

Chapter 6

The coherence and consistency of Australia's public diplomacy message

Introduction

6.1 A country's international image and reputation are 'public goods which can create either an enabling or a disabling environment for individual transactions'.¹ This chapter considers the effectiveness of Australia's public diplomacy in conveying images that will serve Australia's foreign policy objectives by influencing the attitudes of others in a positive way. It looks at the measures taken to ensure that the relevant audiences receive and understand Australia's public diplomacy messages.

Australia's message

6.2 The Australian Government clearly recognises the connection between Australia's international reputation and its ability to influence the regional and global agenda in ways that promote Australia's interests.² It understands that its reputation can either promote or undermine its foreign policy objectives. DFAT's handbook on public diplomacy makes clear:

Public diplomacy contributes to our national security by helping to build understanding about Australia and its place in the world as a stable, sophisticated, tolerant and culturally diverse nation. It contributes to our economic prosperity by promoting Australia as a source of innovative and high quality goods and services, as an attractive place to visit and as a country which offers international students first rate educational opportunities.³

6.3 According to the government, Australia's fundamental values and beliefs are clear and its identity strong.⁴ Official statements often refer to the Australian values upon which the country's reputation rests. The 1997 White Paper on Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy provided a statement outlining these values:

The values which Australia brings to its foreign policy are the values of a liberal democracy...they include the rule of law, freedom of the press, the

1 Mark Leonard with Catherine Stead and Conrad Smewing, *Public Diplomacy*, The Foreign Policy Centre, London, 2002, p. 9 and cited at paragraph 3.7 of this report.

2 See for example, Commonwealth of Australia, *In the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper*, 1997, paragraph 25, p. 13.

3 *Submission 18*, p. 8.

4 Commonwealth of Australia, *Advancing the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper*, 2003, pp. vii and viii.

accountability of the government to an elected parliament and a commitment to a 'fair go'.⁵

6.4 The 2003 White Paper also singled out certain qualities the government believes characterise the Australian people including a commitment to racial equality and religious tolerance:

Australians value tolerance, perseverance and mateship. These values form our spirit as a nation. They are evident in our readiness to pull together in times of adversity; in our defence, for more than one hundred years, of the freedoms we value; and in our social cohesion and national unity. We value the individual worth of every man and woman in our society. This is the essence of our egalitarian society and our identity as Australia and Australians.

Australia is a liberal democracy with a proud commitment to the core values of political and economic freedom...⁶

6.5 These images of Australians are the ones the government wants conveyed to the world and seen as genuine. As noted in the previous chapter, however, not all the messages and images coming out of Australia are consistent with the government's public diplomacy objectives or are interpreted as the government intended. Stereotypical or outdated preconceptions may in some cases block out or distort the content of the message or image. Furthermore, Australians may not appreciate that other countries do not necessarily share Australia's view of itself.

6.6 The following section considers the measures taken by Australia through its public diplomacy efforts to ensure that it is conveying a coherent, credible message to the rest of the world.

Understanding others

6.7 Students of public diplomacy often remind practitioners that one of the basic elements of effective communication is to understand the audience. They highlight the importance of fully appreciating the listener's views. Joshua S. Fouts, Director, Center on Public Diplomacy, University of Southern California, argued that public diplomacy involves not only shaping the message(s) that a country wishes to present abroad but:

...also analyzing and understanding the ways that the message is interpreted by diverse societies and developing the tools of listening and conversation as well as the tools of persuasion.⁷

5 Commonwealth of Australia, *In the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper*, 1997, paragraph 22, p. 11.

6 Commonwealth of Australia, *Advancing the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper*, 2003, p. vii.

6.8 Professor Jan Melissen, who underlined the importance of listening to and understanding the audience, observed that foreign ministries tend not to be strong in this area:

The information departments of foreign ministries generally have a lot of experience in disseminating all sorts of information about their country, including brochures, glossy magazines, films, CD ROMs and DVDs. They have however accumulated much less experience in the art of actually dialoguing with non-official organisations and individuals abroad. Feedback of any significance is often simply missing.⁸

6.9 Witnesses to this inquiry placed the same emphasis on listening to, and knowing, the target audience. For example, Mr Geoff Miller, former senior Australian diplomat, pointed to the importance of Australia having an understanding of 'the well-springs of feeling and action in foreign countries which simply may not be apparent to outside observers with limited acquaintance with the country in question'.⁹

