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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

July 2011  
Canberra

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# Contents

Foreword .....	v
Membership of the Committee .....	viii
Membership of the Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee .....	ix
Committee Secretariat .....	x
Terms of reference .....	xi
List of abbreviations .....	xii
<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The conduct of this review .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Annual Report .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Structure of the report .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 Outcome 1 .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Australia's representation overseas .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Embassies and high commissions .....	5
Committee comment .....	12
<b>Human rights .....</b>	<b>13</b>
United Nations human rights forums .....	15
Bilateral engagement on human rights .....	17
Committee comment .....	19
<b>Australia's public diplomacy activity .....</b>	<b>19</b>
Public diplomacy funding .....	19
New media and public diplomacy .....	20
The Australia Network .....	23
Committee comment .....	24

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<b>3</b>	<b>Outcome 2</b> .....	<b>25</b>
	<b>Responsive travel advice</b> .....	<b>25</b>
	<i>Smartraveller</i> service .....	26
	New media .....	27
	Committee comment .....	28
	<b>Services to Australians abroad</b> .....	<b>28</b>
	Consular services.....	29
	Passports .....	30
	Committee comment .....	31
<b>4</b>	<b>Outcome 3</b> .....	<b>33</b>
	E-diplomacy and communications security .....	33
	Overseas property .....	34
	Committee comment.....	35
<b>5</b>	<b>Other issues</b> .....	<b>37</b>
	Gender equality .....	37
	Funding .....	38
	Staffing.....	39
	Committee comment.....	41
	<b>Appendix A—List of Submissions</b> .....	<b>43</b>
	<b>Appendix B—List of Exhibits</b> .....	<b>44</b>
	<b>Appendix C—List of Hearings and Witnesses</b> .....	<b>45</b>



## 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
Senator S Hanson-Young	The Hon. L Ferguson MP
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

<b>Chair</b>	Mr M Danby MP (to 06/07/11) Mr N Champion MP (from 06/07/11)	
<b>Deputy Chair</b>	Senator R Trood (to 30/06/11) The Hon. Dr S Stone MP (from 04/07/11)	
<b>Members</b>	Senator M Forshaw ( <i>ex officio</i> to 30/06/11) Senator M Furner Senator S Ludlam Senator the Hon. I MacDonald Senator C Moore Senator S Parry (from 01/07/11) Senator M Payne Senator the Hon. U Stephens (from 01/07/11)	The Hon. D Adams MP The Hon. J Bishop MP Ms G Brodtman MP The Hon. A Byrne MP Mr M Danby MP ( <i>ex officio</i> from 06/07/11) The Hon. L Ferguson MP Mrs J Gash MP ( <i>ex officio</i> ) 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> See *Votes and Proceedings*, 29 September 2010.

<sup>2</sup> 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

## Introduction

### The conduct of this review

- 1.1 On 7 March 2011 the Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade announced a review of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Annual Report 2009–10.
- 1.2 The decision to conduct this review was made pursuant to paragraph 1(b) of the Committee’s resolution of appointment, which empowers the Committee 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.<sup>1</sup> The Speaker’s schedule lists annual reports from agencies within the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio as being available for review by the Committee.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.3 The Committee had not reviewed a DFAT Annual Report since 2001–2. Given the changing world Australia finds itself in, and the changing needs of the increasing number of Australians living, working and travelling abroad, the review was timely. The Committee found the exercise useful and worth repeating, but in future would consider doing so at a different time so that it is not conducted simultaneously with Senate Estimates. This would give the opportunity to call more witnesses for longer periods, and allow a deeper exploration of the issues.

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

2 Speaker’s Schedule: Allocation to Committees of Annual Reports of Government Departments and Agencies. See *Votes and Proceedings*, No. 4, 19 October 2010.

- 1.4 The Committee received nine submissions, which are listed in Appendix A. These raised several issues, including:
- the adequacy of Australia's diplomatic and consular representation and activities;
  - the lack of a human rights ambassador, and a human rights policy against which the human rights impact of other policies can be measured;
  - the lack of e-diplomacy, and the underutilisation of new media and social networking by DFAT; and
  - the need for DFAT staff to be trained in new media and human rights, and for an increase in language training.
- 1.5 The exhibits received are listed in Appendix B.
- 1.6 Two public hearings were conducted:
- The first examined evidence from members of the public with expertise in foreign affairs, new media and human rights. It was held on 23 May 2011.
  - The second examined evidence from DFAT on the contents of the Annual Report, and sought responses to the issues raised earlier. The hearing was held on 27 May 2011.
- 1.7 Details of witnesses are listed in Appendix C.

## **The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Annual Report**

- 1.8 The *Public Service Act 1999* states that secretaries of Australian Government departments must prepare annual reports at the end of each financial year. These reports are prepared for the responsible Minister, and are presented to Parliament on or before 31 October each year.
- 1.9 Annual reports provide a detailed retrospective account of the activities and outputs of departments, as well as a statement of the expenditure administered. They are the means by which departments are accountable to the Parliament and the wider community for their activities.
- 1.10 The DFAT Annual Report 2009-10 is made up of five main parts:

- Section 1 provides an overview of the Department's activities, role and structure;
  - Section 2 reports on outcomes and program performance;
  - Section 3 reports matters such as external scrutiny, corporate governance, and the management of human and financial resources;
  - Section 4 is made up of statistical and other appendices; and
  - Section 5 contains financial statements.
- 1.11 This review focused mostly on Section 2, which itself is split into three outcomes:
- Outcome 1 focuses on 'the advancement of Australia's international strategic, security and economic interests including through bilateral, regional and multilateral engagement' in government trade and foreign policies.<sup>3</sup>
  - Outcome 2 details DFAT efforts in 'the protection and welfare of Australians abroad' through the provision of travel advice, passports, and consular services.<sup>4</sup>
  - Outcome 3 examines the provision of 'a secure Australian Government presence overseas' and specifically focuses on security, information and communication technology infrastructure, and the management of overseas property.<sup>5</sup>

## Structure of the report

- 1.12 The report continues in Chapter 2 with consideration of issues arising from DFAT's Outcome 1 – the advancement of Australia's international strategic, security and economic interests. Issues considered are: Australia's overseas representation; DFAT's promotion of human rights; and Australia's public diplomacy activity.
- 1.13 Chapter 3 considers issues arising from Outcome 2 – the protection and welfare of Australians abroad. Issues considered are: the provision of responsive travel advice; the administration of travel warnings; and the provision of services to overseas Australians.

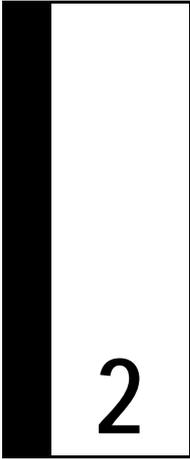
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3 DFAT Annual Report 2009–10, p. 15.

4 DFAT Annual Report 2009–10, p. 15.

5 DFAT Annual Report 2009–10, p. 15.

- 1.14 Chapter 4 considers issues arising from Outcome 3 – the provision of a secure Australian Government presence overseas. Issues considered are the potential role of e-diplomacy and the management of the Overseas Owned Estate.
- 1.15 The final chapter considers other issues such as gender equality and DFAT funding.



## Outcome 1

2.1 DFAT describes Outcome 1 as focusing on:

The advancement of Australia's international strategic, security and economic interests including through bilateral, regional and multilateral engagement on Australian Government foreign and trade policy priorities.<sup>1</sup>

2.2 This outcome accounts for the majority of the financial and human resources of the Department. It includes such activities as developing and implementing Australia's international policies, managing Australia's bilateral and multilateral engagement, the provision of public information services and public diplomacy, and diplomatic and consular services.

2.3 During the Inquiry, issues raised in relation to Outcome 1 and its Programs included:

- Australia's representation overseas;
- the role played by DFAT in the promotion of human rights; and
- Australia's public diplomacy activity.

### **Australia's representation overseas**

#### **Embassies and high commissions**

2.4 DFAT is responsible for running and staffing 89 embassies, high commissions, consulates-general and multilateral missions around the

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<sup>1</sup> DFAT Annual Report 2009-10, p. 20.

world.<sup>2</sup> Of these 89 missions, 74 are either embassies or high commissions; four are missions to multilateral organisations, and the balance are consulates-general managed by DFAT.<sup>3</sup> This section will focus only on embassies and high commissions, as these are the focus of Australia's representation in other countries. Consulates are examined in Chapter 3, where the provision of services to Australians overseas is discussed.

