
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Review of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Annual Report 2009–10

Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

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Foreword

This Review of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Annual Report 2009–10 is the first conducted by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade since 2001–2. It is timely given the changing world Australia finds itself in, and the changing needs of the increasing number of Australians travelling, living and working overseas. This Review was conducted pursuant to the Committee’s resolution of appointment under which Annual Reports of relevant departments stand referred to the Committee for any inquiry it wishes to make.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is responsible for the management of Australia’s foreign relations and representation overseas, public diplomacy, and providing services to Australians living, working and travelling overseas. As such, its Annual Report is potentially an important document in terms of accountability to both Parliament and the people of Australia.

The DFAT Annual Report reports on three outcomes which cover DFAT’s activities. Consequently, this Review is structured around these three outcomes, and contains an additional chapter on other issues raised during the Review.

Outcome 1

In Chapter 2, the report considers DFAT’s Outcome 1. This Outcome is focused on the advancement of Australia’s international strategic, security and economic interests. This includes matters such as Australia’s representation overseas, DFAT’s human rights activities, and DFAT’s public diplomacy activity.

While Australia maintains an extensive network of diplomatic posts, the Committee found that there is a substantial question in relation to DFAT’s future role and the adequacy of the services it provides overseas on behalf of Australia. The Committee is of the view that a substantial inquiry needs to be undertaken on Australia’s representation overseas, so that comprehensive advice can be provided

to the Government on how Australia's interests might be better served by Australia's diplomatic network.

In regard to DFAT's human rights activities, the Committee was pleased to note the role played by DFAT in facilitating bilateral human rights dialogues with China, Vietnam and Iran and looks forward to capitalising on the successes achieved so far – particularly the involvement of Australian parliamentarians in these dialogues. The Committee is also pleased to have received a reference from the Foreign Minister to conduct an inquiry into Australia's human rights dialogues with Vietnam and China.

DFAT's public diplomacy efforts were examined during this Review, with a particular focus on the use of new media and social networks. Overall, the Committee is not satisfied with DFAT's public diplomacy efforts, and considers that DFAT needs to make stronger efforts to capitalise on the potential offered by modern communications technology in the dissemination and collection of information. As such, the Committee believes that DFAT needs to make a greater effort to understand current and future e-diplomacy opportunities.

Outcome 2

In Chapter 3, the Committee considers Outcome 2. This Outcome is focused on the protection and welfare of Australians abroad and the provision of passport services.

The Committee found that DFAT provides valuable advice to Australians travelling overseas. However, the Committee noted that efforts need to be directed towards increasing the proportion of Australians using Smartraveller. Furthermore, while travel advisories have always been contentious, liability issues associated with understating the level of risk means it is wise to take a cautious approach in issuing travel advisories.

The Committee was satisfied with DFAT's efforts in regard to the provision of passport services. The increasing demand for passport and consular services and the increasing pressure this places on DFAT's budget warrants further examination of the provision of consular services.

Outcome 3

In Chapter 4, the Committee examines Outcome 4. This Outcome details DFAT's efforts towards providing for a secure Australian government presence overseas via provision of security services and the management of Australia's overseas owned estate.

Overall, the Committee was satisfied with DFAT's efforts in this area, but cautions that in light of recent events DFAT needs to remain alert to the security of its e-network in particular.

Other Issues

Other issues that arose during the course of the review were gender equality within the Department, and the staffing implications of DFAT's funding situation. These are examined in Chapter 5

In regard to gender equality, the Committee noted that there was a considerable gender disparity at Senior Executive level within the Department. DFAT acknowledged that this was the case, but commented that a high proportion of its graduate intake was female, and further that it was acting to implement internal policies which address family issues that impact on women. The Committee was satisfied with this response.

On funding, the Committee noted the long-term relative decline in funding, our poor relative standing in the number of diplomatic posts as compared to the other comparable countries in the OECD and the resulting staff cutbacks, experienced by DFAT under successive governments. However, the Committee was pleased to note the recent increase in funding, and believes that this trend should be continued and the number of our overseas posts increased.

Mr Michael Danby MP

Chair, Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee

July 2011

Membership of the Committee

Chair Senator M Forshaw (to 30/06/11)
Mr M Danby MP (from 06/07/11)

Deputy Chair Mrs J Gash MP

Members	Senator M Bishop	The Hon. D Adams MP
	Senator the Hon. J Faulkner (to 14/02/11)	The Hon. J Bishop MP
	Senator D Fawcett (from 01/07/11)	Ms G Brodtmann MP
	Senator the Hon. A Ferguson (to 30/06/11)	The Hon. A Byrne MP
	Senator M Furner	Mr N Champion MP
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	Senator the Hon. D Johnston	The Hon. J Fitzgibbon MP
	Senator S Ludlum	Mr S Georganas MP (to 24/03/11)
	Senator the Hon. I MacDonald	Mr S Gibbons MP
	Senator A McEwen (from 01/07/11)	The Hon. A Griffin MP
	Senator C Moore	Dr D Jensen MP
	Senator K O'Brien (to 30/06/11)	Mrs S Mirabella MP
	Senator S Parry (from 01/07/11)	The Hon. J Murphy MP
	Senator M Payne	Mr K O'Dowd MP
	Senator the Hon. U Stephens (from 01/07/11)	Ms M Parke MP
	Senator R Trood (to 30/06/11)	Mr S Robert MP
		The Hon. P Ruddock MP
		Ms J Saffin MP
		The Hon. B Scott MP
		The Hon. Dr S Stone MP
		Ms M Vamvakinou MP

Membership of the Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee

Chair	Mr M Danby MP (to 06/07/11)	
	Mr N Champion MP (from 06/07/11)	
Deputy Chair	Senator R Trood (to 30/06/11)	
	The Hon. Dr S Stone MP (from 04/07/11)	
Members	Senator M Forshaw (<i>ex officio</i> to 30/06/11)	The Hon. D Adams MP
	Senator M Furner	The Hon. J Bishop MP
	Senator S Ludlam	Ms G Brodtman MP
	Senator the Hon. I MacDonald	The Hon. A Byrne MP
	Senator C Moore	Mr M Danby MP (<i>ex officio</i> from 06/07/11)
	Senator S Parry (from 01/07/11)	The Hon. L Ferguson MP
	Senator M Payne	Mrs J Gash MP (<i>ex officio</i>)
	Senator the Hon. U Stephens (from 01/07/11)	The Hon. A Griffin MP
		Dr D Jensen MP
		Mrs S Mirabella MP
		Ms M Parke MP
		The Hon. P Ruddock MP
		Ms M Vamvakinou MP



Committee Secretariat

Secretary Dr M Kerley (to 10/06/11)

Dr J Carter (from 10/6/11)

Inquiry Secretary Dr J Carter

Research Officers Mr J Bunce

Mr R Merrett

Administrative Officers Ms J Butler

Ms G Drew

Mrs S Gaspar



Terms of reference

Pursuant to paragraph 1(b) of its resolution of appointment, the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade is empowered to consider and report on the annual reports of government agencies, in accordance with a schedule presented by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.¹

The Speaker's schedule lists annual reports from with the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio as being available for review by the Committee.²

¹ See *Votes and Proceedings*, 29 September 2010.

² Speaker's Schedule: Allocation to Committees of Annual Reports of Departments and Agencies.



List of abbreviations

ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organisation
CLA	Civil Liberties Australia
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
JSCFADT	Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
NTAC	National Threat Assessment Centre
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPO	Overseas Property Office
SES	Senior Executive Service
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association