

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.¹ The Speaker’s schedule lists annual reports from agencies within the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio as being available for review by the Committee.²
- 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.

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.³
 - Outcome 2 details DFAT efforts in 'the protection and welfare of Australians abroad' through the provision of travel advice, passports, and consular services.⁴
 - 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.⁵

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.

3 DFAT Annual Report 2009–10, p. 15.

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- 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.