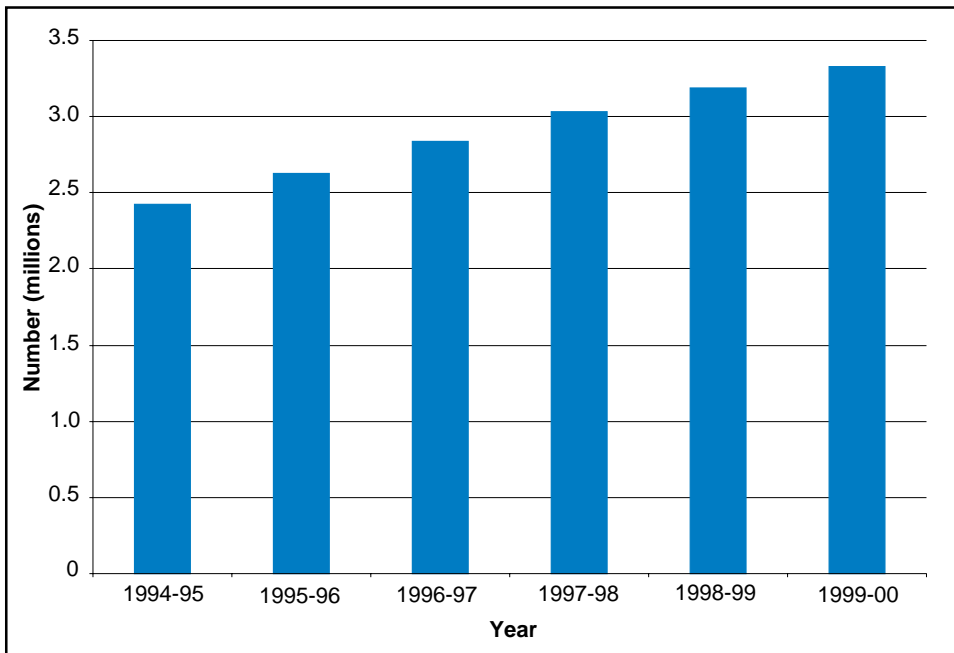
### **Consular services are a safety net for Australians abroad**

**1.1** The Australian Government provides consular services overseas and in Australia to protect the welfare and interests of Australian travellers and residents abroad, and their next of kin in Australia. In recent years the Government has given a high priority to providing accessible, comprehensive and high-quality consular services.

**1.2** The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is responsible for delivering these services; assisting Australian travellers and residents overseas is one of its five key corporate goals. DFAT's role is to provide advice to Australians on how to avoid trouble overseas and to assist Australians in difficulties abroad, when they cannot resolve these difficulties through their own resources. Services are provided through some 153 overseas and eight domestic service delivery points.

**1.3** In 1999–2000, some 7.1 million Australians possessed passports and made some 3.3 million overseas trips. There were also an estimated 0.8 million Australians living abroad. The number of Australians travelling overseas has been rising by 5 to 8 per cent a year (see Figure 1)—increasing the potential demand for consular services.

**Figure 1**  
**Number of Australians travelling overseas**



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

## The nature and volume of consular services

**1.4** The provision of consular assistance is governed by international consular law and consular practice, bilateral arrangements between Australia and particular countries, and Australian Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation. The privacy of clients assisted is protected under the *Privacy Act 1988*.

**1.5** There are limits to the consular assistance which DFAT is able to provide to Australians because of this international and domestic legal framework, as well as practical administrative and resource considerations. What Australian consuls can and cannot do to assist clients is summarised in Appendix 1.

**1.6** DFAT has about 400 000 contacts with consular clients every year. Most of these involve consular services of a routine and minor nature, such as travel-related enquiries, notarial services<sup>1</sup> and issuing emergency passports overseas.

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<sup>1</sup> Notarial services include the authentication or legalisation of private or commercial documents covering transactions between parties in two or more countries.



1.7 More significant consular assistance includes welfare guidance and assistance, inquiries on behalf of next of kin into the whereabouts of missing family members, and assistance following the hospitalisation, death or arrest of Australians abroad. There are about 20 000 such substantial consular assistance cases each year, out of the total 400 000 client contacts (see Table 1).<sup>2</sup> In addition to these services, DFAT responds to serious, but infrequent consular incidents such as the kidnapping or hijacking of Australians in overseas countries.

**Table 1**  
**Substantial consular assistance provided to Australians overseas, 1999–2000**

<i>Short-hand description</i>	<i>Nature of consular assistance provided</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>
Welfare cases	Australians given general welfare guidance and assistance	16 085
Travellers emergency loan cases	Australians in financial difficulties who were lent public funds to cover immediate needs	775
Whereabouts cases	Inquiries made about Australians overseas who could not be contacted by their next of kin	1850
Hospitalisation cases	Hospitalised Australians given guidance and assistance	656
Medical evacuation cases	Australians evacuated to another location for medical purposes	103
Death cases	Next of kin guided or assisted with disposal of remains in relation to death overseas	604
Repatriation cases	Australians having difficulty arranging their own return to Australia given guidance and assistance	60
Arrest cases	Australians arrested overseas	453
Prisoner cases	Australians in prison overseas (as at 30 June)	155
<b>Total number of cases involving Australians in difficulty</b>		<b>20 741</b>

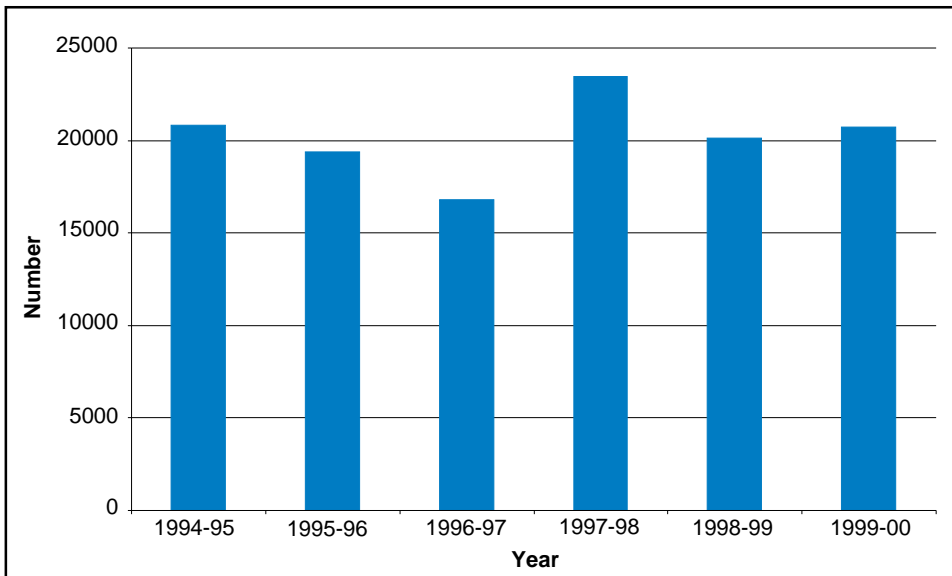
Source: DFAT consular statistics

1.8 Figure 2 shows the numbers of Australians provided with substantial consular assistance in recent years. The peak in 1997–98 was mainly caused by unrest in Indonesia.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'substantial consular assistance' is used in this report to refer to the more significant types of consular assistance listed in Table 1. This assistance is distinguishable from consular services of a routine and minor nature.

**Figure 2**

**Number of Australians provided with substantial consular assistance**



Source: DFAT consular statistics

### **Service cost**

**1.9** Consular services are estimated to cost \$39 million in 2000–2001. This is a cost of about \$1770 for each client requiring substantial consular assistance, or approximately \$11 for each Australian travelling abroad each year.

**1.10** Of course, the actual cost of assisting each client varies considerably according to the nature and complexity of the case. The issue of an emergency passport costs about \$20, whereas the handling of a significant case involving the detention of an Australian overseas may cost more than \$20 000. A major high-profile consular incident, the detention of Messrs Pratt and Wallace in Yugoslavia in 1998–99, cost DFAT more than \$1 million.

**1.11** Resources applied to consular work increased from 101 staff years in 1996–97 to 142 in 1999–2000. This was against a background of a slight decline in DFAT’s overall staffing (from 3665 to 3575 staff years).<sup>3</sup> Consular staffing now represents about 4 per cent of total staff resources.

<sup>3</sup> Figures for 1999–2000 supplied by DFAT. DFAT noted that these figures were compiled using a more sophisticated methodology than had been used for previous years.

**1.12** Both locally-engaged staff and Australia-based staff are used to deliver consular services at overseas posts. DFAT has sought to increase the range of routine consular duties (particularly notarial services) performed by locally-engaged staff and they now account for about 69 per cent of consular staff resources employed at posts.

## Recent reviews

**1.13** The Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee tabled a major review of consular services in June 1997.<sup>4</sup> The inquiry addressed a broad range of issues relating to consular assistance and examined DFAT's handling of a number of difficult consular cases.

**1.14** The Committee found that DFAT's consular services had been fairly narrowly focussed on Australians in trouble overseas with much less attention given to their families back in Australia. It also found that DFAT responded to Australians in need overseas but devoted little attention to the prevention of problems. The Committee noted that there was now a recognition in DFAT that more attention should be devoted to these issues. The Committee report made 23 recommendations for improving consular services.

**1.15** A joint DFAT-Department of Finance and Administration output pricing review of the consular function was completed in 1999–2000. The review concluded that Australia provides comprehensive and high-quality consular services at a reasonable cost.

**1.16** Following the review, the Government allocated additional ongoing funding of \$1.1 million a year for consular services in the 2000–2001 Budget. This was provided to maintain the level of consular service in the face of an expected increase in demand (due primarily to more Australians travelling abroad), to better target travel advice and information, to enable the development of global on-line case management technology and to extend access to the Consular Operations Centre.

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<sup>4</sup> Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, *Helping Australians Abroad. A Review of the Australian Government's Consular Services*, June 1997.

## The audit

### Audit objective, focus and criteria

1.17 The objective of this audit was to form an opinion and report to the Parliament on the adequacy of administration of consular services by DFAT. The audit focussed on:

- travel advice to alert Australian travellers and residents abroad and the Australian travel industry to potential travel risks;
- case management systems to record and monitor action on more complex consular cases;
- the development, collection and use of performance information for the management of consular services; and
- contingency planning for major consular incidents.

1.18 The audit sought to identify areas where DFAT can improve its management, administration and delivery of consular services to Australian citizens.

1.19 The audit also reviewed action taken by DFAT and other agencies to address those recommendations by the Senate Committee on Australia's consular services which the Government accepted, or indicated, would be further considered.

1.20 The criteria for the audit were derived from recognised good practice for client service delivery and performance management and from benchmarks in previous ANAO audits and audits undertaken by overseas audit offices. The criteria are summarised in Appendix 2.

### Audit methodology

1.21 The audit was conducted in accordance with ANAO auditing standards. The cost of the audit to report tabling was \$336 000.

1.22 Audit fieldwork was undertaken in Australia at the Consular Branch in Canberra; the DFAT Sydney Office; and in overseas posts at Riyadh, Athens, Bali and Manila. The audit included interviews with key DFAT staff, file and documentation review and examination of DFAT case management and other computer-based systems. Discussions were held with the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade), which delivers consular services on behalf of DFAT through 17 overseas offices. The Australian Federation of Travel Agents, the industry peak body for travel agencies, was also consulted.

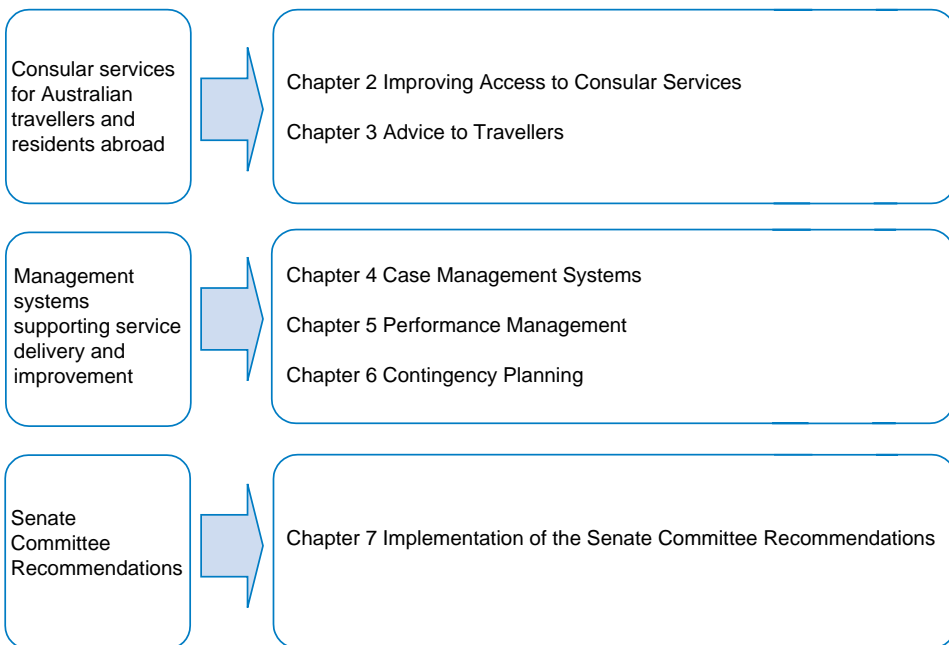
**1.23** International practice in the provision of consular services was examined to benchmark DFAT performance. Sources included website information relating to the consular activities of comparable Western countries; audit reports on the consular function in the United Kingdom and Canada; and documentation relating to the advanced global case management information system which supports Canadian consular operations.

## Report structure

**1.24** The structure of the remainder of this report is outlined in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

### Structure of the remainder of the report



## 2. Improving Access to Consular Services

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*This chapter examines DFAT action to provide clients with improved access to consular assistance and to ensure consular staff have the skills to provide high-quality service.*

### Number of overseas consular service points and range of services

#### The number of service points has increased in recent years

2.1 The overseas consular network comprises 137 Australian posts<sup>5</sup> and an additional 16 Canadian posts which assist Australians in designated countries under a consular sharing agreement. There has been a 6 per cent increase in the number of overseas consular service points since 1997 (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

#### Number of overseas consular service delivery points

Type of overseas post	Number of posts	
	1997	2000
DFAT-managed posts	81	78
Austrade-managed posts	18	17
Posts managed by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs	3	0
Honorary consuls	31	42
Canadian posts	12	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>153</b>

Source: DFAT

2.2 The network covers the main travel locations for Australians, with one or more consular service point in the 34 countries and territories which are the main destinations of Australians travelling overseas (see Appendix 4). In some parts of the world, such as the countries of the former Soviet Union, in Latin America and Africa, Australia has limited resident diplomatic or consular representation because they are beyond the main focus of Australia's international interests and are visited by smaller numbers of Australian travellers.

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<sup>5</sup> Post is short for an overseas mission. It may be an embassy, high commission, an Austrade post or a consulate headed by an honorary consul.

## **A wide range of consular services is provided across the network**

2.3 DFAT provides Australian travellers and residents abroad and their next of kin with a wide range of consular services. In addition to the services mentioned in paragraph 1.7, DFAT provides consular information such as travel advisories and undertakes contingency planning and consular crisis management to protect the safety and welfare of Australians abroad. It also provides assistance in child abduction cases.

2.4 A benchmarking study undertaken in 1999 for the DFAT-Department of Finance and Administration output pricing review identified the type and level of consular services of Australia and six other Western countries. It found that DFAT provided consular services which are both comprehensive and uniformly available across the network.

## **Expanding the number of service delivery points**

2.5 DFAT diplomatic and consular missions are the mainstay of Australia's overseas consular network. In recent years DFAT has closed some embassies and opened others. Given the relatively high costs associated with the establishment and operations of these missions, DFAT has sought to extend overseas consular service points by expanding consular sharing arrangements with Canada and by appointing additional honorary consuls.



*Entrance, Riyadh embassy. The Riyadh post provides consular services to Australians in Saudi Arabia, as well as in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Yemen.* Photo: DFAT

## **DFAT has made greater use of consular sharing arrangements with Canada**

2.6 The Senate Committee inquiry examined consular sharing arrangements between Australia and other countries, and recommended that DFAT continue to explore these arrangements to increase the reach, effectiveness and efficiency of Australia's consular services.<sup>6</sup>

2.7 Australia's only formal consular sharing arrangement is with Canada. Since 1986 this arrangement has provided Australians with access to consular assistance in countries, particularly in Africa, where Australia does not have posts. The similarity of Canadian consular services with DFAT services has helped ensure the success of these arrangements. Since 1997, the number of countries in which Canadian consular services are provided to Australians increased from 12 to 17 countries.

2.8 The agreement provides for the exchange of consular statistics, but DFAT did not have this information available at the time of audit. Such information would enable DFAT to assess the impact of the agreement on consular service provision for Australians abroad, for performance management purposes. Senior DFAT management should ensure that the provisions of the agreement in this regard are met and monitored.

## **There may be opportunities for pursuing sharing arrangements with other countries**

2.9 The United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States of America are consular partners which provide consular services to Australians on an informal basis. These arrangements have assisted Australians in some notable cases involving significant consular incidents in recent years. Annual meetings are held between the five consular partner countries to discuss consular cooperation. DFAT advised the ANAO that, in the collective judgement of the consular partners, there has been no need to formalise arrangements which work well already.

2.10 DFAT indicated to the Senate Committee that it might be advantageous to Australia to pursue opportunities for sharing arrangements with other countries, such as Germany and the Scandinavian countries. It noted that the Scandinavian countries had some representation in areas of the former Soviet Union where Australia, Canada and New Zealand were not represented.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 1*, para. 2.31.

<sup>7</sup> Senate Committee Report, para. 2.27.



**2.11** Notwithstanding its evidence to the Committee, DFAT has not pursued these opportunities further. The ANAO considers that, consistent with the discussion in the Senate Committee report, there would be merit in DFAT examining the potential benefits and costs of entering into consular sharing arrangements with other countries. Australia already has special ‘one off’ arrangements with Germany and Sweden to provide consular services to Australians in two countries where DFAT does not have a post.<sup>8</sup> Suitable sharing arrangements with countries other than Canada would extend the reach of Australia’s consular services to some of the more remote parts of the world, without requiring significant additional DFAT outlays.

**2.12** At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it considers that its existing consular network meets current needs, but that it will continue to explore opportunities to expand the network through sharing arrangements with other countries on a case-by-case basis.

### **Austrade posts continue to provide consular services on behalf of DFAT**

**2.13** Austrade-managed posts provide additional consular service delivery points. In a number of countries, these posts are located in cities other than the capital city where the DFAT diplomatic mission is situated. Austrade posts handled some 1300 substantial consular assistance cases (7 per cent of all of these cases) in 1999–2000.

**2.14** The Senate Committee examined Austrade consular operations overseas and noted that Austrade funding covered both trade promotion and consular functions at its posts. The Senate Committee recommended, and the Government agreed, that funding for *consular* activities at Austrade posts be separately identified.<sup>9</sup>

**2.15** The ANAO found that Austrade has not identified consular funding separately in Portfolio Budget Statements. Instead, consular funding is included in the combined outcome for *consular, passport and immigration* services. Separate disclosure of these costs would improve transparency to Parliament. Austrade has advised that it intends to separately identify the consular component from 2001–2002, consistent with the Senate Committee recommendation.

<sup>8</sup> These arrangements relate to Libya and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) respectively.

<sup>9</sup> Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 2*, para. 3.21.

**2.16** It is recognised better practice that provider and client agencies have agreements covering service provision, resourcing, performance information and accountability reporting. An agreement for the delivery of consular activities at Austrade posts would provide improved governance arrangements. Austrade has proposed that its provision of consular services on behalf of DFAT be the subject of a service agreement between the two agencies; this proposal is under consideration by DFAT.

### **Honorary consuls are a cost-effective means of providing additional service points**

**2.17** Honorary consuls are a useful adjunct to Australia-based DFAT and Austrade staff in the delivery of consular assistance overseas. They have the authority to provide a wide range of consular services, in consultation with the Australian diplomatic or consular mission designated to oversight their activities. Honorary consuls are generally appointed by the Australian Government where there is a demonstrated need that cannot be met efficiently and economically by a post or through another Commonwealth consular service.

**2.18** Honorary consuls handled about 1000 substantial consular assistance cases (5 per cent of all of these cases) in 1999–2000. They receive relatively modest honoraria and administrative expenses of about \$7500 a year. The total cost of honorary consuls is about \$300 000 a year, which is equivalent to the cost of maintaining one senior Australia-based officer at a higher-cost overseas post. As such, honorary consuls represent value for money in the delivery of consular services.

