

# Chapter 8

## The role and coordination of public diplomacy activities by government departments and agencies

### Introduction

8.1 Public diplomacy encompasses a wide range of activities and involves people from disparate agencies. The numerous organisations involved in public diplomacy and the diversity of their interests means that public diplomacy programs may not always integrate or mesh smoothly. The 2005 UK review of public diplomacy noted that:

The breadth of the Strategy makes it difficult to provide a clear steer on where there is greatest need for resources or where activity will have the greatest impact. This in turn means that public diplomacy activity carried out by the various partners is not always aligned. While it is important for individual organisations to be able to set and meet their own objectives, a clearer central steer would increase the collective impact of activity.<sup>1</sup>

8.2 It stated further:

It is clearly difficult to set out a strategy that is sufficiently high-level to encompass the activities of all the public diplomacy partners, and yet focused enough to direct activity and resources in a meaningful way. This must be addressed if public diplomacy activity is to be effectively directed and co-ordinated.<sup>2</sup>

8.3 This chapter considers the main government departments and agencies involved in Australia's public diplomacy and how their activities come together as a joint effort to promote Australia's foreign policy objectives.

### Government departments and public diplomacy

8.4 Mr Geoff Miller pointed out that many government departments have their own 'international sections, capable officials, and established links to counterpart agencies overseas'. He spoke of the border between what is a concern of domestic policy and what is a concern of foreign policy. In his view the separation has 'practically disappeared':

Almost every government activity now has an international dimension, an international liaison aspect and a set of international meetings of its own'.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Lord Carter of Coles, *Review of Public Diplomacy*, presented to the Foreign Secretary and Chief Secretary of the Treasury, 13 December 2005, paragraph 4.1.

2 Lord Carter of Coles, *Review of Public Diplomacy*, presented to the Foreign Secretary and Chief Secretary of the Treasury, 13 December 2005, paragraph 4.3.

3 *Submission 16*, p. 200.

8.5 He was not concerned so much about who should be engaged internationally on government business but how effectively they carried out their function and furthermore their contribution to advancing a whole-of-government policy. In emphasising the importance of having an effective whole-of-government policy coordination, he wrote:

...a stance in one specialised, perhaps quite technical, area can easily, if run with unchecked, come to assume a weighting in a relationship that tilts it in an unwanted direction, even though this may not be intended by the government as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

8.6 He explained further:

It would be considered precious for DFAT to insist that all of every Department's overseas responsibilities be carried out through it. But coordination is essential if the country is to present a consistent and effective face to its international interlocutors. Unfortunately coordination is also very demanding on scarce time and resources, not least because the would-be coordinator has to have an adequate grasp of what are often complex and can be quite technical issues.<sup>5</sup>

### **Agencies that contribute significantly to Australia's public diplomacy**

8.7 DFAT recognises that many of its programs depend on the cooperation of other government departments and state and territory governments. In some cases, it enlists the assistance of other agencies to help manage or deliver a program. In other circumstances, the department may lend its support to other departments or agencies whose programs contribute to Australia's public diplomacy. Two large autonomous agencies within DFAT contribute to Australia's public diplomacy. Although not directly charged with the task of enhancing Australia's reputation abroad in order to advance the national interest, AusAID and Austrade have a significant role in public diplomacy.

8.8 Government departments and agencies particularly Department of Education Science and Training (DEST), Department of Defence, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), Department of Immigration and Citizenship, and Tourism Australia also actively contribute to Australia's public diplomacy. For example, DEST plays an important role in Australia's public diplomacy efforts by focusing on developing bilateral, multilateral and regional relationships to promote Australia's education and training services. DEST's international staff engage in work to improve Australia's profile with relevant government and private organisations and prospective international students and their families.

8.9 In 2002, the government established 'Study in Australia' as an umbrella brand for the promotion of Australian education internationally. Under this brand, Australia

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4 *Submission 16*, p. 200.

5 *Submission 16*, p. 200.

is projected as the country of choice for potential students 'to develop both themselves and their careers through Australia's special balance of lifestyle in conjunction with high academic standards'.<sup>6</sup> To this end, the department employs a whole-of-government approach and is a member of DFAT's inter-departmental committee meeting on public diplomacy.

