

Main findings and recommendations

Australia's public diplomacy

The committee found that Australia's public diplomacy is spread across a large canvas with many contributors. A significant number of government departments and agencies are engaged in work overseas that either directly or indirectly conveys to the world a positive image of Australia.

It commends the work of Australia's government departments and agencies, the cultural and educational institutions and the many private organisations that are actively engaged in promoting Australia's reputation overseas. Many of these organisations are working quietly behind the scenes and, through word and deed, are helping to secure a presence for Australia on the international stage. They are helping to build a reputation that will hold the country in good stead.

In the May 2007 Budget, the Australian Government provided \$20.4 million over four years to enhance Australia's cultural diplomacy and improve market access for Australia's cultural exports. The committee welcomes the increased funding allocated to cultural diplomacy. Undoubtedly it will allow Australia's cultural institutions to make an even larger contribution to Australia's image abroad.

The committee notes, however, that Australia is in intense competition with other countries also seeking to be heard on matters of importance to them. To ensure that Australia's public diplomacy efforts are not overshadowed in the highly contested international space, Australia must ensure that it takes advantage of opportunities to capitalise on the positive outcomes from its many public diplomacy activities. The committee identified some areas where it believes Australia could improve its public diplomacy achievements. For example, one pertinent observation made during the inquiry was that 'the whole [of Australia's public diplomacy] is not as great as the sum of the parts'.¹ The committee was particularly concerned about:

- the low level of interest in, or awareness of, Australia's public diplomacy by many Australians;
- the lack of methodical and long-term research into attitudes toward Australia by countries that are of significance to Australia;
- the effectiveness of Australia's whole-of-government approach to public diplomacy in producing a cooperative, coordinated and united effort by the many agencies and organisations that contribute to, or have the potential to contribute to, Australia's public diplomacy, including Australia's diaspora;
- DFAT's ability to meet the growing challenges of conducting public diplomacy in a fiercely contested environment including matters such the

1 Ms Jennifer McGregor, Asialink, *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 9.

resources devoted to public diplomacy, staff training and the role of locally engaged staff;

- the need to ensure that those responsible for managing and delivering public diplomacy programs are taking full advantage of advances in technology to reach the global audience; and
- the apparent absence of appropriate performance indicators suggesting that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade does not have mechanisms in place to monitor and assess adequately the effectiveness of its public diplomacy programs.

In light of these factors, the committee made a number of recommendations.

Recommendation 1 (paragraph 6.36)

The committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) give a higher priority to tracking opinions of Australia in countries of greatest significance to Australia as a means of obtaining better insights into the attitudes of others toward Australia. To this end, DFAT should devote appropriate resources to develop a capacity to conduct and evaluate regular assessments of attitudes towards Australia and its foreign policy.

Recommendation 2 (paragraph 6.49)

The committee recommends that the government's public diplomacy policy attach greater importance to creating an awareness of public diplomacy domestically. It recommends that the government formulate a public communication strategy and put in place explicit programs designed:

- to inform more Australians about Australia's public diplomacy; and
- to encourage and facilitate the many and varied organisations and groups involved in international activities to take a constructive role in actively supporting Australia's public diplomacy objectives.

Recommendation 3 (paragraph 7.39)

The committee recommends that the government take a more active role in working with Australian educational institutions to develop stronger and more effective alumni programs for overseas students who have studied in Australia.

Recommendation 4 (paragraph 7.52)

The committee recommends that:

- all visitors' or training programs sponsored or funded by the government have clearly identified public diplomacy objectives;
- DFAT ensure that all government sponsored or funded visitors' or training programs adopt a longer-term perspective and include measures or plans that are intended to consolidate and build on the immediate public diplomacy benefits that accrue from such activities; and

- as an accountability measure, the organisers or sponsors of a visitors' or training program report on how the program has contributed to Australia's public diplomacy.

Recommendation 5 (paragraph 7.61)

Consistent with the findings of previous parliamentary reports,² the committee recommends that the government consider introducing additional incentives for Australian students not only to study an Asian language but to combine their studies with cultural studies.

Recommendation 6 (paragraph 8.43)

The committee recommends that the government restructure the interdepartmental committee on public diplomacy (IDC) so that its functions extend beyond sharing information between departments and agencies to include coordinating and monitoring Australia's public diplomacy activities. It recommends:

- more senior representation on the IDC than is currently the case— Departments should be represented at the Deputy Secretary level;
- expanding the functions of the IDC to ensure that it has a central role in planning and overseeing a whole-of-government long-term strategic plan for Australia's public diplomacy;
- the IDC have responsibility for ensuring that the synergies among government departments and agencies are identified and exploited in pursuit of the government's foreign policy objectives;
- the IDC produce a coherent public diplomacy strategy that outlines priority objectives for public diplomacy along the lines of the UK Public Diplomacy Board;
- the government's public diplomacy strategic framework acknowledge the potential of local governments, particularly the major city councils, to engage in Australia's public diplomacy;
- the government's strategic framework take account of non-state stakeholders and adopt as one of its key operating principles in its public diplomacy strategy 'work with others, including business, NGOs and Australian expatriates';
- some cross membership on the IDC and the Australia International Cultural Council;
- the IDC produce a report on discussions and decisions taken at its meetings to be published on its website;

2 See Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, *Opportunities and challenges: Australia's relationship with China*, March 2006, pp. 274–5. Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade, Foreign Affairs Sub Committee, *Near Neighbours—Good Neighbours*, May 2004, Canberra, p. 147

- (i) establishing a sub-committee of the IDC with responsibility for ensuring that non-state organisations involved in international activities, including diaspora communities, are incorporated into an overarching public diplomacy framework;
- (j) establishing a sub-committee of the IDC that would be responsible for ensuring that Australia's public diplomacy stays at the forefront of developments in technology.