**2.19** The Senate Committee found honorary consuls to be a valuable addition to the overseas consular network. It recommended that funding be provided to continue to expand the honorary consul system.<sup>10</sup> The Government accepted the recommendation, but noted that the availability of funding would be an important factor.

**2.20** DFAT increased the number of honorary consuls from 31 in 1997 to 42 in 2000. However, this is less than DFAT identified as optimal in a 1998 DFAT review of the honorary consul system and less than some comparable Western countries.

**2.21** On several occasions in recent years DFAT has identified priority locations for the establishment of further honorary consul positions, but DFAT has advised that funding for these appointments had not been

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<sup>10</sup> Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 3*, para. 3.40.

available in its Budget. Given the cost-effectiveness of such appointments, there would be merit in DFAT re-assessing its ability to further expand the honorary consul system, particularly in light of the additional ongoing funding provided for consular services in the 2000–2001 Budget. DFAT advised that, following the provision of the additional funding, it expects to establish a small number of additional honorary consul positions shortly.

**2.22** The Senate Committee noted that DFAT generally did not provide honorary consuls with staff. It recommended that DFAT provide staff assistance for those honorary consuls who have a heavy consular workload.<sup>11</sup> The Government accepted this recommendation and stated that individual requests would be closely considered.

**2.23** The ANAO found that DFAT had provided funding for administrative support to help meet the workload of honorary consuls in Zagreb and Copenhagen. These honorary consulates have now closed, following the opening of DFAT-managed embassies. DFAT advised that it has not received any requests from honorary consuls for staffing assistance since the Senate Committee report.

**2.24** However, DFAT consular statistics indicate that some honorary consuls have a high consular workload. Consistent with the Government's response to the Senate Committee recommendation, DFAT should monitor the need for supplementary funding for administrative support where honorary consuls have demonstrably high consular caseload. The provision of staff assistance, where justified on cost-benefit grounds, would relieve honorary consuls of excessive administrative workload and help ensure Australians are provided with high-quality consular assistance.

## Expanding global access to 24-hour consular assistance for more countries

**2.25** The Senate Committee examined after hours access to consular assistance overseas and the cost borne by clients in keeping in telephone contact with posts and with the Consular Branch in Australia. It noted that DFAT was soon due to begin a trial of 24-hour consular access from overseas. In addition, the Senate Committee recommended that DFAT establish a free telephone call service for callers from within Australia.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 4*, para. 3.43.

<sup>12</sup> Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 10*, para. 5.132.

**2.26** The ANAO found that since 1997 DFAT has substantially enhanced telephone access to its consular services. Within Australia there is a free call service which is the primary means by which the Australian public contacts DFAT in relation to consular matters. DFAT also has a 24-hour Consular Operations Centre (COC) which enables consular clients in designated overseas countries to obtain after-hours emergency consular assistance when overseas posts are closed. This service has also helped DFAT to reduce after-hours staffing at overseas posts and associated costs.

**2.27** Clients use a toll-free telephone number or have their calls to overseas posts automatically diverted to the COC. Depending on client needs, COC assistance ranges from providing callers with information which helps them to deal immediately with their problem, to arranging for post staff to respond to an emergency situation outside normal business hours (see Figure 4). This service covers 57 posts. Additional funding in the 2000–2001 Budget will allow DFAT to extend COC access to countries not yet connected to the service, whenever improvement to the communication infrastructure in those countries permits.

**2.28** Telephone call services are widely used by consular clients, with DFAT receiving some 135 000 telephone calls in the Consular Branch and its free call numbers in 1999–2000. However, DFAT does not have adequate performance information on COC usage and service quality. The collection and use of such performance information is necessary to effectively manage client service and is recognised better practice for agencies with call centre operations.<sup>13</sup> DFAT advised that it proposes to introduce call analysis software to provide this information.

## **Consular services are a high priority at overseas posts**

**2.29** The ANAO found that consular service delivery is an important function at overseas posts. DFAT recognises that the provision of comprehensive and high-quality consular services is a Government priority and that its professional handling of consular cases helps to shape broader public perceptions of the performance of the Department.

**2.30** ANAO visits to overseas posts confirmed the increased priority which DFAT attaches to consular services. Posts visited have maintained consular staffing levels in recent years, notwithstanding overall staff reductions overseas. Heads of Mission take an active interest in the handling of significant consular cases and, where appropriate, personally assist and support Australians in difficulty and their next of kin. Heads of Mission are also kept informed of consular operations through regular briefings from consular staff.

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<sup>13</sup> Australian National Audit Office, *Telephone Call Centres* (Better Practice Guide), December 1996, pp.11–12.

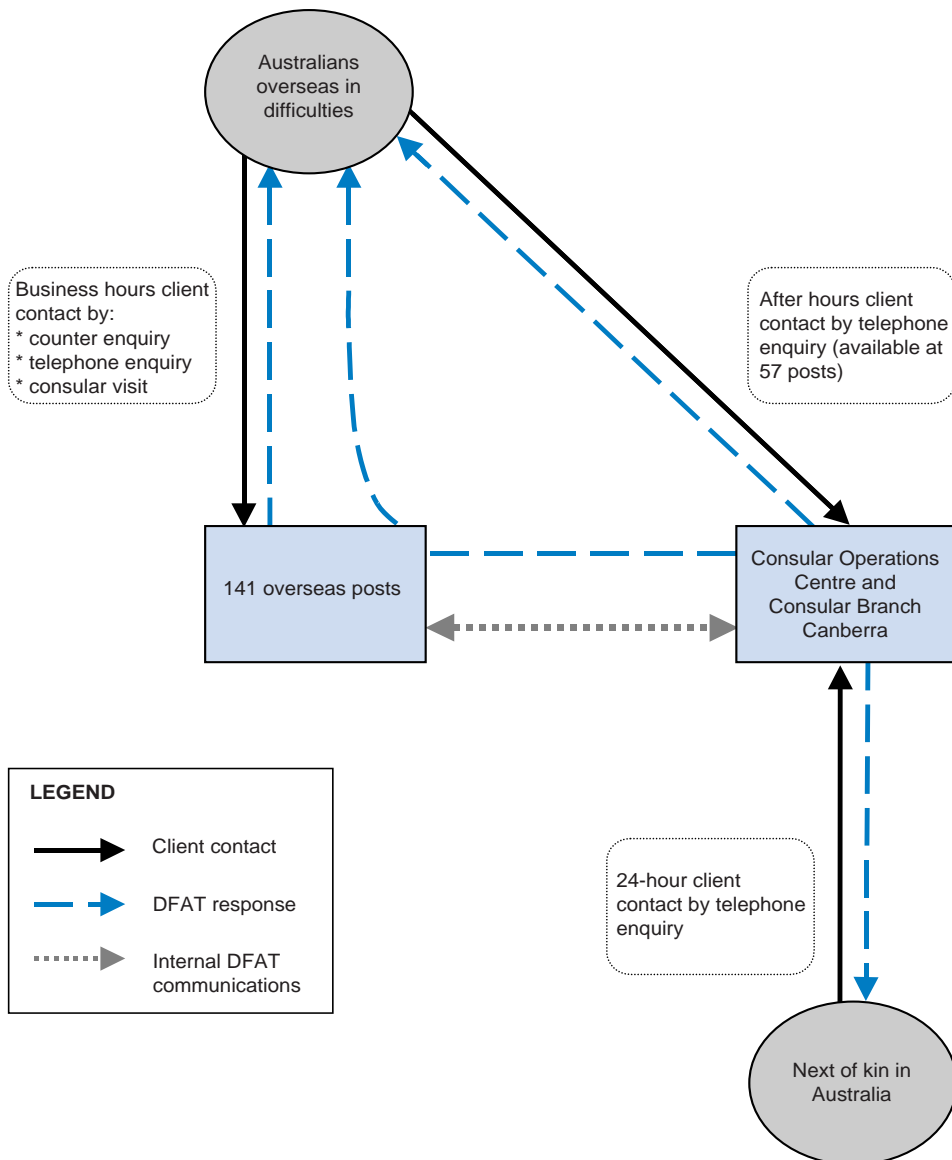
## Providing the skills and support to deliver quality service

### Consular training effort overseas is being increased

2.31 DFAT recognises that the provision of quality consular service depends in large measure on having motivated and well-trained professional consular staff. Its main approach to training consular staff is for Australia-based staff to undertake a broad-ranging, one-week consular training course in Canberra prior to taking up their overseas posting.

**Figure 4**

**DFAT operations for providing 24-hour consular assistance**



2.32 Consular training for locally-engaged staff and honorary consuls has usually been provided on-the-job at the overseas post or at overseas regional training seminars. Notwithstanding the recognised benefit of providing consular staff with structured training through regional seminars, these activities were curtailed in recent years due to limited DFAT funds. DFAT has now taken action to redress this. During 2000, it held a series of regional training seminars and expects to cover the remainder of the consular network over the next 12 months.

### **Counselling services are available to consular staff**

2.33 The Senate Committee observed that consular work could place consular officers under significant stress and recommended that DFAT institute a formal counselling program for those staff.<sup>14</sup>

2.34 The ANAO found that counselling facilities are available for consular staff. In addition, the consular training course for Australia-based staff being posted overseas addresses occupational stress associated with consular duties and effective stress management.

## **Conclusion**

2.35 The ANAO concluded that DFAT has improved the accessibility of consular services for Australians abroad and their next of kin in recent years, by increasing the number of service delivery points overseas and providing 24-hour consular access from overseas. There remain opportunities to expand consular sharing arrangements and increase the use of honorary consuls. There would be merit in DFAT examining these opportunities further.

2.36 DFAT places considerable importance on the delivery of a wide range of quality consular services. Heads of Mission are actively involved in consular services, particularly higher-profile consular casework. DFAT has recently renewed its consular training effort overseas and continues to provide counselling support for consular staff and training in stress management.

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<sup>14</sup> Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 13*, para. 5.159.

## 3. Advice to Travellers

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*This chapter examines DFAT's arrangements for providing travel warnings and other travel advice and consular information to Australians travelling or residing overseas and to the travel industry.*

### Introduction

3.1 DFAT provides Australians travelling abroad and the travel industry with travel warnings to alert them to potential trouble spots overseas, as well as general travel and welfare advice on how to avoid problems on their trip and what to do if problems are encountered. It also provides information on what consular assistance is available and how to contact DFAT consular service delivery points.

3.2 This information is distributed through a range of DFAT publications in booklet, brochure and newsletter format, post information sheets, and DFAT and overseas post websites. Appendix 6 sets out DFAT's main consular publications, websites and other client communication channels discussed in this chapter.

### Developing a client communication strategy for consular services

#### **DFAT has not had an overall strategy for communicating travel advice to Australian travellers**

3.3 The effective communication of travel advice and consular information is an important aspect of the consular function, both from a service quality perspective and in risk management terms. Better prepared and more informed travellers are more likely to avoid general travel risks and have realistic expectations about the extent of available consular assistance, should they get into difficulties overseas. Reducing the incidence of problems encountered by Australians abroad through improved client advice and information has the potential to curb the demand for consular services and associated service delivery costs.

3.4 Notwithstanding the importance of effective client communication, at the time of audit fieldwork DFAT did not have an overall communication strategy to underpin the issuance of travel advisories, production and distribution of consular publications, and development of more innovative ways of communicating messages to consular clients.

3.5 The development of such strategies is recognised better practice for Commonwealth agencies with a major public interface. The ANAO considers that a communication strategy for DFAT consular services would help improve the effective provision of travel advice for consular clients and would increase the focus on evaluating client communication initiatives.

3.6 At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it now has a public information strategy. Part of the additional funding provided in the 2000–2001 Budget for consular services is to be used to ensure that essential travel advice and information is better targeted.

### **Improved knowledge about client information needs would help DFAT to produce more effective consular publications**

3.7 The Senate Committee found that many Australians travelling or living overseas had unrealistic expectations of the range of consular assistance which overseas posts can provide.<sup>15</sup> The ANAO found that some Australians continue to have unrealistic expectations that DFAT can arrange visas, secure their release from gaol or represent them in legal proceedings.

3.8 DFAT recognises the importance of improving client understanding of the limits of consular assistance available, but it has not undertaken research to profile its consular clients and to identify particular information needs of client groups, such as first-time travellers, pensioners resident overseas, and so on. Posts visited during the audit indicated that considerable consular effort was expended on servicing some client groups.

3.9 Recognised better practice in client communication includes identifying client groups and their information needs and using appropriate and cost-effective media to communicate with those client groups. The ANAO considers that focussed client research into these areas would support DFAT efforts to communicate key messages to higher-risk client groups more effectively.

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<sup>15</sup> Senate Committee Report, paras. 5.1–5.7.



## Gauging the penetration and effectiveness of travel advice

**3.10** DFAT currently does not have adequate, systematic information on the extent to which its travel advice and consular information is reaching clients and influencing their actions. Recognised better practice in client communication is to evaluate the penetration and effectiveness of key messages to clients in order to assess the outcomes achieved and to identify means of improving communication. The effectiveness of advice on travel insurance and travel warnings are two such areas which call for closer DFAT examination.

**3.11** DFAT has highlighted the need for travel insurance in most travel advisories as well as key consular publications since the Senate Committee inquiry, which noted that about 30 per cent of Australians travelling overseas were then uninsured.<sup>16</sup> However, DFAT does not have information on changes in the level of travel insurance coverage of consular clients or the travelling public generally, that have since occurred.

**3.12** DFAT has not measured the effectiveness of its travel advisories in discouraging Australians from travelling to potentially dangerous locations. The impact of travel advice on awareness among travellers of potential trouble spots is one of DFAT's key performance indicators for consular services (see Figure 10 in Chapter 5).

**3.13** DFAT is of the view that the impact on numbers of Australians travelling to particular destinations, such as Fiji following the crisis in that country in May 2000, was evidence of the effectiveness of its travel advisories. However, DFAT has not undertaken the necessary research to demonstrate that its advisories have been the prime reason for intending travellers to defer or cancel travel in such circumstances. Other factors such as media coverage of overseas events may be influential.

**3.14** DFAT advised that it is proceeding with surveys of the penetration and effectiveness of its major consular publications, and plans to extend this approach to include its travel advice.

## Conclusion—Client communication

**3.15** At the time of audit fieldwork, DFAT did not have an explicit and coherent client communication strategy which would help direct, coordinate and evaluate its consular information activities. The desirability of such a strategy is illustrated by some Australians continuing to have unrealistic expectations about the consular assistance that can and cannot be provided.

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<sup>16</sup> Senate Committee Report, para. 5.134.

**3.16** DFAT also does not have adequate, systematic information on the effectiveness of its travel advisories, general travel advice and consular information in meeting the information needs of clients and in helping them to avoid trouble while overseas. Such information would help DFAT to assess the outcomes achieved and identify means of improving its communications.

## **Recommendation No. 1**

**3.17** The ANAO recommends that DFAT:

- develop a client communication strategy to assist in the production and distribution of information to target client groups; and
- develop methods to assess the penetration and effectiveness of travel advice to ensure that client information needs are met and the risks to their safety and welfare are minimised.

### *DFAT response*

**3.18** Agreed. Implementation is largely complete. The Department finalised, in October 2000, a fully-funded public communication strategy to highlight the availability of consular services and the practical limits on these services; and to advise what Australian travellers can do to minimise or avoid difficulty overseas. This strategy is pursued through direct liaison with the media, travel industry and public; continuous enhancement of the DFAT consular website, consular publications and travel advice; and better use of sponsorship to support public information activities. Target groups include adventure travellers and seniors. The Department is proceeding with surveys of the effect and penetration of its major consular publications, and plans to extend this approach to include its travel advice.

## **Travel warnings**

**3.19** The effective communication of information on potential trouble spots overseas is an important aspect of managing the risk to Australian travellers; it assists and encourages travellers to protect their personal safety and to avoid travel to dangerous locations.

**3.20** Travel advisories are DFAT's main means of alerting Australians and the travel industry to specific dangers in visiting particular countries or parts of the world. Travel advisories usually contain a travel warning and provide background information on the nature of the threat. They may also offer advice on how Australians can minimise their exposure to that threat. An example of a DFAT travel advisory is shown in Figure 5.

## Figure 5

### Travel advisory for Papua New Guinea, August 2000

#### TRAVEL INFORMATION

#### PAPUA NEW GUINEA (including Bougainville)

**This advice is current for Tuesday 08 August 2000**

**The advice was issued on 20 December 1999**

Australians resident in and those travelling to Papua New Guinea should exercise extreme care and maintain a very high level of security awareness in light of continuing law and order problems. Australians are advised not to walk the Kokoda track until further notice.

Instances of violent crime continue to occur, including murders associated with robberies and rapes. There has also been a marked increase in the number of violent car thefts involving the use of weapons, mostly within the Port Moresby area. Security incidents in the vicinity of the Port Moresby airport are also of concern.

Australians intending to visit Bougainville are advised that travel should only be undertaken with the appropriate authorisation of the Papua New Guinea Government and in strict accordance with Papua New Guinea law.

Medical and travel insurance, including coverage for medical evacuation, is strongly recommended.

Australians are strongly advised to register with the Australian High Commission, Port Moresby, Locked Bag 129, Waigani, NCD—telephone (675) 325 9333 or facsimile (675) 325 9183. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra can also be contacted for information on (02) 6261 3305.

Source: DFAT

**3.21** Travel advisories are available on the DFAT website and distributed electronically to the Australian travel industry and media. Further examples of travel advisories in force at the time of the audit, including some analysed in this chapter, are reproduced in Appendix 5.

**3.22** The prominence given to travel advisories as a key preventative consular function is reflected in a number of recent DFAT reviews of the travel advisory function and consequent improvement of the number of potential trouble spots covered through travel advisories. As a result, DFAT has progressively implemented improvements aimed at ensuring that travel advisories are current, use plain language and express travel warnings clearly, and incorporate reminders for travellers to obtain medical and travel insurance.

**3.23** Further improvements to the travel advisory system are under consideration, including such innovations as an interactive voice system, which would provide telephone callers with recorded travel advisory information. In the course of the audit DFAT was responsive to a number of ANAO suggestions for improvements to its travel advisories.

## Travel advisories on issue

### **The number of travel advisories on issue has increased**

**3.24** DFAT increased the number of travel advisories on issue from 47 in 1997 to 77 in August 2000. They now cover about one-third of the countries that have Australian post residential or non-residential accreditation. This expansion in country coverage reflects the increased priority given to consular activities by the Government and also responds to the Senate Committee's 1997 concern that DFAT did not devote enough attention to the prevention of problems overseas.

**3.25** DFAT's approach to the issuance of travel advisories aimed at providing clear travel warnings is more focussed than some of Australia's major consular partners. Canada and the United Kingdom have more travel advisories but some provide general travel information for overseas countries, without specific travel warnings.

**3.26** DFAT's approach is focussed, since it is not practical for it to monitor in detail travel conditions in all countries throughout the world and to issue a travel advisory in every case where there is a risk, however remote, that Australians may encounter danger or difficulty. Instead, DFAT has facilitated access by Australians to general country travel information prepared by Australia's consular partners by providing web links to the partners' travel advice websites (see Appendix 6).

### **DFAT regularly updates travel advisories**

**3.27** DFAT aims to review all travel advisories on issue at no more than six monthly intervals. In rapidly changing situations and major crises, it expects to update them more frequently. The ANAO found that DFAT was close to achieving its target for updating travel advisories, with 96 per cent less than six months old at August 2000. Some 67 per cent of DFAT advisories were less than three months old.

**3.28** Travel advisories on issue for an extended period may undermine the confidence that travellers and the travel industry place in them as authoritative travel warnings. To address this risk, one consular partner requires its travel advisories to be reviewed at least every three months. The ANAO considers there would be merit in DFAT seeking to further reduce the age of its travel advisories to also address this risk.

**3.29** At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it had introduced a new performance benchmark that no travel advisory be more than three months old and had reduced the age of its travel advisories so that all are now less than three months old.

## Issuing travel advisories

**3.30** The procedure for issuing a travel advisory involves two key steps. The first entails the identification by DFAT of a potential risk to Australian travellers in visiting a particular country or region. The second involves an assessment and decision by DFAT on whether there is a need to alert Australians and the travel industry to that potential risk. These two steps are examined below.

### **Greater assurance is required that potential risks are systematically identified and brought to the attention of Consular Branch**

**3.31** Overseas posts and DFAT geographic branches in Canberra currently monitor potential dangers to Australian travellers as part of their routine review of current affairs in overseas countries. Where a danger is sufficient to warrant consideration of the need to issue a warning to Australians, the matter is to be brought to the attention of the Consular Branch. The Consular Branch also monitors the incidence of consular cases to identify patterns or trends for particular countries that might be of concern.

