



**The Parliament of the
Commonwealth of Australia**

**Report on the Australian Parliamentary Delegation
to Ireland and Italy
June – July 2010**

October 2010

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Members of the Delegation

Leader	Senator the Hon John Hogg President of the Senate Senator for Queensland Australian Labor Party
Deputy Leader	Mrs Margaret May (then) Member for McPherson Liberal Party of Australia
Members	Senator Steve Fielding Senator for Victoria Family First Australia Ms Sharon Grierson Member for Newcastle Australian Labor Party Mrs Julia Irwin (then) Member for Fowler Australian Labor Party
Accompanying Officer	Ms Julia Clifford Adviser Office of the President of the Senate
Delegation Secretary	Dr Shona Batge Committee Secretary Department of the Senate

The delegation was accompanied by Mrs Sue Hogg, Mr David May and Mr Geoff Irwin.

Foreword

Between 26 June and 10 July 2010, it was my pleasure to lead an Australian parliamentary delegation to Ireland, Italy and the Holy See. The aims of the delegation included renewing and strengthening relationships with the parliaments of Ireland and Italy, and providing opportunities for parliamentarians to compare approaches to public policy issues of mutual interest and concern.

The full delegation was as follows:

- Delegation Leader, Senator the Hon John Hogg, President of the Senate and Senator for Queensland
- Deputy Delegation Leader, Mrs Margaret May MP, the then Member for McPherson
- Senator Steve Fielding, Senator for Victoria
- Ms Sharon Grierson MP, Member for Newcastle, and
- Mrs Julia Irwin MP, the then Member for Fowler.

The delegation was supported by Ms Julia Clifford (Adviser to the President of the Senate) and Dr Shona Batge (Delegation Secretary). The delegation was also accompanied by Mrs Sue Hogg, Mr David May and Mr Geoff Irwin.

Our two-week program took us to Dublin, Galway, Rome, Vatican City and Palermo for a comprehensive array of meetings designed to help the delegation meet a predetermined set of aims and objectives. The topics of our meetings were wide-ranging but included the following:

- Delegates met with the Presiding Officers of each parliament we visited and were able to discuss practical matters pertaining to the operation of parliamentary business and buildings.
- Delegates met with a number of parliamentary committees from the Irish Parliament and from the Italian Parliament, providing an opportunity to discuss the operation of the committee systems as well as particular policy areas of interest.
- The impacts of the global financial crisis are being felt strongly in both Ireland and Italy, with unemployment levels rising and the availability of credit decreasing. Many of those with whom we met were very interested in discussing the outcomes of the economic stimulus measures that were enacted in Australia during the crisis.
- The subject of illegal immigration, including policies on detention and processing of claims for asylum, was also discussed in both Ireland and Italy.

I would like to express sincere thanks to the Irish Parliament and to the Italian Parliament for hosting our visits. The warm hospitality extended to the delegation and the effort put into arranging and facilitating programs of work for us ensured that our visits were both fruitful and enjoyable. I thank all those who generously made themselves available to meet with the delegation and assist us in fulfilling the aims of our visit. We engaged in many frank and informative dialogues and were able to gather much useful information.

Finally, I thank my fellow delegates for their participation and commitment to our program of work.



Senator the Hon John Hogg

Delegation Leader



Left to right: Ms Sharon Grierson MP, Mrs Julia Irwin MP, Senator John Hogg, Senator Steve Fielding and Mrs Margaret May MP, in the Palatine Chapel in Palermo

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 This report details the activities and observations of a delegation from the Parliament of Australia which travelled to Ireland, Italy and the Holy See between 26 June and 10 July 2010.

Aims and objectives

1.2 Parliamentary delegations provide an opportunity to build parliament-to-parliament relationships which complement, and are different to, relationships between governments or between ministers. The overall aim of this delegation was to renew and strengthen bilateral relationships between the Australian Parliament and the Irish Parliament, the Italian Parliament and the Holy See.

1.3 In the months prior to the delegation, delegation members held a series of meetings to establish the specific aims and objectives of the respective visits to Ireland, Italy and the Holy See. Assisted by officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Parliamentary Library, the delegation determined priority areas to examine during the visits. The aims and objectives specific to each destination, and the meetings held to address these, are described in the following chapters of this report.

Acknowledgements

1.4 The delegation would like to record its deep appreciation to the Irish Parliament and to the Italian Parliament for hosting its visit to Ireland and to Italy respectively.

1.5 Delegates also express their appreciation of the efforts of the many people who contributed to the smooth operation of the visits and who assisted in making the delegation's visits such an overall success, including DFAT staff at each destination.

1.6 Before departure, the delegation received detailed oral and written briefings from staff from DFAT and the Parliamentary Library. The assistance provided by these officials is acknowledged with thanks.

1.7 The delegation also notes the assistance provided before and during the visit by staff in the Parliamentary Relations Office, particularly Mr Andrew Templeton, and the work of HRG staff in making the necessary travel arrangements.

1.8 Finally, the delegation thanks the many individuals and organisations who met with the delegation for their generosity in sharing their time, views and knowledge with the delegates. Specific acknowledgements will be made in the following chapters.

Structure of this report

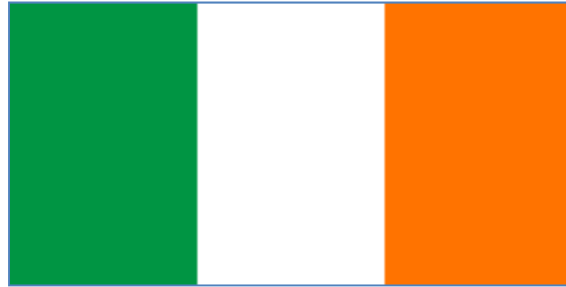
1.9 Chapter 2 describes meetings and activities undertaken by the delegation in Ireland. The program for the delegation's visit to Ireland is set out in Appendix 1.

1.10 Chapter 3 describes the meetings and activities that the delegation participated in while visiting Italy, including Sicily. The program for the delegation's visit to Italy is in Appendix 2.

1.11 Chapter 4 describes the meetings and activities that took place during the delegation's visit to the Holy See. The program for the visit is in Appendix 3.

Chapter 2

Visit to the Republic of Ireland



Background¹

The Republic of Ireland

2.1 The Republic of Ireland, which has a population of approximately 4.4 million people, is made up of 26 counties. It is located on the same island as the six north-eastern counties which make up Northern Ireland (which remains part of the United Kingdom).

2.2 Ireland was established under the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921. The Constitution of Ireland came into force in 1937, and the *Republic of Ireland Act 1948* formally severed links with the United Kingdom.

2.3 Ireland has been a member of the European Economic Community, and subsequently the European Union (EU), since 1973.

The national parliament

2.4 Ireland operates as a bicameral parliamentary democracy, with a popularly elected President as head of state. The current President is H.E. Mary McAleese. First elected to this position in 1997, she is now nearing the end of her second term. The next Presidential elections are due to be held in 2011.

2.5 The primary legislative body is the lower house, the Dáil Éireann, whose 166 members are directly elected at least once every five years through a proportional representation system. The upper house, the Seanad Éireann, has 60 members elected through a system of electoral colleges. The next parliamentary elections are due to be held in 2012.

1 Sourced from DFAT briefing notes.

2.6 The current Taoiseach (Prime Minister) is Mr Brian Cowen, the leader of Fianna Fáil. He has been Taoiseach since May 2008 and heads a coalition government with the Irish Green Party.

2.7 The two most prominent political parties represented in the parliament are Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. Both parties can be considered centre-right but originated from different positions on the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty. The founders of Fianna Fáil rejected the treaty due to the exclusion of the six counties that make up Northern Ireland. In contrast, the founders of Fine Gael were pro-treaty. The parties still advocate different policies in relation to Northern Ireland, but there is bipartisan support for the Northern Ireland Peace Process.