6.10 Former diplomat, Mr Trevor Wilson, underlined the importance of tailoring Australia's approach to the target audience.¹⁰ Dr Alison Broinowski, also a former diplomat, stressed the need to understand 'what it is that people in the receiving countries are looking for from Australia rather than deciding at this end what it is we are going to give them'.¹¹ In her view, Australians must be aware of, and take account of, how others are interpreting Australia's public diplomacy messages:

...it is also very important never to lose sight, which we often do, of how we look from the point of view of the observer—that is, the client, as you might say, in the various countries where we are trying to influence opinion, trying to create a positive impression of Australia and trying to influence people either to want to trade with us, or to travel to Australia, or to be accepting of a wide range of Australian activities.¹²

7 Joshua S. Fouts, Director, Center on Public Diplomacy, University of Southern California, 'Rethinking Public Diplomacy for the 21st Century: A Toolbox for Engaging the Hearts and Minds of the Open Source Generation', Prepared for presentation at the APSA Political Communication Conference on International Communication and Conflict, 31 August 2005, pp. 4–5.

8 Jan Melissen, 'Public Diplomacy Between Theory and Practice, The 2006 Madrid Conference on Public Diplomacy, p. 9 of 28, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documents/276.asp> (accessed 23 January 2007).

9 Geoff Miller, *Submission 16*, 'Current and emerging challenges to the practice of Australian diplomacy', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2002, p. 204.

10 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 7.

11 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 5.

12 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 4.

6.11 Developing this line of thought, Mr Mirchandani, who is managing director of Media Gurus an organisation that specialises in delivering public diplomacy training, provided broadcasting as a practical example of where efforts to communicate would fail if the message does not connect with the audience:

...there is now a plethora of channels available and the challenge is to say, if you have 99 channels available on your set, which one you actually turn to and why. I suggest that you would need to look at that very carefully to see what the content is of what is being transmitted. This then goes to this whole business of what we call the 'emotional intelligence'—the knowledge of what is already out there and what audiences are seeking before we just blast out into the atmosphere and broadcast whatever we feel would be relevant or not.¹³

6.12 To underline the importance of understanding the attitudes of others, Mr Jacob Townsend enunciated his view of Australia's struggle in the war of ideas with transnational terrorists. He explained:

...a major reason...we cannot operationalise a comprehensive public diplomacy component of our counter-terrorism strategy is that we have so little information about our audience. In counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation, differentiating the opponent and the audience can be quite difficult. For example, you might have someone who hates Australia but preaches nonviolence. On the other hand, you might have someone who takes up a gun against an Australian organisation or interest but has very little knowledge or attachment to any kind of opposing ideology in a concrete sense.

In any kind of war, but especially in a war of ideas, not knowing your opponent's motivation is a huge strategic blind spot. You cannot counter what they are trying to do if you do not know what they are trying to do.¹⁴

The type of information we need is why people are or are not attracted to Islamic extremism or why they dislike or like the West, Western ideology, Western societies, Australia and/or Australians, and why they become attracted to or spurn violence. It seems to me that it is particularly important to understand those people who lean away from us but who are not participating in violence—they are the sea in which the violent fish swim. Australia does not have a lot of information of this kind.¹⁵

6.13 As with Jacob Townsend, Mr Mirchandani used the public diplomacy efforts of Al-Qaeda to illustrate its success in delivering a clear, compelling message to specific audiences. He contrasted this with the difficulties the West has in countering this message:

13 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 48.

14 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 15.

15 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 15.

Al-Qaeda have said that their target is the hearts and minds of moderate Muslims. Their main message, which they are promoting everywhere, is that Islam is under attack. Every military boot that goes through a door in Baghdad and every gun that is pointed at a woman and child plays entirely into the hands of this particular message. Conversely, the coalition message is kind of, if you like, varied. It does not come together in a simple, single narrative which people can believe.¹⁶

If, for example, we are to promote the idea that Australia is a great supporter of moderate Islam, let us say in Indonesia, then we need to understand what will resonate with the target audiences so that we can say, 'We are fair dinkum in this and here is the evidence to support it.' In our training we place great emphasis not only on making motherhood statements but on what we called evidentiary support, which is proof that you are doing what you say you are doing.¹⁷

6.14 Former Ambassador to Indonesia and Chairman of the Australia Indonesia Institute, Mr Richard Woolcott, stated last year that if Australia is to succeed in its endeavours in East Asia, it must develop a much deeper public understanding of Indonesia.¹⁸

Committee view

6.15 The positive effects from the messages and images Australia conveys overseas through its public diplomacy activities will be lost if audiences are not receptive to them or interpret them negatively. To correct misconceptions, counter negative views, and generally improve Australia's reputation overseas, these messages and images need to be crafted so that they are received and interpreted by the targeted audience as intended. To do so, Australia's public diplomacy practitioners must also have a sound understanding of the culture, society and attitudes of their chosen audiences.