**3.32** DFAT does not undertake an ongoing, systematic assessment and documented analysis of the general level of travel risk in overseas countries. The absence of such an arrangement weakens the assurance for DFAT that it has appropriately identified those potential risks which may require travel advisories. DFAT should consider strengthening the travel advisory function by instituting arrangements for posts to report briefly and periodically on their assessment of potential dangers in countries to which they are accredited—even when no travel advisory is recommended, and for the Consular Branch to analyse those reports. At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it would task overseas posts to review periodically the need for a travel advisory for those countries where one is not on issue.

### **A more systematic assessment of the need to issue travel advisories is required**

**3.33** DFAT guidance specifies six separate factors to be considered in assessing and deciding whether it is necessary to issue a travel advisory (see Figure 6). In addition, the process provides for other relevant factors to be taken into account.

## Figure 6

### Factors for consideration in issuing a travel advisory

- The nature of the threat posed to foreigner visitors.
- The number of Australian residents concerned.
- The number (and prospect) of Australian visitors to the country or region concerned.
- The profile of the situation in the international media.
- Local capacity to deal with a law and order situation.
- Reliability of information on which assessments are based.

**3.34** When a proposal to issue a travel advisory is made, the relevant post generally supplies the Consular Branch with supporting information about the identified danger. The Consular Branch, overseas post and geographic branch consult on the need for a warning and provide input into the proposed travel advisory, drawing on their in-country and consular knowledge and experience and exercising their professional judgement regarding the risk to Australians. As part of this process, DFAT has regard to travel advisories issued by consular partners.

**3.35** DFAT's approach to assessing the need for travel advisories is similar to that of its consular partners. The ANAO considers this approach is sound, providing for flexibility within a structured assessment process and appropriate input from relevant areas of the Department.

**3.36** The ANAO examined a number of case studies where travel advisories were issued in recent years to assess the extent to which the above procedures were applied systematically and the analysis documented for management assessment and review. The ANAO found that information available to the Consular Branch in relation to the danger in particular overseas countries generally covered only some of the factors in Figure 6. Moreover, there was not a systematic documented analysis against the above factors in support of the decision to issue travel advisories in the cases examined. The latter is illustrated in the case study of travel advisories issued following the Fiji hostage crisis and civil coup in May 2000 (see Figure 7).

## Figure 7

### DFAT travel advisories during the Fiji crisis, May 2000

- The Prime Minister of Fiji and other persons were taken hostage in the Parliamentary building in Suva, Fiji on 19 May 2000.
- DFAT issued 21 travel advisories relating to the Fiji crisis between 19 May and 4 July. Australian travel advisories were updated during this period more often than the advisories of Australia's consular partners (Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and New Zealand).
- Australia and its consular partners provided similar travel warnings to their citizens in Fiji at the time of the coup: they were advised to remain indoors, maintain a high level of personal security awareness and stay away from demonstrations and large public gatherings.
- Australian travel advice to citizens who were contemplating travel to Fiji between 19 and 25/26 May differed from that given by Australia's consular partners:
  - Australia's consular partners advised their citizens on 19 May to defer all travel or non-essential business travel to Fiji, but particularly to Suva, until the situation improved.
  - In contrast, between 19 and 25/26 May DFAT did not provide any specific advice to prospective travellers on whether they should travel or not. This changed when DFAT advised Australians to defer all holiday travel and normal business travel to Suva on 25 May and to Fiji on 26 May. (The 19 May and 26 May travel advisories are reproduced at Appendix 5.)

**3.37** The ANAO found that the Suva post provided regular cable information on the Fiji crisis. While DFAT had information that was relevant to all six factors, there was no systematic documented analysis against those factors undertaken between 19 and 26 May in support of the key warnings issued on 19 May and 25/26 May. It was not possible, therefore, for the ANAO to assess whether the factors had been appropriately addressed at the time the decisions were made.<sup>17</sup>

**3.38** The ANAO examined two other cases involving recent significant incidents, where travel advisories had not been issued for particular countries.

**3.39** The first case involved the detention in China of a number of Australians belonging to the Falungong sect. DFAT did not have a departmental file containing papers relating to the assessment of the need for a travel advisory as a result of this incident. Without documentation it was not evident that DFAT had given appropriate consideration to issuing a travel advisory in relation to the incident.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> DFAT reconstructed the analysis in November 2000 following ANAO comment. It advised the ANAO that the Consular Branch had followed a structured consultative approach to the review of the Fiji travel advisories, which entailed direct communication and clearance with the post and geographic branch on the level of warning and wording of the advice. Its assessment on 19 May was that the incident was essentially localised and did not warrant broad advice to Australians contemplating travel to Fiji, or indeed Suva. DFAT's focus was on the safety of Australians already in Suva.

<sup>18</sup> DFAT advised the ANAO that it adequately addressed the incident at the time by means other than issuing a travel advisory. Following ANAO comment, DFAT reconsidered the matter and confirmed that a travel advisory was not necessary.

**3.40** The second case involved the kidnapping of foreigners in a cross-border incident, in which the victims were taken from Malaysia to the Philippines where they were held hostage. In this case DFAT did have travel advisory files for both countries. It made reference to the incident in an updated travel advisory for the Philippines, but did not initially consider the need to issue a travel advisory for Malaysia, where the incident had actually taken place, and where there was a potential risk to Australian tourists.<sup>19</sup>

**3.41** The absence of a systematic and documented assessment of the need for travel advisories weakens the assurance for DFAT management that risks are appropriately assessed and factors are addressed in a disciplined way. Systematic application of procedures and documentation of assessments, particularly when there are time pressures, would reduce the risk that key considerations might be overlooked. It would also facilitate subsequent DFAT review of the case for maintaining, downgrading or withdrawing existing travel advisories. Importantly, this approach would not diminish the exercise of professional judgement by DFAT officers at overseas posts and in Canberra in assessing the risks posed to Australians in visiting particular countries.

**3.42** The benefits of applying risk management principles across DFAT operations, including appropriate documentation of the risk management process, have previously been recognised by DFAT management.<sup>20</sup>

**3.43** DFAT has advised that it will introduce systematic written reference to the six factors in the future.

## Clarity of travel warnings

### **DFAT travel warning levels should be more clearly explained**

**3.44** DFAT employs four levels of warning in travel advisories, with each level indicating a particular course of action that travellers should take in response to the threat in the country concerned (see Figure 8). Approximately 25 per cent of travel advisories on issue in August 2000 were at the highest two warning levels; most of these related to African countries.

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<sup>19</sup> Following ANAO comment and subsequent advice from the mission in Kuala Lumpur, DFAT issued a travel advisory for Malaysia, referring to the incident.

<sup>20</sup> In March 2000, DFAT launched a Risk Management Policy and Toolkit to assist managers to adopt a more formal and comprehensive approach to risk management. The Toolkit states that documentation of the risk management process is important to ensure that the process has been given due consideration. It also promotes effective review and monitoring.



## Figure 8

### Travel warning levels in DFAT travel advisories

- Exercise due care.
- Maintain a high level of personal security awareness.
- Consider deferring holiday and normal business travel.
- Consider deferring all travel.

3.45 DFAT's general travel advice and website do not expand upon, nor indeed refer to, the four warning levels. In practice, it is particularly difficult to distinguish between the first warning—*exercise due care* and the second—*maintain a high level of personal security awareness*. For example, travellers are not provided with general advice on additional precautionary measures that they should take if DFAT upgrades its warning from the first to the second level, such as keeping themselves well-informed of developments that might affect their safety by monitoring local and international media, and avoiding large public gatherings.

3.46 The potential for travellers to be uncertain about the severity of warnings is compounded by the fact that about 20 per cent of DFAT travel advisories on issue in August 2000 contained both the first and second warnings (see Figure 5—Papua New Guinea and Appendix 5—Georgia).

3.47 Uncertainty about the meaning of warnings has the potential to undermine their purpose of preventing travellers getting into difficulty. The ANAO considers that DFAT should clearly explain the warning levels to clients and use them more systematically in travel advisories, to help clients appreciate the severity of the warning and respond appropriately.

3.48 In this context there would be merit in DFAT considering the cost-effectiveness of assessing and improving user understanding of the warning levels, such as by a client comprehension survey. DFAT indicated that it would consider this, having regard to resource constraints.

### Key warning messages should be highlighted in travel advisories

3.49 DFAT intends that travel advisories present the key warning in their first paragraph and incorporate reminders for travellers to obtain travel insurance.

3.50 The ANAO found that almost all travel advisories on issue in August 2000 did state the key travel warning in the opening paragraph. However, the warning is woven into the text rather than printed in bold or otherwise highlighted. The ANAO considers that more prominent presentation of the warning would reduce the risk that clients overlook the key message of travel advisories.

**3.51** At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it was moving to adopt the ANAO suggestions that warning levels be highlighted and explained. It stated that it has no evidence that its existing approach has caused confusion on the part of Australian travellers. DFAT also noted that more than one travel warning level would continue to be included in travel advisories for countries which have regions with significant variation in the risks for travellers.

**3.52** In 1997, the Senate Committee observed that every encouragement should be given to travellers to obtain travel insurance before travelling overseas to avoid costly repatriation or medical evacuation in unforeseen circumstances. It noted that DFAT expended considerable effort in assisting uninsured travellers who required hospitalisation and medical evacuation assistance. The Committee recommended, and the Government agreed, that DFAT should continue, with the travel industry, to highlight the need for adequate insurance.<sup>21</sup>

**3.53** Reminders to obtain insurance are included in key consular publications issued to travellers such as *Hints for Australian Travellers*. However, about 20 per cent of travel advisories did not include advice on travel and medical insurance. Following ANAO comment, DFAT has acknowledged the merit of including insurance reminders in all travel advisories.

**3.54** Travel advisories are not intended to present routine travel information. Yet about 25 per cent of travel advisories contained routine travel information such as advice on taxi use, restaurant overcharging, currency exchange and visa issue. The inclusion of this advice could detract from the key warning. DFAT withdrew one travel advisory containing routine travel information, following ANAO comment on that advisory.<sup>22</sup>

**3.55** At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that reference to the importance of travel insurance has now been made standard in all travel advisories. It also advised that routine travel information has been progressively expunged from travel advisories.

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<sup>21</sup> Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 11*, para. 5.139.

<sup>22</sup> As discussed in paragraph 3.84, consular information bulletins on post websites are an effective means of communicating such routine travel information to Australians travelling or residing overseas.

## Conclusion—Travel warnings

**3.56** The ANAO concluded that travel advisory services have been strengthened in recent years; they now cover more countries, are updated more frequently and have a greater focus on key messages. DFAT provides Australians with travel advisory services that are accessible through the DFAT website and generally offers useful and up-to-date advice on trouble spots overseas.

**3.57** DFAT's underlying approach for assessing the need for travel warnings is sound, but it is not sufficiently supported by systematic documented analysis. This weakens the assurance that risks are appropriately assessed and factors are addressed in a disciplined way. An appropriately structured and documented approach would help provide such assurance, without diminishing the exercise of professional judgement by DFAT officers regarding the level of risk to Australians in visiting particular countries.

**3.58** There are also weaknesses in the presentation of travel warnings. While the key warning message is usually included in the first paragraph, the warning is not highlighted nor is its meaning clearly explained. Clarification and highlighting of warnings would further strengthen the effectiveness of travel advice.

## Recommendation No. 2

**3.59** The ANAO recommends that DFAT strengthen its management of travel advisories to ensure that it is able to provide adequate assurance that Australians are appropriately advised of travel risks, by:

- systematically applying procedures for assessing the need for travel advisories, and appropriately documenting the assessment; and
- ensuring that travel warnings in travel advisories are highlighted, and their severity clearly explained.

### *DFAT response*

**3.60** Agreed. Implementation is currently being finalised. The arrangements for the provision of high-quality travel advice and information have been strengthened by the introduction of new performance standards ensuring that all advice is less than three months old and that warnings are very clear. Travel advice is now underpinned by a fully-funded communication strategy introduced in October 2000. Following further consultation with DFAT staff overseas, the travel industry and broader public, and suggestions from the ANAO, we are currently refining further the presentation of travel advice and our systems for ensuring the Department has identified appropriately all potential risks that may require travel advisories.

## Improving consular publications and other information for clients

### **DFAT should evaluate the effectiveness of ‘Hints for Australian Travellers’**

3.61 The booklet, *Hints for Australian Travellers*, is DFAT’s key publication on general travel advice and consular services. It is comprehensive and easy to read, and has wide distribution, with a copy provided with each new passport issued. Production of the publication is outsourced and costs are partly met through advertising.

3.62 DFAT has not undertaken an evaluation to assess whether *Hints* is widely read and valued by travellers. It also has not assessed whether there may be ways of significantly improving its distribution to Australians going overseas, at little additional cost (for example, by providing additional copies at airport departure points).

3.63 Given the central role of *Hints* in communicating with Australian travellers, the ANAO considers that an evaluation of *Hints* would be appropriate to assess whether client information needs are being met and its key messages are reaching clients and influencing their actions. Such an evaluation would be consistent with the wider communication strategy discussed above.

3.64 DFAT advised that client feedback on the value of *Hints* is now being sought through a broader passports survey. This would supplement its ongoing means of monitoring the effectiveness of *Hints*, which include consultation with travel industry organisations, the continued support of advertisers and e-mail feedback from the public.

### **DFAT has increased its range of topic-specific brochures**

3.65 DFAT currently has 10 brochures available to Australians travelling and living overseas, and their next of kin. Some of these publications set out travel tips for particular types of travellers such as backpackers, while others offer guidance on what to do if, for example, they or a family member are arrested or sexually assaulted. DFAT distributed 184 000 copies of these publications in 1999–2000.

3.66 DFAT introduced its range of topic-specific brochures following the Senate Committee recommendation in 1997 that DFAT consider the need for such publications (see Figure 9).<sup>23</sup> This range is now generally comparable with Australia’s consular partners.

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<sup>23</sup> Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 6*, para. 5.38.

**3.67** At the time of audit, DFAT did not have publications specifically addressing some significant groups of Australians who may be at risk while abroad. In particular, the needs of elderly travellers, adventure travellers and Australian residents overseas were not focussed upon in any publications, even though their numbers have increased in recent years. There would be merit in DFAT producing additional publications for these client groups. By providing these travellers with information on specific risks affecting them, DFAT may help them to avoid trouble and thereby reduce DFAT's consular caseload.

**3.68** At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it had recently issued a separate brochure for elderly travellers. It considers that the needs of adventure travellers are addressed through the existing brochure for backpackers, ongoing DFAT representation at Youth Hostels Association (YHA) information nights and hot links between DFAT and the Lonely Planet websites.

**3.69** The Senate Committee in 1997 examined a new DFAT brochure, *Travelling Overseas?*, which provides key information on DFAT consular services. The Committee noted that the publication was available only in English and observed that it is important that Australian travellers have access to travel advice and information in a language which they fully understand. The Committee recommended, and the Government agreed, to investigate the possibility of producing the brochure in languages other than English and pursuing sponsorship for its production.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 6*, para. 5.38.

**Figure 9**  
DFAT brochures

**i**nformation Brochures

**DUAL NATIONALITY**  
WHAT IS IT? WHAT COULD IT MEAN FOR YOU?  
AUSTRALIAN CONSULAR SERVICES

**Travelling to BALI?**  
SOME TIPS  
AUSTRALIAN CONSULAR SERVICES

**BACKPACKING OVERSEAS?**  
Some tips  
AUSTRALIAN CONSULAR SERVICES

**Tips for WOMEN TRAVELLERS**  
AUSTRALIAN CONSULAR SERVICES

**What to do when someone is MISSING OVERSEAS**  
AUSTRALIAN CONSULAR SERVICES

**IF YOU ARE ARRESTED OR GAOLED OVERSEAS**  
• How your Consul can/should help you  
• How you can help yourself  
• Information for relatives  
AUSTRALIAN CONSULAR SERVICES

**IF YOU ARE THE VICTIM OF SEXUAL ASSAULT WHILE TRAVELLING OVERSEAS**  
AUSTRALIAN CONSULAR SERVICES

**CONSULAR SERVICES CHARTER**  
Consuls act to protect the welfare and interests of Australians overseas.  
This Charter sets out the standards of service you can expect to receive from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and our network of overseas offices. The Charter signifies our commitment to providing effective, prompt and courteous consular services, delivered in an equitable way, to all Australians requiring them.  
This Charter was written in consultation with our clients and staff. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will monitor our performance regularly under this Charter and will review its provisions periodically.  
The Charter will be independently reviewed every three years. We welcome client comments on our Charter.

These eight brochures, produced by Consular Services, are available free. They provide basic tips and specific advice to assist Australian travellers, and their families, who might find themselves in particularly difficult situations overseas. Contact [brochures@dfat.gov.au](mailto:brochures@dfat.gov.au) or ☎ 1 300 555 135 for a copy or supplies.

Access is also available at [www.dfat.gov.au/consular](http://www.dfat.gov.au/consular)

3.70 DFAT advised the ANAO that a lack of resources has prevented the issuance of the brochure in other languages. DFAT also advised that sponsorship has been considered, but it concluded that greater revenue could be obtained from sponsorship of *Hints*. However, DFAT could not provide the ANAO with any records indicating that sponsorship of the brochure had been actively pursued.

**3.71** Given the resource constraints which have apparently prevented implementation of the Senate Committee's recommendation, the ANAO suggests that DFAT consider the cost-benefit of pursuing lower-cost alternatives. One such option may be for overseas posts to translate into other languages the key messages contained in *Travelling Overseas?* and other consular publications. The translations could be made available through DFAT and post websites, and printed on request at service delivery points.

**3.72** At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that a revised English language version of *Travelling Overseas?* was due to be released soon and, as part of the Consular Branch's established liaison activities with the media, it would consider engaging ethnic media to assist in broadcasting information contained in the brochure. DFAT noted that there may be a stronger argument for translating the brochure on dual nationality, rather than this brochure, into other languages.

**3.73** DFAT also advised that it has recently advertised for proposals from interested parties for the provision of advertising management services for the full range of DFAT consular and passport publications and associated websites. DFAT expects that the tender process will be completed by the end of the 2000–2001 financial year.

### **Up-to-date lists of lawyers are available at most posts, but their usefulness could be improved**

**3.74** Assisting Australians arrested or otherwise detained overseas to obtain access to appropriate legal defence (at their expense) is an important and valued consular function. DFAT requires overseas posts to maintain up-to-date lists of lawyers that may be provided to Australians in need of legal assistance.

**3.75** The Senate Committee examined concerns about the quality of overseas lawyers and the need to include details of lawyers' court jurisdiction and specialisation on these lists. The Committee recommended, and the Government agreed, that posts take steps to ensure that, as far as practicable, lists identify lawyers who are reputable and, where applicable, show the court jurisdiction in which they can practise.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 15*, para. 6.61.

3.76 The lists of lawyers for most countries were brought up-to-date during the audit. DFAT requires posts to make enquiries to justify the inclusion of lawyers on the post list. However, it does not have a mechanism for posts to provide assurance to the Consular Branch that appropriate enquiries have been made.

3.77 DFAT has not adequately addressed the second part of the Senate Committee recommendation. Some post lists do not indicate whether the lawyers may practise in a particular court jurisdiction. The inclusion of this information would improve the usefulness of post lists and fully implement the Senate Committee recommendation.

3.78 At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that overseas posts have now been tasked to include details of the court jurisdiction of lawyers in post lists.

## **Improving client access to travel advice and consular information**

### **Improved ways of facilitating travel industry access to travel advisories should be examined**

3.79 DFAT has arrangements with the travel industry whereby updated travel advisories are placed on the computerised reservation systems used by the travel industry (see Appendix 6). However, there are technical difficulties in travel agents gaining ready screen access to the travel advisories through their booking systems, which were highlighted in a DFAT travel advisory review undertaken in 1999 and reinforced during this audit by ANAO discussions with the Australian Federation of Travel Agents.

3.80 Travel agents are significant intermediaries whom travellers use to obtain overseas travel advice. More effective arrangements would increase DFAT's assurance that travel agents and their customers have timely and authoritative travel advice at the point of ticket booking. The ANAO considers that DFAT should explore with the travel industry possible ways of improving industry access to travel advisories, through the existing travel industry systems or other means.

### **Innovative ways of disseminating general travel advice to clients should be pursued**

3.81 Better practice in client communication is to ensure that appropriate and cost-effective media are used to communicate with clients. DFAT relies heavily on its range of consular publications and websites as



its main channels for communicating with consular clients. It has also made some ad hoc efforts to disseminate general travel advice through travel magazines, presentations to travel conferences, newspaper articles and television travel programs.

**3.82** There would be benefit in DFAT examining the benefits and costs of actively pursuing more innovative ways of disseminating consular messages, with the aim of increasing the penetration and effectiveness of travel advice and consular information to the travelling public. In this regard, there may be opportunities for DFAT to use commercial travel trade publications to communicate key messages about travel risks and consular services to the travel industry. Messages to Australian travellers could be communicated through promotional material such as posters and brochure stands at airports and advertorial material in airline magazines or in-flight videos.