2.5 Central to the discussion of Australia's representation overseas is funding and staffing levels within DFAT. As noted by Ms Alexandra Oliver,

During the period between 1996 and 2008, while the Public Service grew 25 to 30 per cent, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade actually contracted in size by 11 per cent.

2.6 Obviously, this has had an impact on the number of DFAT staff posted overseas, and this then has flow-on effects on Australia's diplomatic representation.<sup>4</sup>

2.7 Furthermore, Dr Paul Monk pointed out that this relative decline in capacity within DFAT is not limited to staffing levels. He pointed out that DFAT's 'resourcing has shrunk over the past decade from 0.43 to 0.25 per cent of Federal Government spending'.<sup>5</sup> Again, as with staffing, relative declines in funding necessarily affects DFAT's ability to represent Australia abroad.

2.8 Aside from these broad issues, matters raised in the course of this Review in relation to Australia's embassies and high commissions included:

- the geographic location and spread of Australia's representation;
- staffing levels and conditions; and
- the way in which embassies and high commissions represent Australia.

### Geographic location and spread

2.9 Out of a total of 89 DFAT-managed missions, 74 are embassies and high commissions, while the balance are missions to multilateral organisations, consulates and consulates-general. Questions were raised during the course of this Review about the number and geographic location of these missions.

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2 *DFAT Annual Report 2009-10*, p. 12.

3 *DFAT Annual Report 2009-10*, pp. 259-61.

4 This is examined in greater detail below.

5 Dr Paul Monk, *Submission No. 6*, p. 64. Funding levels within DFAT are dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 5 of this report.

2.10 Dr Monk noted that Australia's representation overseas was facing 'severe incapacitation ... in several crucial respects'. For Dr Monk,

One of the starkest indices of this is that Australia has fewer overseas missions than all but four members of the OECD. These four are the Slovak Republic, Ireland, New Zealand and Luxembourg.<sup>6</sup>

2.11 To place this in context, while Australia has 89 posts, the OECD average is '150 posts out of 192 UN member states'. This is less than Denmark with a population of five million or Sweden with a population of nine million.<sup>7</sup>

2.12 Dr Monk continued:

It seems anomalous that there are many countries smaller and less well endowed than Australia who have representation in a great many more countries than we do. It is not clear why exactly that decision would have been taken. One can imagine an argument being advanced that the reason we have less is that, unlike most countries, we have not just gone along and been represented everywhere because that is what you do; that we have thought about it and we have come up with a very economical scheme for being represented where we really need to be.<sup>8</sup>

2.13 Ms Oliver put this in slightly different terms, noting that Australia is:

Home to eight of the world's largest corporations, we have the 13<sup>th</sup> largest economy by GDP in current prices, we have around the 12<sup>th</sup> largest defence budget, we have around the 13<sup>th</sup> largest aid budget of OECD nations, but we are in the lowest five of the 30 OECD nations in terms of our overseas network.<sup>9</sup>

2.14 Ms Oliver connected this lack of representation to the progressively security oriented approach to foreign policy in some Western countries. Ms Oliver drew attention to:

... the imbalance between the emphasis on security and the funding of security efforts by the United States in comparison with its funding of diplomacy. ...

That same overemphasis on security is happening in Australia ...  
[W]hen you consider our funding of defence and security in

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6 Dr Paul Monk, *Submission No. 6*, p. 64.

7 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 29.

8 Dr Paul Monk, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 20.

9 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 29.

comparison with our funding of diplomacy ... the imbalance is enormous.<sup>10</sup>

- 2.15 In order to redress this decline in Australia's diplomatic representation, Ms Oliver contended that Australia should look towards opening another 20 posts overseas.<sup>11</sup> Ideally, these posts should be opened:

... in areas of key geo-strategic interest to Australia, and where our representation is lacking: regional India and China, Africa, Latin America and North and Central Asia.<sup>12</sup>

- 2.16 An example of the effects of this perceived underrepresentation can be found in the case of Ukraine. Despite having had diplomatic relations with Ukraine since 1992, Australia does not have any representation there, and is represented through Vienna.<sup>13</sup> However, it was noted during the public hearings that Ukrainians wishing to obtain a visa to enter Australia must first get a visa to go to Russia in order to apply at the Australian embassy in Moscow.<sup>14</sup>

- 2.17 The Ukrainian Ambassador suggested that given Ukraine has been directly represented in Australia since 2000, Ukraine would welcome the opening of an Australian mission in Kiev.<sup>15</sup>

- 2.18 In an increasingly complex world, where global problems abound, such underrepresentation matters because, in Ms Oliver's words:

This underrepresentation compounds Australia's difficulties and impedes its abilities to understand the exponentially increasing complexity of the international context in which we operate.<sup>16</sup>

- 2.19 DFAT responded to the issue by noting:

If there were additional resources and you were looking at additional posts, that is a matter for the government of the day, as you know: we can have views and make recommendations.

- 2.20 Nonetheless, the Committee considered DFAT did have a role to play in this process.

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10 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 33.

11 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 31.

12 Ms Alexandra Oliver, 'Australia's deepening diplomatic deficit', *Government, Business, Foreign Affairs and Trade*, October 2010, p. 18.

13 Embassy of Ukraine, *Submission No. 9*, p. 85.

14 *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 20.

15 Embassy of Ukraine, *Submission No. 9*, pp. 85-6.

16 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 29.

2.21 In regard to the potential recommendations, DFAT continued:

From where I sit I think an obvious candidate for additional representation would be China. I think our representation in China is a bit underdone. We have ... Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai, and they are essentially what we have had for the last 20-odd years. You can look at the growth in China and consider that in the 25 years leading up to 2015 China's economy will have grown 25 times.<sup>17</sup>

2.22 DFAT noted that that considering much of this growth has taken place away from the eastern seaboard, 'there is a strong case for additional representation in China'.<sup>18</sup>

2.23 Furthermore, Australia seems to be underrepresented in some of the larger countries when measured by population. For instance, the top five most populous countries in which Australia has no diplomatic representation are:

- Democratic Republic of Congo with a population of 68.6 million;
- Ukraine, 45.7 million;
- Colombia, 43.6 million;
- Tanzania, 41 million; and
- Sudan, 41 million.<sup>19</sup>

2.24 In contrast, the top five least populous countries where Australia does have an embassy or high commission are:

- The Holy See (The Vatican), 826;
- Federated States of Micronesia, 107 434;
- Vanuatu; 218 519;
- Samoa; 219 998; and
- Brunei Darussalam, 388 190.<sup>20</sup>

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17 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 11.

18 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 11.

19 Parliamentary Library, *Twenty most populous countries where Australia does not have an embassy or high commission*, March, 2010. All population figures are July 2009 estimates.

20 Parliamentary Library, *Twenty least populous countries where Australia has an embassy or high commission*, March 2010. All population figures are July 2009 estimates.

## Staffing at overseas posts

- 2.25 As noted above, DFAT's staffing has not been increasing in line with the wider public service. Total staffing levels in DFAT have fallen 14 per cent between 1988 and 2009; from 4635 to 3971 personnel.<sup>21</sup>
- 2.26 Dr Monk put the figures rather starkly:
- Over the past twenty years, DFAT's diplomatic corps shrank by nearly 40 per cent, from 870 overseas based [Australian] staff in 1989 to 537 in 2009.<sup>22</sup>
- 2.27 Given that the proportion of locally based staff employed at diplomatic posts has not markedly changed over this period, the number of Australia-based DFAT staff posted overseas has declined at a faster rate than overall staffing levels. As Ms Oliver notes, this is a concern because 'good diplomacy needs people on the ground overseas'.<sup>23</sup>
- 2.28 One effect of this relative decline in Australian staff posted overseas is that a large proportion of Australia's diplomatic posts are considered to be small posts. Ms Oliver noted that in 1986 only 26 per cent of Australia's diplomatic posts were small posts with three or less Australia-based staff. However, by 2009 this had increased to 40 per cent of posts.<sup>24</sup>
- 2.29 According to Ms Oliver:
- These posts struggle to do essential work on the ground when people take annual leave, when people are ill, when people are away on official business, when small posts are accredited to several nations at a time. This is a real difficulty that the department struggles with in its foreign service.<sup>25</sup>
- 2.30 DFAT responded to this by saying that, in order to avoid any further deterioration in Australia's representation overseas:
- If there is a need and we have to reduce staff numbers, that will be done here in Australia – in Canberra.<sup>26</sup>
- 2.31 Mr Prakash Mirchandani contended that DFAT staff were not posted overseas for long enough. He said that, by posting staff to other countries

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21 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 31.