8.10 Defence also engages in activities and programs that inform and influence opinion in other countries. Its messages, however, are different from DEST's. Indeed the messages conveyed by Defence activities are complex in themselves. Mr Michael Pezzullo, Deputy Secretary, Strategy, Department of Defence, argued that the use of military power and the different gradations employed in using military power is of itself 'an exercise in public perception management'. He elaborated on this statement:

You can have a military that is postured and not actually employed, but people know that it exists and then that shapes their perceptions of how they should act...You can deploy a military and not actually engage in combat operations, but the very act of your deployment is a public signal. ...You can deploy it for humanitarian, non-combat purposes or, at the other end of the scale, you can engage in war-fighting with other states. Then, of course, there is the actual employment of the military quite consciously from the get-go for war-fighting purposes. Each of those requires public diplomacy techniques and tools, because they themselves are statements about what your nation is willing not only to undertake but also, in undertaking those actions, the signal you are willing to give to others that there are limits to bad behaviour.<sup>7</sup>

8.11 The Pacific Patrol Boat Program conveys a different image of Defence. By enabling participating countries to monitor and manage the maritime resources in their exclusive economic zones, the program:

...creates a perception in people's minds that we are helpful, technically competent, engaged and willing to engage with other folk to build capacity.<sup>8</sup>

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6 *Submission 28*, p. 3.

7 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 80.

8 *Submission 19*, p. 5 and *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 84.



Department of Defence

*The Pacific Patrol Boat Program*

The Pacific Patrol Boat Program provides participating countries with a maritime surveillance capability that enables them to monitor and manage their maritime resources in their exclusive economic zones. The patrol boats are also used by these countries for national activities such as quarantine enforcement, search and rescue operations and disaster relief. (*Submission 19*, p. 5)

8.12 The messages conveyed by DEST and Defence differ again from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). Its main public diplomacy objective is to inform and influence Australia's trade partners about the benefits of Australian agriculture, fisheries, forestry and food. It also sets out to ensure that travellers and people sending goods to Australia are aware of, and comply with, Australia's strict quarantine rules.<sup>9</sup>

8.13 The Australian Sports Commission (ASC), which is interested in sports development, provides yet another very different perspective on the type of government programs that tie in closely with Australia's public diplomacy. The ASC is involved with AusAID in delivering 'sport for development' programs under an umbrella agreement that includes the Australian Sports Outreach Program (ASOP).<sup>10</sup>

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9 *Submission 26*, p. 1.

10 *Submission 21*, p. 1.

The primary objective of the program is to increase capacity in 'targeted countries to deliver sports based programs that contribute to social development'. The main focus of the programs is on developing leadership, promoting social cohesion and better health as well as contributing to Australia's public diplomacy objectives. According to Mr Greg Nance, ASC, sport for development has a 'great public diplomacy effect'. He provided the following example:

The intangible nature of sport for development...is a real one. You do not have people drinking more water or, say, direct health outcomes in some respects. They are generally longer term. They are generally a feeling of social wellbeing. We have found that increasingly in the Pacific with the preventive nature that sport brings to, say, health outcomes—diabetes being a classic example. We have been brought very close to the World Health Organisation in the Pacific and we are now actively collaborating with them. The Pacific partners, the countries involved, have seen the value of the sport being involved in the preventative side of diabetes, which has reached epidemic proportions in many countries.<sup>11</sup>



Australian Sports Commission

*Sport for development*

The Australian Sports commission together with AusAID deliver several 'sport for development' programs mainly in the Pacific region but also in Southern Africa and the Caribbean. The programs use sport as a tool to create better communities, in very difficult economic circumstances, 'through the people or the infrastructure or just the playing of sport'. (*Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007 p. 75)

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11 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 79.



Australian Sports Commission

*Sports for Development*

Australia's reputation for encouraging participation in sport 'gives Australia a unique credibility to provide public diplomacy programs which have real penetration and meaning to countries'. (Submission 21, p. 3)

8.14 To his mind, sport for development is a 'good story'. He informed the committee that following a Pacific Islands Forum education ministers' meeting at which he gave a presentation on the programs, 'every one of the countries represented at the forum approached us to bring the programs into their country.'<sup>12</sup>

8.15 There can be no doubt about the valuable contribution that DEST, Defence, DAFF, the Sports Commission and many other departments and agencies make to Australia's public diplomacy. Each, however, has a special area of interest and conveys an image of Australia relevant to that interest. For Australia's public diplomacy efforts to be effective, the activities undertaken by the various agencies should be coordinated and, although different, complement each other in building a coherent and comprehensive picture of Australia and its people.

8.16 As the department with primary responsibility for implementing Australia's public diplomacy programs, DFAT has a critical role in ensuring that the activities of

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12 *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2007, p. 83.

other departments and agencies support, where possible, Australia's foreign and trade policy objectives.