Mechanisms for obtaining an understanding of others

6.16 To acquire this level of understanding, numerous witnesses recognised the need for Australia to have mechanisms in place to measure public opinion in foreign countries.¹⁹ Mr Geoff Miller referred to the necessity for Australia to have informed, evaluated reporting and assessment as a regular part of its policy making.²⁰ Mr John Meert, Group Executive Director, Australian National Audit Office, also spoke of the

16 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 49.

17 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 49.

18 Richard Woolcott AC, 'Good Neighbour, Bad neighbour. What's the difference?' Uniya Seminar Series 2006, Xavier College Melbourne, 2 August 2006.

19 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 35.

20 Geoff Miller, *Submission 16*, 'Current and emerging challenges to the practice of Australian diplomacy', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2002, p. 204.

need to have indicators that will provide information on whether activities are 'having the desired effect'.²¹ He accepted that gauging the perceptions of a country is difficult but 'if you are not measuring it then you could be throwing money at the wrong approach'.²² Mr Jacob Townsend reinforced the importance of survey-based research stating that at least, 'if you are measuring them, you have a chance of seeing where the problem lies'. He noted that if attitudes are not being measured then to a significant extent public diplomacy strategy is being formulated 'in the dark'.²³

6.17 Media Gurus agreed with the view that much more work needed to be done in understanding the way our target audiences think and respond:

There appears to be no effective mechanism for getting 'emotional intelligence' on what specific audiences might already perceive about issues which Australia wishes to discuss, or positions it has taken. The only methodology that seems to recur is that of media monitoring, and even that does not take the next step of provision of media analysis.²⁴

Mr Mirchandani referred to international market research as a well-known tool to determine how people in other countries think and feel.²⁵

Market research, surveys and opinion polls

6.18 A number of Australian agencies advised the committee of the measures they take to ensure that they understand their audience and tailor their message to suit that audience. Invest Australia and Tourism Australia stand out as two of the most active agencies in this regard. Tourism Australia relies heavily on market research to guide its marketing strategies. Mr Cameron-Smith, Manager, International Operations, Tourism Australia, told the committee:

We determine our marketing message based on market research. So as part of our global target segment, from that research we can determine what they read, where they read, what sort of messages appeal to them and then adapt our creativ[ity] around that to ensure we are getting the cut-through. There is too much wastage in consumer marketing if it is not targeted, and we do not have the money to waste.²⁶

6.19 Invest Australia spent approximately \$1 million in the 2006–07 financial year in a global advertising campaign aimed at the US, Europe and Asia. It used targeted messages to build a positive and accurate image of Australia that according to Invest Australia 'is supported by factual, independent data'. It stated:

21 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 2.

22 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 3.

23 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 14.

24 *Submission 2*, p. 5.

25 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 49.

26 *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2007, p. 8.

Key messages in the advertisements match the target audiences' key drivers of investment as identified in research. The ads also address information failure and help educate the target audiences about Australia's economy, business environment and industries.²⁷

6.20 Although some international commentators on public diplomacy argue that surveys and opinion polls on their own may not produce a complete picture, they nonetheless recognise that they provide crucial intelligence.²⁸ The UK 2005 review of public diplomacy recommended that:

...tracking should be reintroduced on an annual basis, between 10-30 countries being surveyed each year, and that data should be collected over time to attempt to identify shifts in impact and influence. Results from such polling would be just one output measure for public diplomacy, and findings would contribute to a wider repository of information on inputs, outputs and impact on a country by country basis. The Review Team recommends that a central monitoring and performance management unit should collect such information.²⁹

6.21 A number of witnesses to this inquiry were of the view that surveys or opinion polls certainly provide a basis on which to tailor public diplomacy messages. Mr Townsend gave the following example:

...if Australia has a positive image in Japan and you are conducting polls you need to nail down where the people received that image. How did they get that image? That then allows you to tailor your strategy or tactics more accurately. For example, if your respondents are saying that they receive a positive image through positive press coverage then that puts more weighting on the column inches measurement of public diplomacy activities. If they are receiving it from TV shows in which Australians are represented then that gives us an incentive to think about how we insert more positive images of Australians into Japanese TV shows. It could be sport. It could be schools—if so you would collaborate with the ministry of education in Japan.³⁰

6.22 DFAT informed the committee that it conducts targeted opinion surveys in key countries and regions from 'time to time'. It provided the committee with information, as outlined below, on the surveys that it had conducted over the last decade.