**3.83** In response to ANAO comments, DFAT indicated that it has an arrangement for the distribution of *Hints* at one airline lounge and is pursuing the possibility of a video. It noted that videos, posters and magazines have resource implications and may not be easy to arrange.

### **Websites of overseas posts should be made more widely known**

**3.84** Australians' access to the Internet has been increasing rapidly and DFAT has encouraged posts to provide consular information bulletins on post websites as a means of disseminating country-specific information to Australians travelling or resident overseas. The ANAO found that these post websites are particularly useful for communicating supplementary travel advice and routine travel information, including details of consular services available at the post. Some 38 DFAT posts maintained websites in addition to the main DFAT website in February 2000, with some providing information in languages other than English.

**3.85** However, though almost all posts had websites with links to the DFAT website, this fact was mentioned in only half of relevant country travel advisories. Also, about 20 per cent of posts' websites were not hotlinked from the Federal Government website, making it more difficult for clients to find them. The ANAO considers that DFAT should improve website linkages and references to websites in travel advisories to facilitate client access to these additional, useful sources of local travel advice and information.

## **Conclusion—Improving client access to advice and information**

**3.86** DFAT has increased the range of material available to Australians travelling overseas, including its collection of topic-specific consular publications. There would be benefit in DFAT producing additional consular publications to keep pace with changing needs of Australians going overseas and strengthening means of communicating travel advice to the travel industry and travellers.

## 4. Case Management Systems

*This chapter examines the systems supporting the management of consular cases and the arrangements to collect consular caseload and other information. DFAT's proposed case management information system is also examined.*

### Introduction

**4.1** As discussed in Chapter 1, DFAT manages about 20 000 substantial consular assistance cases overseas each year. The Consular Branch in Canberra assists in about 2500 of these cases, principally to contact next of kin in Australia about the welfare of family members abroad.

**4.2** While the effective management of individual consular cases primarily depends on the knowledge, skills and experience of consular staff, it needs to be underpinned by case management arrangements which enable staff to record and retrieve case information easily, monitor the progress of cases closely and share case information quickly between posts and the Consular Branch where this is necessary. Effective case management systems can make a significant contribution to the provision of responsive consular assistance and to the efficient and effective utilisation of staff resources.



*Consular Branch, Canberra. The work of consular staff in Canberra includes contacting next of kin in Australia about the welfare of family members abroad, as well as handling telephone enquiries from the Australian public, particularly in relation to travel warnings.*

Photo: DFAT

## Limitations of existing case management systems

### **Case management systems at overseas posts lack commonality and do not adequately support case actioning and monitoring**

4.3 Posts generally use locally-developed paper-based systems to record particulars of individual consular cases. There are considerable differences between posts in the type and quality of these case records. Keeping records of client details and actions taken to assist clients in a consistent format and to a minimum specified standard would assist in the efficient and effective handling of consular cases across the overseas consular network.

4.4 A relatively small number of consular cases, such as those involving criminal investigations and legal proceedings, require close, sustained case management. However, posts do not usually give special attention to maintaining systematic and comprehensive case records, including summary notes, for these difficult, long-term consular cases. Improved record keeping for these cases would help ensure that complex consular matters are handled responsively and would provide clear evidence of the action taken to meet the needs of clients. It would also support continuity in the case management of clients, such as prisoners, assisted over an extended period of time.

4.5 Posts have a variety of local arrangements to monitor cases which require further action, including the manual preparation of case lists and the physical checking of case records. These arrangements are time-consuming for staff and present the risk of cases being overlooked. More effective means of case monitoring would provide greater assurance that cases are actioned in a timely manner and any overdue cases receive priority attention.

### **Cable transmittal of case information does not provide real-time information sharing**

4.6 Posts and the Consular Branch use the DFAT cable system to exchange case information. This includes notification by posts of consular incidents, such as the death or arrest of Australians abroad, which may require the Consular Branch to contact next of kin in Australia.

4.7 While the cable system is reliable and fast, it does not provide posts and the Consular Branch with immediate, shared access to common case information. It has also limited the capacity of the Consular Branch to maximise potential efficiency gains in case handling and record management from the operation of its database system (discussed below), because key case information continues to be received from posts in paper form through cables.

## **The Consular Branch database system has limitations as a case management tool**

4.8 The Consular Branch uses a simple database system to support the management of the 2500 substantial consular assistance cases in which it becomes involved each year. The system has adequate features for recording case information and monitoring the status of cases requiring further action. The Consular Branch has made good use of the system facilities to record actions taken on individual cases.

4.9 However, the system does not enable staff to view a summary client history of previous consular assistance, record links between related consular cases and enter full case details notified to the Consular Branch through the cable system. Further, it does not have in-built data validity checks, access controls or audit trail facilities, which are recognised better practice features for ensuring data integrity and data quality in agency records. The Consular Branch has not made effective use of some system features such as those intended to assist staff to keep notes on their contact with clients, record more detailed information on some types of cases and check the status of all active cases for possible further action.

## **DFAT does not have a common data collection system for overseas posts**

4.10 Effective case management systems facilitate the collection of information used for performance management and accountability purposes, in addition to underpinning case management. (Chapter 5 discusses DFAT's use of performance information for management of the consular function.)

4.11 DFAT does not have a common system for collecting statistics on consular caseload and for preparing estimates of staff resource usage on consular cases. Posts have therefore developed a variety of different local systems for this purpose. However, considerable staff effort is required to maintain these local data collection systems and there have been some data quality problems in the collection of information. Posts' local data collection systems also do not capture useful case information, such as the demographic profile of clients, that would enable sophisticated caseload analysis for performance management purposes.

## Improving system support for case management and data collection

### **The proposed case management information system has the potential to overcome weaknesses of existing systems**

**4.12** DFAT has been aware of the limitations of its existing case management arrangements and has had under consideration the development of a network-wide, common case management information system (CMIS) since 1997.<sup>26</sup> Canada has operated such a system for its global consular network since 1994, but most comparable Western countries use paper-based systems similar to DFAT.

**4.13** The 2000–2001 Budget provided DFAT with additional funding for the CMIS project and development and testing of the CMIS prototype is planned for 2000–2001, with roll-out expected in 2001–2002. The proposed CMIS is intended to facilitate a general improvement in information management and contribute to the delivery of improved consular services.

**4.14** The proposed CMIS provides DFAT with an opportunity to improve case management arrangements at posts by introducing a standardised case management system across the overseas consular service network; by raising the quality of post case records (particularly for more difficult and long-term consular cases); and by enhancing post monitoring of ongoing cases.

**4.15** It is expected that the system will provide real-time information sharing between the relevant post and the Consular Branch. This would enable DFAT to provide more responsive services to some clients and their next of kin in particular time-critical situations such as serious hospitalisation and medical evacuation cases.

**4.16** The proposed CMIS has the potential to significantly improve the performance management of DFAT consular services through more automated, systematic collection of detailed performance information. This would provide DFAT with the capability to gain an improved understanding of particular problems encountered overseas by Australian travellers, the demographic profile of consular clients and the resource effort applied to managing particular types of consular cases.

**4.17** By the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that the CMIS project was well-advanced and that the testing of one software application for the new system has been completed.

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<sup>26</sup> Limited DFAT funds previously prevented the CMIS proposal from going ahead, but it recently received renewed impetus as a result of the output pricing review of consular services undertaken in 1999–2000.

## **CMIS project management and planning issues which require closer DFAT attention**

**4.18** In the initial phase of the project during the period April to June 2000, DFAT instituted project management arrangements for the CMIS and identified expected project benefits and possible risks associated with the project. Consular business requirements were documented and high-level functional specifications were developed for the project.

**4.19** However, the ANAO found that there were a number of aspects of project management and planning which need to be further addressed to achieve effective outcomes from the project.

**4.20** In particular, the ANAO found that no clear parameters for the cost and implementation timeframe had been set for the CMIS project and previous estimates of the cost of CMIS proposals prepared since 1997 had ranged widely. DFAT's decision to derive a cost model for the CMIS from in-house work on business requirements and functional specifications, rather than 'market test' the functional specifications, had the effect of greatly narrowing the cost and technical options under active consideration for the proposed new system.

**4.21** Business process re-engineering<sup>27</sup> was excluded from the scope of the CMIS project, notwithstanding the likely substantial impact that the new system would have on existing case management and data collection arrangements, particularly at overseas posts. Little work was undertaken to obtain the views of overseas posts in the course of scoping business requirements for the new system. Recognised better practice is to consult widely with prospective system users to ensure their requirements are taken into account in system design.

**4.22** The functional specifications developed for the new system focussed on the automation of the collection of existing consular caseload statistics. The possible collection of additional performance information, to strengthen performance management particularly relating to service performance, was not given sufficient consideration.

**4.23** The ANAO considers that it is important that during ongoing planning and development of the CMIS project, DFAT should further address these issues. In response, DFAT advised that the ANAO suggestions on the CMIS were fully consistent with DFAT's initiatives in this area.

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<sup>27</sup> Business process re-engineering refers to major redesign of core work processes to achieve significant improvements in organisational performance.

## Conclusion

**4.24** The ANAO concluded that DFAT's existing case management systems have significant limitations. Locally-developed systems at overseas posts do not adequately support case actioning and monitoring. The DFAT cable system does not provide real-time information sharing across the consular network and the Consular Branch database system has limitations as a case management tool.

**4.25** DFAT does not have a common system to collect performance data across the consular network. Local data collection systems are resource-intensive and do not capture comprehensive case information. This hampers effective performance management of consular services.

**4.26** DFAT is developing a new CMIS which has the potential to record comprehensive case details, assist effective monitoring of case progress and provide responsive communication of case information across the consular network. The new system also provides opportunities to automatically capture consular caseload and other performance information and thereby enable more effective performance management of consular operations.

## Recommendation No. 3

**4.27** The ANAO recommends that DFAT ensure that it has a case management information system that:

- enables the recording and transmittal of sufficient information to facilitate the actioning and monitoring of cases at both the post and in Canberra;
- overcomes weaknesses in existing case management and data collection systems, that were identified by the ANAO in the course of the audit; and
- facilitates the collection of consular caseload and other performance information.

### *DFAT response*

**4.28** Agreed. Implementation is well under way following the provision of funding for this purpose in July 2000. The Department has made significant progress in the testing of software applications for a new Consular Management Information System (CMIS) since the provision of funding for this purpose in July 2000. Detailed technical testing procedures were finalised in February 2001, and at the time of writing



the Department was considering options for a pilot trial involving a number of overseas posts. It is hoped that the CMIS will enhance significantly the Department's capacity to service the steadily increasing consular workload. The Department is itself committed to ensuring CMIS has the capacity to address the issues identified by the ANAO.

## 5. Performance Management

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*This chapter examines DFAT's use of performance information for the management of consular services. It also examines client service quality and client satisfaction, and complaint handling.*

### Performance information

5.1 Performance management involves the systematic use of performance information to manage agency activities. Performance information helps management to assess progress in achieving planned outcomes and to take timely and effective action to improve performance. It also enables external accountability reporting on performance.

#### **DFAT has reported against some identified performance indicators but not others**

5.2 DFAT's framework for the performance management of consular services is presented in its annual Portfolio Budget Statement, and was extended for 2000–2001 to broaden coverage (see Figure 10).

5.3 DFAT presented performance information in its 1999–2000 Annual Report,<sup>28</sup> reporting *inter alia*, that:

- travel advisory services had been improved (see Chapter 3 of this audit report);
- consular services had become more accessible to clients (see Chapter 2);
- it had been responsive to a number of specific consular crises; and
- its contingency preparedness for the Y2K changeover had been effective.

5.4 While DFAT reported against all of its consular indicators in its 1999–2000 Annual Report, there was only partial reporting in some instances. For example, the Report outlined efforts to disseminate consular information to clients, but did not provide performance information on the impact of those efforts on traveller awareness of potential trouble spots and available consular assistance. The Report also did not present any performance information on the satisfaction of the travel industry with consular services and advice.

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<sup>28</sup> DFAT, *Annual Report 1999–2000*, pp.138–151.

5.5 The absence of key performance information weakens the assurance DFAT is able to provide that it is achieving planned outcomes for consular services.

### **A broader range of performance indicators is required**

5.6 DFAT's effectiveness indicators for consular services for 2000–2001 cover the accessibility, quality and responsiveness of consular assistance and, as such, address planned outcomes for major aspects of consular services as well as several recent service initiatives in relation to the consular function.<sup>29</sup> However, DFAT has a relatively narrow range of quality and quantity indicators in support of its effectiveness indicators. While several performance indicators address DFAT responsiveness to crises and disasters, there are limited or no indicators to assess the other effectiveness indicators for 2000–2001 (Figure 10). For example, there are no specific quality and quantity indicators for the different aspects of the planned outcome of an 'improved consular network'.

5.7 A broader range of performance indicators for the consular function would provide a more comprehensive, balanced and detailed framework. Some such information was provided in the DFAT 1999–2000 Annual Report but is not part of the current performance framework. This included details of the number of service delivery points, including honorary consuls, and the increase in the number of Australian posts connected to the 24-hour Consular Operations Centre.<sup>30</sup> Where practicable, these indicators should be stated in quantifiable terms. A possible indicator for the 'improved consular network' effectiveness indicator, for example, could include a target increase in the number of honorary consuls.

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<sup>29</sup> *Portfolio Budget Statements 2000–2001. Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio*, pp.43–44.

<sup>30</sup> DFAT, *Annual Report 1999–2000*, pp.142–143.

**Figure 10**

**Performance framework for DFAT consular services, 1999–2000 and 2000–2001**

<b>Outcome 2: “Australians informed about and provided access to consular and passport services in Australia and overseas”</b>	
<b>Output 2.1: Consular and passport services</b>	
<b>Sub-output 2.1.1 24-hour consular services</b>	
Indicator	1999–2000
Effectiveness indicators	Awareness among Australian travellers of potential trouble spots and understanding of the extent of assistance that can be provided by Australian government officials, indicated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• numbers of Australians seeking consular assistance compared to the number of Australians travelling overseas; and</li> <li>• impact of departmental efforts to maximise dissemination of departmental consular information to consular clients, including travel advice to travellers and the travel industry.</li> </ul>
	Responsiveness of the Department to consular crises, indicated by departmental handling of specific consular crises.
	Accessibility of consular services, demonstrated by worldwide availability of consular advice and support through the work of overseas posts, Consular Branch and the 24-hour Consular Operations Centre in Canberra; and through consular cooperation arrangements with other governments.
Milestones	Provision of consular advice and services maximised during the Y2K problem period, especially in countries where Y2K compliance is expected to be low.
Quality indicators	Satisfaction including of the public and travel industry with consular services and advice.
	Response time to consular issues/crises.
Quantity indicators	Number of Australians assisted overseas, including the number of public enquiries handled, notarial acts performed and travel advisories issued.
Price	\$123.608m (including passport services)

Source: *Portfolio Budget Statements 1999–2000. Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio*, pp.52–53; *Portfolio Budget Statements 2000–2001. Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio*, pp.43–44

<b>2000–2001</b>
Comprehensive, high-quality consular services provided to the growing number of Australians travelling overseas, including through the use of improved technology.
Awareness among Australian travellers of potential trouble spots and understanding of the extent of assistance that the Australian Government can provide.
Responsiveness of the Department to major international crises and natural disasters in order to help Australians affected by them.
Accessibility of advice to and support for Australians travelling overseas, as well as their families in Australia, through the Department's network of overseas posts and honorary consulates, the 24-hour Consular Operations Centre, and consular cooperation arrangements with other countries.
Improved consular information program, including upgraded consular travel advice system and better use of website.
Improved consular network, through widening of the 24-hour service overseas, more honorary consuls, greater cooperation with partner consular services and better consular case management.
Satisfaction of the public and travel industry with consular services.
Extent to which highly developed crisis management procedures are in place and tested.
Response time to consular issues.
Number of Australians assisted overseas, including the number of public enquiries handled, notarial acts performed and travel advisories issued.
Number of unexpected events or crises handled by the Department, number of associated Departmental Emergency Task Force/Inter-Departmental Emergency Task Force meetings held, and the duration of Crisis Centre operations.
\$39.039m

## **Inclusion of unit cost measures would strengthen consular performance management**

**5.8** DFAT has improved the transparency of its performance framework for 2000–2001 by separately disclosing the price of its consular services (Figure 10).<sup>31</sup> However, the unit cost of consular services is not specified as a performance indicator, and DFAT does not routinely assess or monitor cost per client for the overall consular function or for particular types of consular assistance.

**5.9** It is recognised better practice to include unit cost performance measures both to aid overall cost management and to provide insight into the cost of particular services. Such measures would help DFAT to identify opportunities to improve service delivery efficiency. The analysis and public reporting of consular unit costs would assist DFAT's focus on providing high-quality consular services at reasonable cost, and enhance its external accountability for performance in this area. Such information would also facilitate benchmarking with other comparable Western countries.

**5.10** The cost of the consular function per traveller was benchmarked as a special exercise in a DFAT-Department of Finance and Administration output pricing review undertaken in 1999–2000. It was estimated that the cost of consular services was \$11 per Australian traveller.<sup>32</sup> The review concluded that this compared favourably with the cost for several other Western countries.

**5.11** The ANAO expanded this analysis, and estimates that the unit cost of the DFAT consular function is approximately \$1770 per substantial consular assistance case. As noted in Chapter 1, the actual cost of assisting each client varies considerably according to the nature and complexity of the case. This suggests that there would be benefit in DFAT assessing and monitoring cost per client for particular types of consular assistance.

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<sup>31</sup> The price of consular and passport services was reported jointly for 1999–2000.

<sup>32</sup> This figure was confirmed by the ANAO.

## Consular caseload statistics

### **Consular statistics are not effectively used for performance management purposes**

**5.12** As noted in Chapter 4, statistics are collected from overseas posts on consular caseload and consular staff resource usage (see Table 1 for 1999–2000 data on substantial consular assistance cases). The data collected are held centrally in the Consular Branch in Canberra, but are not routinely analysed or used for performance management purposes.

**5.13** There are significant opportunities for DFAT to use this information to improve performance management of consular operations. For example, analysis of consular caseload statistics would inform management of emerging trends in service needs of consular clients. Such analysis would also enable DFAT to better identify major trouble spots for Australians travellers abroad and to help develop future consular communication strategies aimed at alerting travellers to potential risks at those travel destinations. Further, comparison of caseload and resource usage statistics at overseas posts would help to identify better practice in service delivery for the overseas consular network and support and inform decisions on consular staffing requirements at overseas posts.

**5.14** In response to this audit, DFAT advised that it would institute quarterly reviews of consular statistics to take more careful account of statistical information and trends in the management of consular services. It will also make better use of the statistics to identify points of pressure across the consular network and ease those pressures through targeted use of short-term assignments of Canberra-based consular officers to overseas posts.

### **Improving the reliability and usefulness of consular caseload statistics**

**5.15** Performance management of consular services needs to be underpinned by the collection of valid, appropriate and reliable data on consular caseload. This is a significant challenge for DFAT, given the global spread of overseas posts, the diversity of situations in which Australians get into difficulty while abroad and the range of staff effort required to provide consular assistance.

**5.16** These circumstances reinforce the need for clear guidance on data collection to support reliable performance data. However, the ANAO found that guidance to overseas posts on the collection of consular statistics does not provide adequate operational definitions of most caseload categories, increasing the risk of miscounting or misclassification in consular statistics. The risk was demonstrated in errors in some posts' consular statistics identified during the audit. Clearer definitions of consular caseload categories, with practical examples where appropriate, would promote a common understanding across the consular network of the requirements for accurate statistical reporting.

**5.17** In preparing such guidance, DFAT could usefully consider providing further categorisation for some consular activities. DFAT caseload statistics do not separately identify some consular services which are provided to substantial numbers of Australians abroad and can involve significant consular effort for some posts. These services include new registrations of Australian residents; the distribution of Australian pension cheques; and consular visits to prisoners.

**5.18** The collection and analysis of data on these services would help identify the associated workload and assist DFAT to develop ways to better manage these activities. The proposed CMIS, described in Chapter 4, has the potential to support the more detailed classification of consular caseload and the extraction of relevant statistics on particular services, as required, for performance management purposes.

**5.19** DFAT does not report on its total consular workload for external accountability purposes. Statistics on miscellaneous consular cases, client enquiries and other consular activities are recorded at overseas posts, following progressive improvements to consular caseload data collection in recent years. However, these statistics are not included in the DFAT Annual Report. In 1999–2000, these three categories of consular services involved some 370 000 consular activities,<sup>33</sup> additional to the 20 000 substantial consular assistance cases and 45 000 notarial services handled during the year. Separate reporting of these statistics in the DFAT Annual Report would provide a more complete picture of total consular workload.