Aims and objectives

2.8 Prior to travelling to the Republic of Ireland, delegates agreed to the following set of aims and objectives for the one-week visit:

- to renew and strengthen relations with the Irish National Parliament (also known as the Houses of the Oireachtas), including the Dáil Éireann and the Seanad Éireann
- to acquire an insight into parliamentary issues, including:
 - the respective parliamentary committee structures
 - security issues for both the parliamentary buildings and parliamentarians
 - experiences with media access to and interaction with the parliament
 - cyber safety, and
 - management of parliamentary art collections
- to seek an enhanced understanding of the Irish government's domestic policies on health and ageing, environment and heritage protection, and policies to engender social cohesion
- to gain an appreciation of the Republic of Ireland's position on global issues, such as:
 - immigration matters (including illegal immigration)
 - climate change
 - responses to the global financial crisis, and
 - changes in the workings of the European Union following the Lisbon Treaty's entry into force²

2 The Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, reforms and strengthens the ways in which EU nations work together on key policy issues. For more information, please see http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/index_en.htm (accessed on 2 August 2010).

- to gain an appreciation of Australia-Ireland relations, including:
 - the scope and nature of Australian involvement in Ireland
 - Ireland's outreach to the Australian diaspora community
 - opportunities for the enhancement of people-to-people links, including between Australian and Irish academic institutions, and
 - bilateral commercial and trade ties;
- to gain an insight into Ireland's Asia strategy for the next decade and where it sees Australia playing a role, and
- to discuss cooperation within the multilateral system and seek an enhanced understanding of Ireland's approach on multilateral issues.

Acknowledgements

2.9 The delegates acknowledge with thanks the generous hospitality of the Irish Parliament and the efforts made by our hosts to put in place a program of meetings and visits that assisted us in meeting the aims and objectives of our visit.

2.10 The delegation is particularly appreciative of the assistance provided by Mr Ben Dunne, Head of Inter-Parliamentary Affairs for the Houses of the Oireachtas, and other staff members of the Office of Inter-Parliamentary Affairs who accompanied delegates during their visit.

2.11 The delegation also thanks H.E. Ambassador Bruce Davis and staff of the Australian Embassy in Dublin for their support during the visit and for co-hosting an evening function at the Ambassador's residence which enabled delegates to meet with Australian academics and business people working in Ireland.



Left to right: H.E. Ambassador Bruce Davis, Senator Hogg, Ms Grierson, Mrs May, Senator Fielding and Mrs Irwin, in the garden of the Ambassador's residence in Dublin.

2.12 Thanks are also due to the following individuals and groups who met with the delegation in Ireland:

Meetings with members of the Houses of the Oireachtas³

- Senator Pat Moylan, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad Éireann (Chairman of the Senate)
- the Hon Séamus Kirk TD, Ceann Comhairle (Speaker of the House)
- the Hon Billy Kelleher TD, Minister of State for Trade and Commerce
- Dr Michael Woods TD, Chairman of the Joint Foreign Affairs Committee
- Senator Ivana Bacik
- Senator Cecilia Keaveney
- members of the Working Group of Committee Chairmen
- members of the Joint Committee on Environment, Heritage and Local Government
- members of the Joint Committee on Transport
- members of the Joint Committee on Health and Children
- members of the Ireland-Australian and Asian Friendship Group

Other meetings

- officials from the Office for Internet Safety and the National Centre for Technology in Education Program of work
- officials from the Railway Procurement Agency
- officers from An Garda Síochána, the national police service of Ireland
- Mr Christy Cooney, President of the Gaelic Athletic Association, and
- Mayor of Galway, Mr Michael Crowe, and other City of Galway officials.

Program of work

2.13 The program for the delegation's visit to Ireland is outlined in Appendix 1.

Meetings with Presiding Officers

2.14 The delegation thanks Senator Pat Moylan, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad Éireann (Chairman of the Senate) and the Hon Séamus Kirk TD, Ceann Comhairle (Speaker of the House) for their warm welcome and hospitality during the delegates' stay in Dublin. It was the delegation's pleasure to dine with each of the Presiding Officers, providing an opportunity to discuss matters of mutual interest and also to

3 Members of the Seanad Éireann are referred to as Senators. Members of the Dáil Éireann are known as Teachtaí Dála (TDs) or Deputies.

thank the Irish Parliament for hosting the Australian delegation. Leader of the Australian delegation, Senator the Hon John Hogg, provided an official letter of invitation to each of the Presiding Officers to send a reciprocal delegation to the Australian Parliament in the future.

2.15 The committee also thanks Dr Michael Woods TD, Chairman of the Joint Foreign Affairs Committee, for hosting a working luncheon for delegates.

Attendance at parliamentary sittings

2.16 The delegation was able to attend a sitting of both the Seanad Éireann and the Dáil Éireann, receiving an official welcome in each chamber. Delegates also had an opportunity to tour Leinster House, the central Dublin building that has housed the Oireachtas, the national parliament of Ireland, since 1922.⁴

Meeting with Minister Kelleher

2.17 Delegates were pleased to meet with the Hon Billy Kelleher TD, Minister of State for Trade and Commerce, to discuss issues of mutual interest to Australia and Ireland.

2.18 Minister Kelleher first provided delegates with a brief overview of contemporary social policy in Ireland, touching on issues such as the national minimum wage, child care allowances, parental leave, immigration matters and impacts of the economic downturn at the domestic level.

2.19 Minister Kelleher then went on to discuss the still strong performance of Irish research and development, noting that software remains Ireland's biggest export and that Ireland is the second biggest software exporter in the world. In recent years, other prominent exports have included high-end foods.

2.20 Irish business is supported by two state agencies: the Industrial Development Agency, which serves to encourage investment by overseas agencies in Ireland⁵, and Enterprise Ireland, which promotes exports by indigenous companies.⁶ As an EU member, there are some limitations on how the government can assist Irish companies. Under state aid rules, it is not permissible to put government money into Irish companies that would potentially disadvantage other EU companies. However, the Irish government can and does set up assistance programs such as incubator units.

2.21 Minister Kelleher noted an increasing eagerness by Irish companies to gain markets in China and the potential for some such companies to first set up in

4 Information about the history of Leinster House can be viewed at <http://www.gov.ie/oireachtas/tour/kildare.htm> (accessed on 12 August 2010).

5 <http://www.idaireland.com/> (accessed on 14 August 2010).

6 <http://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/> (accessed on 14 August 2010).

Australian locations, such as Sydney, and to then leverage off Australian contacts in the region to break into Asian markets.

Meeting with Senator Bacik and Senator Keaveney

2.22 Prior to travelling to Ireland, delegates expressed a specific interest in meeting with women parliamentarians. Senators Ivana Bacik and Cecilia Keaveney kindly agreed to this request.

2.23 Senator Bacik is a Labour Senator for Dublin University, with particular interests in education rights, equality, social policy issues, women's rights, criminal justice and anti-racism.⁷

2.24 Senator Keaveney, a member of Fianna Fáil, is Government Spokesperson on Education and Science. She has previously been a TD in the Dáil Éireann.

2.25 The Senators informed the committee of recent work undertaken by the Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Women's Rights on women's participation in politics. During 2009 the committee published a report on this subject, finding that women's participation is limited by "the five Cs"—that is, lack of cash, lack of child care, lack of confidence, the prevailing culture and candidate selection procedures.⁸ The Senators spoke candidly with delegates about the challenges they have faced in gaining preselection and then being successfully elected to the Parliament.

Meetings with members of parliamentary committees

*Working Group of Committee Chairmen*⁹

2.26 The Working Group of Committee Chairmen provided an overview of the Irish Parliament's committee system. The Irish Parliament currently has 22 working committees, as well as committees that deal with matters of procedure and privilege. Absolute privilege has only recently been introduced for witnesses; previously it applied only to members.

2.27 The system is broadly similar to the Australian Parliament's committee system. The committees exist to alleviate workload in the chamber and provide an opportunity for members to consider legislation and policy in detail.