22 Dr Paul Monk, *Submission No. 6*, p. 64.

23 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 31.

24 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 32.

25 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 32.

26 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 6.

for up to eight years, they would be able 'to master the language and culture of the countries to which they are sent'.<sup>27</sup>

2.32 This would, according to Mr Mirchandani,

Enable DFAT to position diplomats at 'nodes of trust', who engage much more profoundly and with a much wider cross-section of the host populations than they do at the moment.<sup>28</sup>

2.33 Mr Mirchandani maintained that, despite the potential risk of diplomats becoming so engaged in the local community that they forget they are representing Australia in the process, the dividends were worth it. He noted that journalists who do this:

... gain such credibility that people come to them with information and indeed they are regarded more as a paragon of information than many politicians in that country. They have gained credibility, and I am pretty sure that a similar area or similar stature could be acquired by our own diplomats.<sup>29</sup>

2.34 However DFAT noted that there are a high proportion of DFAT staff married to other staff members.<sup>30</sup> Given that when a spouse takes up a posting overseas, the other spouse often finds it necessary to take unpaid leave for a large part of postings,<sup>31</sup> it would be difficult to find sufficient numbers of senior DFAT staff willing to disrupt the lives of the spouses in order to take on an eight year posting. Especially given that, as noted by DFAT, managing the current length of spouses' posting is 'a juggling act'.<sup>32</sup>

### Activities of diplomatic posts

2.35 Australia's embassies and high commissions are the focal point for Australia's representation overseas. As such, they are the locus of a variety of activities which include official functions, meetings between Australian and overseas officials, the conduct of public diplomacy, as well as the place where citizens of other countries apply for entry to Australia.

2.36 However, Mr Mirchandani told the Committee that:

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27 Mr Prakash Mirchandani, *Submission No. 3*, p. 37.

28 Mr Prakash Mirchandani, *Submission No. 3*, p. 37.

29 Mr Prakash Mirchandani, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 12.

30 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 4.

31 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 5.

32 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 5.

Diplomatic missions should be seen in a totally different light – as resources that can use public diplomacy to connect directly with the citizens and influential networks in their host countries.<sup>33</sup>

2.37 Mr Mirchandani argued that the ‘basic core’ functions of maintaining bilateral relationships can be left to a few diplomats, and as such his proposed course of action would not require a great number of new staff.

2.38 Furthermore, Mr Mirchandani noted the possibility of tapping into:

Public-private partnerships with a host of Australian private sector companies and organisations who have networks that are parallel to and, in some cases, more credible than those of governments.<sup>34</sup>

## Committee comment

2.39 The Committee is of the view that there is a substantial question in relation to DFAT’s future role and the adequacy of the services it provides on behalf of Australia. The Committee believes a substantial inquiry should be undertaken by the Committee on Australia’s representation overseas in order to provide comprehensive advice to the Government on how Australia’s interests might be better served by Australia’s diplomatic network, and invites the Foreign Minister to provide it with a reference to conduct this substantial inquiry.

2.40 The issues examined by the proposed inquiry should include, but not be restricted to:

- the activities that Australia’s diplomatic posts must undertake;
- their geographic location and spread;
- the appropriate level of staffing, including locally engaged staff; and
- the effect of e-diplomacy and information and communications technology on the activities of diplomatic posts.

2.41 The Committee recognises the potential inherent in the approach proposed by Mr Mirchandani. However, caution must be exercised in relation to any public-private partnership in any context, given the potential for damaged reputation associated with being seen as too close to private sector actors.

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33 Mr Prakash Mirchandani, *Submission No. 3*, p. 43.

34 Mr Prakash Mirchandani, *Submission No. 3*, p. 43.

- 2.42 Furthermore, the Committee sees the value in reconsidering the role of Australian embassies and high commissions in public diplomacy, especially considering the staff-related constraints placed on DFAT by the high proportion of small posts with three or less staff noted above.
- 2.43 However, increasing the time of posting of Australia – based staff would doubtless have a detrimental effect on career prospects for many staff, and would, in some cases, make it difficult for DFAT to find qualified staff willing to take up such long postings.

## Human rights

- 2.44 Several submissions to the Review raised the possibility of DFAT formulating an overarching human rights policy which could be used to gauge the human rights impact of other foreign policies.
- 2.45 The DFAT Annual Report states that:
- The promotion of universal human rights is an important foreign policy objective, which was reflected in strong Australian engagement on priority human rights issues during 2009–10.<sup>35</sup>
- 2.46 Civil Liberties Australia (CLA) told the Committee that, despite this statement and others like it:
- There is an inconsistency of core mission and message, there is uncertainty about where to put the weight and emphasis between Australia’s values and beliefs by comparison with our security, policing and trade interests and there is no clear leadership and direction provided by the organisation about what it is trying to achieve.<sup>36</sup>
- 2.47 The CLA criticised DFAT’s efforts on human rights overall. It characterised the discussion of human rights in the Annual Report as:
- A sad commentary on DFAT’s misdirected approach to what its role of ‘advancing Australia’s interests’ really is.<sup>37</sup>
- 2.48 Furthermore, the CLA noted that within the human rights advocacy community ‘there is a consistent message’ that ‘DFAT is letting Australia down in how it handles human rights’.<sup>38</sup>

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35 *DFAT Annual Report 2009–10*, p. 102.

36 Mr Bill Rowlings, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 22.

37 CLA, *Submission No. 8*, p. 74.

- 2.49 The CLA's argument on DFAT's human rights advocacy and activity is not that human rights should be at the centre of DFAT's activities, but more that it should be better integrated into DFAT activities. This could be achieved by including more explicit recognition of human rights in the Annual Report, and in DFAT's mission statement and reporting on DFAT's substantive activities.<sup>39</sup>
- 2.50 Even where DFAT does talk about its human rights focus and activities, the CLA found it to be lacking. The CLA commented that the Annual Report 'does not clearly spell out what its overall mission is'. Furthermore, it expressed concern about the measurables and deliverables in the area of human rights, noting that the Annual Report:
- Does not quantify them in any way – they are waffly, vague: you cannot report on them and you cannot hold the department accountable.<sup>40</sup>
- 2.51 DFAT told the Committee that incorporating a human rights policy into Australia's foreign policy was "ultimately ... a matter for government".<sup>41</sup>
- 2.52 However, DFAT stated:
- I would say that successive governments have taken human rights seriously. Our graduate recruits have some training in that area. It is a part of our work that cuts right across the department and most of our embassies, in one form or another, are also involved in respect of human rights, so I would not quite agree with the characterisation of some of the submissions.<sup>42</sup>
- 2.53 According to the Annual Report, DFAT's promotion of human rights was conducted primarily through two means:
- UN human rights forums; and
  - 'dialogues, consultations and representations on human rights' with both other countries and NGOs.<sup>43</sup>
- 2.54 The Committee notes the achievement of DFAT in facilitating annual human rights dialogues with China since 1997, with the most recent taking place in February 2009 in Canberra and in August 2010 in Beijing.

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38 Mr Bill Rowlings, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 22.

39 Mr Bill Rowlings, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, pp. 23, 25.

40 Mr Bill Rowlings, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 25.

41 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 13.

42 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 12.

43 *DFAT Annual Report 2009-10*, pp. 102-3.

- 2.55 Such dialogues have also been conducted with Vietnam since 2002, with the most recent meetings occurring in December 2009 in Hanoi and in February 2011 in Canberra.
- 2.56 The Committee notes the degree of success – such as the partial involvement of Australian parliamentarians – which has been achieved and the potential for future progress, and as such looks forward to capitalising on this positive development.