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<sup>33</sup> Not all of these activities involve contact with consular clients. 'Other consular activities' include information gathering and research; work on consular policy matters; and consular public affairs activities at overseas posts.





Photo: DFAT

*Consular services waiting area, Athens embassy. This post has a high caseload involving substantial consular assistance as well as more routine consular services.*

## Performance feedback to posts

### Overseas posts would benefit from receiving more feedback on lessons learnt from consular casework

5.20 DFAT has a number of mechanisms by which overseas posts and the Consular Branch report on consular operations and receive feedback on consular performance. These include ongoing management reporting within posts and through the DFAT management structure in Canberra; quarterly and ad hoc Consular Branch feedback to posts; and DFAT planning and evaluation processes such as divisional evaluation reviews; post evaluation reports; and post liaison visits.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> DFAT's planning and evaluation processes include:

- Divisional evaluation reviews, held twice a year, to allow DFAT to evaluate the performance of each division, determine priorities for the coming period and make resource adjustments as necessary;
- Post evaluation reports, made once a year, to review the performance of overseas posts and set priorities for the coming period; and
- Post liaison visits, conducted by deputy secretaries to around 12 posts a year, to assess first hand post performance against agreed objectives and review post staffing and resourcing levels.

**5.21** Quarterly consular information reports, prepared by the Consular Branch, provide general feedback to all posts on the handling of major consular incidents. The ANAO found that the reports are useful in recognising the good performance of the posts which handled major consular incidents, such as the Swiss canyoning tragedy,<sup>35</sup> and also provide other posts with information that could assist them to deal with similar incidents in the future. However, the reports do not cover more routine casework which is the bulk of the caseload of the overseas consular network. Greater use of these reports to highlight and disseminate lessons learnt on a wider range of consular cases would encourage the adoption of better practice in service delivery. DFAT advised that it is seeking to move in this direction.

## **Client service quality and client satisfaction**

**5.22** The provision of quality client service is an important value of the Australian Public Service. The development of service standards and client feedback on services, including the establishment of effective complaint handling systems, are recognised better practice features of quality client service.<sup>36</sup>

### **There is a focus on quality client service**

**5.23** The ANAO found a strong focus on, and a professional approach to, client service quality in the delivery of consular assistance. This was evident across a range of services provided to clients, with cases observed during the audit addressed promptly and responsively. The ANAO also found that DFAT provided appropriate customised service to assist individual clients in need. For example, in some instances, post staff went to considerable effort to guide and assist people abroad with serious welfare problems. Consular Branch staff in Australia also maintained supportive contact over an extended period of time with next of kin distressed about the consular problems of family members overseas.

**5.24** Some examples of consular assistance provided in more difficult and complex cases are set out in Figure 11.

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<sup>35</sup> DFAT provided significant consular assistance and represented the interests of the victims, survivors and next of kin following the death of 14 young Australians in a canyoning accident at Interlaken, Switzerland in July 1999.

<sup>36</sup> Department of Industry, Science and Tourism, *Putting Service First: Principles for Developing a Service Charter*, March 1997; Department of Finance and Administration, *Client Service Charter Principles*, June 2000.

**Figure 11**  
**Consular assistance examples**

<p><b>Welfare assistance</b>  <b>DFAT provided welfare assistance to some 16 085 Australians overseas in 1999–2000. This category of consular assistance covers a broad range of consular problems. Some cases involved distressed Australians who were not able to resolve personal or financial difficulties without special consular assistance.</b></p>	<p>X was a pensioner who had been staying abroad for some time. When he contacted the post, his visa to stay in the overseas country had expired and he would need to pay administrative fines before he would be permitted to leave the country. He did not have sufficient funds to pay those fines.</p> <p>The post assessed that he would not be able to obtain the necessary funds or handle his visa overstay problems without assistance from the post.</p> <p>Significant consular staff time was spent over several days in helping with his early return home to Australia. The post and the Consular Branch in Canberra assisted him to obtain funds from next of kin in Australia; resolve his overstay status with local immigration authorities; and secure an airline booking as soon as possible.</p>
<p><b>Hospitalisation assistance</b>  <b>DFAT provided assistance to 656 Australians hospitalised overseas in 1999–2000. In cases where Australians suffer severe injury or illness requiring hospitalisation, overseas posts may need to monitor their condition and treatment.</b></p>	<p>Y was a patient in a disturbed mental state being treated at a hospital some distance from the overseas post. The hospital contacted the post about the patient whose nationality and identity were not clear. He also was not responding to treatment.</p> <p>The post went to some lengths to confirm the identity of the patient and next of kin were informed of his condition through the Consular Branch in Canberra. The post remained in frequent contact with the hospital for about a fortnight to monitor the patient's health and welfare. The post assisted next of kin with arrangements for his return to Australia.</p>
<p><b>Prisoner assistance</b>  <b>There were 155 Australians in prisons overseas in June 2000. Consular assistance to prisoners typically involves considerable ongoing, resource-intensive consular time and effort.</b></p>	<p>Z was a long-term prisoner in gaol in an overseas country. A consular officer in that country visited him every month; sometimes the consular officer was the prisoner's only visitor for the month.</p> <p>The consular officer spent up to two hours with the prisoner on each visit. Through these visits, the health and welfare of the prisoner was monitored and the post took whatever action it could to address any special needs he raised (such as problems with mail services).</p> <p>The post provided the prisoner with small loans for his sustenance and medical expenses. (Prisoners are eligible for loans for these purposes in countries where prison authorities do not provide adequate food and other essentials.) The post also helped with arrangements for next of kin to visit the prisoner in gaol.</p>

Note: Case details have been framed to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

## **There are no service performance targets**

5.25 DFAT's commitment to providing quality consular services is reflected in its Consular Service Charter, which states that DFAT will do whatever it can to assist clients in the shortest possible time. However, DFAT statements in the Charter regarding service responsiveness are very broad and are not underpinned in the Charter or elsewhere by explicit service targets for the delivery of consular services. The specification of meaningful and measurable service indicators and targets is recognised better practice in client-focussed service delivery organisations, as they focus staff and client attention on the expected quality of service to be provided and provide clear benchmarks to monitor and account for service delivery.

5.26 DFAT has expressed reservations about the efficacy of service performance targets for the consular function, given the diversity of consular cases and the range of environments in which consular services are delivered worldwide. It has commented that targets could reinforce unrealistic expectations of clients or promote client dissatisfaction if they cannot be met due to exogenous factors.

5.27 The ANAO recognises that setting meaningful service targets presents a challenge in the environment of a wide range of consular services and different circumstances in which they are delivered. However, service performance targets are practicable for higher-volume, more routine consular services. Possibilities include service response times for handling counter and telephone enquiries, and issuing replacement passports. Furthermore, such targets can be usefully applied to the initial stages of more complex casework, such as the initial contact with clients and the notification of next of kin regarding family members in difficulty abroad. Service targets may not be practicable for the *resolution* of many complex cases, which often depend on the cooperation and performance of host government authorities and overseas service providers such as hospitals and airlines.

5.28 The ANAO therefore considers that it is feasible for DFAT to develop appropriate service targets for higher-volume, more routine consular services and for the initial stages of more complex casework to signal the expected standard of service. Concerns about targets fostering unrealistic service expectations by clients can be addressed by, for example, presenting them as statements of desired service quality, which are not guarantees of service in every situation, and by making adjustments to targets locally to reflect particular conditions which adversely affect service performance in some overseas countries.

## **More systematic measurement and/or assessment of client satisfaction would better support quality client service**

5.29 DFAT's performance framework for consular services identifies client satisfaction as a performance indicator. DFAT's Annual Report reported 'strongly positive' consular client feedback during 1999–2000. This was based on two sources of information. Some 260 clients completed a client service questionnaire offered at post counter enquiry areas, with 83 per cent of respondents describing the consular service as 'excellent'. The second source, 81 unsolicited letters received from clients in DFAT Canberra, praised the service provided in 87 per cent of cases.<sup>37</sup>

5.30 The client service questionnaire exercise had a number of limitations in terms of assessing, reviewing and acting upon client satisfaction data in order to improve service delivery. The questionnaire focussed on service delivery at counters only at overseas posts; it was not designed to cover the full range of consular services provided to clients and their next of kin at posts and in Australia. There was a relatively small number of self-selected respondents out of the large number of clients assisted at posts, and they were not representative of clients assisted across the consular service network.

5.31 Systematic measurement and/or assessment of client satisfaction, and effective use of this information to identify and address areas for service improvement, are key elements of client-focussed service delivery organisations. Better performance information on whether clients are satisfied with consular services and what improvements clients would like to services would both assist in planning for service improvement and strengthen accountability for the delivery of consular services.

5.32 DFAT acknowledged that it would be beneficial to explore more structured ways to gauge client satisfaction.

## **Complaint handling**

### **More structured complaint handling is required to support quality service**

5.33 Overseas posts and the Consular Branch in Canberra have local, ad hoc procedures for dealing with individual consular complaints. There are no guidelines to assist staff in handling dissatisfied clients and no target timeframes for responding to complaints.

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<sup>37</sup> DFAT, *Annual Report 1999–2000*, p.148.

**5.34** Recognised better practice is for agencies to have in place a structured complaint handling system, supported by comprehensive staff guidance on dealing with complaint cases.<sup>38</sup> Instituting such procedures in DFAT would help ensure that complaints are dealt with fairly and consistently across the consular service network. Timeliness is also recognised to be an important factor in client satisfaction with complaint handling. Setting target timeframes would focus staff attention on the importance of responding to consular client complaints promptly.

**5.35** DFAT does not have systematic records of consular complaints received across the consular service network. There are no records of oral complaints from clients kept at posts or in the Consular Branch. Posts are not required to report centrally on written complaints handled overseas. DFAT also includes little accountability information on consular complaint handling in its Annual Report.<sup>39</sup> The central maintenance and analysis of records of consular complaints would help DFAT to identify and address any underlying service quality problems highlighted in complaint cases. It would also improve external accountability reporting on complaint handling.

**5.36** In response to the audit findings, DFAT acknowledged the need for a more systematic approach to recording and reporting of client complaints and compliments.

## Conclusion

**5.37** DFAT presented performance information indicating improved consular performance in its 1999–2000 Annual Report. While DFAT reported against all of its consular indicators, there was only partial reporting in some instances.

**5.38** DFAT's effectiveness indicators for consular services for 2000–2001 address planned outcomes for major aspects of the consular function. However, some of these effectiveness indicators are not supported by quality and quantity indicators needed to effectively assess and report on the achievement of planned outcomes. Expansion of the range of performance indicators would improve performance management and accountability reporting.

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<sup>38</sup> Better practice in complaint handling is set out in the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office, *A Good Practice Guide for Effective Complaint Handling*, 1997.

<sup>39</sup> DFAT, *Annual Report 1998–1999*, p.172, DFAT, *Annual Report 1999–2000*, p.148.

**5.39** DFAT does not use the statistics it collects on consular caseload and staff resource usage for performance management purposes. There are significant opportunities to use this information to improve performance management.

**5.40** DFAT has not set explicit service performance targets to focus staff and client attention on the high quality of service it expects to provide consular clients. It has also carried out only limited work to ascertain whether consular clients are satisfied with the standard of service provided at consular service delivery points overseas and in Australia. The specification of appropriate service indicators and targets as well as the systematic measurement and/or assessment of client satisfaction are recognised better practice in client-focussed service organisations.

**5.41** DFAT does not have a structured approach to consular complaint handling. There are local, ad hoc procedures for dealing with individual complaints. Consular complaints received across the consular network are also not systematically recorded, to help identify and address any underlying service quality problems.

## **Recommendation No. 4**

**5.42** The ANAO recommends that DFAT strengthen performance management for consular services by:

- specifying a wider range of performance information that can be used to readily assess and report on planned outcomes for the consular function;
- making more effective use of information on consular caseload for performance management purposes;
- establishing service performance targets for high-volume, more routine consular services and the initial stages of more complex casework;
- systematically measuring and/or assessing client satisfaction; and
- establishing a consular complaint handling system to deal with client complaints in a timely and effective manner and to capture information to facilitate appropriate performance improvement.

### *DFAT response*

**5.43** Agreed. Implementation is already under way. The Department is committed to ensuring that the CMIS will have a sophisticated capacity for the automatic collection of relevant and useful performance information as described by the ANAO, and is taking this into careful account in examining potential applications. This will enhance the Department's approach to the collection and analysis, for management and accountability purposes, of performance information in the consular area.

## 6. Contingency Planning

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*This chapter examines the arrangements for contingency planning at overseas posts and the coordination of those arrangements by DFAT Canberra. It also looks at the registration and warden arrangements that have been established by some posts and examines procedural weaknesses revealed by the June 2000 evacuation of Australian citizens from the Solomon Islands.*

### Post contingency plans

#### Introduction

**6.1** DFAT coordinates the management of overseas threats or crises through an arrangement known as the Emergency Response Program (ERP). Under the ERP, Heads of Mission are responsible for preparing realistic and flexible contingency plans to meet potential threats to their missions. The Consular Branch is responsible for ensuring that post contingency plans comply with departmental guidelines and are realistic.

**6.2** Post contingency plans set out procedures for the post to follow in the event of crises such as a demonstration outside the mission, an aircraft hijacking incident, a war or natural disaster, or an evacuation of the mission. They also set out information such as emergency contact lists of Australia-based staff and local authorities for use by the post or the Consular Branch in Australia in the event of a crisis.

#### **Post contingency plans need to give more attention to the protection of Australian citizens**

**6.3** The objectives of the ERP are to safeguard the interests of Australian government personnel and their families, to protect the interests of Australian citizens and to coordinate relief with other government agencies and international relief organisations. The requirement for post contingency plans to adequately address all Australian citizens, as well as mission security, was emphasised to all Heads of Mission in 1996:

*As well as concentrating on the security of mission staff and their dependants, [contingency plans] also need to incorporate plans to prepare for the protection of all Australians in their country of accreditation. This is an important departmental responsibility.<sup>40</sup>*

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<sup>40</sup> DFAT Administrative Circular No. 5/96 of 4 January 1996.



6.4 Notwithstanding this departmental responsibility, the ANAO found that the post contingency plans it examined had a predominant focus on the protection of mission staff and families. The posts visited by the ANAO generally acknowledged this focus.

6.5 In particular, post contingency plans did not give sufficient attention to identifying arrangements for contacting and assisting Australian travellers and residents abroad in the event of a crisis. For example, the ERP guidelines identify an expectation that in the event of a war or natural disaster the post contingency plans will provide for an officer to contact hotels to ascertain numbers of Australian citizens. Two of the posts visited by the ANAO advised that there were no arrangements to contact Australian travellers at hotels in the event of a crisis.

6.6 As a consequence, the ANAO concluded that DFAT does not have an adequate assurance that these posts can meet the ERP requirements in this regard.

### **Contingency plans vary in quality and consistency**

6.7 The ANAO found that the quality of contingency plans varied across posts both in terms of the consistency of planning information and the coverage of risk.

6.8 Some post contingency plans did not address potential events that might occur outside the city in which the post is located, notwithstanding the fact that the post's responsibility extended beyond that city to the entire country and, in some cases, to surrounding countries where the post had responsibilities as a result of its non-resident accreditation.

6.9 An important element of post contingency plans is up-to-date city and country maps showing the location of the mission and possible evacuation points in the event of a crisis. Both the post and the Consular Branch retain these maps. The ANAO found that some maps were not up-to-date or marked to show the mission location or the position of evacuation points.

6.10 The ANAO found that, at three of the four posts visited, officers responsible for the preparation and maintenance of the contingency plans were not satisfied with the quality and coverage of those plans and had commenced, completed or were planning reviews. The ANAO also found that some post officers with contingency planning responsibilities were not familiar with the content of the post plan. Some plans were large and lacked user-friendliness and the format and content of plans varied from post to post making it difficult for staff moving between posts to readily familiarise themselves with the plans.

**6.11** The ANAO examined the planning format used by two of Australia's consular sharing partners that DFAT had under consideration at the time of audit and found that Canada uses a standard template approach which is compact, user-friendly and practical.

**6.12** The ANAO concluded that the development of a standard template that could be tailored to each post's particular circumstances would address many of the weaknesses in contingency plans observed during the audit. It would improve the consistency and quality of post contingency plans and make it easier for staff transferring from post to post.

**6.13** DFAT acknowledged that there are problems with the variable quality of contingency plans across posts. At the time of audit, it had commenced a review of the format and content of post contingency plans with a view to delivering a more focussed, user-friendly and less resource-intensive system, based on a template approach.

### **Post review of risks should be more systematic**

**6.14** Posts are required to revise their contingency plans in whole or in part whenever conditions change and, in any event, to undertake an annual review and update of the plan.<sup>41</sup> Heads of Mission are encouraged to involve all Australia-based officers in the review and update process.

**6.15** The ANAO found that the process for reviewing the risks at the posts it visited might typically involve regular monitoring of the local environment, discussion amongst Australia-based staff of potential risks and liaison with other friendly missions. Following this process, the post would amend the contingency plan to reflect any new or changed risks that were identified.

**6.16** The ANAO found that while the process employed some elements of an effective risk management approach, it did not involve a rigorous and systematic analysis and assessment of risks using a standard risk management framework.

**6.17** The ANAO concluded that a more rigorous and systematic approach to risk management by the posts would be required to provide an assurance that risks are being identified and appropriately treated in post contingency plans. DFAT recognises that a more formal and comprehensive approach across the Department to risk management is required and in March 2000 launched a Risk Management Policy and Toolkit<sup>42</sup> to assist all managers in this regard. The ANAO concluded that the application of this approach to risk management for post contingency planning would address many of the concerns noted above.

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<sup>41</sup> DFAT Security Instructions, Chapter 9, 1995.

<sup>42</sup> DFAT Administrative Circular P251 of 13 March 2000.

## Coordination and management by DFAT should be improved

**6.18** Under the ERP, DFAT Canberra is responsible for confirming that contingency plans are realistically able to respond to assessed threats and comply with departmental guidelines. To fulfil this role it is important that the Consular Branch reviews post plans to ensure they meet the guidelines and are up-to-date, and that posts are provided with better practice guidance as well as feedback on any shortcomings in their plans.

### *DFAT has not ensured that post plans are reviewed annually*

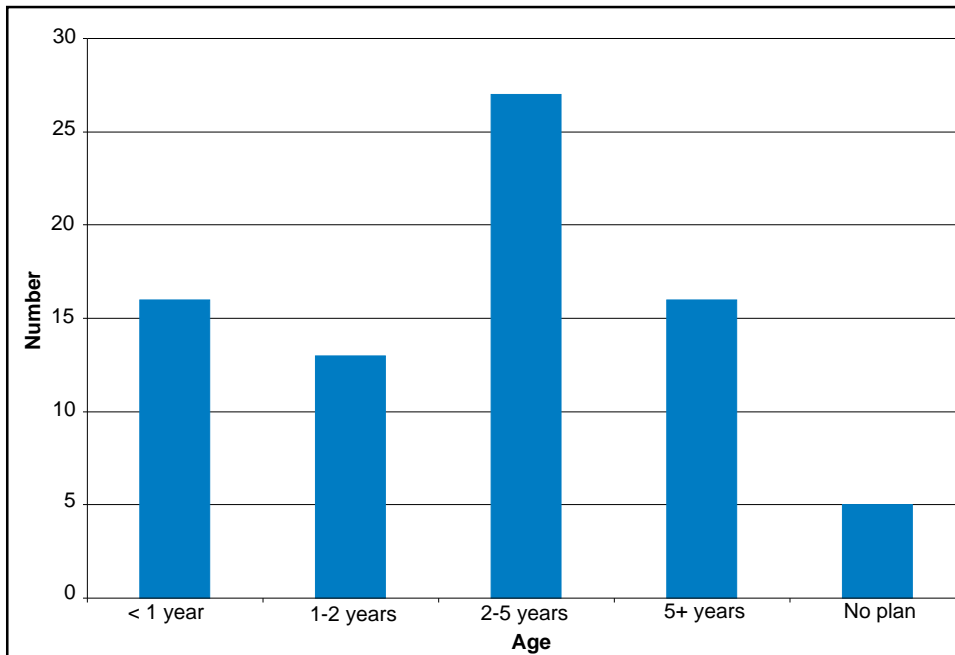
**6.19** Annual review by posts of their plans is a DFAT requirement, as it is important to identify and address emerging issues, refresh the plan in the minds of Australia-based staff and to enable contact lists and other reference data to be kept up-to-date.

**6.20** There is also a requirement that updated plans are provided to DFAT Canberra, to enable DFAT to discharge its responsibilities for ensuring that plans are realistic and comply with departmental guidelines.