27 *Submission 24*, p. 4.

28 Philip Fiske de Gouveia, Foreign Policy Centre, The 2006 Madrid Conference on Public Diplomacy, pp. 6–7 of 28, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documents/276.asp> (accessed 23 January 2007).

29 Lord Carter of Coles, *Review of Public Diplomacy*, presented to the Foreign Secretary and Chief Secretary of the Treasury, 13 December 2005, paragraph 3.9.

30 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 15.

6.23 In November 1998, DFAT presented a festival of Australian culture, sport, technology and business in Manila. An independent evaluation conducted by Trends-MBL following the promotion indicated there had been a significant fall in the percentage of writers and commentators who perceived Australia as a racist country, which had fallen from 66 to 36 per cent. The evaluation also found that 'although Filipinos continued to view Australia primarily in terms of tourism, there was a growing awareness of Australia's achievements as an advanced economy'.³¹

6.24 Despite these valuable findings, DFAT informed the committee that there had been no follow-up surveys. It noted, however, that it is about to undertake 'some joint survey work' with Australia Network.³²

6.25 The public affairs section of the Australian Embassy in Tokyo conducted surveys between 1980 and 2002 as a means of ascertaining Japanese attitudes toward Australia. The department no longer conducts these surveys because they were found to be 'not of sufficient value to justify the expense'.³³ Indeed, Dr Strahan informed the committee that it is not a cheap exercise to commission an opinion survey with 'a fairly sizeable data sample' and cited the figure of tens of thousands of dollars.³⁴

6.26 Tourism Australia and DEST have conducted opinion surveys in China in recent years. The Australia-China Council funded a survey of Chinese students at six universities in 2002–03. In early 2005, the Australian Embassy in France undertook an in-house survey to determine the quantity and nature of demand for information from embassy visitors. In the same year, the Australian Embassy in Berlin commissioned a market analysis company to conduct a one-off survey on German public views of Australia.³⁵

6.27 The evidence provided by DFAT to the committee suggests that DFAT does not undertake rigorous surveys, opinion polls or focus groups in order to understand or track attitudes toward Australia in other countries. When the occasional survey is undertaken, there is no evidence that it fits into a wider strategic plan or that there is any follow-up.

6.28 DFAT does, however, especially through overseas posts, monitor and report on attitudes toward Australia. For example, DFAT noted that there are 'perceptions among some South Africans, mostly ill-informed, of racism in Australia.' It stated that it had not conducted surveys of South African attitudes towards Australia and Australians but that it monitors closely such attitudes through the media. According to DFAT, it also maintains regular direct contact with a wide cross-section of South

31 DFAT answer to written question on notice, 1 May 2007, p. 4.

32 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 52.

33 DFAT answer to written question on notice, 1 May 2007, p. 4.

34 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 52.

35 DFAT answer to written question on notice, 1 May 2007, p. 4.

African society to determine the views held by South Africans toward Australia.³⁶ DFAT informed the committee that more generally overseas posts monitor coverage of Australia in the local press and submit monthly summaries and reports on particular emerging or contentious issues as they arise.³⁷

6.29 A recent public diplomacy report from Australia's post in Tehran provides an example of the way DFAT gleans important information about attitudes toward Australians. The post had determined that there was 'a pressing need to enhance understanding in Iran that Muslims are an integral part of the fabric of Australian society'. The post reported:

According to DIAC [Department of Immigration and Citizenship] Tehran, refugee applicants have on occasion asked DIAC staff if they would need to renounce their faith on arrival in Australia and even if they would be forced to 'spit on the Quran'.³⁸