2.28 At this stage, the general population does not have a strong understanding of the work that the parliamentary committees do. The committee members recognise

7 <http://www.ivanabacik.com/> (accessed on 12 August 2010).

8 The report can be viewed at http://www.oireachtas.ie/documents/committees30thdail/j-justiceedwr/reports_2008/20091105.pdf (accessed on 12 August 2010).

9 The committee's homepage is at http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/Committees30thDail/WorkingGroup_Chairmen.htm (accessed on 13 August 2010).

this as a weakness of the system. In order to help address this, the Irish Parliament has recently appointed two public relations officers to explain and promote the work of the committees—a concept that has been borrowed from the United Kingdom, where it has proved a big success in making the work of the House of Commons more accessible to the public at large.

2.29 Committee members also took the opportunity to explain to delegates the work of the Joint Committee on European Scrutiny, a recently established committee which examines EU legislative directives that will directly impact on the citizens of Ireland.¹⁰ Where possible, the committee engages in public hearings, although sometimes short timeframes for the implementation of European legislative directives make this challenging. In order to keep workload manageable, only around 20 per cent of eligible EU bills are referred to the committee for detailed consideration.

2.30 Finally, committee members and delegates engaged in a comparative discussion about the estimates process. The Irish parliamentary process technically allows for committees to question ministers and line department officials in advance of expenditure; however, this scrutiny is generally short in duration (only a matter of hours) and in practice often happens after money has already been spent. There is also an opportunity for the Committee of Public Accounts¹¹ to scrutinise expenditure after the fact, to ensure that money has been spent as it was intended.

*Joint Committee on the Environment, Heritage and Local Government*¹²

2.31 Delegates met with members of the Joint Committee on the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to discuss the Irish Parliament's committee system and the work program of this committee.

2.32 The committee has 15 members, from across all parties, with an in-built government majority. The committee is supported by a small secretariat team and also has access to consultants and opportunities to travel within the EU on fact-finding missions.

2.33 Committee members noted that the strength of the committee system is that it is a cross-party system. However, they also noted a weakness, namely that the committee's ability to achieve tangible outcomes depends on the government of the day's willingness to take on board the committee's recommendations.

10 See <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/Committees30thDail/J-EUScrutiny/Homepage.htm> (accessed on 12 August 2010).

11 See <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/Committees30thDail/PAC/Homepage.htm> (accessed on 14 August 2010).

12 See <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/Committees30thDail/J-EnvHerLocGov/Homepage.htm> (accessed on 14 August 2010).

2.34 Current or recent areas of work for the committee include renewable energy sources, such as wind and wave power; recycling and waste management; management of the electoral register; and revision of local planning laws. There is a separate committee for climate change, but inevitably there is some overlap in the work of the committees. The Irish government is currently considering introducing a bill to set emissions targets. Although there is a broad agreement about the need to manage carbon emissions, the Irish people are currently very concerned about unemployment rates and economic performance, and there is disagreement at the political level about the implementation and level of any carbon price or tax.

*Joint Committee on Transport*¹³

2.35 A key work area of this committee relates to the need to get people out of cars and into public transport. Committee members noted that the low-density of population in Ireland has meant that it has been difficult, over time, to design and implement efficient public transport systems.

2.36 Committee members further noted that, now that Ireland's motorway construction program is largely complete, the policy emphasis is on improving public transport services and also the image of public transport. They also noted interest in, and commitment to, the rollout of infrastructure to support the transition to electric cars.

*Joint Committee on Health and Children*¹⁴

2.37 Committee members explained how they act as a sounding board for lobby groups and public interest groups across the country on matters relating to health and children. When scrutinising legislation or conducting inquiries, the committee aims for a consensus opinion and then lobbies government for change.

2.38 Recent and upcoming topics of work for the committee include youth suicide and obesity. Committee members also engaged in a robust discussion about the provision of primary health care in Ireland. These matters were the subject of a recent report by the committee, which recommends fundamental changes to the way healthcare funding is allocated.¹⁵

13 The committee's homepage is at <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/Committees30thDail/J-Transport/Membership/document1.htm> (accessed on 12 August 2010).

14 See <http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/Committees30thDail/J-HealthChildren/Homepage.htm> (accessed on 12 August 2010).

15 The report, *Report on Primary Medical Care in the Community*, can be viewed at the committee's webpage, http://www.oireachtas.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=/documents/Committees30thDail/J-HealthChildren/Reports_2009/20100210.doc (accessed on 12 August 2010).

Meeting with members of the Ireland-Australian and Asian Friendship Group

2.39 Delegates discussed challenges to the Irish economy, unemployment levels, the budget deficit and critical cutbacks across all public sector programs with members of the Ireland-Australian & Asian Friendship Group, led by John Cregan TD.

2.40 The dominant economic conversation in Ireland at the moment is around the pros and cons of stimulus measures versus austerity measures. The strong regulatory system underpinning Australia's financial institutions was contrasted with a lighter touch regulatory system in Ireland, where it became necessary for the government to nationalise the Anglo Irish Bank in late 2008.

Briefing on internet safety and cyberbullying

2.41 Delegates met with officials from the Office for Internet Safety and the National Centre for Technology in Education to receive a briefing on Irish initiatives to promote safe use of the internet. The policy focus is on preventing illegal and harmful content such as child pornography.

2.42 There has been debate over a number of years at the national level regarding the potential application of a filter, specifically to target child pornography. Although there is as yet no compulsory filter in operation in Ireland, mobile phone companies have agreed to apply a voluntary filter.

2.43 Ireland is a party to relevant EU initiatives and directives and is therefore currently considering an opt-in draft proposal for an EU Safer Internet Program that has a dual emphasis on preventing illegal content and on raising awareness about internet dangers. The program aims to empower young users, in particular, to make safe choices about the sites they visit and the online interactions they engage in. The program also encourages active industry participation in content regulation.¹⁶

2.44 Because issuing notices to providers to take down inappropriate content has been found to be relatively ineffective, the EU is discussing the development of a blocked sites list. EU member states may choose to adopt a voluntary approach, working with industry (e.g. with the UK-based Internet Watch Foundation¹⁷) to reduce illegal content. The alternative would be to implement national legislation to introduce blocking of selected sites. However, such an approach may face constitutional issues and there is also concern that legitimate sites may be unfairly or inadvertently blocked.

16 More information about the program can be viewed at http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/index_en.htm (accessed on 2 August 2010).

17 <http://www.iwf.org.uk/> (accessed on 2 August 2010).

2.45 To try to improve safe use of the internet by children, the Irish government manages a filtering system on the free broadband provided to all schools in the country. There are six different levels of filter, designed to accommodate different ages, denominations and requirements. Each school is required to develop an acceptable use policy, which is drawn up and approved by the board and then signed up to by students and staff, in order to qualify for the provision of the free broadband service.

2.46 The National Centre for Technology in Education, an agency of the Department of Education and Science, is responsible for managing the implementation of the Irish Government's Information and Communications Technology in Schools policy. As part of this mandate, it runs a range of courses in schools at a nominal charge, with the most popular course being one for parents about establishing behavioural rules (rather than technical barriers) around home internet use. The courses cover material such as the following:

- personal safety issues when using social networking sites and Instant Messenger
- risks associated with disclosing personal information and posting personal photos online
- strategies for protecting personal safety and security online.¹⁸

2.47 Within core school subjects such as Social, Personal & Health Education and Civics, Social & Political Education, students participate in units designed to assist them in staying safe online, alerting them to 'stranger danger' and the need to safeguard their privacy on the internet. Although there is no prescriptive curriculum, many resources are made available to schools and teachers, and specific training is provided to teachers to assist them in integrating internet safety measures into their general teaching and learning programs.¹⁹

2.48 Noting that there are also concerns around SMS-based bullying, officials told delegates about an initiative by mobile phone company O2 which allows simple blocking of a number from which unwelcome text, picture or video messages are being received.²⁰ This is a free service.