**6.21** The ANAO found that many posts did not review their plans annually or provide updates to DFAT Canberra. As illustrated by Figure 12, only 16 plans (20 per cent of all plans) held by the Consular Branch were less than one year old and some 16 plans (20 per cent) were more than five years old.

**Figure 12**

**Age of post contingency plans held by Consular Branch, at August 2000**



Source: DFAT records and ANAO analysis

**6.22** DFAT has not consistently and actively monitored post contingency plans to ensure that they are up-to-date and pursued posts where they failed to provide updated plans, to enable DFAT to discharge its responsibilities. There were also inconsistencies in DFAT's monitoring of the adequacy of post contingency plans. For example, the ANAO found that in recent years posts that had updated their plans had not always been provided with feedback on those plans.

**6.23** DFAT advised that the focus of its contingency planning effort in 1999 involved preparations to ensure that DFAT systems and equipment both in Australia and overseas were Y2K compliant. DFAT acknowledged that many posts have not been annually reviewing contingency plans as required and, in May 2000, asked posts to ensure that their plans remained current pending the outcome of its contingency planning review.

*Guidelines for posts are out-of-date*

**6.24** DFAT's ERP draws together the various departmental procedures, plans and task forces involved in crisis management into a consolidated program in order to utilise DFAT's resources to respond to a crisis overseas in an efficient and timely manner. Information and instruction on the ERP for posts and DFAT Canberra is set out in a substantial volume of procedures and guidelines.

**6.25** The preparation and content of post contingency plans is governed by these guidelines. However, the guidelines were promulgated in 1987 and have remained largely unchanged since that time despite significant changes in the number and profile of Australians travelling overseas and living abroad; technological changes; and changes in functional oversight responsibility within DFAT.

**6.26** Consequently, the ANAO found that the guidelines were out-of-date and not user-friendly; this made them of limited practical use to posts. A review and update of the guidelines should be a matter of priority. DFAT responded that it proposed shortening and improving the document, and had sought post views on how to achieve this.

**6.27** At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it had completed its review of contingency planning arrangements and issued a new manual addressing contingency planning, crisis management and evacuation procedures, and that all posts would be required to update their contingency plans annually.

## Conclusion—Post contingency plans

**6.28** The ANAO concluded that post contingency plans are not sufficiently focussed on the protection of Australians travelling and residing abroad and vary in quality and consistency across posts. A more rigorous and systematic approach to risk management by the posts is required to provide an assurance that risks are being identified and appropriately treated in post contingency plans.

**6.29** Current arrangements for managing, monitoring and reviewing post contingency plans do not ensure that posts have appropriate, high-quality and up-to-date plans. The ERP guidelines governing contingency planning are out-of-date and lack user-friendliness, making them of limited use to posts.

### Recommendation No. 5

**6.30** The ANAO recommends that DFAT ensure that its management arrangements for post contingency plans provide for appropriate coordination, monitoring and review. In particular, DFAT should ensure that:

- post contingency plans protect the interests of Australians travelling and residing abroad as well as those of the mission;
- posts undertake regular, systematic analyses of their risks;
- post contingency plans are kept up-to-date; and
- guidelines on the preparation of post contingency plans are kept up-to-date.

#### *DFAT response*

**6.31** Agreed. This recommendation has been implemented. The Department completed a review of its contingency plans for managing crisis situations overseas. The review led to the introduction of a Contingency Planning, Crisis Management and Evacuation Manual. This manual, which has been distributed to posts, is designed to provide updated guidance on preparing contingency plans, responding to crisis situations overseas, and evacuation procedures. Central to these new guidelines is the principle that contingency planning should be focussed squarely on protecting Australians overseas.

## Registration of Australian citizens abroad

**6.32** Australians travelling or residing abroad may register their presence in a particular country with the Australian post to facilitate later contact by that post for consular purposes.

**6.33** As the need for posts to contact Australians is most likely in an emergency situation, the need to register is greater in those countries where such a situation is likely to arise. DFAT recognises that for some higher risk countries there is a need for the post to actively pursue Australians to register and, to this end, allocates posts to one of three groups depending on the local circumstances:

Group A posts—registration to be pursued actively;

Group B posts—registration to be pursued at post’s discretion; and

Group C posts—registration not to be pursued.

**6.34** This risk-based approach is also reflected in DFAT’s key publication on travel risks and consular services, *Hints for Australian Travellers*, which advises travellers to register with the Australian post if the country being visited has a current travel warning on issue. Registration in these circumstances is intended to help the post find the traveller if the situation deteriorates.

**6.35** The ANAO expected, therefore, that the travel advisories on issue for Group A posts would recommend to those travelling to the particular countries to register at the post. The ANAO found, however, that only half of the travel advisories that were on issue for Group A countries recommended that Australians register with the post.

**6.36** The extent to which posts achieve registration of Australian travellers or residents depends on a number of factors including the effort put into registration by the post and the traveller’s perception of the potential risk. While overall about 9 per cent of the total estimated number of Australians residing overseas are registered with Australian posts the actual number registered at particular posts varies considerably. The approach to registration and the numbers registered, at posts visited during the audit, are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
**Registration of Australians at posts visited by the ANAO**

<i>Post</i>	<i>Category for registration purposes</i>	<i>Approach taken to registering Australians</i>	<i>Estimated number of Australians living in the district</i>	<i>Registrations</i>	
				<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Manila	Group B post (pursuit discretionary)	Actively pursues registration	6000	1022	17
Bali	Group B post (pursuit discretionary)	Encourages registration	4000	877	22
Riyadh	Group B post (pursuit discretionary)	Actively pursues registration	4725	2849	60
Athens	Group C post (no pursuit)	Voluntary registration	135 000	1292	1

Source: DFAT consular statistics and ANAO analysis

**6.37** Table 3 indicates that the actual approach taken by posts to pursue registrations does not necessarily reflect the approach that might be expected given the formal categorisation of the post. For example, while the pursuit of registration is optional for the Riyadh post, the reality is that the post vigorously pursues registration. In addition, while the Athens post is not expected to pursue registrations, the reality is that it writes to registered Australians annually seeking updated particulars. A review of the categorisation of posts for registration purposes to ensure that posts are appropriately classified would be timely.

**6.38** The ANAO found that there is no monitoring or analysis undertaken by DFAT across posts to determine the success or otherwise of post registration efforts. Such monitoring would assist the identification of any posts where the registration effort falls short of expectations and would facilitate the identification and sharing of any better practice.

**6.39** The ANAO concluded that a review of the categorisation of posts would enable both DFAT Canberra and the posts to reassess whether the post effort to register Australians travelling or residing overseas appropriately reflects the local level of risk. DFAT should also more closely monitor and analyse the effectiveness of post registration efforts with a view, for example, to identify and share better practice.

## Recommendation No. 6

**6.40** The ANAO recommends that DFAT review the categorisation of posts for registration purposes to ensure that posts are appropriately classified and that it monitor the effectiveness of post registration efforts.

### *DFAT response*

**6.41** Agreed. A review of the categorisation of posts for registration purposes is under way. This review will be informed by the knowledge gained from a series of visits to high-risk posts conducted since mid-2000.

## Warden systems

**6.42** In times of civil unrest, riots, war or natural disaster it is important that Australian posts are able to communicate with, and provide assistance to, Australian tourists and residents. Where the Australian community is larger than about thirty families, posts may institute a 'pyramid' or warden system whereby selected members of the community are each allocated a number of other members to notify of advice received from the post.

**6.43** The ANAO found that the role of wardens was neither clearly defined in guidance to posts nor well understood by the posts that it visited. Although the original purpose of warden systems was to help communicate with Australians in times of emergency, some posts saw them as a method of disseminating routine information such as passport renewal forms to the Australian community, assisting Australians in difficulty or assisting with public diplomacy.

**6.44** Only one of the four posts visited by the ANAO operated a formal warden system. Other posts did not operate warden systems because they saw a potential for wardens to defraud fellow Australians, abuse their positions or were otherwise concerned that wardens were unreliable or did not suit the transient population serviced by the post.

**6.45** While warden systems might be able to perform a number of useful functions on behalf of posts, the ANAO concluded that clarification of the warden role by DFAT would assist posts to fully utilise a potentially valuable resource.



## Evacuation of the Solomon Islands

### Introduction

6.46 During the course of the audit a crisis in the Solomon Islands took place which necessitated the evacuation of Australian citizens from Honiara to Australia. The crisis was managed by DFAT and an Interdepartmental Emergency Task Force (IDETF) formed for this specific purpose. The evacuation was successful.

6.47 The management of the crisis by DFAT and the IDETF was largely outside the scope of the audit as it involved a range of other Commonwealth agencies and exceeded the provision of consular assistance. However, some confusion arose when evacuees were asked to sign an *undertaking to repay*<sup>43</sup> on boarding HMAS Tobruk. The ANAO reviewed this specific aspect of the evacuation.

### Evacuation revealed a gap in procedural guidelines

6.48 The Australian Government has arranged for the evacuation of Australian citizens from overseas countries to Australia on a number of occasions over recent years. A longstanding arrangement governing the evacuation of Australian citizens provides for evacuees to be charged for commercial charter evacuations but not for military assisted evacuations.

6.49 The evacuation of Australians from Honiara commenced on 8 June 2000 by use of HMAS Tobruk. At that time, the destination of the Tobruk had not been decided, as this would be determined to a large extent by the number of civilians on board at the time of sailing. On boarding the Tobruk, DFAT asked evacuees to sign an *undertaking to repay* involving \$717 for each adult and lesser rates for children.<sup>44</sup>

6.50 DFAT advised the ANAO that, in accordance with the longstanding arrangement, the *undertaking to repay* would only have been invoked if the Tobruk had offloaded the evacuees at Port Vila, Vanuatu, for return to Australia by commercial charter flight. While DFAT advised that this intention was orally explained to evacuees on boarding the Tobruk the written advice provided to evacuees at the time did not explain this intention. The Tobruk actually sailed to Brisbane and media reports indicated confusion among some evacuees about whether they would be required to pay for their passage.

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<sup>43</sup> In signing the *undertaking to repay* form the evacuee acknowledged that he/she would be indebted to the Australian Government for a specified amount of money; agreed to repay that amount of money; and understood that the Australian Government may cancel, confiscate or refuse to reissue a passport until the money has been repaid.

<sup>44</sup> The amounts were determined by DFAT to be equivalent to an economy airfare from Honiara to Brisbane.

**6.51** The ANAO found that the 1987 Emergency Response Program guidelines governing evacuations were out-of-date and did not clearly set out the circumstances in which evacuees would be required to pay for their passage. In addition, the ANAO found that on a previous occasion where the issue of possible evacuation had been raised, the advice to Australians appeared to be that they would be required to repay any government transportation costs.<sup>45</sup>

**6.52** Soon after the Solomon Islands' evacuation DFAT undertook a post-evacuation analysis which revealed that the decision to ask evacuees to sign an *undertaking to repay* occurred because the evacuation was the first that anticipated the use of both defence assets and a commercial air charter arrangement.

**6.53** DFAT acknowledged that its documentation was out-of-date. By the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it had issued a new manual addressing contingency planning, crisis management and evacuation procedures, covering, among other things, the use of *undertakings to repay* and the advice to be given to evacuees.

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<sup>45</sup> The arrangement of charging a fee for transportation that might be provided by the Australian Government was set out in a 1997 message to Australian nationals living in the Persian Gulf countries:

*The Australian government does not provide funds for evacuation and in the first instance, commercial and chartered flights should be used. If this is no longer available and the Australian government provides transportation you will be requested to sign an undertaking that you will repay the costs at a later date.*

## 7. Recommendations of the 1997 Senate Committee Report

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*This chapter outlines progress by DFAT and other agencies to implement recommendations of the 1997 Senate Committee report into consular services.*

### Introduction

7.1 In June 1997, the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee completed a report entitled *Helping Australians Abroad—A Review of the Australian Government’s Consular Services*. The report addressed a broad range of issues relating to consular assistance and examined DFAT’s handling of a number of difficult consular cases. These included the kidnapping and murder of David Wilson by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia in 1994, which had prompted the establishment of the inquiry.

7.2 The Committee made a number of findings, including the following:

- DFAT’s consular services had been fairly narrowly focussed on Australians in trouble overseas with much less attention given to their families back in Australia. In addition, DFAT responded to Australians in need overseas but devoted little attention to the prevention of problems. The Committee noted that there was now a recognition in DFAT that more attention should be devoted to these issues;
- DFAT had been seeking to expand access to consular services overseas for Australians, by appointing honorary consuls and entering into a consular sharing agreement with Canada. The Committee supported these initiatives;
- many Australians had unrealistic expectations of what DFAT’s consular services can provide Australians overseas and many criticisms of DFAT stem from this misunderstanding of the scope of consular services; and
- DFAT’s policy of ‘no comment’ to the media during the Wilson hostage crisis was a mistake, even though it was the agreed position of the Australian, British and French Governments. DFAT should enter into more cooperative arrangements with the media in any future hostage crisis or similar serious events.

7.3 The Committee made 23 recommendations for improving consular services. In its response to the Committee report in November 1997, the Government accepted 18 recommendations and indicated that three additional recommendations required further consideration or consultation. The Government response also noted that implementation of some recommendations would require the cooperation of State and Territory Governments.

7.4 Seventeen of the recommendations which the Government accepted, or indicated would be further considered, required DFAT action; three required action by the Attorney-General's Department; and one involved Austrade action. DFAT stated in its 1998–99 Annual Report that it had completed implementation of recommendations accepted by the Government. This chapter summarises the ANAO's assessment of implementation of the recommendations by DFAT and other agencies.

## Action to implement recommendations

7.5 The ANAO addressed a number of the issues which had been the subject of Senate Committee recommendations as part of the detailed examination of the audit objectives. These issues cover nine related Committee recommendations and have been discussed in previous chapters of this report.<sup>46</sup>

7.6 Action by DFAT and the other agencies to implement the other Committee recommendations was also reviewed by the ANAO. Appendix 3 summarises implementation action advised by the agencies and ANAO comment on those actions.

## Action has been taken to implement most of the Committee recommendations

7.7 Overall, the ANAO found that DFAT and other agencies have taken action to address partly or wholly 17 of the 21 Senate Committee recommendations which the Government accepted, or indicated, would be further considered (see Table 4).

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<sup>46</sup> The Senate Committee recommendations addressed in previous chapters were: Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 10 and 13 (Chapter 2) and Recommendations 6, 11 and 15 (Chapter 3).

**Table 4**

**Implementation action taken by DFAT and other agencies on Senate Committee recommendations which the Government accepted, or indicated, would be further considered**

<i>Action taken by DFAT and other agencies</i>	<i>Senate Committee Recommendation</i>	<i>Total</i>
Implemented	Recommendations 3, 10, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23	9
Implementation continuing	Recommendations 2, 5, 11 and 18	4
Further action not required	Recommendations 4 and 17	2
Partially implemented	Recommendations 1 and 15	2
Action not taken	Recommendation 12	1
Agency action could not be verified	Recommendations 6, 8 and 9	3
		<b>21</b>

7.8 Of those not fully implemented, the ANAO found that:

- further opportunities for expanding consular sharing arrangements with other countries could be usefully explored (Recommendation 1);
- the recommendation for referral of grieving next of kin to coronial counselling services and the maintenance of a list of private counsellors (Recommendation 12) has not been implemented, although this was accepted by the Government; and
- jurisdictional information has not been included on posts' lists of lawyers provided to Australians abroad in need of legal advice (part of Recommendation 15).

7.9 At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that:

- it would continue to explore opportunities to expand the consular network through sharing arrangements with other countries on a case-by-case basis (Recommendation 1);
- it had now commenced a review of procedures for counselling referral (Recommendation 12); and
- it had now tasked overseas posts to include court jurisdiction details in their lists of lawyers (part of Recommendation 15).

7.10 In addition, the ANAO found that action had not been taken to inform persons being extradited abroad of consular assistance available to persons in gaol overseas (part of Recommendation 19). The Attorney-General's Department and DFAT advised that they have now introduced arrangements to facilitate the provision of consular information to Australians facing extradition to other countries.

7.11 The Government's response to three recommendations required DFAT to further pursue:

- investigating the possibility of producing a key consular information brochure, *Travelling Overseas?*, in languages other than English and pursuing sponsorship of its production (parts of Recommendation 6);
- instituting measures to impound passports of travellers owing a debt to the Commonwealth arising from a repatriation or medical evacuation (Recommendation 8); and
- putting in place arrangements for debts to the Commonwealth arising from a repatriation or medical evacuation to be registered against existing government entitlements or added to the recipient's future tax liability, with the agreement of recipients (Recommendation 9).

7.12 There have been no changes implemented in these areas. The ANAO found that there was no documentary evidence that these matters had been further pursued following the Government response. DFAT advised that it had given these matters due consideration and judgements were made not to proceed, but without a written record being made. DFAT has undertaken to consider the recommendations afresh, having regard to developments since the Senate Committee report. Appendix 3 provides further information.

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Canberra ACT  
29 March 2001



P. J. Barrett  
Auditor-General

# **Appendices**

## Appendix 1

### Consular assistance for Australians overseas

The DFAT Consular Services Charter includes lists of consular services which DFAT can and cannot provide Australians overseas. These are reproduced below.

#### What Can We Do For You

We provide a wide range of consular services to Australian citizens overseas. For example, we can:

- issue passports (applicant must provide relevant documentation and comply with procedures required by law), including emergency passports;
- provide advice and support in the case of an accident, serious illness or death, or if you are a victim of a serious crime, and arrange for next of kin to be informed;
- visit or contact you if you are arrested and arrange for your family to be informed if you wish;
- contact relatives and friends on your behalf to ask them to assist you with money or tickets;
- provide limited financial assistance in real emergencies;
- provide a list of local doctors and lawyers;
- help during emergencies, such as civil disturbances and natural disasters;
- witness and certify signatures and provide certain other notarial services (specified fees apply);
- provide the latest consular travel advices, which include information about security and health conditions in many parts of the world;
- provide voting facilities at Federal and some State elections.

Consulates headed by an honorary consul provide only some of the above services.

#### What We Cannot Do For You

The following are services we *cannot* provide:

- arrange visas, work or residence permits for other countries, or help you to obtain them;
- give legal advice, intervene in court proceedings or provide funds to pay your legal costs or fines;



- get you out of prison or obtain special treatment for you in prison;
- pay or guarantee payment of your hotel, medical or any other bills, including the cost of returning lost luggage to Australia;
- act as a travel agent, bank or post office, or store your luggage;
- become involved in commercial disputes or take up complaints about local purchases etc.;
- provide interpreter, telephone or photocopy services;
- pay pensions (although we can provide you with contact details of government authorities in Australia to help you to resolve payment difficulties);
- help find you a job overseas;
- investigate crimes in foreign countries.

However, we can advise you how to get help on these and other matters.

## Appendix 2

### Audit criteria

1. DFAT has in place mechanisms for measuring and managing consular performance.
2. DFAT has identified potential consular crises and has up-to-date plans to handle those situations.
3. Consular case management systems are efficient and effective in recording and monitoring action taken and under way.
4. Information on consular services and travel risks is clear, timely, appropriate and widely communicated to Australian travellers, Australians residents abroad, their families and the travel industry.
5. Consular services are readily accessible to consular clients both in Australia and overseas.
6. In handling more complex consular cases, DFAT is responsive, both in terms of timeliness and addressing the particular needs of the individuals in difficulty and their families.
7. DFAT liaises with other Commonwealth agencies, consular sharing countries and stakeholders in relation to significant consular issues.

## Appendix 3

### Agency action to implement recommendations of the 1997 Senate Committee Report

This Appendix sets out the 23 recommendations made by the Senate Committee and summarises implementation action advised by DFAT, the Attorney-General's Department and Austrade, and ANAO comment on those actions. For the ANAO's overall assessment of action by DFAT and other agencies to implement the recommendations of the Senate Committee report, see Chapter 7 of the audit report.

**Recommendation 1—The Committee recommends that DFAT continue to explore sharing arrangements with other countries to increase the reach, effectiveness and efficiency of Australia's consular services.**

*Government Response: Accepted. We will take steps to strengthen existing arrangements and continue to explore avenues for further consular sharing.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** Annual meetings of Australia's consular partners—Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America—have been held to discuss consular cooperation.

Since 1997 DFAT has arranged for Canada to extend consular services to Australians in 17 locations (mainly Africa/Caribbean), while Australia has reciprocated in 19 (Asia/Pacific). A 10-year review of the Agreement with Canada in May 2000 led to an expansion of the arrangement with four more countries to be added to the Canadian list, and one to the Australian list.

DFAT advised that in the collective judgement of the five consular partner countries there has been no need to formalise arrangements which are considered to work well.