6.30 A number of witnesses expressed concern that the steps taken by DFAT to determine overseas attitudes toward Australia were inadequate. Mr Kirk Coningham, a former DFAT officer, was of the view that DFAT's performance on research—surveys and market research—and more generally its public diplomacy communication strategies overseas would 'paint a sorry story'.³⁹ He noted that in Australia everything from 'domestic violence through to power naps in cars' is subjected to a focus group and is tested and evaluated—but not Australia's reputation abroad.⁴⁰ He questioned the reasons for the government cancelling the surveys on public opinion about Australia in Japan.⁴¹ On this matter of the surveys undertaken in Japan up to 2002, Mr Trevor Wilson, who served as Deputy Head of Mission from 1996–2000, commented:

This was one good way of assessing the impact of what Australian public diplomacy was doing, because the questions—which we influenced—were directly related to our public diplomacy targets and to our activities, so you could measure them over this long period of time and see what kinds of changes occurred and where Australia related to other countries. And we actually came off very well, particularly in something like trust, even at a time when Australia was being criticised for strikes and other sorts of disruptions to supplies of raw material to Japan.⁴²

6.31 He noted DFAT's concern about the expense involved, but expressed disappointment at the approach that posts should not carry out public opinion polls

36 DFAT answer to written question on notice, 1 May 2007, p. 24.

37 *Submission 18*, p. 22.

38 DFAT, answer to written question on notice, 1 May 2007, p. 69.

39 *Submission 1*, p. [3].

40 *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2007, p. 47.

41 *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2007, p. 47.

42 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 7.

because, in his view, they are a valuable method of 'evaluating the impact' that public diplomacy, is having.⁴³ A former counsellor in the embassy in Tokyo, Mr Christopher Stewart, endorsed these views adding the comment that:

We started that research for a very good reason: we wanted to look at attitudes and perceptions as they were developing in Japan over time, in a generational transition—and it is standard operating practice in public affairs to conduct activities based on research, not hunches.⁴⁴

6.32 Addressing the issue of the expense involved in using the tools of market research, Mr Stewart indicated that the surveys conducted in Japan were costing around \$3,000 a year 'because it was omnibus research'.⁴⁵

6.33 Confining the matter to radical Islam and terrorism in Indonesia, an ASPI study suggested that the government 'should consider the development of an 'Indonesian Attitudes Project' to provide baseline data and analysis on the Indonesian population's attitudes to terrorism, Australia, and the role of Islam in public policy'.⁴⁶ It then argued that once a survey of Indonesian opinion has been established, 'the next priority should be to develop a suitable public diplomacy strategy'.⁴⁷

Committee view

6.34 The committee appreciates the importance of research to public diplomacy. A thorough understanding based on solid and up-to-date research enables those responsible for Australia's public diplomacy to craft messages and images that are more likely to enhance Australia's reputation in target groups. It would also assist the government to identify priority areas requiring targeted public diplomacy programs and to assign appropriate funding and personnel to these relevant areas.

6.35 Based on evidence to the committee, it is clear, that DFAT is not conducting that type of research. While posts monitor the local media to obtain some insight into attitudes toward Australia and use other means such as immigration forms to assess the impressions that individuals have of Australia, they are no substitute for in-depth research. The committee accepts that research tools such as surveys are expensive but for countries of crucial importance to Australia, such as Indonesia, the committee believes that gathering information is a critical element in the successful conduct of its foreign policy. The omnibus type survey conducted in Japan could serve as a model. This conclusion and following recommendation are also relevant to findings made

43 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 8.

44 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 17.

45 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 17.

46 Fealy G. and Borgu A., *Local Jihad: Radical Islam and terrorism in Indonesia*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, September 2005, p. 9.

47 Fealy G. and Borgu A., *Local Jihad; Radical Islam and terrorism in Indonesia*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, September 2005, p. 9.

later in the report where the committee considers the evaluation of public diplomacy activities.

Recommendation 1

6.36 The committee recommends that 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.

6.37 The committee now turns to the challenges in managing and bringing coherence to the different messages being conveyed from Australia to overseas audiences.

Managing the many and diverse images coming out of Australia

6.38 Public diplomacy must also manage images coming out of the country that have the potential to undermine the government's attempts to promote a positive image. In its 2005–2006 Annual Report, DFAT highlighted that the department responded 'promptly to some inaccurate reporting' on the Cronulla riots, the Vivian Alvarez Solon deportation case, high profile cases in Bali and Singapore and the introduction of workplace reform legislation.⁴⁸ It did so 'in close cooperation with other agencies and posts'.⁴⁹ Overall, it noted that Australia had:

...a high profile year in the **international media**, with reporting for the most part factual but on occasion requiring concerted effort by our posts overseas to rectify misconceptions or to underscore key messages.⁵⁰