Briefing on light rail

2.49 Officials from the Railway Procurement Agency provided delegates with a presentation on light rail services in Dublin, where currently two separate lines

18 More information about the Webwise_Parents course is available via www.webwise.ie (accessed on 2 August 2010).

19 More information about these courses and strategies is available via <http://www.ncte.ie/InternetSafety/> and also via <http://www.webwise.ie/> (accessed on 2 August 2010).

20 See www.o2.ie/blockit (accessed on 2 August 2010).

operate. There is a gap of 1.5 kilometres between the ends of the lines, with no connection in the city centre. The current system is wired, but wireless options are under consideration to join the two existing sections of track through the centre of Dublin.

2.50 The system, which operates between 5.30am and 1.00am, carried a peak of 28 million passengers in 2007. There has been a slight decrease in passenger load since the economic downturn.

2.51 Passengers purchase tickets at self-service ticket machines, with random checks made by inspectors. Currently bus and light rail services are not integrated, but there is a project underway to introduce Smartcard ticketing that allows for seamless movement between the services.

2.52 Despite initial public and political scepticism, the Luas²¹ service has been running successfully since 2004. Public perceptions of the service are that it is fast, frequent, reliable and efficient. However, there are some security concerns, particularly since the recession hit.

2.53 The policy intent underlying the Luas is to drive cultural change, towards an acceptance that the city centre is not a place to bring a car. An estimated 60 per cent of current Luas users would previously have used a car to travel to the city.

2.54 Currently around 5 to 6 per cent of Luas travellers use 'park and ride' facilities. The Railway Procurement Agency is hoping to expand this figure over time, through the construction of more parking facilities. However, the current expansion priorities are:

- construction of an underground line, using light rail technology, linking the city centre and the airport; and
- construction of the Luas City Centre link between the existing Red and Green lines.

Briefing with Garda officers

2.55 Officers of An Garda Síochána, the national police service of Ireland, made themselves available to brief the committee on management of street crime, responsibility for protection of the Parliament, drug-related crimes and transnational crime issues, including terrorism. Delegates appreciate these officers making time to discuss approaches to crime reduction.

21 This is the Gaelic (Irish) word for 'speed'. More information about the Luas can be found at <http://www.luas.ie/> (accessed on 12 August 2010).

Visit to Croke Park

2.56 Mr Christy Cooney, President of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), hosted a tour and working luncheon for the delegation at Croke Park.²² This stadium, which has a crowd capacity of over 80 000 (making it the fourth largest stadium in Europe), is the home of Gaelic football and hurling—two quintessentially Irish sports which are extremely popular throughout the country. Mr Cooney explained that, unlike Australian football codes, both competitions are amateur leagues; team members are not paid to play, and the focus remains on community involvement and support for the game.

Visit to Kilmainham Gaol

2.57 A visit to the museum at Kilmainham Gaol²³ provided delegates with insights into Irish nationalism and the political history of Ireland. During the early 1900s many leading figures in the struggle for Irish independence were imprisoned on this site.

Visit to Galway

2.58 Delegates travelled to the City of Galway, on the west coast of Ireland, to meet with city officials and discuss tourism and heritage management. The delegation thanks the newly elected Mayor of Galway, Councillor Michael Crowe, for hosting a working luncheon and making council staff available to assist in answering delegates' questions.

2.59 Delegates benefited from a detailed presentation by Ms Fiona Monaghan, General Manager, West Region, Fáilte Ireland (the National Tourism Development Authority). Ms Monaghan outlined key initiatives designed to bring tourists to the region, including securing the final leg of the 2012 Volvo Ocean Race²⁴ and hosting a successful range of festivals, such as the annual Galway Film Fleadh. A key challenge is encouraging Irish citizens to holiday at home, rather than in other European destinations.

2.60 Mr Tom Connell, Director of Services, Galway City Council, provided a briefing on the 2005 – 2011 Galway City Development Plan, a land use plan that sets out a vision and planned framework for the development of the city that takes national, regional and local planning policies into account. The plan has a focus on protecting and promoting both natural heritage areas and the built and archaeological heritage of the city (which includes a historical centre of medieval streets).

22 <http://www.crokepark.ie/about> (accessed on 13 August 2010).

23 See <http://www.heritageireland.ie/en/Dublin/KilmainhamGaol/> (accessed on 13 August 2010).

24 See <http://www.galwaynews.ie/11672-%E2%82%AC80m-windfall-galway-secures-volvo-ocean-race-finish> (accessed on 14 August 2010).

2.61 While in County Galway, delegates also visited Kylemore Abbey in Connemara. Originally built as a private castle between 1867 and 1871, since 1920 the building has been a Benedictine Abbey. The building is now an iconic destination for visitors to Galway, who can take walking tours of the extensive grounds and visit restored sections of the main building.²⁵

25 <http://www.kylemoreabbeytourism.ie/> (accessed on 14 August 2010).

Chapter 3

Visit to the Italian Republic



Background¹

The Republic of Italy

3.1 Italy was established as a parliamentary republic by referendum in 1946. The Constitution of Italy was adopted in 1947 and came into effect in 1948.

3.2 The population of Italy currently exceeds 60 million people.

The national parliament

3.3 The bicameral parliament consists of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, with a separate judiciary and an executive branch headed by a Prime Minister. The current Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, was appointed in 2008. The constitution also created the position of President, held by Giorgio Napolitano since 2006.

3.4 Members of both houses of parliament are directly elected, with election to the Senate based upon regional representation. There are 630 members in the Chamber of Deputies and 315 elected senators.² The maximum term for both houses is five years, but either may be dissolved early. Legislative bills may originate from either house and must be passed by a majority in both.

3.5 In 2006, for the first time, the approximately 2.7 million Italians living abroad were eligible to elect 12 members of the Chamber of Deputies and six Senators representing four overseas divisions.³

1 Sourced from DFAT briefing notes.

2 The Senate also includes former presidents and several lifetime appointees.

3 Europe; South America; North and Central America; and Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Antarctic.

Aims and objectives

3.6 Prior to visiting Italy, delegates agreed to the following set of aims and objectives for the one-week visit:

- to reinforce parliamentary relations with the Italian Parliament, including the Chamber of Deputies (Camera dei Deputati, 630 members) and the Senate of the Republic (Senato della Repubblica, 315 members)
- to acquire an insight into parliamentary issues, including:
 - the respective parliamentary committee structures
 - security issues for both the parliamentary buildings and parliamentarians
 - experiences with media access and interaction with the parliament
 - cyber safety, and
 - management of parliamentary art collections
- to gain an appreciation of the involvement and role of overseas based members in the Italian Parliament, including two parliamentarians from Australia (Antonino Randazzo and Marco Fedi)
- to gain appreciation of the Italian Republic's position on global and regional issues, such as:
 - immigration matters (including illegal immigration)
 - climate change
 - responses to the global financial crisis
 - Italy's engagement in Afghanistan
 - Iranian nuclear issue
 - changes in the workings of the European Union and especially the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) following the Lisbon Treaty's entry into force
- to obtain an understanding of Italy's domestic policies on health and ageing, environment and heritage protection, and policies to engender social cohesion
- to expand the scope of bilateral relations to include discussions on bilateral trade and strengthening of commercial relations, as well as education links, and
- to discuss cooperation within the multilateral system.

Acknowledgements

3.7 The delegates acknowledge with thanks the generous hospitality of the Italian Parliament and the efforts made by our hosts to put in place a program of meetings and visits that assisted us in meeting the aims and objectives of our visit.

3.8 The delegation particularly notes the contribution made by Mr Peter Gazetta, Protocol Office, Italian Parliament, who travelled with the delegation throughout its stay in Italy.

3.9 The delegation was also very ably supported by DFAT staff at the Australian Embassy in Rome, including Deputy Head of Mission, Mr Peter Rayner; Second Secretary, Mr Toshi Kawaguchi; Visit Liaison Officer, Ms Sabrina Albanese; and Liaison Officer, Ms Clelia March.