## United Nations human rights forums

- 2.57 The Australian Baha’i Community praised DFAT’s:
- ... endeavours to use multilateral means to promote and protect human rights, including through active support for country resolutions and other measures at the UN Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly.<sup>44</sup>
- 2.58 However, the Australian Baha’i Community went on to recommend that Australia:
- More actively engage in the election of appropriate Council members and support for the candidacies of qualified treaty body members and Special Procedures; and
  - Play a more proactive role in – and in relation to – the Human Rights Council, including by advocating for a strengthening of its mandate and modalities.<sup>45</sup>
- 2.59 Furthermore, the Australian Baha’i Community noted that Australia’s candidacy for a UN Security Council seat in 2013–14 was an ideal opportunity to commit to the ‘global promotion, protection and realisation of human rights’, and to advocate for the Security Council to engage more intensively in this area.<sup>46</sup>
- 2.60 The CLA took a different view of Australia’s international engagement on human rights. Rather than the current focus on UN ‘machinery and processes’, the CLA expressed a preference for DFAT to focus its efforts on improving and strengthening ‘human rights in the Pacific and Southeast Asia’. It argued that many nations are attempting to:
- ... remedy the defects of the UN model, whereas Australia has the leading responsibility for actively advocating for better human

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44 Australian Baha’i Community, *Submission No. 4*, p. 49.

45 Australian Baha’i Community, *Submission No. 4*, p. 50.

46 Australian Baha’i Community, *Submission No. 4*, p. 50.

rights in the Pacific certainly, and for taking a far more proactive stance in Southeast Asia.<sup>47</sup>

- 2.61 Consolidating Australia's current engagement with the UN on human rights, and facilitating an expansion of this engagement, could be achieved by creating a human rights ambassador. The Australian Baha'i Community noted that such a post would help 'ensure a coordinated and coherent approach to human rights at the international level'.<sup>48</sup>
- 2.62 The CLA also supported this proposal.<sup>49</sup>
- 2.63 The Human Rights Law Centre drew attention to a Canadian initiative, wherein such an ambassador could become a permanent representative to the UN Human Rights Council, helping to 'significantly enhance Canada's role and capacity at the Council', as well as raising 'the profile and standing of human rights as a foreign policy issue'.<sup>50</sup>
- 2.64 The Human Rights Law Centre told the Committee that a human rights ambassador could play a wider role than just engaging with the UN. It could:
- assist in 'integrating human rights into all areas of foreign ... policy';
  - form a part of delegations of foreign ministers to engage in human rights dialogue in places where human rights are identified as a concern; and
  - assist in 'maintaining and developing contacts with Australian society ... to propagate human rights policy and acquire new ideas'.<sup>51</sup>
- 2.65 YWCA Australia also supported the creation of a human rights ambassador. In addition, it proposed the establishment of a women's rights ambassador, with a particular focus on strengthening efforts to 'promote gender equality', 'eliminate violence against women and girls', and 'enhance women's political participation in the Asia-Pacific region'.<sup>52</sup>
- 2.66 The Australian Baha'i Community also supported this proposal.<sup>53</sup>
- 2.67 In response to the proposed appointment of a human rights and women's rights ambassador, DFAT stated that:

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47 CLA, *Submission No. 8*, p. 80.

48 Australian Baha'i Community, *Submission No. 4*, p. 48.

49 Mr Bill Rowlings, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 22.

50 Human Rights Law Centre, *Submission No. 2*, p. 33.

51 Human Rights Law Centre, *Submission No. 2*, p. 34.

52 YWCA Australia, *Submission No. 7*, p. 69.

53 Australian Baha'i Community, *Submission No. 4*, p. 54.

Australian Heads of Mission and other staff regularly make representations on human rights concerns, including women's rights, to foreign governments bilaterally and in regional and multilateral fora.<sup>54</sup>

2.68 Therefore:

Given the wide range of existing human rights activities supported by the Department and posts, the Department does not consider the additional costs associated with these positions to be warranted at this time.<sup>55</sup>

## Bilateral engagement on human rights

2.69 One of the primary bilateral mechanisms by which DFAT engages on human rights is through human rights dialogues. A prime example of such dialogue that was raised during the course of the Review was Australia's human rights dialogue with Vietnam.

2.70 The DFAT Annual Report notes that Australia's bilateral strategic dialogue with Vietnam includes:

Frank and constructive discussion about human rights issues, including national approaches to human rights, freedom of expression and association, freedom of religion and belief, criminal justice and the death penalty.<sup>56</sup>

2.71 The CLA was critical of DFAT's reporting of this activity. It noted that 'there had been no "positive", "enhanced" or "strengthened" outcome' in regard to human rights in Vietnam. The crux of CLA's criticism is that there are no outcomes recorded in the Annual Report. Only outputs are recorded.<sup>57</sup>

2.72 DFAT responded that in terms of measuring outcomes in regard to bilateral dialogues on human rights:

With some countries it is what happens sometimes in respect of individual cases. Sometimes you can measure it in terms of the frankness of the exchange. It is not something that is easy to

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54 DFAT, *Submission No. 10*, p. 89.

55 DFAT, *Submission No. 10*, p. 89.

56 DFAT *Annual Report 2009–10*, p. 103.

57 CLA, *Submission No. 8*, p. 79.

measure in a quantifiable sense, in a mathematical, measurable sense. It is more qualitative. But I think we have some successes.<sup>58</sup>

2.73 The Australian Baha'i Community also noted the need to establish 'clear and measureable benchmarks for all human rights dialogues to ensure the most effective outcomes'.<sup>59</sup>

2.74 Furthermore, the CLA told the Committee that its understanding of the dialogue process was:

That to a large extent they are proformas, so we go along to a meeting and we sit down and say to the Chinese, 'You know where we stand on human rights, don't you?' and they say 'Yes' and, okay, we tick that one off... So while it is reported that we have done it, it is ticking-a-box type of human rights dialogue.<sup>60</sup>

2.75 As such, the CLA was supportive of the idea that members of the Human Rights Sub-Committee of the JSCFADT attend these dialogues as part of the Australian delegation, and subsequently report on the dialogues.<sup>61</sup> The Australian Baha'i Community also echoed the call for the dialogues to be more accountable to the Human Rights Sub-Committee.<sup>62</sup>

2.76 DFAT responded that any such decision:

Would be entirely a matter for the government. If they were public hearings, obviously there would be a limit to what was shared.

2.77 Regarding making these dialogues more transparent, DFAT added:

Depending on what one means by that, the further you take that then you do need to be conscious of the trade off you may be making in terms of the frankness of the exchanges.<sup>63</sup>

2.78 The Australian Baha'i Community, however, was supportive of human rights dialogues, but offered several notes of caution:

- We regard human rights dialogue as only one of the avenues for advancing human rights ...
- We urge Australia to ensure its commitment to the human rights dialogue process does not result in the preclusion of the option of pursuing UN resolutions on human rights or the use of other mechanisms.

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58 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 13.

59 Australian Baha'i Community, *Submission No. 4*, p. 52.

60 Mr Bill Rowlings, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 23.

61 Mr Bill Rowlings, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 23.

62 Australian Baha'i Community, *Submission No. 4*, p. 52.

63 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 13.

- We are concerned that human rights dialogue may become an end in itself. Human rights dialogue is the means to an end; it should be results oriented to ensure real progress in the observation of international human rights standards.
- We believe that transparency and accountability are generally desirable in human rights matters and both are necessary in the human rights dialogue process.<sup>64</sup>

## Committee comment

- 2.79 The Committee notes the potential value of having an overarching human rights framework against which to test foreign policies, and encourages DFAT to further highlight the importance of human rights in its annual report.
- 2.80 The Committee also sees the value of having parliamentarians and in particular the Human Rights Sub-Committee, its Chair, Deputy Chair or other elected representatives to participate in bilateral human rights dialogues on a permanent basis. Like other Western parliaments, Australia's human rights dialogues with countries like Vietnam, Iran or China should be reported back to the Committee as appropriate.
- 2.81 The Committee welcomes the Foreign Minister's reference to conduct an inquiry into Australia's human rights dialogues with China and Vietnam.

## Australia's public diplomacy activity

- 2.82 Three broad issues arose concerning Australia's public diplomacy activity. These were:
- traditional public diplomacy and its funding;
  - new media and public diplomacy, or e-diplomacy; and
  - the management of the Australia Network.