## **Coordinating the public diplomacy activities of government departments and agencies**

8.17 DFAT recognises that effective public diplomacy requires 'whole-of-government cooperation'. It stated:

DFAT utilises formal and informal, and ongoing and ad hoc mechanisms to coordinate with other federal and state government agencies to ensure that Australia delivers consistent and well conceived PD messages and to achieve mutually reinforcing benefits overseas.<sup>13</sup>

8.18 The following section considers how effectively the public diplomacy activities of government departments come together as whole. It examines the inter-departmental committee on public diplomacy as one of the primary means for aligning the activities of government departments and agencies with the objectives of Australia's public diplomacy.

### ***Inter-departmental committee meetings on public diplomacy***

8.19 In 2002, Images of Australia Branch (IAB) established an inter-departmental committee (IDC) meeting of public diplomacy teams across government.<sup>14</sup> DFAT coordinates this meeting which brings together 21 key federal agencies 'to share information and identify synergies across the spectrum of agency programs'.<sup>15</sup> The aim of the meeting is to ensure that government departments and agencies project an accurate image of Australia internationally and that their activities are consistent with the whole-of-government approach to key advocacy issues.<sup>16</sup> It meets on average twice a year but gathers on occasion to discuss specific matters.

8.20 Departments on the committee may also conduct coordinating activities with other organisations. DEST informed the committee that:

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13 *Submission 18*, p. 55.

14 Members of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Public Diplomacy are: AusAID, Australian Federal Police, Austrade, AQIS, Attorney-General's Department, Australian Sports Commission, CSIRO, Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, Department of Defence, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Department of Education Science and Training, Department of the Environment and Heritage, Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Department of Health and Ageing, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Department of Industry Tourism and Resources, Invest Australia, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Tourism Australia, Department of Veterans' Affairs. See *Submission 18*, p. 108.

15 *Submission 18*, p. 55.

16 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Annual Report 2005–06*, p. 194.

...We also have a coordinating role with the states. We meet two to three times a year with the international sides of the departments of education or their equivalents, because sometimes state and regional development departments look after this aspect, where we again try to make sure that we are not duplicative. We try to coordinate and enhance what we are all doing.<sup>17</sup>

8.21 DFAT's submission lists the following IDC achievements to date:

- inter-agency subscription to DFAT's monthly international media monitoring summary;
- inter-agency support for Australian Education International's *Study in Australia* project;
- inter-agency support for IAB's *Australia—Trading with the World Kit*; and
- the development of IAB's online public diplomacy Bulletin Board as a central point where all member agencies can post public diplomacy material for use by our posts.<sup>18</sup>

The committee regards these as very modest achievements over five years of operation.

8.22 In DEST's view, the IDC 'is an effective vehicle for a coordinated and collaborative approach to public diplomacy activities'. Australian Education International (AEI) is a member of the committee. According to DEST, AEI 'has had the opportunity to brief the group on the *Study in Australia* brand and it has provided a useful forum for discussion on ensuring a consistent approach to branding across a range of government activities'.<sup>19</sup> DEST cited the following as examples of practical cooperation from the forum:

- AEI has provided education briefings to DFAT regional workshops for public diplomacy officers, allowing greater understanding of the education role in the region and building collaboration between the agencies on public diplomacy matters;
- AEI has provided the education footage for DFAT's updated generic film on Australia creating cost-savings and helping to reinforce a consistent education message across government; and
- DEST, through AEI, has provided content for education and science elements of DFAT publications.<sup>20</sup>

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17 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 56.

18 *Submission 18*, paragraph 4.1.2, p. 55.

19 *Submission 28*, p. 8.

20 *Submission 28*, p. 8.



8.23 Again, these achievements are unremarkable. In response to the suggestion that the IDC's achievements are modest, DFAT responded:

The PD IDC has tended in the past to concentrate on general coordination and information sharing, with each agency outlining its current and planned PD activities. Future IDC meetings will adopt a more strategic focus, with agencies providing a written summary beforehand of their current and planned activities to allow a more free-flowing discussion to take place. The next meeting is scheduled to take place in June and will consider several strategic issues, including the Beijing Olympics. Separate, specialised IDCs will continue to handle specific issues (such as Expo 2010 in Shanghai) which require more intensive cooperation, with the PD IDC acting as a general clearing house.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Views on the effectiveness of the whole-of-government approach***

8.24 A number of witnesses to the inquiry were less than enthusiastic about the work of the IDC. Mr Freeman, a public affairs practitioner and former DFAT officer, noted that over the years there have been various IDCs. He drew attention in particular to the IDC that existed before the Sydney Olympics. According to Mr Freeman, it worked well because there was a central overriding focus which brought 26 agencies together. Around the table, they were able to agree 'to put all their material under a common banner'.<sup>22</sup> Guided by a shared goal, the 26 separate agencies worked as one. Although Mr Freeman was of the view that the work of the IDC was 'really quite encouraging, he suggested that it was 'fairly short-lived'.<sup>23</sup> He questioned the effectiveness of Australia's whole-of-government approach:

