

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 22 FEBRUARY 2011

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(149) Program 3.1: Border Management

Senator Cash asked:

What biometric tools have been trialled or are scheduled to be trialled for potential use at Australian airports and seaports?

Answer:

During 2005 - 2006, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) sponsored a project trialling the use of biometrics in selected DIAC activities. One of the areas chosen for the trial was Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport. DIAC trialled a solution to acquire fingerprints, facial images and iris scans. This project was part of a wider Federal Government identity management initiative involving DIAC, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (Customs and Border Protection). A number of recommendations were derived as a result of the trials which helped to set directions for DIAC's use of biometric tools corporately.

The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service have rolled out the Smartgate system, which uses facial image verification to automate Australian border crossings for Australian and New Zealand citizens.

In December 2010, DIAC introduced the 'Biometrics for Offshore Visa Processing Program', a phased implementation of biometric collection at selected overseas posts, as part of visa processing offshore. A project to begin verifying and using biometrics in secondary line processing at the border has been initiated to complement the visa offshore collection strategy. Solutions will be developed and implemented over the next three years, with rollout expected to begin in late 2011.

DIAC is also working with Customs and Border Protection to model the impact of biometric collection at the border.