## Public diplomacy funding

- 2.83 The public diplomacy activity of DFAT encompasses a range of activities designed to project a positive and accurate image of Australia overseas. This includes the Australia Network, the activities of Australia's diplomatic posts, international cultural visits, grants to organisations such

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64 Australian Baha'i Community, *Submission No. 4*, p. 52.

as the Australia–China Council, scholarships, and one-off activities like the Australian pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai World Expo.<sup>65</sup>

- 2.84 Mr Mirchandani noted that, while the Annual Report details DFAT’s spending on public diplomacy as \$65.9 million:

If you actually look at the figures, with \$20 million taken out for the Australia Network and numbers taken out for the various foundations which DFAT contributes to and one-offs like expos and the like, you are actually left with an operational budget of around \$6.8 million or so.<sup>66</sup>

- 2.85 However, DFAT stated that this spending ‘is not the only expenditure in terms of public diplomacy’:

Each embassy has a small public diplomacy budget and, indeed, I think what we spend on public diplomacy is probably a lot greater than what the figures might suggest. For instance, the actual dollar amount that we state in the Annual Report does not take account of what heads of mission do on a regular basis in speech giving and their public diplomacy activities. It takes no account of the cost of servicing government in terms of what ministers do on the public diplomacy front ... So I actually think our budget figures understate what we spend on public diplomacy.<sup>67</sup>

- 2.86 Despite such assurances, Ms Oliver told the Committee that, when compared with previous Annual Reports:

The public diplomacy funding in this annual report is the lowest it has been at any time since 2000 – and that is in actual dollars, not real terms.<sup>68</sup>

- 2.87 As a result, the ‘public diplomacy function’ of DFAT has been brought ‘almost completely to its knees’.<sup>69</sup>

## **New media and public diplomacy**

- 2.88 E-diplomacy is concerned with the use of internal and external communication by the Department in improving the efficiency and facilitation of information. It is the use of web and ICT (information and

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65 *DFAT Annual Report 2009–10*, pp. 125–39.

66 Mr Prakash Mirchandani, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 8.

67 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 24.

68 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 30.

69 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 30.

communication technologies) to help further Australia's diplomatic interests.

2.89 Mr Mirchandani noted that e-diplomacy has the potential to increase the number of people able to articulate government policy in multiple languages across multiple spheres. The ability to engage with a wider international audience enhances policy making and public diplomacy.

2.90 Fergus Hanson provided many examples of the effective use of social media in e-diplomacy. For instance, Mr Hanson noted that:

The State Department has been active in encouraging the take-up of social media tools. It operates 230 Facebook accounts, 80 Twitter feeds and 55 YouTube channels and has 40 Flickr<sup>70</sup> sites. The [British Foreign and Commonwealth Office] operates 55 Facebook accounts (with over 50 000 followers), 57 Twitter feeds (with over 66 000 followers) and has more than 80 Flickr accounts.<sup>71</sup>

2.91 Furthermore, Mr Hanson provided examples of how these platforms were used. He noted that the US Embassy in Jakarta has a Facebook page with 'around 290 000 fans'. This Facebook page even has 'a dedicated employee whose job is to update the account in Bahasa Indonesia'. Another example is that of British Secretary of State William Hague, who uses his Twitter account to conduct question and answer sessions with the public.<sup>72</sup>

2.92 Mr Fergus Hanson told the Committee that:

DFAT is still only at the very early stages of transitioning to the use of social media. Its use of digital tools more broadly is also very nascent so there is still a very long way to go. Secondly, there still appears to be a degree of tentativeness within DFAT about how to use social media and digital tools. Thirdly, a champion of e-diplomacy is still yet to emerge within the department.

2.93 As such, Mr Hanson noted that the short-term challenges which face the Department include:

- The absence of an e-diplomacy office within DFAT;
- Budget limitations;
- The lack of clear internal clarification about how e-diplomacy could promote foreign policy outcomes and reduce work-rates.

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70 Flickr is a photo sharing website.

71 Mr Fergus Hanson, *Exhibit No. 1*, p. 9.

72 Mr Fergus Hanson, *Exhibit No. 1*, p. 10.

2.94 In light of these challenges, Mr Hanson proposed the establishment of an independent e-diplomacy branch within the Department, staffed by a mix of policy and technical experts. Additionally, the amalgamation of existing Departmental sections such as communications would overcome budget limitations.<sup>73</sup>

2.95 In contrast to the proposal by Mr Hanson regarding the establishment of an independent e-diplomacy branch, Mr Mirchandani told the Committee that all staff in DFAT should undergo training in order to effectively perform the functions of e-diplomacy:

The impetus has to come from senior leadership. They have to understand why public diplomacy is necessary in enabling the implementation of government policy. There has to be a total core change in the understanding of where diplomacy sits in the 21st century.<sup>74</sup>

2.96 The US's bureaucratic reform under Secretary of State Hilary Clinton is an example of a policy driven initiative to incorporate e-diplomacy into the State Department. From this reform came the concept of 'technical delegations' - joint government and industry group experts, who travelled the world under State Department auspices, to try and provide good governance using new media. According to US Department officials, e-diplomacy is:

A way to amplify traditional diplomatic efforts, develop technical-based policy solutions and encourage cyberactivism.<sup>75</sup>

2.97 There are limitations and risks associated with e-diplomacy. Dr Monk noted that the need to verify information before it is communicated through e-diplomacy delays its responsiveness.<sup>76</sup>

2.98 However Mr Hanson told the Committee that:

With e-diplomacy there is a need to take slightly more risk... If the department is not an active player in e-diplomacy, it has very little chance shaping the commentary when news pieces have been written.<sup>77</sup>

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73 Mr Fergus Hanson, *Exhibit No. 1*, p. 13.

74 Mr Prakash Mirchandani, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 16.

75 Mr Prakash Mirchandani, *Submission No. 3*, p. 42.

76 Mr Prakash Mirchandani, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 16.

77 Mr Fergus Hanson, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 4.

2.99 Furthermore:

It might not be possible for DFAT to clear every message with the minister and they will need to have what the UK calls 'assumed confidence' - a confidence that is assumed to be able to engage in these discussions in a professional manner.<sup>78</sup>

## The Australia Network

2.100 An integral mechanism in Australia's public diplomacy is the ability to put forth an Australian point of view. One way in which this has been achieved is through the Australia Network, which in the past has been delivered by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

2.101 DFAT describes the Australia Network as broadcasting:

independent news and current affairs, as well as English language learning programs, drama, children's entertainment and sport. Australia Network is available in 22 million homes across 44 countries, though 648 rebroadcast partners.<sup>79</sup>

2.102 Mr Mirchandani proposed an alternative method of delivering the type of service offered by the Australia Network:

For \$20 million, you can produce 200 documentary programs of 50 minutes each. How about setting up an expert panel of both Australian and regional eminent media executives to oversee this money? The panel would invite top documentary makers from relevant countries to come and make documentaries on Australia free of charge – on any subject and in their own regional languages, with no editorial censorship. They would be shot and edited by Australians, giving a much needed shot in the arm to a flagging industry. Copyright would vest with Australia. These documentaries would then be aired on regional television channels in local languages [and] also aired in English on an Australian internet channel, [and] would be an exemplar of our democracy and openness to scrutiny. The internet would then provide a multilingual forum for engaging with regional

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78 Mr Fergus Hanson, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 4.

79 *DFAT Annual Report*, p. 137.

audiences, and we would truly accomplish the aims which Brand Australia has set itself out to do.<sup>80</sup>

- 2.103 The Committee notes that this is a very interesting suggestion.
- 2.104 The Committee raised concern over both the way the Australia Network is delivered, and the metrics by which its impact is measured. DFAT told the Committee that the Australia Network is currently up for tender, and that no decision has yet been reached on who will be granted the next ten year contract.<sup>81</sup>
- 2.105 Towards the end of this Review, the Federal Government announced that the final decision on the tender for the Australia Network has been delayed by a further six months due to 'changed international circumstances'.<sup>82</sup>
- 2.106 The Committee is concerned about the delay attached to resolving the current tender.