3.10 Thanks are due to the following individuals and groups who met with the delegation in Rome:

- the Hon Gianfranco Fini, President of the Chamber of Deputies
- Senator Emma Bonino, Vice President of the Senate
- the Hon Mara Carfagna, Minister for Equal Opportunities
- the Hon Giancarlo Giorgetti, President of the Parliamentary Committee for the Budget, and other members of the committee
- the Hon Giuseppe Palumbo, President of the Social Affairs Committee (health, ageing and palliative care), and other members of the committee
- the Hon Gianfranco Conte, President of the Parliamentary Committee on Finance, and other members of the committee
- Prefect Angela Pria, Head of Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, Ministry of Interior
- Mr Daniel Kraus, Deputy Director, Confindustria
- Ms Giuliana Gasparrini, Senior Official for Climate Change, Ministry of Environment,
- Ambassador Giovanni Castellaneta, Co-President of the Italo Australian Advisory Committee for the L'Aquila Reconstruction Project, and President of SACE (Export Credit Agency), and
- senior officials of the Italian Parliament responsible for the management of the parliamentary art collection.

3.11 The delegation also thanks the following individuals and groups who met with the delegation in Sicily:

- Mr Raffaele Lombardo, President of the Sicily Region
- Mr Francesco Cascio, President of the Sicilian Regional Assembly
- Mr Giovanni Avanti, President of the Province of Palermo
- members of the Regional Committee for Institutional Affairs
- Mr Diego Cammarata, Mayor of Palermo
- the Public Security Committee, and

- residents and staff of the immigration reception centre for asylum seekers, Trapani.

Program of work - Rome

3.12 The program for the delegation's visit to Italy is set out in Appendix 2.

Meetings with Presiding Officers

3.13 The delegation was honoured to meet with the Hon Gianfranco Fini, President of the Chamber of Deputies, to thank the Italian Parliament for its hospitality and to discuss the role of parliament. Senator Hogg presented President Fini with a letter of invitation for a reciprocal delegation from Italy to visit the Australian Parliament in due course.

3.14 President Fini and delegates discussed the 2006 reforms to electoral law that allow Italians living abroad to vote members into the Italian parliament. There are currently two members from Australia in the Italian parliament, Deputy Marco Fedi and Senator Antonino Randazzo. There was also acknowledgment during the meeting of the substantial Italian diaspora in Australia⁴ and the warm history of cooperation and friendly relations between our countries.

3.15 President Fini provided his perspective on the challenges of illegal immigration, noting that Italy's high population density makes this issue a real concern for citizens and that a push-back policy has been adopted to ensure that illegal immigrants are returned to their country of origin. He noted that there is sometimes community concern about the integration of immigrants into Italian society and suggested that there are lessons to be learned by observing the success of multiethnic societies such as in Australia.

3.16 President Fini also made some observations on the impact of the global financial crisis in Italy, noting that it has been necessary for the government to approve a package of savings measures, based on reducing public expenditure and on increasing revenue by combating tax evasion. He noted that a particular challenge for Italy is managing its high level of public debt but that, fortunately for the country, private debt is relatively low. A major debate for the Italian parliament now is how to reduce public debt while maintaining essential public services.

4 According to the 2006 census, 852,418 Australians indicated Italian ancestry and 199,124 residents were born in Italy. Source: DFAT briefing notes.



Delegation leader Senator Hogg (*left*) meeting with the Hon Gianfranco Fini, President of the Chamber of Deputies (*at right*)

3.17 The delegation also had the honour of meeting with Senator Emma Bonino, the Deputy President of the Senate. Again, Senator Hogg took the opportunity to thank the Italian Parliament for its hospitality to the Australian delegation and to issue a formal invitation for a reciprocal Italian delegation to come to the Australian Parliament in due course.

3.18 Senator Bonino told the delegation of her strong interest in promoting the status of women, including their participation in the workforce. She made mention of EU-wide work currently being done under the auspices of the Treaty of Lisbon to assist in growing the rate of workforce participation. In Italy, entrenched cultural expectations place a significant care burden on women, who are often expected to care for both young children and ageing parents. Access to public child care facilities and to quality care for the elderly is still limited. Paid parental leave policies were also discussed.

3.19 On Monday, 5 July 2010 delegates had an opportunity to attend a sitting of the Chamber of Deputies. An official welcome was extended to the delegation.

Meeting with Minister Carfagna

3.20 Minister Carfagna's responsibilities as Minister for Equal Opportunity include advocating for the rights of the disabled. She told delegates about her efforts to ensure

government funding to promote integration and assistance for disabled people and also to provide social support and fight discrimination and violence.

3.21 Minister Carfagna also spoke about combating discrimination in the workplace, including through the recent transposition into legislation of an EU directive preventing discrimination against women. She nominated access to jobs, career progress and opportunities to return to work post maternity leave as key issues that are being addressed.

3.22 Minister Carfagna indicated her particular interest in introducing laws to combat sexual and domestic violence. She has been responsible for introducing a law that makes street prostitution a crime in Italy and has recently sponsored a new anti-stalking law.

Meetings with members of committees of the Italian National Parliament

Parliamentary Committee for the Budget

3.23 Delegates met with Hon Giancarlo Giorgetti, President of the Parliamentary Committee for the Budget, and other members of the committee to learn about the threefold responsibilities of this committee:

- considering the provisional and final budget
- developing economic policy, and
- providing financial opinions on all bills before the parliament, assessing whether the government has the financial resources to cover the measures in each bill.

3.24 The Budget Committee is entitled to organise hearings with ministers and senior public servants and to make amendments to budget bills before they go to the plenary to be voted on. The committee can also provide qualified opinions to the plenary, indicating that support for a bill is conditional on certain amendments being made or expenditure ceilings being set.

3.25 The composition of the committee reflects the composition of the plenary, so the majority on the committee is the same as the majority in the chamber. Committee members noted that the financial opinions they provide are usually bipartisan but that in recent times some opinions have been negative—that is, the finding of the committee has been that the government does not in fact have the financial resources to cover the measures in the bill. Although it is technically possible for the plenary to vote for a bill with a qualified majority even where the Budget Committee has handed down a negative financial opinion, the President would not be able to enact such a bill into law—so, in practice, the plenary upholds the opinion of the Budget Committee even if it does not accept it.

3.26 The committee is currently considering a package of savings measures. All parliamentary responses to the global financial response to date have been managed through this committee.

Social Affairs Committee

3.27 Delegates also met with the Hon Giuseppe Palumbo, President of the Social Affairs Committee, and other members of the committee to discuss its program of work. Their latest work has been in the area of palliative care, where laws have recently been passed regarding the network and structure of available care in Italy as well as the administration of anti-pain therapies. These laws were approved by unanimous vote in both houses of the Italian Parliament. Health care funding models were also discussed.

Parliamentary Committee on Finance

3.28 The Hon Gianfranco Conte, President of the Parliamentary Committee on Finance, and other members of the committee explained that their main responsibilities are in tax and financial services policy. Tax evasion is a topical subject, as the government is currently trying to reduce tax evasion as part of its overall response to the global financial crisis and the resultant economic downturn. It is estimated that up to 20 per cent of general revenue tax that is due currently goes uncollected. However, dealing with this issue is sensitive, as the political parties represented in the parliament (and therefore on the Finance Committee) are deeply divided on the appropriate policy response.

*Meetings with other officials in Rome**Briefing on illegal immigration*

3.29 Prefect Angela Pria, Head of the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, Ministry of Interior, together with staff from relevant government departments, met with the delegation to provide an overview of the management of illegal immigration in Italy.

3.30 Delegates were informed that, due to its geographical location, Italy is the major European port of arrival for illegal immigrants from Africa as a whole. Sicily, in particular the island of Lampedusa, has been one of the most affected areas, with illegal immigrants arriving by sea via Libya (which acts as a transit country for illegal immigrants from all parts of Africa).

3.31 There have also been problems with Afghanis and Iraqis flowing through Turkey to Calabria. However, unlike those arriving in Sicily – who are generally considered to be 'economic' migrants – there is an understanding that many of these people are leaving their home countries on humanitarian grounds.