The committee does not intend the IDC to encroach on the independence of statutory bodies such as the ABC or of non-government organisations bound by their own charters. The IDC would recognise and respect their independence. Its objective would be to work in partnership with them, advising and offering guidance and assistance where appropriate to maximise their contribution to Australia's public diplomacy.

Recommendation 7 (paragraph 8.45)

The committee recommends that if, after considering the above recommendation, the government is of the view that the IDC cannot or should not be the body to take on this leadership and whole-of-government coordinating and advisory function, the government establish an appropriate separate and permanent body that would do so.

Recommendation 8 (paragraph 8.58)

The committee recommends that the Australian Government explore opportunities for greater and more effective collaboration and coordination with Australian capital city councils in promoting Australia's public diplomacy.

Recommendation 9 (paragraph 9.35)

The committee recommends that the Australia International Cultural Council (AICC) take note of the evidence relating to the coordination and planning of international cultural activities with a view to addressing the concerns raised in evidence. Close consultation with the relevant sections in the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, DFAT and Australia's cultural institutions would be central to AICC's consideration. The committee suggests that a report of the Council's deliberations and decisions be made available to the committee and also made public by publishing them on DFAT's and the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts' websites (also see recommendation 6).

Recommendation 10 (paragraph 9.36)

The committee recommends further that the government consider that the AICC be co-chaired by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Arts and Sports. The committee suggests that this would contribute significantly to greater coordination and cooperation in the area of cultural diplomacy.

Recommendation 11 (paragraph 9.40)

The committee recommends that the government establish a small but specifically tasked cultural and public diplomacy unit in the Department for Communications,

Information Technology and the Arts. In liaison with DFAT, the unit would provide the necessary institutional framework to ensure that Australia's cultural institutions are well placed and encouraged to take full advantage of opportunities to contribute to Australia's public diplomacy.

Recommendation 12 (paragraph 9.52)

The committee recommends that DFAT ensure that its public diplomacy framework accommodates the concerns of the educational institutions especially with regard to industry engagement by formulating with the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and the Vice Chancellors of Australian Universities appropriate strategies to facilitate a more productive engagement by these institutions in Australia's public diplomacy.

Recommendation 13 (paragraph 9.53)

The committee also recommends that DFAT initiate and sponsor a public debate on measures that could be taken to promote a more productive partnership between government departments and educational institutions in promoting Australia's public diplomacy.

Recommendation 14 (paragraph 10.42)

The committee recommends that DFAT review the findings of the Lowy report, *Diaspora*, reconsider the relevant recommendations made in March 2005 by the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee on Australian Expatriates and consider the evidence set out in this report with regard to Australian expatriates and Australia's public diplomacy. The committee urges DFAT to formulate and implement strategies that would enable DFAT to take advantage of the significant resource of the diaspora and encourage Australian expatriates to engage more constructively in Australia's public diplomacy.

Recommendation 15 (paragraphs 11.31 and 11.32)

The committee recommends that DFAT conduct an independent survey of its overseas posts to assess their capacity to conduct effective public diplomacy programs. The survey would seek views on the effectiveness of the post's efforts in promoting Australia's interests, and how they could be improved, the adequacy of resources available to conduct public diplomacy activities, the training and skills of staff with public diplomacy responsibilities, the coordination between agencies in public diplomacy activities; and the level of support provided by the Images of Australia Branch (IAB) and how it could be improved.

The survey would also seek a response from the overseas posts on observations made by the educational and cultural organisations, noted by the committee in this report, levelled at the delivery of Australia's public diplomacy programs. Such matters would include suggestions made to the committee that public diplomacy opportunities are being lost in the absence of an effective mechanism for the coordination of activities. See paragraphs 7.24–7.34 (alumni associations); 9.22–9.30 (cultural organisations); 9.41–9.44 (educational institutions); 10.23–10.39 (Australia's diaspora).

Recommendation 16 (paragraph 12.15)

The committee recommends that DFAT explore the application of innovative technologies to enhance the delivery of its public diplomacy programs.

Recommendation 17 (paragraph 13.57)

The committee recommends that, as a matter of priority, DFAT put in place specific performance indicators that would allow it to both monitor and assess the effectiveness of its public diplomacy programs.

Recommendation 18 (paragraphs 13.65)

The committee recommends that, two years after the tabling of this report, DFAT provide the committee with a report on developments in, and reforms to, Australia's public diplomacy programs giving particular attention to the role and functions of the IDC and the way DFAT evaluates the effectiveness of its public diplomacy activities.

Recommendation 19 (paragraph 14.27)

The committee recommends that DFAT undertake a review of the nine bilateral foundations, councils and institutes (FCIs) with a view to assessing their effectiveness in contributing to the conduct of Australia's public diplomacy. The review should consider, among other matters, whether the FCIs should receive an increase in funding.

Recommendation 20 (paragraph 14.29)

The committee recommends that each FCI produce an annual report to be tabled in Parliament.

Request to the Australian National Audit Office

The committee requests that the Australian National Audit Office consider undertaking a performance audit of DFAT's public diplomacy programs giving particular attention to the evaluation of the effectiveness of such programs.

Chapter 15 provides a fuller explanation of the Committee's findings and recommendations.