### Committee comment

- 2.107 The Committee is not satisfied with DFAT's response regarding its public diplomacy activities. Regarding e-diplomacy, the Committee considers that DFAT's funding constraints preclude it from investing heavily in this area. However, DFAT needs to make stronger efforts to capitalise on the potential offered by modern communications technology in terms of the dissemination and collection of information, and to make greater efforts at understanding future e-diplomacy opportunities.
- 2.108 The use of new media is discussed further in Chapter 3.

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80 Mr Prakash Mirchandani, *Submission No. 3*, p. 44.

81 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 25.

82 Sid Maher, 'Changes for the Australia Network', *The Weekend Australian*, 25-26 June 2011, p. 10.



## Outcome 2

3.1 DFAT describes Outcome 2 as focusing on:

The protection and welfare of Australians abroad and access to secure international travel documentation through timely and responsive travel advice and consular and passport services in Australia and overseas.<sup>1</sup>

3.2 This outcome outlines the Department's support to Australians overseas through the provision of readily available services. As such, these include passport and consular services, timely travel advice, practical contingency planning, and rapid crisis response.

3.3 During the Review, issues raised in relation to Outcome 2 and its Programs included:

- the effectiveness of programs like the *Smartraveller* service in delivering responsive travel advice;<sup>2</sup>
- the criteria determining the administration of travel warnings; and
- the provision of services to Australians living, working and travelling overseas.

### Responsive travel advice

3.4 DFAT's provision of clear, current and practical information on safety and security overseas helps assist Australians in making well-informed travel plans. DFAT advised that its travel advice was issued after close

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1 DFAT Annual Report 2009–10, p. 148.

2 DFAT Annual Report 2009–10, p. 157.

cooperation with the National Threat Assessment Centre (NTAC) and consular partners. The aim was to ensure that they were supported by the best available information.<sup>3</sup>

- 3.5 DFAT's travel advice is communicated through published travel bulletins, consular publications, flyers and the *Smartraveller* website. In addition, DFAT has continued its close relationship with the travel industry to promote travel advice and *Smartraveller* messages.
- 3.6 The department has begun to experiment with mainstream social media technologies in delivering responsive travel advice during times of crisis. This has been displayed in
- 2010 World Cup in South Africa;
  - 2010 Commonwealth Games in India;
  - 2010 earthquake in Chile.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Smartraveller* service**

- 3.7 The *Smartraveller* service is a public information campaign to help Australians prepare for their travel and promote safe travel messages such as the importance of subscribing to their travel advice, registering travel plans online and taking out travel insurance. It also includes a telephone service for those without internet access.
- 3.8 The service reflects DFAT's digital approach in providing responsive travel advice to Australians abroad. The website recorded 27.9 million page-views in 2009-10.<sup>5</sup> However the percentage of Australian travellers registering for the service was low in relation to the total number travelling.
- 3.9 In 2009-10, the automated *Smartraveller* telephone service received 16 292 calls from Australians without internet access or with visual impairment.<sup>6</sup>
- 3.10 The third phase of the *Smartraveller* campaign will draw upon department research on traveller behaviour, needs and expectations to improve DFAT's provision of responsive travel advice.<sup>7</sup> This phase will start in 2010-11.

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3 DFAT Annual Report 2009-10, p. 156.

4 Mr Fergus Hanson, *Exhibit No. 1*, p. 4.

5 DFAT Annual Report 2009-10, p. 156.

6 DFAT Annual Report 2009-10, p. 157.

7 DFAT Annual Report 2009-10, p. 160.

## Travel warnings

- 3.11 DFAT is responsible for administering travel warnings should a level of risk be involved for Australians travelling to particular states.
- 3.12 DFAT has been criticised for the accuracy, responsiveness and timeliness of its travel warnings – even by other governments such as Indonesia.
- 3.13 DFAT told the committee that:

The threat level is determined by the National Threat Assessment Centre, which resides within ASIO. ASIO is the organisation with the legislative authority to make judgements on threats to security. The starting point for our travel advisory is the threat level and the threat advice and information provided by ASIO. We then have different levels of travel warning... There is a strong relationship between the advice provided by ASIO and our travel advisory.<sup>8</sup>

## New media

- 3.14 As mentioned in Chapter 2, new media is a term that categorically defines the digital tools of social interaction used by business and individuals as a forum for discussion. New media's responsive and interactive properties are reflected in websites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn.
- 3.15 Public engagement with new media is continuing to evolve. There are currently 500 million active users on Facebook with more than 30 billion pieces of content shared each month.<sup>9</sup>
- 3.16 DFAT has been criticised for its recognition of new media as a potential source of interaction with Australians travelling abroad. Mr Hanson noted that there is still a tendency within DFAT to indentify the utility of social media at the last minute rather than seeing it as integral from the start.<sup>10</sup>
- 3.17 Mr Hanson told the committee that DFAT is at the early stages of transitioning to the use of social media. However, the lack of an independent e-diplomacy branch ensuring the provision of travel advice hinders the responsiveness of the department.<sup>11</sup>

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8 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript*, 27 May 2011, p. 17.

9 <<http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics#!/press/info.php?statistics>> Accessed May 2011.

10 Mr Fergus Hanson, *Exhibit No. 1*, p. 4.

11 Mr Fergus Hanson, *Transcript*, 23 May 2011, p. 2.

- 3.18 Mr Mirchandani made particular reference to the department's non responsive twitter account. He said that:

DFAT's tweets have been largely concentrated on repeating media releases, travel advice and announcing jobs available in the department.<sup>12</sup>

- 3.19 In response to criticism regarding the use of new media in delivering responsive travel advice, DFAT told the committee that:

We will continue to approach the use of social media fairly carefully. ...

We are taking tentative steps in the consular area where it is clearly in our own interests and clearly in the interests of the travelling public that we engage more.<sup>13</sup>

### **Committee comment**

- 3.20 The Committee considers that DFAT provides a valuable *Smartraveller* service to Australians travelling overseas. Of concern, however, is the low proportion of Australian travellers registering for the service. Efforts need to be directed towards increasing the proportion of Australians using *Smartraveller*.
- 3.21 Travel advisories have always been contentious. There is the potential for liability issues to arise if travel warnings are issued which imply lower levels of risk to that which is subsequently found to be the case. As such, it is prudent to be cautious in issuing travel advisories.

### **Services to Australians abroad**

- 3.22 Australians' propensity to travel widely is reflected in the diverse range of complex and challenging issues addressed by consular services. In protecting Australians overseas, the department has continued to liaise with other countries on consular assistance and cooperation. In addition to greater demands being placed on consular services, DFAT has been dealing with a record level of demand for passports. Furthermore, DFAT

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12 Mr Prakash Mirchandani, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 13.

13 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 21.

expects demand for both consular services and passports to increase further.<sup>14</sup>

## Consular services

3.23 Given the increasing number of Australians travelling abroad, DFAT has experienced record levels of demand for consular and related services. DFAT told the Committee that:

It has meant our effort has been spread more thinly. Obviously, it has meant we have to sharply prioritise.<sup>15</sup>

3.24 Furthermore,

The consulate area, of course, has been under pressure; however, in the event of crisis we simply move resources around the department to ensure that we can cope with the immediacy of the crisis.<sup>16</sup>

## Travellers emergency loans

3.25 In 2009–10 the department granted emergency loans to 286 Australian travellers to the total value of \$320 456 compared with the loans issued in the previous year to 334 Australian travellers to the value of \$415 767.<sup>17</sup>

3.26 In 2009–10 the department recovered \$196 447 from Australians who had been issued loans, compared with \$181 789 in 2008–09.

3.27 DFAT told the committee that the recovery of funds is a long-term process. Loans are only deemed unrecoverable when the individual in question is no longer contactable, deceased or bankrupt.<sup>18</sup>

3.28 In seeking to recover funds, DFAT stated:

In broad terms, as a statement of departmental philosophy, we are prepared to be as tough as what the elected representatives determine us to be.<sup>19</sup>

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14 *DFAT Annual Report 2009–10*, pp. 8–10.

15 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 3.

16 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 3.

17 *DFAT Annual Report 2009–10*, p. 170.