3.32 The numbers of illegal arrivals peaked during the years 2005 to 2008, numbering in the tens of thousands per year. This became a significant issue during the 2008 election campaign, and since 2009 the government has achieved marked reductions in arrivals by sea (as much as 90 per cent) through the introduction of strict new policies and legislation.

3.33 Delegates were told that the centrepiece of the Italian government's strategy is a 'push-back policy', designed to return illegal immigrants to their country of origin. The success of this policy has been built on strong cooperation with Libyan authorities. In 2009, the Italian government and the Libyan leadership signed a Protocol of Cooperation and now run joint patrols in Libyan waters. Italy has also seconded immigration officials into Libya, where several people smuggling rings have been successfully dismantled.

3.34 When boats are intercepted at sea, their position is communicated to Libya and they are sent back (unless there are some exceptional circumstances—for example, an express claim for asylum is made). Officials acknowledged that it can be challenging to manage 'mixed' flows by sea of economic and humanitarian migrants and stated that, in such circumstances, Italy is aware of its obligations under international and EU standards, particularly the principal of non-refoulement.⁵

3.35 If illegal immigrants reach Italian shores, they are immediately taken to immigration reception centres. The default position, unless a specific claim for asylum is made (in which case they are transferred to an asylum seeker centre), is that they will be returned to their country of origin. If they are not carrying any identification documents, they are detained in identification and expulsion centres, where Italian authorities have 180 days to work with possible source countries to identify individuals and source the necessary documentation to allow for their return. The Italian government has actively worked to enhance cooperation with both transit countries and countries of origin to facilitate such returns. This can include sending photographs and fingerprints of unidentified illegal arrivals to potential home countries. Officials told delegates that unaccompanied minors are not expelled immediately. Instead, they are taken to municipal centres for care and education until they come of age.

3.36 Officials noted that some illegal immigrants arrive legally in Italy by land or by air and then overstay their visas. However, expulsion can be more easily arranged in these cases because copies of identification documents are likely to be on file and so it takes less time to identify them.

Meeting with Mr Daniel Kraus, Deputy Director, Confindustria

3.37 Mr Daniel Kraus, Deputy Director of Confindustria, the Italian employers' federation, met with the delegation to discuss the fallout from the global financial crisis and the next steps necessary to repair the damage done to the Italian economy.

3.38 Mr Kraus first noted that Italy's extremely high public debt prevented the application of any substantial government stimulus to the economy, although some aid

5 Italy is a signatory to the United Nations Convention Relating to the Treatment of Refugees. Libya is not. For more information about the convention and UN opinion on the push-back policy, see <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b73b0d63.pdf> (accessed on 16 August 2010).

was provided to the car industry. However, because Italian families generally do not carry large private debts and because the Italian banking system was less modern and less internationalised than other banking systems in Europe (and therefore had less exposure to toxic assets), there has nevertheless been some resilience in the face of the crisis. For instance, because Italian families were not forced to sell their homes, there has not been a sudden oversupply of housing leading to widespread price collapses.

3.39 As a manufacturing country, Italy depends on demands for exports, which have fallen substantially during 2009-10. Internal product demand is also down by as much as 40 per cent in some sectors. Problems in neighbouring countries, particularly Greece, are adding to the instability of the Euro, with flow-on effects throughout the Euro area.

3.40 Europe is likely to face substantial and ongoing challenges in the years to come, because it will not generate economic growth competitive with, or comparable to, China and India. European companies will need to move into China to accelerate export growth and reduce their dependence on the somewhat stagnant internal European market. Mr Kraus sees joint ventures, such as a current arrangement between Fiat and a Chinese counterpart, as important steps in this direction.

3.41 Mr Kraus also discussed with the delegation the economic challenges posed by an ageing population, the difficulties of being bound by EU directive on managing carbon emissions when similar commitments have not been made in other economies, and the difficulty of identifying renewable or alternative energy sources that are both environmentally sustainable and economically viable.

Meeting with Ms Giuliana Gasparrini, Senior Official for Climate Change, Ministry of Environment

3.42 Delegates met with Ms Gasparrini and other officials from the Ministry of Environment to discuss the Italian response to climate change.

3.43 As an EU member, Italy has implemented EU legislation in this area, both with regard to establishment of an emissions trading scheme (ETS) and energy efficiency initiatives.

3.44 Ms Gasparrini noted that Italian industries have already operated under an ETS for six years. Now, with the total emissions cap having been lowered further, they need to either further reduce their emissions or purchase additional carbon credits. Many small and medium factories are worried about how this will affect their competitiveness in the absence of a global agreement on tackling carbon emissions.

3.45 Italy has a high use of road transport and reliance on private cars. Government is trying to improve the energy efficiency of public transport and buildings.

3.46 EU legislation also sets a target for renewable energy production and for carbon capture and storage. Currently, 85 percent of Italy's energy is derived from natural gas, which is piped from Russia and Hungary. Around 13 per cent come from

coal, with the remainder made up from oil and a small proportion of renewables. There are no nuclear power stations in Italy. It remains a considerable challenge for Italy to increase the percentage of power that it derives from renewable energy sources. If it cannot do so, it will be required to buy 'green certificates' from other countries in order to meet its EU obligations.

Meeting with Ambassador Giovanni Castellaneta, Co-President of the Italo Australian Advisory Committee for the L'Aquila Reconstruction Project

3.47 Ambassador Castellaneta briefed the delegation on the progress of reconstruction projects in L'Aquila, a town in central Italy where more than 300 people lost their lives in an earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale on 6 April 2009.

3.48 Delegates were particularly interested in receiving an update on the construction of Nuovo Teatro dell'Aquila, a new theatre that will be funded by a \$3.7 million contribution from Australia (\$1.5 million from the Australian Government, and the balance raised from contributions made by members of the Italo-Australian community). When finished, the theatre will be a public facility, owned and run by the municipality for the use of the community.

3.49 Ambassador Castellaneta told the delegation that the project is being sponsored by the local municipality and is being built on land already owned by the municipality, which will reduce the overall costs. Some building materials are also being given free by the Timber Association.

3.50 It is hoped that the sum provided by Australia will be sufficient to complete the project but, if not, the Mayor of L'Aquila has agreed to cover any shortfall so that the project can be completed. The estimated timeframe for the building is one year.

3.51 An agreement to allow the project to proceed is currently being finalised between the Mayor of L'Aquila and the new Australian Ambassador to Italy. As the Italian Government is not providing any direct funding to the project, it will not be affected by any changes or cuts in the Italian budget.

3.52 Ambassador Castellaneta told delegates that, when the project is finished, it is hoped that the theatre will be able to feature an Australian performance for its opening.

Managers of the parliamentary art collection

3.53 Delegates were provided with a briefing by senior officials of the Italian Parliament responsible for the management of the parliamentary art collection, which consists of paintings, sculptures and tapestries lent to the Chamber over time (mostly in the 1920s) by various museums. Museums in Naples and Florence have been the largest donors.

3.54 Currently the collection contains around 1000 paintings, 500 of which belong to local authorities or museums. Most of the paintings are on loan, but the modern collection has been purchased by the Chamber. Acquisitions have at times been political decisions but the basic intent of the Bureau of the Chamber is to promote and support young artists. The modern collection currently contains around 200 – 250 pieces by young, living artists. Some of these pieces have been donated. There has been a conscious effort to try to select pieces that document important historical moments.

3.55 During the current parliament, the special committee for acquisitions has been discontinued due to budget cuts. The focus is now on carrying out essential maintenance and conservation of older works. As the budget for this is limited (approximately €150 000 per year), the museums that own the paintings assist in identifying which paintings require restoration, and this is then conducted with the financial contribution of the Chamber. Special funds have been put aside for the maintenance of a substantial frieze which was commissioned to decorate the floor of the Chamber of Deputies.