6.39 Stories such as the Cronulla riots and the deportation of an Australian citizen, Vivian Alvarez Solon, to the Philippines, in effect, became 'foreign policy' stories that attracted world-wide attention.⁵¹ Mr Geoff Miller said:

...it's very important for a government always to be aware that in these days of instant communications it's not possible to have a story or a version that's only for domestic consumption. Wire services pick up nearly

48 The Cronulla riots, which occurred in December 2005, were reported widely in the media and attributed to ethnic tensions. For information on the Vivian Alvarez Solon case, see Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, *The removal, search for and discovery of Ms Vivian Solon*, Interim and Final reports, September and December 2005.

49 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Annual Report 2005–06*, p. 191.

50 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Annual Report 2005–06*, p. 191.

51 For thoughts on the importance of domestic diplomacy see for example Mark Leonard and Andrew Small with Martin Rose, *British Public Diplomacy In the 'Age of Schisms'*, The Foreign Policy Centre, London, 2005, pp. 5–7 and Mark Leonard with Catherine Stead and Conrad Smewing, *Public Diplomacy*, The Foreign Policy Centre, London, 2002, p. 13.

everything, and if there's a foreign angle to something it will be sent at once to the country or countries concerned.⁵²

Thus, domestic diplomacy is an important component of public diplomacy.

Domestic diplomacy

6.40 The Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Alexander Downer MP, noted that there is no longer a distinction between the domestic message and the international message. He said:

Foreign correspondents based in Australia base much of their reporting on what's in the domestic press.

And domestic reports are picked up by papers and electronic media around the world.

Sometimes this causes problems for the image of Australia overseas.

The Redfern riots and the Cronulla riots are an example, where people overseas got the impression that law and order had broken down across Sydney, which was not the case.

There's not much the Government can do in these situations when a big story overwhelms the media coverage of Australia.

But over the medium term, in the background, we work away at our public diplomacy programs to build an accurate and positive image of contemporary Australia.⁵³

6.41 A number of submitters noted the importance of marshalling domestic support for Australia's public diplomacy policy as a means of managing or countering adverse impressions arising from events within the country. Professor Naren Chitty, Professor of International Communication at Macquarie University, noted that, 'You cannot run foreign policy effectively unless you have the support of your own people'.⁵⁴ In its submission, RMIT also highlighted the importance of ensuring that public diplomacy takes account of Australians:

Effective public diplomacy also requires strong engagement with domestic populations about its intent and conduct. Indeed, its benefits flow in both directions: a citizenry with a strong understanding of Australia's standing in the world and its engagement with regions and partners is less insular in outlook, better equipped to respond to the pressures and challenges of

52 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 2.

53 'Foreign Policy Values and the Media', The Hon Alexander Downer, MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Speech to the National Newspaper Publishers' Conference, Gold Coast, 28 August 2006, p. 5 of 10, http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2006/060828_nnp_conf.html (accessed 1 March 2007).

54 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 36.

globalisation, and more likely to successfully promote Australia's public diplomacy goals in their own professional and personal lives.⁵⁵

6.42 According to the government, it recognises the importance of broad community understanding of Australia's global environment and support for the policies it pursues to advance Australia's national interests.⁵⁶ It has stated its commitment to wide-ranging consultation within Australia to build broad community understanding of, and support for, Australia's foreign and trade policies.⁵⁷ The government maintains that it consults widely with interested groups through standing bodies and informal means.⁵⁸

6.43 In Chapter 4, however, the committee highlighted the apparent lack of awareness of public diplomacy in Australia. For example, RMIT noted that while there has been discussion in business and academic circles about the importance of 'soft power' in global relations, little public profile has been afforded to government or other agencies' activities and 'little discussion about how Australians might contribute to these goals'.⁵⁹ In its opinion, the 'opportunities for strengthening and broadening understanding of public diplomacy and for engaging individuals and organisations in its pursuit, are not being fully exploited'.⁶⁰ RMIT suggested that:

Government should ensure that the goals of public diplomacy, and the avenues whereby they are pursued, are better understood generally within Australia. A public communication strategy should be considered, targeting selected publics in Australia and overseas.⁶¹

6.44 It should be noted that a 2005 analytical report prepared for the White Paper on Australia's aid program found that engagement with the Australian public could be improved. It suggested that 'extended community engagement needs to be supported by a re-focused and proactive public affairs strategy with sufficient flexibility and resources to support the evolving aid framework, engage with new players and maintain existing public engagement'. It proposed that the Australian Government 'put

55 *Submission 9*, p. 1.