At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it considers that its existing consular network meets current needs, but that it will continue to explore opportunities to expand the network through sharing arrangements with other countries on a case-by-case basis.

**ANAO comment:** Partially implemented. As discussed in paragraph 2.11, DFAT has not pursued opportunities for sharing arrangements with other countries, such as Germany and the Scandinavian countries, which it had indicated to the Senate Committee might be advantageous to Australia. The ANAO considers that DFAT could usefully examine further opportunities for expanding sharing arrangements with other countries. As noted above, DFAT has advised of action proposed to further address the recommendation.

**Recommendation 2—The Committee recommends that funding for consular activities at Austrade posts be separately identified.**

*Government Response: Accepted. Funding for consular activities at Austrade posts will be separately identified.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** In its 2000–2001 Portfolio Budget Statements, Austrade has as one of its outcomes: *Australians informed about and provided access to consular, passport and immigration services in specific locations overseas*, with total appropriations at \$7.72m and total estimated expenses at \$8.93m. Austrade's 2000–2001 Operational Plan breaks this amount down to Post level. Actual expenditure on *consular and passport* activities is also identified at Post level. Austrade proposes to further separate out the individual elements of this outcome in its 2001–2002 Operational Plan and, subject to Ministerial agreement, into individual outputs in its 2001–2002 Portfolio Budget Statements.

**ANAO comment:** Implementation continuing (see paragraph 2.15).

**Recommendation 3—The Committee recommends that funding be provided to continue to expand the Honorary Consul system.**

*Government Response: Accepted. However, availability of funding is still an important factor and will be taken into account when considering establishment of further honorary consulates.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** As at July 2000, Australia had 42 honorary consuls, with another appointment pending. Several more were to be considered in a review to be undertaken in late 2000. In Indonesia, three out of six planned honorary consuls announced by the Prime Minister in 1997 had been appointed by early 1999, but the upsurge of anti-Australian sentiment in September 1999 led to the departure of two.

DFAT advised that as a result of changing priorities, not all of the consulates which had been listed in 1997 for establishment have been opened. Funding has been set aside in 2000–2001 for the appointment of at least three new honorary consuls.

**ANAO comment:** Implemented. The number of honorary consuls increased from 31 positions in May 1997 to 42 positions in July 2000. Since 1998–99, the total number of honorary consuls has remained stable. Opportunities for DFAT to increase the use of honorary consuls is discussed in paragraph 2.21.

**Recommendation 4—The Committee recommends that DFAT provide staff assistance for Honorary Consuls who have a heavy consular workload.**

*Government Response: Accepted. Individual requests for additional administrative support will be considered closely in the light of demonstrated workload.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** DFAT advised that, since the Senate Committee report was released, funding for administrative support was provided to honorary consuls in Zagreb and Copenhagen. These honorary consulates have now closed, following the opening of DFAT-managed embassies. No new arrangements for administrative support have been required, as DFAT has not received any requests for staffing assistance from honorary consuls since the Senate Committee report.

**ANAO comment:** Further action not required. DFAT has advised that there have been no requests from honorary consuls for staffing assistance since the Senate Committee report. The case for providing supplementary funding for administrative support, where justified on cost-benefit grounds, is discussed in paragraph 2.24.

**Recommendation 5—The Committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade examine options to enable locally engaged staff in Australian posts overseas to undertake notarial acts.**

*Government Response: Accepted. Amendments to the Consular Fees Act 1955 have been made, and in consultation with State and Territory Governments, we will examine options to enable suitably qualified locally engaged staff to perform notarial acts under relevant State and Territory legislation.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** The Attorney-General's Department advised that Commonwealth and States/Territories Attorneys-General agreed in April 1999 that Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation be amended to enable locally-engaged staff at overseas posts to carry out notarial acts.

Progress by jurisdictions in amending their legislation is dependent on Parliamentary timetables. To date only Queensland and South Australia have enacted the necessary legislation. Other jurisdictions have yet to implement the agreement. Amendments to relevant Commonwealth legislation are scheduled for introduction in 2001.

To date the Secretary of DFAT has authorised a total of 154 locally-engaged staff at overseas posts to perform notarial acts under Commonwealth legislation.

**ANAO comment:** Implementation continuing.

**Recommendation 6—The Committee recommends that DFAT:**

- (a) investigate the possibility of producing *Travelling Overseas?* in languages other than English;**
- (b) pursue sponsorship for the production of *Travelling Overseas?* and**
- (c) consider the need for more topic specific publications, in particular publications directed at backpackers and independent travellers.**

*Government Response: Accepted. The Government will continue to respond to the information needs of the general travelling public, people from diverse linguistic backgrounds and also pursue sponsorship options for publications.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:**

(a) DFAT advised that resource considerations had prevented the issuance of the brochure *Travelling Overseas?* in other languages. DFAT considered this to be of lesser priority than the issuance of more topic-specific publications, which would reach a much wider public.

At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it would consider engaging ethnic media to assist in broadcasting information contained in a revised English language version of *Travelling Overseas?*, due to be released soon. DFAT noted that there may be a stronger argument for translating the brochure on dual nationality, rather than this brochure, into other languages.

(b) DFAT advised that sponsorship for the brochure was considered, but that it concluded that greater revenue could be obtained from sponsorship of the larger publication *Hints for Australian Travellers*. This commenced in 1997, and sponsorship revenue from *Hints* now defrays a considerable proportion of production costs of that publication.

At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it has recently advertised for proposals from interested parties for the provision of advertising management services for the full range of DFAT consular and passport publications and associated websites. DFAT expects that the tender process will be completed by the end of the 2000–2001 financial year.

(c) Over the past four years, a variety of new topic specific brochures has been issued on such subjects as the Consular Charter, Tips for Backpackers, Tips for Women Travellers, Sexual Assault, Prisoners Overseas, Dual Nationality, Missing Overseas, Travelling to Bali, and Working Overseas. A leaflet encouraging Australians to register with posts was issued in late 1999.

**ANAO comment:** (a) and (b) Agency action following the Government response until the time of audit could not be verified. Notwithstanding DFAT's advice, the ANAO found that there was no documentary evidence that these matters had been further pursued following the Government response.

DFAT has advised that it is reconsidering the first part of the recommendation and is taking action which addresses the second part. The ANAO suggestion that DFAT consider the cost-benefit of pursuing lower-cost alternatives to the issuance of the brochure in other languages is discussed in paragraph 3.71.

(c) Implemented.

**Recommendation 7—The Committee recommends that the global limit of traveller's emergency loans be reviewed to have regard to the cost of living of each country in which it is issued.**

*Government Response: Not necessary. There is sufficient flexibility within current arrangements to ensure that Australians in need are provided with traveller's emergency loans at appropriate levels, without the need to develop, implement and maintain a complex and costly schedule of country specific loan amounts.*

**Recommendation 8—The Committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade institute measures to impound passports of travellers, to prevent the person from travelling overseas, while they owe a debt to the Commonwealth arising from a repatriation or medical evacuation, except in special circumstances.**

*Government Response: Further consultation required.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** DFAT advised that while it considers it would be desirable in principle to prevent outstanding debtors from departing Australia, where debtors are in Australia and in possession of their passport there would be practical difficulties in doing so. In addition, Customs officers could be authorised to impound passports at the departure barrier, but passengers would be likely to object strongly given their tickets will have been paid for and because of the inconvenience involved. Adverse media attention would almost certainly arise if the Government were to follow such a course.

DFAT also advised that where a person is overseas and receives a consular advance, his/her passport could be impounded on return to Australia. However, DFAT considered it doubtful whether the small number of outstanding debts would justify the administrative expense and possible political/legal difficulties of impounding the passports of all those in receipt of travel advances.

**ANAO comment:** Agency action following the Government response until the time of audit could not be verified.

In its report the Senate Committee supported an option put forward by DFAT that the Commonwealth should have the power to impound the passport of a person owing a repatriation or medical evacuation debt. Accordingly, it recommended that DFAT institute measures to impound the passport of consular debtors.

In 1997, in the course of coordinating the Government response to the Senate Committee recommendations, DFAT obtained legal advice to the effect that a person owing money to the Commonwealth in respect of repatriation or medical evacuation may have their passport cancelled and then be required to deliver up the passport. However, legal advice indicated that amendment of the *Passport Act 1938* probably would be necessary to allow a discrete power to impound a passport.

The ANAO found that there was no documentary evidence that this had been further pursued following the Government response. DFAT has undertaken to reconsider the recommendation.

**Recommendation 9—The Committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade put in place arrangements whereby, with the agreement of the recipient, the debt incurred through a repatriation or medical evacuation can be registered against existing Government entitlements or added to the recipient’s future tax liability.**

*Government Response: Further consideration required. The Government will consider making appropriate arrangements in cases where recipients voluntarily request that debts incurred in repatriation or medical evacuations be registered against existing Government entitlements.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** DFAT advised that Centrelink had confirmed that social security entitlements are “inalienable” and cannot be offset against a person’s consular debt without that person’s permission. Also, the Australian Tax Office had confirmed that its debt-recovery powers are limited to tax-related matters and cannot be applied to consular debts.

**ANAO comment:** Agency action following the Government response until the time of audit could not be verified.

In making this recommendation, the Senate Committee indicated support for an option put forward by DFAT to the Committee that legislative arrangements be put in place whereby, with the consent of a debtor, consular debts could be registered against government entitlements or added to future tax liabilities.

In 1997, in the course of coordinating the Government response to the Senate Committee recommendations, DFAT obtained legal advice regarding voluntary deductions from statutory entitlements and also consulted with the Australian Taxation Office and Centrelink.

The legal advice DFAT received was that there appeared to be no legal objection to a person voluntarily requesting deductions from statutory entitlements. However, Centrelink advised DFAT that it had received separate legal advice to the effect that the availability of voluntary deductions from social security payments was unclear. The Australian Taxation Office advised that legislative change would be required to authorise the garnisheeing of any tax refunds accruing to consular debtors.

The ANAO found that there was no documentary evidence that this had been further pursued following the Government response. DFAT has undertaken to reconsider the recommendation.

The ANAO notes that persons owing debts to the Commonwealth arising from repatriation and medical evacuation at Commonwealth expense currently may repay those debts by regular instalments to DFAT.

**Recommendation 10—The Committee recommends that DFAT establish a free call service for callers to the Consular Branch from within Australia.**

*Government Response: Partially accepted. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has established a special telephone number providing access to consular services from anywhere in Australia at the cost of a local call.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** DFAT advised that a free call service was established in October 1997 and has become a primary means of public contact with the Consular Branch and the 24-hour Consular Operations Centre.

**ANAO comment:** Implemented.

**Recommendation 11—The Committee recommends that the Department should continue, with the travel industry, to highlight the need for adequate insurance cover for travellers.**

*Government Response: Accepted. The Government accepts the recommendation and will continue its program of industry consultation.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** DFAT advised that considerable contact with the travel industry has continued since 1997 and that in all client contact and public addresses the need for travel insurance has been consistently emphasised. The need for insurance is prominently displayed in *Hints for Overseas Travellers*, which is distributed with each of the 1.1 million new passports issued every year; and is regularly mentioned in the three-monthly Consular Newsletter. It is also covered in every travel advisory issued.

DFAT also advised that its consular public information strategy in 2000–2001 would focus on alerting Australian overseas travellers to the need for adequate insurance cover.

**ANAO comment:** Implementation continuing. At August 2000, about 20 per cent of travel advisories did not highlight the need for adequate insurance (see paragraph 3.53).



**Recommendation 12—The Committee recommends that DFAT should negotiate with State and Territory Governments and with the Coroners to make arrangements for grieving or distressed families in their respective States and Territories to have access to their counselling services. DFAT should also maintain a list of private counsellors to provide to families.**

*Government Response: Accepted. Most State and Territory Coroners indicate a strong willingness to assist distressed and grieving families through services they provide. Action is currently under way to formalise referrals.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** In 1997, DFAT advised that there was a need for more formal counselling referral arrangements. This service would be offered to families in Australia affected by the death of next of kin overseas, as well as to individuals who suffer trauma while overseas.

At that time, DFAT had made contact with State and Territory coroners and had received a generally positive response. Letters had been written which sought agreement on appropriate referral procedures and protocols. Coroners in most States and Territories would be able to assist families when next of kin die overseas and provide, or refer, families to bereavement counselling. DFAT also advised that arrangements were being developed for it to bring the services provided by the Australian Psychological Society to the attention of its consular clients.

During the audit, DFAT advised that consular staff routinely advise victims of consular incidents and their families about where they may turn to for advice on the availability of counselling services, both overseas and in Australia. However, the Consular Branch does not have counselling expertise itself, nor is it equipped to make comparative judgements about available counselling services (indeed, it would not wish to because of liability implications). Increasingly, the Branch's experience has shown that consular clients are best directed in the first instance to their family doctor and to local State and community medical services.

DFAT further advised that the Consular Branch consults the Departmental Counsellor about referrals to counselling services overseas and in Australia. It involves the Counsellor in particularly traumatic consular incidents such as the Swiss Canyoning Tragedy.

At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it attaches importance to counselling for clients and it is common practice for consular officers to suggest to distressed family members or victims of tragedy that they seek counselling. DFAT acknowledged the need to adopt a more systematic approach to counselling referral and has now commenced a review of procedures in this area.

**ANAO comment:** Action not taken to implement the Senate Committee recommendation. DFAT does not have formal arrangements with State or Territory Governments or other organisations to assist next of kin to obtain access to counselling services. It does not maintain a list of private counsellors to provide to next of kin. As noted above, DFAT has advised that it is now reviewing its procedures for counselling referral.

The ANAO noted that DFAT's standard letter to the next of kin confirming information of the death of an Australian and offering assistance with funeral arrangements, does not refer to service providers such as the family doctor or community services which may provide counselling. The ANAO considers that DFAT should include general information on the availability of such services in the advice letter, to assist grieving and distressed families.

**Recommendation 13—The Committee recommends that the Department should institute a formal counselling program for consular officers as soon as possible.**

*Government Response: Accepted. A counselling program for consular officers within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has already been instituted.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** DFAT advised that the Consular Branch continues to provide training and counselling in trauma management for consular staff in Australia and overseas. For officers proceeding overseas, such training is routinely included in the Consular Training Course and is conducted by the Departmental Counsellor. In Canberra, all newly-arrived officers in the Consular Branch participate in a trauma management course conducted by outside consultants.

**ANAO comment:** Implemented (see paragraph 2.34).

**Recommendation 14—The Committee recommends that, where necessary, the mission should continue the practice of obtaining legal opinion from local lawyers if it believes that an Australian has not been given due process, has been or may be subject to cruel punishment in international human rights terms or has been subject to discrimination on nationality grounds.**

*Government Response: Agreed. It is important that where necessary, Australia's missions obtain legal advice in certain situations to clarify issues affecting Australians overseas.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** DFAT advised that, when the need arises, overseas posts continue to seek advice from local lawyers to satisfy themselves that Australians subjected to local judicial processes are treated fairly and without discrimination.

**ANAO comment:** Implemented. DFAT has sought advice from local lawyers in foreign jurisdictions in a relatively small number of consular cases where Australians abroad may not have been treated fairly and without discrimination.

DFAT guidelines for consular work (Australian Consular Instructions) do not mention DFAT's practice of seeking legal advice from local lawyers in such circumstances. Guidance on this issue would help ensure that, where appropriate, posts seek local legal advice regarding possible unfair treatment or discrimination of Australians abroad.

**Recommendation 15—The Committee recommends that Australian posts overseas take steps to ensure that, as far as practicable, the lawyers included on lists provided to Australians in need of legal advice are reputable. Where applicable, the jurisdictions in which each lawyer can practise should be shown.**

*Government Response: Accepted. Not all legal systems operate in a manner identical to that in effect in Australia. However, we will endeavour to have missions overseas include as much information as possible in listings of local lawyers, including applicable jurisdictions.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** DFAT advised that posts are required to maintain lists of lawyers which operate in their countries of accreditation and that all reasonable efforts are made to ensure that the lawyers included on those lists are reputable. Posts are now required to update their lists of lawyers twice each year and to forward any amendments to the Consular Operations Centre.

DFAT also advised that it is not always possible to identify the jurisdictions in which individual lawyers practise as many countries operate their legal systems with “fully fused” professions, where individuals licensed to practise are able to practise in all courts and in all areas of the law.

At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that overseas posts have now been tasked to include details of the court jurisdiction in which each lawyer practices in post lists.

**ANAO comment:** Partially implemented.

DFAT requires posts to make enquiries to justify the inclusion of lawyers on the post list. However, it does not have a mechanism for posts to provide assurance to the Consular Branch that appropriate enquiries have been made.

The second part of the recommendation, that lists of lawyers show the jurisdiction, where applicable, in which lawyers may practise, had not been adequately addressed at the time of audit. Consular Instructions do not require that posts identify the court jurisdiction of lawyers, where applicable, and some post lists do not indicate whether the lawyers practise in a particular court jurisdiction. As discussed in paragraph 3.77, the ANAO considers that the inclusion of this information would improve the usefulness of the lists. As noted above, DFAT has advised of recent action taken to address the second part of the Senate Committee recommendation.

**Recommendation 16—In the case of Australian victims of crime and those facing serious charges in overseas jurisdictions, the Committee recommends that DFAT provide them with translator and interpreter services.**

*Government Response: Not supported. The Government cannot commit itself to an open obligation to fund translators overseas. However, the Government is prepared to consider carefully providing translators and interpreters on a case by case basis.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** DFAT advised that translator and/or interpreter services are provided from time to time for particular cases.

**Recommendation 17—The Committee recommends that in the case of the victims of crimes special consideration should be given to ensure that they have access to adequate legal representation, if required, in a foreign jurisdiction, that travelling and in country expenses be provided if these are not met by the foreign government and that funding for these services be provided under the Special Circumstances (Overseas) Scheme.**

*Government Response: Further consideration necessary. The recommendation requires additional funding and will be considered in the context of the budget of the Attorney-General's Department.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** The Attorney-General's Department advised that assistance of the type recommended can be provided under the Special Circumstances (Overseas) Scheme, subject to the applicant satisfying the usual conditions for assistance under that scheme. The scheme is administered by the Legal Assistance Branch of the Family Law and Legal Assistance Division of the Attorney-General's Department, and application forms and copies of the guidelines that relate to the scheme are available on request.

The Attorney-General's Department has not pursued additional funding for assistance for victims of crime overseas, as only a very small number of applications have been received. Since 1997 there have been two applications relating to victims of crime overseas. Funding was provided in one case.

DFAT advised that it draws the existence of the scheme to the attention of Australian crime victims on a selective basis, bearing in mind that in many jurisdictions (including Australia), legal representation for victims of crime is not normal procedure.

**ANAO comment:** Further action not required.

**Recommendation 18—The Committee recommends that the Attorney-General seek the co-operation of the States and Territories to implement the arrangements necessary for the introduction of the international prisoner transfer scheme.**

*Government Response: Agreed. Commonwealth legislation providing arrangements for international prisoner transfer has already been enacted. The States and Territories (except Western Australia and the Northern Territory) have agreed in principle to enact complementary legislation and are preparing to do so.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** The Attorney-General's Department advised that all States and Territories have now passed complementary legislation. The Commonwealth has been consulting with all States and Territories on draft Administrative Arrangements which will be necessary for the implementation of the legislation. The Commonwealth is also preparing draft regulations under the Commonwealth legislation and associated materials in relation to the scheme. Australia will then enter into appropriate international transfer arrangements.

The Attorney-General's Department advised that the key international priorities are to conclude a bilateral agreement with Thailand and to accede to the Council of Europe Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons. Negotiations on a draft agreement with Thailand are nearing completion. Australia's accession to the Council of Europe Convention would enable Australia to enter into prisoner transfer arrangements with approximately 50 countries, including several with large numbers of Australian prisoners, such as the United Kingdom, Greece and the United States of America. The Government has initiated processes for Australia's accession to the Convention.

The Government also proposes to arrange for Australia's participation in the Commonwealth Scheme for the Transfer of Convicted Offenders, and will examine possible bilateral arrangements with other countries as appropriate. All proposed international arrangements will be subject to Parliamentary scrutiny, including review by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties.

**ANAO comment:** Implementation continuing.

**Recommendation 19—The Committee recommends that the Attorney-General's Department ensure that appropriate consular officers are advised when an Australian national is to be extradited to a foreign jurisdiction and that the person being extradited be informed of the assistance that may be provided by Australian consular officials to persons in gaol overseas.**

*Government Response: Agreed. The Attorney-General's Department will advise the Consular Branch of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade when Australians are to be extradited to foreign jurisdictions.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** The Attorney-General's Department advised that arrangements to inform the Consular Branch of all relevant extradition cases were not introduced until February 2000. DFAT commented that, in practice, it has learnt very quickly of such cases in recent years, and posts have extended the same consular service to extradited Australian citizens as to any other prisoners abroad. In many cases, the use of the diplomatic communications system provides automatic access to information concerning extraditions.