18 Ms Ann Thorpe, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 19.

19 Mr Dennis Richardson *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 19.

## Passports

- 3.29 The Australian passport is one of the most widely held documents in the Australian community and is an essential element of the Government's National Identity Security Strategy. In 2009-10 the number of passports reported lost rose to 36 099. This included 115 passports reported missing in the mail.<sup>20</sup>
- 3.30 In response DFAT had worked closely with the Commonwealth Ombudsman as part of an inquiry into the operations of Australia Post and the handling of passports by holders and other parties. Two recommendations from the inquiry were implemented in order to secure the handling of passports within the post.<sup>21</sup>
- 3.31 The CLA told the Committee that the inquiry into lost passports in the postal service reflected a mismanagement of resources. It argued that there should instead have been greater attention on the 36 099 passports that were reported lost in 2009-10.<sup>22</sup>
- 3.32 DFAT told the committee that the number of lost Australian passports is relatively low in comparison to the number of passports issued. The department acknowledged that the greatest contribution of passport management has been the introduction of the new *Passports Act 2005* that includes penalties for those who lose their passports.<sup>23</sup>
- 3.33 Should an individual lose their passport within a five-year period, the additional fees amount to;
- \$100 for the first occurrence;
  - \$226 for the second occurrence;
  - \$454 for the third occurrence and thereafter.<sup>24</sup>
- 3.34 In addition, an applicant can be refused or be granted a limited validity passport and is automatically referred to DFAT's Fraud and Investigations Unit.<sup>25</sup>
- 3.35 The department has begun to implement the Passport Redevelopment Program. The program aims to better meet the demand from the public

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20 DFAT Annual Report 2009-10, p. 165.

21 DFAT Annual Report 2009-10, p. 165.

22 Mr Bill Rowlings, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 52.

23 Ms Penny Williams *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 15.

24 Ms Penny Williams *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 15.

25 Ms Penny Williams *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 16.

and give increased functionality, particularly in fraud. It is estimated that the program will be fully completed in 6 years time.<sup>26</sup>

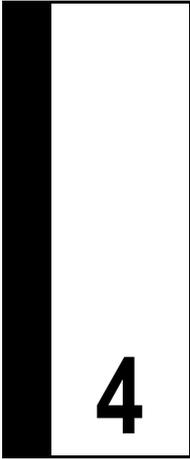
### **Committee comment**

- 3.36 The Committee is satisfied with DFAT's responses to the issues arising from its passports program. Its consular services have proved valuable in international emergencies but require a far more intensive examination not possible given the scope and time constraints of this report.
- 3.37 The Committee notes the increasing pressure the growing number of Australians travelling overseas places on DFAT's consular services and responsibilities, and that the budgetary challenge presented requires constant vigilance. This issue should be addressed in the further inquiry regarding the adequacy of DFAT's activities overseas.

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26 Ms Penny Williams *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 16.





## **Outcome 3**

4.1 DFAT describes Outcome 3 as focusing on:

A secure Australian Government presence overseas through the provision of security services and information and communications technology infrastructure and the management of the Commonwealth's overseas owned estates.<sup>1</sup>

4.2 This outcome is concerned with effective security procedures in protecting Australian Government personnel and consular posts overseas. In doing so, DFAT aims to manage overseas networks in an efficient and effective manner, including its owned overseas estates.

4.3 Issues raised in relation to Outcome 3 and its Program included:

- the potential role of e-diplomacy in DFAT's enhancement of security measures; and
- the management of the Overseas Owned Estate.

### **E-diplomacy and communications security**

4.4 As mentioned in Chapter 2, e-diplomacy is concerned with the use of internal and external communication by the Department in improving the efficiency and facilitation of information. It is the use of web and information and communication technologies (ICT) to help carry out diplomatic objectives.

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<sup>1</sup> DFAT Annual Report 2009–10, p. 172.

- 4.5 In June 2010, DFAT completed the installation of a new internet gateway. The aim is to further enhance security and provide greater ease of access for the department's remote working capability.<sup>2</sup>
- 4.6 In addition, the department completed the three-year ICT Asset-Refresh program. Through this program the department enhanced its communications to missions, and ensured the continuity of reliable communications in high-risk environment.<sup>3</sup>
- 4.7 However the level of risk involved in the utilisation of e-diplomacy may compromise the security of the department. Mr Hanson noted that there is a level of necessary modest risk involved in the effective utilisation of e-diplomacy.<sup>4</sup>
- 4.8 Mr Mirchandani told the Committee about governments which have attempted to impose controls and censorship on new media. In particular:
- The US has attempted to gain legal control over Twitter accounts to find out who leaked what to whom. More recently in the UK we have seen attempts to sue Twitter for revealing names in what has been called the 'super junction' case.<sup>5</sup>
- 4.9 DFAT told the Committee that the department has cautiously engaged with e-diplomacy and will continue to be tentative in its approach. It will continue its limited engagement with e-diplomacy in relation to security.<sup>6</sup>
- 4.10 DFAT added that the information security of the department had been systematically reviewed. Consequently, DFAT was confident that the leaking of documents as experienced within the US is unlikely.<sup>7</sup>

## Overseas property

- 4.11 Australian Government-owned property overseas accounts for 400 properties in 60 locations, with a value totalling \$1.7 billion. It is managed by the Overseas Property Office (OPO). DFAT is the largest tenant, accounting for 65% of all rent collected.

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2 DFAT Annual Report 2009-10, p. 176.

3 DFAT Annual Report 2009-10, p. 176.

4 Mr Fergus Hanson, *Exhibit No. 1*, p. 14.

5 Mr Prakash Mirchandani, *Transcript*, 23 May 2011, p. 18.

6 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript*, 27 May 2011, p. 21.

7 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript*, 23 May 2011, p. 22.

- 4.12 The overseas property special account is an operation funded by the income generated from the rents payed to the OPO. It is a self-funding service that distributes the surplus attained from the rent to properties in need of refurbishment.<sup>8</sup>
- 4.13 This account has been used for the midlife upgrades of properties in Wellington, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. DFAT told the Committee that Paris and Washington will soon undergo their midlife upgrades.<sup>9</sup>
- 4.14 It was noted during the review that the current Australian embassy in Brussels was not of a reputable standard.
- 4.15 DFAT told the Committee that the current lease for the embassy in Brussels was coming to an end. As such, it was currently identifying and negotiating a new building to serve as the new Australian embassy in that city.<sup>10</sup>

## Committee comment

- 4.16 The Committee notes DFAT's satisfaction with how it responds to these issues but cautions that with continuous reporting of cyber warfare issues involving all Industrialised countries including Australia,<sup>11</sup> DFAT needs to be alert to the security of its e-network.

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8 Ms Ann Thorpe, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 22.

9 Mr Stephan Candotti, *Transcript, 27 May 2011*, p. 23.

10 Mr Stephan Candotti, *Transcript, 27 May 2011*, p. 21.

11 <<http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/national/australia-cyber-security-weak-report/story-e6freuzr-12255999922298>> Accessed June 2011.



## Other issues

- 5.1 In addition to the examination of Outcomes 1, 2 and 3, the Committee also inquired into a range of other issues arising from the *DFAT Annual Report 2009–10*. These included:
- gender equality; and
  - funding and the implications on staffing.

### Gender equality

- 5.2 The *DFAT Annual Report 2009–10* notes that at June 2010 there were 2064 female employees and 1907 male employees within DFAT.<sup>1</sup>
- 5.3 However, the Australian National Committee for UN women (UN Women Australia) was concerned by the disproportionate representation of women at the Senior Executive Service (SES) level. The *DFAT Annual Report 2009–10* advises that 58 of the 220 SES positions were held by women.<sup>2</sup>
- 5.4 Additionally, UN Women Australia noted DFAT does not have a system of accountability, or a merit based process behind women’s participation in senior positions.<sup>3</sup>
- 5.5 In response, DFAT told the Committee that the percentage of women in the SES had increased dramatically in the last 25 years from one percent to 26 percent.<sup>4</sup>

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1 *DFAT Annual Report 2009–10*, p. 214.

2 *DFAT Annual Report 2009–10*, p. 214.