56 Commonwealth of Australia, *Advancing the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper*, 2003, p. 127.

57 Commonwealth of Australia, *Advancing the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper*, 2003, p. xx.

58 Commonwealth of Australia, *Advancing the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper*, 2003, p. 127. The White Paper mentioned the Foreign Affairs Council, the Trade Minister's World Trade Organization Advisory Group, DFAT's formal consultations twice a year with non-government organisations interested in human rights and the National Consultative Committee on Peace and Disarmament.

59 *Submission 9*, p. [3].

60 *Submission 9*, p. [3].

61 *Submission 9*, p. [3].

in place a three-year program of Town Hall meetings to inform the Australian public about developments in the aid program and invite feedback and ideas'.⁶²

6.45 The report also found that 'to generate greater media coverage of the longer term and substantive policy issues surrounding the aid program, there needs to be a targeted media communications strategy aimed at engaging significant and credible media players in dialogue about development'.⁶³ These findings could also apply more broadly to Australia's public diplomacy which is a closely related activity .

6.46 The White Paper on Australian overseas aid, briefly referred to AusAID 'not maximising the opportunities to capture its achievements and share information with the Australian public, stakeholders and development partners'. It noted a number of measures that would be taken including 'increase transparency and information sharing to a wider audience'.⁶⁴ Again, the committee notes that these observations have direct relevance to Australia's public diplomacy.

6.47 A number of overseas commentators have remarked on measures taken by some governments to connect with the domestic audience in order to mobilise support for the country's foreign policy. They include community liaison committees, town meetings, visits to regional areas and focus groups. In some cases, Ambassadors on home consultation visits engage with the domestic audience through speeches to business associations and service clubs.⁶⁵

Committee view

6.48 As with many countries throughout the world, there is no longer a distinction in Australia between a domestic message and one intended for an overseas audience. The Australian Government does need to consider its domestic diplomacy to ensure that the Australian community is fully informed about the objectives of Australia's public diplomacy and how they might take a constructive role in helping to convey overseas a positive image of Australia. The committee believes that the government

62 Gaye Hart and Ellen Shipley, *Engaging the Australian Community, Analytical Report for the White Paper on Australia's Aid Program*, October 2005, paragraphs 103–104, p. 18. It should be noted that the views expressed in this report were those of the authors and did not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government.

63 Gaye Hart and Ellen Shipley, *Engaging the Australian Community, Analytical Report for the White Paper on Australia's Aid Program*, October 2005, paragraph 110, p. 19. It should be noted that the views expressed in this report were those of the authors and did not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government.

64 Australian Government, AusAID, *Australian Aid: Promoting Growth and Stability, A White Paper on the Australian Government's Overseas Aid Program*, April 2006, p. 73.

65 See for example, Kishan S Rana, *Foreign Ministries: Change and Reform*, Working paper, November 2005, pp. 3 and 13. See also suggestions by the UK Foreign Policy Centre as cited in Philip Fiske de Gouveia, Foreign Policy Centre, The 2006 Madrid Conference on Public Diplomacy, p. 6 of 28, <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/documents/276.asp> (accessed 23 January 2007).

should be active in exploring all the available opportunities to harness domestic support for its public diplomacy programs. The committee notes that the government has stated that it consults widely with interested groups through standing bodies and informal means. Even so, the experiences of this committee together with the evidence presented to it suggest that Australians are not well informed about Australia's public diplomacy programs.

Recommendation 2

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.**

Conclusion

6.50 Public diplomacy messages are intended to convey to other countries a positive image of Australia. In some cases efforts are needed to fill information gaps, or correct misconceptions. To do so effectively, public diplomacy practitioners must have a very clear understanding of those they seek to inform and ultimately influence. This understanding should be based in solid research and continuous assessment such as country surveys on attitudes toward Australia. A strategic plan based on this level of understanding is needed to ensure that the message and images Australia conveys to chosen audiences will help Australia achieve its foreign policy objectives.

6.51 Furthermore, to be fully effective in conveying a convincing, coherent and credible message, Australia's public diplomacy needs the support of Australians. Strengthening domestic support for Australia's public diplomacy should be an important part of Australia's overall public diplomacy strategy. The following chapter considers people-to-people links as another important aspect of public diplomacy.