The ANAO found that, in practice, posts had not always been notified in advance of extradition cases.<sup>47</sup> To address this, the Attorney-General's Department and DFAT have now agreed and implemented arrangements whereby the Attorney-General's Department advises DFAT of the impending extradition of Australian citizens as soon as their date of surrender is finalised (usually about a week before surrender occurs) so that DFAT can notify the relevant post in time for it to take appropriate consular measures upon the arrival of the extraditee.

The ANAO also found that the second part of the recommendation, that persons being extradited abroad be informed of consular assistance available to persons in gaol overseas, had not been implemented, as the Attorney-General's Department's understanding had been that the extraditee would be informed of consular assistance on arrival in the overseas country. The Attorney-General's Department and DFAT have now agreed and implemented arrangements to address this. The Attorney-General's Department provides advice on consular services to Australian citizens facing extradition at the same time as they are advised that the Minister has signed a warrant for their surrender. The Attorney-General's Department considers that this arrangement ensures that the person has ample time to consider this information before surrender occurs.

**ANAO comment:** Implemented.

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<sup>47</sup> The Attorney-General's Department advised the ANAO that it aimed to notify DFAT of impending extraditions about two days before surrender; it would be possible to give notification a few days earlier as the date of surrender is normally finalised a week in advance. It advised that in the cases raised by the ANAO, notification had been postponed a day or two because the arrangements for the surrender and departure of the extraditees were unusually complex.

**Recommendation 20—The Committee recommends that, given Khmer Rouge General Paet’s central role in the whole David Wilson hostage crisis including the death of the hostages, the Australian Government should take the strongest possible action at an international level should he be captured or defect and not be brought to trial for the death of the hostages.**

*Government Response: Agreed. The Government is committed to seeing General Paet brought to justice for his central role in the David Wilson hostage crisis including the death of the hostages.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** DFAT advised that following persistent efforts on DFAT’s part with the Cambodian Government, General Nuon Paet was tried and convicted by a Cambodian court on 9 June 1999 for his part in the 1994 abduction and murder of David Wilson. The court of appeal in Cambodia was scheduled to hear the appeal against Paet’s conviction on 20 September 2000.

DFAT also advised that it had made representations to ensure that the Cambodian Government would arrest and charge others directly involved in David Wilson’s murder in accordance with Cambodian law. This led to formal charges being laid against Sam Bith and Chhouk Rin on 22 June 1999.

Chhouk Rin was tried and acquitted on 18 July 2000 on the grounds that he was covered by an amnesty law made by the Cambodian Government in favour of former members of the Khmer Rouge. The Australian Embassy in Phnom Penh subsequently made high-level representations to the Cambodian authorities about the Australian Government’s concern with the acquittal. The Cambodian Prosecutor’s office has lodged an appeal against the decision. Sam Bith has not yet been arrested.

**ANAO comment:** Implemented.

**Recommendation 21—The Committee recommends that the provision of information to families, in such distressing circumstances, be a high priority for DFAT and any mission abroad.**

*Government Response: Agreed. The Government is committed to providing a very high level of service to the families of Australians in difficulties overseas.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** DFAT advised that it continues to give the highest priority to informing and assisting families during and in the aftermath of consular incidents. It is now established practice that by far the greater part of total resources devoted to the successful resolution of most consular cases is devoted to informing and assisting families. In some notable examples, such as the Yemen kidnappings of December 1998 and the Swiss canyoning tragedy of July 1999, the Department’s servicing of family needs ran (and in the latter case continues to run) for many months after the event. The introduction of the 24-hour Consular Operations Centre in 1997 greatly enhanced the Department’s capacity to inform and assist families in a prompt and comprehensive manner.

**ANAO comment:** Implemented (see paragraph 5.23).

**Recommendation 22—The Committee recommends that, in any future hostage crisis or similar event, DFAT provide guidance to the media rather than ignore the media. The Department should also explain its media strategy to a hostage's family.**

*Government Response: Agreed. Every effort will be made to provide guidance to the media. However, there will be times when circumstances demand that media briefings be extremely limited, particularly when there is a need to ensure that a client's physical safety is maintained and not compromised and also in cases where express requests for privacy have been made by the families of those directly concerned.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** Since 1997 DFAT's general approach has been to have regular background briefings for the media. DFAT has sought to be as cooperative as possible with the media in consular cases, within the constraints imposed by the Privacy Act. In the context of the management of hostage cases, DFAT is mindful of the need to counteract media coverage that might jeopardise the successful outcome of particular cases. It seeks to ensure that its media strategies are fully explained to families of hostages.

DFAT has followed this general approach in all major cases since 1997, including two recent hostage cases in South America. DFAT advised that there was positive feedback on the handling of the Indian Airlines hijacking incident in December 1999.

**ANAO comment:** Implemented.

**Recommendation 23—The Committee recommends that Australia continue to urge regional countries to accede to The Hague Convention.**

*Government Response: Agreed. The Government is pleased that our representations are generally receiving a more positive hearing now than they did in 1996. The countries which are either committed or preparing to become party to the Convention are: the Czech Republic, Fiji, Hong Kong, Philippines, Slovakia, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Turkey.*

**Summary of action advised by agency:** DFAT advised that annual representations have been made since June 1997 encouraging accession to the Hague Convention to selected countries, mainly countries of importance to Australia and/or countries which are thought likely to accede soon. In 1997, four countries (Colombia, Georgia, Iceland and South Africa) as well as Hong Kong acceded to the Convention. In 1998, a further seven countries (Belarus, Cayman Islands, Czech Republic, Falkland Islands, Moldova, Paraguay and Turkmenistan) and in 1999, a further nine countries (Belgium, Brazil, Costa Rica, Fiji, Macau, Malta, Montserrat, Uruguay and Uzbekistan) acceded. In 2000, Turkey and Trinidad Tobago joined the Convention, and Sri Lanka indicated that it had prepared its instrument of accession. Australia's consular partners are informed of our activities in this regard, as they frequently make representations in parallel. A further round of representations was launched in November 2000.

**ANAO comment:** Implemented.

## Appendix 4

### Main destinations of Australians travelling abroad

These statistics indicate the main destinations of Australians travelling abroad. Australia has posts in the 34 overseas countries or territories listed below. These countries account for 91 per cent of the main destinations of Australian travellers.

**Table 5**

**Main destinations of Australians travelling abroad, 1999–2000**

<i>Main destination</i>	<i>Number (000's)</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<b>Southeast Asia:</b>		
Indonesia	261.7	7.9
Thailand	147.8	4.4
Singapore	145.9	4.4
Malaysia	126.3	3.8
Philippines	55.6	1.7
Viet Nam	50.0	1.5
Other	13.5	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>801.0</b>	<b>24.0</b>
<b>Oceania and Antarctica:</b>		
New Zealand	506.7	15.2
Fiji	107.2	3.2
Papua New Guinea	43.6	1.3
Vanuatu	36.7	1.1
Norfolk Island (c)	27.7	0.8
New Caledonia	14.4	0.4
Other	40.5	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>776.8</b>	<b>23.3</b>
<b>Europe and the former USSR:</b>		
United Kingdom	330.2	9.9
Italy	64.7	1.9
France	44.3	1.3
Greece	42.1	1.3
Germany	39.5	1.2
Ireland	25.9	0.8
Netherlands	19.5	0.6
Spain	14.7	0.4
Switzerland	12.4	0.4
Poland	8.5	0.3
Other	101.4	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>703.3</b>	<b>21.1</b>



<i>Main destination</i>	<i>Number (000's)</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<b>The Americas:</b>		
United States of America	373.7	11.2
Canada	62.5	1.9
Other	31.5	0.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>467.7</b>	<b>14.0</b>
<b>Northeast Asia:</b>		
Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China)	149.7	4.5
China	86.3	2.6
Japan	64.6	1.9
Taiwan (d)	34.9	1.0
Korea	19.8	0.6
Other	1.8	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>357.0</b>	<b>10.7</b>
<b>Southern Asia:</b>		
India	41.2	1.2
Sri Lanka	14.8	0.4
Other	21.1	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>77.2</b>	<b>2.3</b>
<b>Middle East and North Africa:</b>		
Lebanon	18.9	0.6
Turkey	15.9	0.5
Israel	8.3	0.2
Other	33.7	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>76.8</b>	<b>2.3</b>
<b>Africa (excluding North Africa):</b>		
South Africa	35.5	1.1
Other	22.1	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>57.6</b>	<b>1.7</b>
Not stated	15.0	0.5
<b>Overall total</b>	<b>3332.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Notes:

- (a) Numbers may not add due to rounding.
- (b) Statistics relate to Australian residents intending to stay overseas for less than 12 months.
- (c) Norfolk Island is part of the Commonwealth of Australia.
- (d) Australia does not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan. In Taipei, the Australian Commerce and Industry Office is maintained by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Its staff include staff on leave-without-pay or seconded from DFAT and other Commonwealth agencies.

## Appendix 5

### Selected DFAT travel advisories

Selected DFAT travel advisories issued for Fiji and Georgia during 2000 are reproduced below. These travel advisories are discussed in paragraphs 3.36 and 3.46 respectively of the audit report.

#### **TRAVEL ADVICE**

#### **FIJI**

**Issued 19 May 2000  
Consular Branch**

Australian citizens are advised that some members of the Fiji Government, including the Prime Minister, have been taken hostage by gunmen at the Parliament in Suva on the morning of 19 May 2000. Police have surrounded the building. The situation appears to be an organised hostage-taking activity and the action restricted to the parliamentary precinct in Suva.

A State of Emergency has been declared. A curfew has been imposed in the Suva city area from 1800 hours local time 19 May until 0600 hours 20 May. If travel is essential outside of the curfew hours, Australians are advised to exercise caution and stay away from demonstrations and large public gatherings.

Tourist resorts have not been affected by these events.

Tourists and expatriates are not the specific targets of the action, however, Australians in Suva are advised to remain indoors and maintain a very high level of personal security awareness and monitor the developments through the local media, which is providing regular reports of the situation.

At this stage telecommunications with Fiji are difficult.

At this time international flights to and from Australia are operating normally however travellers should check departure times with their airline.

Australian citizens in Fiji are strongly advised to contact either the Australian High Commission, 37 Princes Road, Tamavua - telephone (679) 382211 or the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on telephone (02) 6261 3305 for an update on the security situation.

**TRAVEL ADVICE  
FIJI**

**Issued 26 May 2000  
Consular Branch**

Australian citizens are advised to defer all holiday and normal business travel to Fiji until further notice. Those currently in Fiji should maintain a very high level of personal security awareness and monitor developments that might affect their safety. Australians should stay well clear of demonstrations or large public gatherings.

The current kidnap situation at Parliament House remains unresolved. Although the action is restricted to the parliamentary precinct there remains an increased possibility of civil disturbances particularly in the downtown area. Australians in Suva should avoid this area and are advised to maintain a very high level of personal security awareness and to monitor developments through the local media. Those in the immediate vicinity should remain indoors or move to a safer location.

A State of Emergency is in force throughout the country. A curfew has been imposed in the greater Suva area, Nausori, the area between Suva and Nausori, as well as Labasa on the island of Vanua Levu. Curfew hours have been reduced, now operating from 2000 hours until 0500 hours.

Due to increased demand, international telecommunications with Fiji remain difficult.

Generally, international flights to and from Australia continue to operate normally. International flights to and from Nausori (Suva) are being diverted to Nadi or suspended. Domestic flights are operating as normal. Travellers should in any case check details with their airline.

Australian citizens are strongly advised to register with the Australian High Commission in Suva. For an update on the security situation, or to register, Australians may contact the Australian High Commission, 37 Princes Road, Tamavua - telephone (679) 382211 or via e-mail at address: [leba.kini@dfat.gov.au](mailto:leba.kini@dfat.gov.au) The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade may also be contacted on telephone (02) 6261 3305.

**TRAVEL INFORMATION  
GEORGIA**

**This advice is current for Tuesday 08 August 2000 14:34:40 EST  
The advice was issued on Thursday 11 May 2000**

Australian citizens intending to travel to Georgia are advised to exercise care and maintain a high level of personal security awareness.

Australians are advised that unnecessary travel outside the capital, Tbilisi, should be avoided particularly at night. There have been reports of violent crime throughout much of the country and the security situation in various regions remains uncertain.

Australians are advised to avoid travel near the land borders with Russia, especially Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia. There is a risk of kidnapping in these areas. The break-away regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain insecure and should also be avoided.

There is no Australian Embassy in Georgia. Australians intending travel to Georgia are strongly advised to register with the Embassy in Moscow at Kropotkinsky Pereulok 13 - telephone (7-095 or 7-503) 956 6070 or facsimile 956 6170. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra may also be contacted on telephone (02) 6261 3305.

## Appendix 6

### Consular publications, websites and other communication channels

DFAT's main consular publications, websites and other channels for communicating travel advice to Australian travellers and residents overseas are summarised below.

Consular publications	
<p><b>General publications</b></p> <p><i>Hints for Australian Travellers</i></p> <p><i>Consular Newsletter</i></p>	<p><b>Publication and distribution arrangements</b></p> <p>Booklet published biannually Print run of 550 000 copies Issued with passports</p> <p>Newsletter published quarterly Print run of 7000 copies Distributed mainly to travel agents</p>
<p><b>Brochures</b></p> <p>General brochures: <i>Travelling Overseas? A Moment Please</i></p> <p><i>Consular Services Charter</i></p>	<p>Distributed in response to demand from the travel industry and the travelling public</p> <p>Updated when required Print run of 20 000 copies</p> <p>Updated when required Print run of 40 000 copies</p>
<p>Travel tips: <i>Backpacking Overseas? Some Tips</i> <i>Travelling to Bali? Some Tips</i> <i>Tips for Women Travellers</i> <i>Dual Nationality</i> <i>Working Overseas</i></p>	<p>Updated when required Print run of 20 000 copies per brochure</p>
<p>Welfare advice: <i>If You Are Arrested or Jailed Overseas</i> <i>If You Are the Victim of Sexual Assault While Travelling Overseas</i> <i>What to Do When Someone is Missing Overseas</i></p>	<p>Updated when required Print run of 20 000 copies per brochure</p>

<b>Websites</b>	
<b>DFAT websites</b>	
<i>Travel advisories:</i>	<a href="http://www.dfat.gov.au/consular/advice/index.html">http://www.dfat.gov.au/consular/advice/index.html</a>
<i>Visa information:</i>	<a href="http://www.dfat.gov.au/visas">http://www.dfat.gov.au/visas</a>
<b>Links to travel advisories of consular sharing partners</b>	
<i>Canada:</i>	<a href="http://voyage.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/destinations/menu_e.htm">http://voyage.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/destinations/menu_e.htm</a>
<i>UK:</i>	<a href="http://193.114.50.10/travel">http://193.114.50.10/travel</a>
<i>USA:</i>	<a href="http://travel.state.gov/travel_warnings.html">http://travel.state.gov/travel_warnings.html</a>
<i>NZ:</i>	<a href="http://www.mfat.govt.nz/travel/reports.shtml">http://www.mfat.govt.nz/travel/reports.shtml</a>
<b>Overseas posts with website</b>	
<i>Federal Government website listing:</i>	<a href="http://www.fed.gov.au/sitelists/web_alpha1.htm">http://www.fed.gov.au/sitelists/web_alpha1.htm</a>
<u>Selected posts</u>	
<i>Bali:</i>	<a href="http://www.dfat.gov.au/bali">http://www.dfat.gov.au/bali</a>
<i>Greece:</i>	<a href="http://www.ausemb.gr/">http://www.ausemb.gr/</a>
<i>Philippines:</i>	<a href="http://www.australia.com.ph">http://www.australia.com.ph</a>

<b>Other channels for communicating travel advice</b>	
<b>Clients</b>	<b>Communication channel</b>
The travel industry and media organisations	Electronic distribution to computerised reservation systems Fax distribution E-mail distribution
Australians registered with DFAT	E-mail distribution
Australians registered with posts	E-mail distribution at some posts

Source: DFAT Annual Report, DFAT website and other sources

# Index

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## A

Attorney-General's Department 100, 101, 107, 108, 116, 117

### audit

conclusion 12, 13, 46, 49, 66, 72, 86, 93

cost 36

criteria 36, 106

key findings 16-24

methodology 36, 37

objective 12, 36

recommendations 14, 25-27, 50, 59, 72, 87, 93, 96

report structure 37

Austrade 36, 38, 41, 42, 100, 107

## C

case management systems 14, 15, 20, 67-73, 80, 87

client communication strategy 17, 47, 49, 50

client satisfaction 22, 82, 85, 87

complaint handling 22, 82, 85-87

consular caseload statistics 79, 80

Consular Operations Centre (COC) 17, 44

consular publications 19, 20, 60-63, 66, 124

consular service points 16, 38, 39

consular sharing arrangements 16, 39-41, 46, 107

consular training 17, 45, 46

contingency planning 15, 22, 23, 88-93

counselling for staff 17, 46, 114

## D

DFAT response 14, 25-27, 50, 59, 72, 87, 93, 96

## E

evacuation of the Solomon Islands 97

## H

honorary consuls 16, 38, 39, 42, 43, 46, 108

## L

lists of lawyers 20, 63, 64, 115

## P

performance feedback to posts 81

performance information 15, 21, 69-72, 74-77, 86, 87

## R

range of consular services 33, 39, 84, 104

registration 23, 94-96

## S

Senate Committee report 11, 15, 23, 24, 35, 40-43, 46, 48, 58, 60, 61, 63, 99-102, 107-119

service cost 34

service performance targets 22, 84, 87

staff resources 34, 35

## T

travel advisories 14, 18-20, 47, 49-59, 64, 65, 122, 123, 125

travel warning levels 14, 19, 56, 57

## W

warden systems 96

websites 20, 47, 52, 63-65, 109, 124, 125

# Series Titles

---

## Titles published during the financial year 2000–01

Audit Report No.30 Performance Audit

*Management of the Work for the Dole Programme*

Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business

Audit Report No.29 Performance Audit

*Review of Veterans' Appeals Against Disability Compensation Entitlement Decisions*

Department of Veterans' Affairs

Veterans' Review Board

Audit Report No.28 Audit Activity Report

*Audit Activity Report: July to December 2000*

Summary of Outcomes

Audit Report No.27 Performance Audit

*Program Administration Training and Youth Division—Business Reengineering*

Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA)

Audit Report No.26 Performance Audit

*Defence Estate Facilities Operations*

Department of Defence

Audit Report No.25 Benchmarking Study

*Benchmarking the Finance Function*

Audit Report No.24 Performance Audit

*Family Relationships Services Program (FRSP)*

Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS)

Audit Report No.23 Financial Statement Audit

*Audits of the Financial Statements of Commonwealth Entities for the Period Ended 30 June 2000*

Audit Report No.22 Performance Audit

*Fraud Control in Defence*

Department of Defence

Audit Report No.21 Performance Audit

*Management of the National Highways System Program*

Department of Transport and Regional Services

Audit Report No.20 Performance Audit

*Second Tranche Sale of Telstra Shares*

Audit Report No.19 Financial Control and Administration Audit

*Management of Public Sector Travel Arrangements—Follow-up audit*

Audit Report No.18 Performance Audit  
*Reform of Service Delivery of Business Assistance Programs*  
Department of Industry, Science and Resources

Audit Report No.17 Performance Audit  
*Administration of the Waterfront Redundancy Scheme*  
Department of Transport and Regional Services  
Maritime Industry Finance Company Limited

Audit Report No.16 Performance Audit  
*Australian Taxation Office Internal Fraud Control Arrangements*  
Australian Taxation Office

Audit Report No.15 Performance Audit  
*Agencies' Performance Monitoring of Commonwealth Government  
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*Amphibious Transport Ship Project*  
Department of Defence

Audit Report No.7 Performance Audit  
*The Australian Taxation Offices' Use of AUSTRAC Data*  
Australian Taxation Office

Audit Report No.6 Performance Audit  
*Fraud Control Arrangements in the Department of Health & Aged Care*  
Department of Health & Aged Care

Audit Report No.5 Performance Audit  
*Fraud Control Arrangements in the Department of Industry, Science & Resources*  
Department of Industry, Science & Resources



Audit Report No.4 Activity Report  
*Audit Activity Report: January to June 2000—Summary of Outcomes*

Audit Report No.3 Performance Audit  
*Environmental Management of Commonwealth Land—Follow-up audit*  
Department of Defence

Audit Report No.2 Performance Audit  
*Drug Evaluation by the Therapeutic Goods Administration—Follow-up audit*  
Department of Health and Aged Care  
Therapeutic Goods Administration

Audit Report No.1 Performance Audit  
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