3.56 Parliamentary artworks are occasionally lent out, either in Italy or abroad. Any decision to lend works is made by the Bureau of the Chamber. There is no cost for these loans other than insurance and transportation costs. Delegates asked whether there was any program in place to enable art exchanges between parliaments, but officials indicated that no such exchanges have taken place.

3.57 The general public has an opportunity to view the most important works once a month when 'Open doors at the Montecitorio' is held, allowing visitors into the parliamentary buildings.

Program of work – Sicily

3.58 The delegation's visit to Sicily provided an opportunity to better understand the levels of government in operation in Italy. Italy is divided into 20 regions, which are in turn divided into 95 provinces. The provinces are further divided into municipalities (called *comuni*).

3.59 Five of the 20 regions, including the island of Sicily, have special autonomous status under the Constitution. These regions are responsible for electing their own regional parliaments.⁶

Meeting with Mr Raffaele Lombardo, President of the Sicily Region

3.60 President Lombardo warmly welcomed delegates to Sicily, proudly noting the region's special status under the Constitution and also that the Sicilian parliament, which has been operating in one form or another since 1130 AD, is one of the oldest parliaments in the world.

6 Source: DFAT briefing notes

3.61 Acknowledging the delegation's particular interest in illegal immigration matters, President Lombardo described how Sicily's geographic location makes it the first landing point for many illegal immigrants travelling from northern Africa. If not intercepted, they then disperse from Sicily to other parts of Europe in search of employment opportunities.

Meeting with Mr Francesco Cascio, President of the Sicilian Regional Assembly

3.62 The Sicilian Regional Assembly consists of 90 elected deputies. Mr Francesco Cascio is the current presiding officer of the assembly, a position to which he was elected by the other deputies. Delegates discussed the operation of the regional parliament with President Cascio, who explained that all decisions of the parliament are made public on the internet and that financial and administrative details are also published daily. When the assembly is in session, President Cascio has control over the order of business and has the power to discipline deputies whose behaviour in the chamber is inappropriate.

3.63 At the time of the delegation's visit, there was a media strike underway throughout Italy in response to new laws under consideration in the national parliament to ban wire and phone tapping by journalists. In this context, delegates engaged in a detailed conversation with President Cascio about the need to find a balance between free press and individual politicians' right to privacy.



Left to right: Mrs Irwin, Ms Grierson, Senator Hogg, President Cascio, Mrs May and Senator Fielding

Meeting with members of the Regional Committee for Institutional Affairs

3.64 Members of the Regional Committee for Institutional Affairs provided a further briefing to delegates on the operation of the Sicilian Regional Assembly and on Sicily's special status as an autonomous region.

3.65 The Regional Assembly has a committee system made up of six 15-member legislative standing committees, a European Affairs Committee, an Anti-Mafia Committee and a Committee for the Special Statute that makes Sicily autonomous. This statute was first approved by Royal decree in 1946 and became constitutional law in 1948.

3.66 The Special Statute is on the same level as the Italian Constitution. It can only be changed by the agreement of both houses of the national parliament, although the Regional Assembly can make requests to the national parliament for changes to be considered.

3.67 The Regional Assembly is the organ of legislative power for the Sicilian region and has full autonomy over regional matters (although local councils and committees can provide opinions). The Special Statute also contains important stipulations about taxes that can be collected at the regional level, although such matters are currently the subject of negotiations between regional governments and Berlusconi's central government.

Meeting with Mr Giovanni Avanti, President of the Province of Palermo

3.68 Sicily is made up of nine provinces, of which the largest is Palermo. President Avanti, who is the directly elected head of this province, warmly welcomed the Australian delegation to Sicily.

3.69 President Avanti noted that, in the wake of the global financial crisis, it has become more difficult to attract tourists to Palermo, as there is a great deal of competition from other nearby venues, some of which can be visited at lower cost. However, he emphasised that the combination of a diverse landscape and rich cultural history still make Sicily an attractive destination.

Meeting with Mr Diego Cammarata, Mayor of Palermo

3.70 The province of Palermo is, in turn, made up of 82 *comuni*, or municipalities. Mayor Cammarata is the elected leader of the Comune di Palermo. He has been the mayor for nine years.

3.71 Mayor Cammarata discussed with delegates the challenges of managing the city's services and budget at a time of decreasing revenue. In the wake of the global financial crisis, money flows from central government have reduced and the ability to collect regional taxes has been weakened. This necessarily translates into substantial reduction in local services such as social services, maintenance of cultural sites and waste management.

Meeting with residents and staff of the immigration centre for asylum seekers at Trapani

3.72 On 9 July 2010 delegates travelled to Trapani to visit an immigration centre for asylum seekers.

3.73 As described earlier in this report, Italy operates three different types of immigration centres:

- initial reception centres, which provide first aid and identify what categories immigrants fall into
- closed identification and expulsion centres, where the focus is on identifying individuals so that they can be returned to their source countries, and
- open centres for those illegal immigrants who have made a specific claim for asylum and are waiting to be recognised as refugees.

3.74 The centre visited by the delegation in Trapani is in the third category and is run by a company called INSIEME. Around 80 staff are employed to run the centre when it is at capacity (310 people) but currently only around 20 asylum seekers are housed at the centre. This particular centre does not house unaccompanied minors but does house families. Delegates met with one young couple from Africa who have recently given birth to their first child while staying in the centre.

3.75 INSIEME staff told delegates that they provide first aid and integration services for the asylum seekers while their claims for asylum are being processed. The assistance provided can include social, psychological and language assistance, as well as public housing and employment assistance in cases where the asylum seekers are found to be genuine refugees. Staff also emphasised that the centre is not closed – asylum seekers can receive a visa that allows them to stay in the community for three or six months while their claim is being processed, if that is their preference and if they have the resources to do so.

3.76 Delegates were informed that the average stay of asylum seekers in the centre is around 140 days. Decisions on asylum claims are made by the local Prefects Office and police. There is an expectation that genuine asylum seekers will either have identification documents or will readily assist authorities in determining their identity; otherwise, they may be transferred instead to an identification and expulsion centre. Asylum seekers with identification are interviewed by the local assessment committee to determine whether they have genuine need of assistance that justifies the granting of refugee status. Visas for one year, three years or five years are all possible. When the visas expire, the situation is reassessed. The visas can be renewed where circumstances require, and after spending a certain amount of time in Italy visa holders are eligible to apply for residence through standard procedures.

3.77 Source countries for asylum seekers at the Trapani centre include Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria, Ghana and, in recent years, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. On the day of the delegation's visit, approximately 12 asylum seekers were undertaking a

language lesson. The majority were men, from African nations (including Nigeria and Kenya), but others in the room indicated they had come from Sri Lanka or, in one case, Burma.

3.78 INSIEME staff provided delegates with a tour of the centre facilities, which include a dining hall and games room, as well as individual rooms for families.

Chapter 4

Visit to the Holy See



Background¹

The Holy See

4.1 The Holy See, the central government of the Catholic Church, is located in the Vatican City State, a territorial base established within Rome by treaty with Italy in 1929. The Pope is the sovereign of the state, with full and absolute executive, legislative and judicial power. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was inaugurated as Pope Benedict XVI on 19 April 2005.

4.2 The Roman Curia, which consists of a range of ministries and institutes, assists the Pope in administering the government. Chief amongst these ministries is the Secretariat of State, presided over by the Cardinal Secretary of State (equivalent to a Prime Minister). The current Cardinal Secretary of State is His Eminence Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone.

4.3 The Holy See is active in foreign relations, maintaining 180 permanent diplomatic missions abroad and with 79 missions—including Australia—with resident Ambassadors in the Holy See. The Holy See became a permanent observer state at the United Nations in 1964 and in 2004 gained full membership rights (except voting).