3 The Australian National Committee for Women, *Submission No 5*, p. 61.

- 5.6 DFAT acknowledged that it did not have programs specifically designed to increase the numbers of females employed within the department. Nevertheless, the department continues to maintain gender equality within the workplace. DFAT drew attention to a proportional increase of females entering DFAT at the graduate level which reflects the community-wide increase of tertiary educated women and not deliberate gender policy.<sup>5</sup>
- 5.7 DFAT told the Committee that it employed on the basis of merit. It has an obligation to:
- ... provide an environment which is conducive and free to everyone ... Where different parts of the organisation do not feel disadvantaged by virtue of their gender.<sup>6</sup>
- 5.8 In maintaining a gender equality environment, DFAT said that it will continue to address family issues that have an impact on women through the implementation of relevant policy. This includes the provision of day-care arrangements and leave without pay for family related reasons.<sup>7</sup>

## Funding

- 5.9 Dr Monk noted in his submission that DFAT's operating budget has seriously suffered. DFAT's resourcing has shrunk over the past decade from 0.43 to 0.25 of federal government spending.<sup>8</sup>
- 5.10 Ms Oliver made a similar observation and notes DFAT has:
- suffered at least a decade of eroding resources, becoming overstretched and increasingly ill-equipped to deal with foreign policy agenda.<sup>9</sup>
- 5.11 In addition, Ms Oliver indicated that the overemphasis on security by the Australian Government is contributing to a disproportionate allocation of funding. She informed the Committee that \$26 billion in funding was

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4 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 4.

5 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 4.

6 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 4.

7 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 4.

8 Dr Paul Monk, *Submission No. 6*, p. 64.

9 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Exhibit No. 2*, p. 1.

allocated to the Department of Defence while only \$2 billion was provided for DFAT.<sup>10</sup>

- 5.12 DFAT acknowledged that it has not done well in budgetary allocations over the past 15 years. However, since 2007 there has been a net increase of \$88 million from the budget which has enabled DFAT to slowly recover from the trough experienced in 2003.<sup>11</sup>
- 5.13 DFAT's current budget is not as constrained as those of other sectors of the public service and reflects the framework of a tight fiscal environment. DFAT told the Committee that the challenge over the course of next year will be absorbing the cost of any enterprise agreement and the efficiency dividend.<sup>12</sup>
- 5.14 DFAT added that it has laid down a broad framework in adapting to the budgetary environment. It includes:
- maintaining the global network;
  - not reducing any training or staff development dollars; and
  - maintaining the graduate intake program.<sup>13</sup>
- 5.15 It was noted during the hearing that the budget for language training had been stagnant at an amount of \$2 million per annum.<sup>14</sup> DFAT informed the Committee that language training had in fact increased from \$3.8 million in 2009–10 to \$4.7 million in 2010–11.<sup>15</sup>

## Staffing

- 5.16 As mentioned in Chapter 2, DFAT's staffing has not reflected the general increases within the wider public service. The total number of personnel has decreased by five per cent despite the general expansion of the public service as a whole by 15 per cent.<sup>16</sup>

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10 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 66.

11 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 2.

12 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 2.

13 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 6.

14 Dr Paul Monk, *Submission No. 6*, p. 65.

15 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 11.

16 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 2.

- 5.17 Between 1996 and 2003, DFAT lost approximately 400 Australian-based staff. While there has been a relative increase of 200 Australian-based staff in 2003, DFAT is still behind the staffing levels of 1996.<sup>17</sup>
- 5.18 In light of these figures, DFAT's level of staffing remained stagnant at 3971 personnel in 2009–10.<sup>18</sup>
- 5.19 Ms Oliver noted that DFAT Australian-based staff posted overseas has plummeted to 25 per cent in 2009 while locally employed staff have hovered around 40 per cent of total DFAT staff for more than a decade.<sup>19</sup>
- 5.20 Dr Monk told the Committee that the replacement of Australian based officers with locally engaged staff is not a comparable substitution.<sup>20</sup>
- 5.21 In addition to his comments made to the Committee, Dr Monk noted in his submission that the number of Australian-based staff fluent in any Asian language remains comparatively low.<sup>21</sup>
- 5.22 DFAT responded by saying that:
- We currently have 18 officers who have a minimum of S3R3 in Indonesian, 44 with a minimum of S3R3 in Japanese and 75 with a minimum of S3R3 in Chinese. But we have some officers whose proficiency has lapsed.<sup>22</sup>
- 5.23 Dr Monk mentioned that 18 of 19 government departments have developed their own international division. This coincides with greater budget allocations to departments such as the Prime Minister and Cabinet who are increasing their oversight of foreign policy.<sup>23</sup>
- 5.24 In response to these developments, DFAT did not express concern, but noted:
- ... there are now departments with an international component to what they do, but that simply reflects globalisation, connectedness and the fact that there are very few areas of government that can now afford to ignore the international dimensions.<sup>24</sup>
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17 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 2.

18 *DFAT Annual Report 2009–10*, p. 214.

19 Ms Alexandra Oliver, *Exhibit No. 2*, p. 2.

20 Dr Paul Monk, *Transcript 23 May 2011*, p. 31.

21 Dr Paul Monk, *Submission No. 6*, p. 65.

22 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 11.

23 Dr Paul Monk, *Submission No. 6*, p. 65.

24 Mr Dennis Richardson, *Transcript 27 May 2011*, p. 12

## **Committee comment**

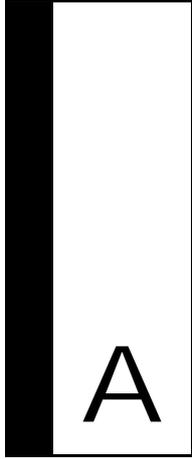
- 5.25 The Committee accepts DFAT's comments regarding gender equity issues. The Committee also welcomes the recent increase in funding for DFAT, but believes that increases in funding should be maintained if Australia is to be adequately represented overseas.

Mr Michael Danby MP

Chair

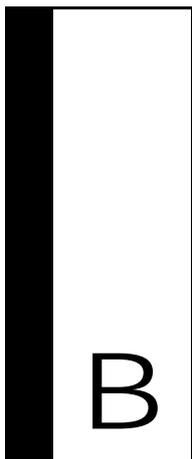
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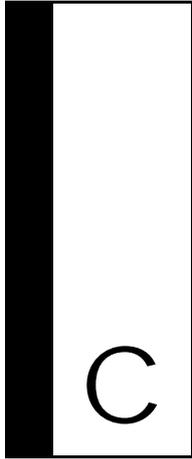
## Appendix A—List of Submissions

- 1 Vietnamese Community in Australia
- 2 Human Rights Law Centre
- 3 Media Gurus
- 4 Australian Bahá'í Community
- 5 Australian National Committee for UN Women
- 6 Dr Paul Monk – Austhink Consulting P/L
- 7 YWCA Australia
- 8 Civil Liberties Australia
- 9 Embassy of Ukraine, Australia
- 10 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



## Appendix B—List of Exhibits

- 1 Mr Fergus Hanson—*A Digital DFAT – Joining the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Lowy Institute Policy Brief, November 2010.
- 2 Australian Bahá’i Community—*Human Rights and Australian Foreign Policy: Australia’s Role as a Principled Advocate of Human Rights for All*.
- 3 Mr Peter Timmins—*A DFAT FOI case study—in excessive caution*.



## Appendix C—List of Hearings and Witnesses

Canberra, 23 May 2011

**Civil Liberties Australia**

Dr Christine Klugman, President

Mr Bill Rowlings, Chief Executive Officer

**Lowy Institute for International Policy**

Mr Fergus Hanson, Research Fellow and Director of Lowy Polling

Ms Alexandra Oliver, Research Fellow

**Media Gurus**

Mr Prakash Mirchandani, Managing Director

**Private Capacity**

Dr Paul Monk

Canberra, 27 May 2011

**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

Mr Stephen Candotti, Acting Executive Director, Overseas Property Office and Services

Mr Tuan Dao, Chief Information Officer, Information Management and Technology Division

Mr Simon Merrifield, Assistant Secretary, Parliamentary and Media Branch

Mr Chris Moriatis, First Assistant Secretary, Corporate Management Division

Mr Dennis Richardson, Secretary

Mr Patrick Suckling, First Assistant Secretary, Consular, Public Diplomacy and  
Parliamentary Affairs Division

Ms Ann Thorpe, Chief Finance Officer

Ms Penny Williams, Executive Director, Australian Passport Office