Australia's relationship with the Holy See

4.4 Pope Benedict's successful visit to Australia in 2008 for World Youth Day was a significant event in the relationship between Australia and the Holy See. It has since been further strengthened by the appointment of the Hon Tim Fischer AC as Australia's first resident Ambassador to the Holy See in January 2009. This appointment has enabled expanded dialogue between Australia and the Holy See on matters of mutual interest, including human rights, political and religious freedom, interfaith dialogue and treatment of refugees.

1 Sourced from DFAT briefing notes.

4.5 The canonisation of Blessed Mary MacKillop as Australia's first Catholic Saint on 17 October 2010, which is expected to be attended by approximately 5000 Australians, will be a further milestone in the relationship.

Aims and objectives

4.6 Prior to visiting the Holy See, delegates agreed to the following set of aims and objectives for the visit:

- to reinforce parliamentary relations with the unicameral Pontifical Commission for Vatican City State (7 members)
- to develop an enhanced understanding of the workings of the State of the Vatican City
- to acquire an insight into:
 - security issues for both the Vatican's buildings and officials
 - experiences with media access and interaction with the Vatican
 - cyber safety, and
 - management of the Vatican's art collections, and
- to gain appreciation of the Vatican's views on global and regional issues, including:
 - immigration
 - climate change
 - interfaith dialogue, and
 - relations with China and Vietnam.

Acknowledgements

4.7 The delegation greatly appreciates the efforts made by H.E. Ambassador Tim Fischer in coordinating its visit to the Holy See, including the arrangements made to facilitate attendance at the Papal Audience.

4.8 The delegation thanks Monsignor Joseph Murphy for making himself available to explain the structure of the Holy See and the work of the Secretariat of State.

Program of work

4.9 The program for the delegation's visit to the Holy See is set out in Appendix 3.

Meeting with Monsignor Joseph Murphy

4.10 Monsignor Joseph Murphy is an official of the Secretariat of State from the country desk that covers Oceania (including Australia and New Zealand) and South

Asia. Monsignor Murphy noted in his opening remarks to the delegation that the appointment of a resident Australian Ambassador to the Holy See has increased the level of engagement between the two states.

4.11 Monsignor Murphy provided delegates with an overview of the governance of the Holy See, focusing on the history and structure of the Secretariat of State. The Secretariat is divided into two sections: the Section for General Affairs, and the Section for Relations with States. The Section for General Affairs is responsible for administrative operations of the Catholic Church, while the Section for Relations with States functions as the foreign relations arm of the Holy See and is responsible for the Holy See's interactions with other governments.

4.12 Monsignor Murphy also identified for the delegation some key matters of significance for the Vatican when engaging in diplomatic relations, including interfaith dialogue, protection of the environment, human rights, and religious and political freedom. The latter includes the freedom for Christians to practice their religion in Western democracies, without legislative restriction. In discussing the areas that fall within the responsibility of the Oceania and South Asia desk, Monsignor Murphy noted a recent agreement between the Holy See and Vietnam for the appointment of an official (non-resident) papal representative.



Left to right: Mrs Irwin, Mrs May, Ambassador Fischer, Monsignor Murphy, Senator Hogg, Ms Grierson and Senator Fielding, at the Vatican

Attendance at Papal audience

4.13 On Wednesday 7 July delegates were privileged to attend the last scheduled Papal audience of the summer in the Paul VI Audience Hall, prior to the Pope's departure for his summer residence at Castel Gandolfo. Senator Hogg and Mrs Sue Hogg were amongst those presented personally to the Pope, when they were able to briefly discuss the forthcoming canonisation of Blessed Mary MacKillop.

Appendix 1

Visit by Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Ireland 27 June to 3 July 2010

Saturday 26 June

- Depart Sydney

Sunday 27 June

- Arrive in Dublin

Monday 28 June

- Briefing at the Australian Embassy
- Tour and working luncheon at Croke Park, hosted by President of the Gaelic Athletic Association, Mr Christy Cooney
- Visit to Kilmainham Gaol
- Reception jointly hosted by Australian Ambassador H.E. Mr Bruce Davis and Senator Hogg in the Ambassador's residence

Tuesday 29 June

- Meeting with Mr John Laffan, Executive Director, Office for Internet Safety, and Mr Simon Grehan, Project Officer – Internet Safety from the National Centre for Technology in Education
- Presentation by the Railway Procurement Agency
- Meeting with the Hon Billy Kelleher TD, Minister of State for Trade and Commerce
- Working luncheon hosted by Senator Pat Moylan, Cathaoirleach of the Seanad Éireann (Chairman of the Senate)
- Meeting with members of the Joint Committee on Environment, Heritage and Local Government
- Meeting with John Cregan TD and members of the Ireland-Australian and Asian Friendship Group
- Attend sitting of the Seanad Éireann (Official Welcome)
- Attend sitting of Dáil Éireann (Official Welcome)
- Tour of Leinster House

- Working dinner hosted by the Hon Séamus Kirk TD, Cean Comhairle (Speaker of the House)

Wednesday 30 June

- Meeting with officers from An Garda Síochána, the national police service of Ireland
- Meeting with members of the Joint Committee on Transport
- Meeting with Senator Ivana Bacik and Senator Cecilia Keaveney
- Meeting with Working Group of Committee Chairmen
- Working luncheon hosted by Dr Michael Woods TD, Chairman of Joint Foreign Affairs Committee
- Meeting with members of the Joint Committee on Health and Children

Thursday 1 July

- Travel to Galway
- Working luncheon with Mayor of Galway and City of Galway officials

Friday 2 July

- Visit to Kylemore Abbey
- Return travel to Dublin

Saturday 3 July

- Depart Dublin for Rome

Appendix 2

Visit by Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Italy

3 to 10 July 2010

Saturday 3 July

- Arrive in Rome

Sunday 4 July

- Visit to Florence – onboard briefing on fast train technology

Monday 5 July

- Meeting with Ambassador Giovanni Castellaneta, Co-President of the Italo-Australian Advisory Committee for the L'Aquila Reconstruction Project, and President of SACE (Export Credit Agency)
- Meeting with senior officials of the Italian Parliament responsible for the management of the parliamentary art collection
- Visit to the Chamber of Deputies (Official Welcome)
- Briefing on illegal immigration with Prefect Angela Pria, Head of Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, Ministry of Interior
- Meeting with Mr Daniel Kraus, Deputy Director, Confindustria
- Meeting with Ms Giuliana Gasparrini, Senior Official for Climate Change, Ministry of Environment

Tuesday 6 July

- Meeting with the Hon Gianfranco Fini, President of the Chamber of Deputies
- Meeting with Senator Emma Bonino, Vice President of the Senate
- Meeting with the Hon Giancarlo Giorgetti, President of the Parliamentary Committee for the Budget, and other members of the committee
- Meeting with the Hon Giuseppe Palumbo, President of the Social Affairs Committee, and other members of the committee
- Meeting with the Hon Gianfranco Conte, President of the Parliamentary Committee on Finance, and other members of the committee
- Meeting with the Hon Mara Carfagna, Minister for Equal Opportunities
- Evening reception with key Australians and bilateral contacts

Wednesday 7 July

- Travel to Palermo, Sicily
- Meeting with Mr Raffaele Lombardo, President of the Sicily Region

Thursday 8 July

- Meeting with Mr Giovanni Avanti, President of the Province of Sicily
- Visit to Sicilian Regional Assembly Building and the Palatine Chapel
- Meeting with members of the Regional Committee for Institutional Affairs
- Meeting with Mr Francesco Cascio, President of the Sicilian Regional Assembly
- Meeting with Mr Diego Cammarata, Mayor of Palermo
- Meeting with the Public Security Committee

Friday 9 July

- Visit to immigration reception centre for asylum seekers, Trapani
- Return travel to Rome

Saturday 10 July

- Depart Rome

Monday 12 July

- Arrive back in Australia

Appendix 3

Visit by Australian Parliamentary Delegation to the Holy See

5 to 7 July 2010

Monday 5 July

- Visit to Sistine Chapel
- Meeting with Monsignor Joseph Murphy, Official of the Secretariat of State

Wednesday 7 July

- Attend Vatican Papal audience