There are plenty of individuals—certainly in my former department, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Invest Australia, Australian Education International, Tourism Australia and others—many of whom, I might add, are quite well funded. So there is a lot of individual activity, and a lot of it is quite valuable and useful. But I believe we have never really had something to mandate some of these people to get together, perhaps more frequently than they might do, at a very high level—not a dictatorial advisory or coordinating committee but something that does have some clout. I know there are various mechanisms in place now...but they are either too low level or, in the case of the one that is fairly high level, too narrow in focus. I just do not think we have a fully effective, coordinated approach.<sup>24</sup>

8.25 In summary, he believed that currently there was very good cooperation at a basic working level—exchanging information, talking about what the departments are producing and how departments might share information and use it for mutual benefit.

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21 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, answer to question on notice, 1 May 2007, p. 28.

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

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

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

He observed, however, that this cooperation was at the level of directors of public relations of various government agencies or deputy directors. In his view, the IDC was 'not normally a high-powered policy making or coordinating unit as such; it is a really good on-the-ground grouping'.<sup>25</sup>

8.26 Media Gurus argued that greater coordination was required among agencies in Canberra. It was of the view, that 'Even at the current inter-departmental Committee level in Canberra, it appears that many disparate "silos" exist, with information carefully guarded and husbanded'.<sup>26</sup> It maintained that 'improved coordination needs to be reflected at Australian diplomatic missions overseas, particularly in our bigger embassies/high commissions, many of which have representatives from a range of key agencies, including the Australian Federal Police, Defence, Immigration, Austrade, Education'.<sup>27</sup> Mr Mirchandani, Managing Director, Media Gurus, stated:

if you choose half a dozen issues of the week, the year, whatever, which Australia really wishes to promote which still resonate in target countries and target areas then it should be the whole-of-government effort. I would suggest indeed...that portfolio secretaries be the spearhead of this...I would suggest that if necessary there be a parallel committee. We have the Secretaries Committee on National Security. What about a secretaries committee on public diplomacy with similar clout, if you like, to make that happen?<sup>28</sup>

8.27 Mr Christopher Stewart, member of International Public Affairs Network, also criticised the performance of DFAT in achieving a whole-of-government outcome. He said:

It has formed committees; it has had interdepartmental committees. But what we have not seen on the ground is a whole-of-government approach. We need, in a strategic sense, to be looking ahead five or 10 years and developing a vision for where Australia will position itself in the world.<sup>29</sup>

8.28 Dr Wells, RMIT University, referred to 'a quite fragmented approach to public diplomacy, which for many people is seen to be the business of one government department'.<sup>30</sup> Mr Trevor Wilson also raised concern about the level and effectiveness of coordination across agencies. He said:

I think we do not [do] a bad job in coordinating and getting agreed approaches and objectives across departments, and I certainly think there is value in...not losing a bit of diversity and appropriate differentiation between different parts of the government, but I am not at all convinced that

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

26 *Submission 2*, p. 4.

27 *Submission 2*, p. 4.

28 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 45.

29 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, p. 13.

30 *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2007, p. 27.

the coordination that happens is very deep or deep-seated. If you look at the mechanisms that are there, they are actually very loose and very weak. They would not control a strong department that had its own agenda and had its own public affairs outreach program, including overseas.

I do not detect that at the moment there is a sense of what I would perhaps call a collegiate approach to public diplomacy, both in the longer term strategic approach of trying to strive for the right understanding and image...of Australia and also in the problem-solving area. If we are trying to deal with the issue of Australia being perceived as a racist country through our immigration policies or through whatever else—it could be our education programs—it seems to me that the departments responsible for those ought to reach out to other parts of the government and get their advice, and to try and develop some kind of collegiate response. I do not see that happening at the moment.<sup>31</sup>

He explained further:

...there are examples of where the Australian government agencies are cooperating and collaborating on international public diplomacy activities, and that is with these big integrated promotions that they talk about. Quite a lot of money is spent on those. I am not sure that they are really value for money. They certainly do lift our profile in countries where they are happening and there is a good element of cooperation between government agencies who are pooling their money to do this. But I am not really sure how useful they are in changing or influencing for the better an understanding or perception of Australia.<sup>32</sup>

8.29 It should be noted that at DFAT's second appearance before the committee, Dr Strahan made a number of observations based on the evidence presented to the committee. He noted that while a lot of agencies had 'very clear ideas of their particular objectives', he thought that 'people had been a little hazy about what public diplomacy means'. He suggested that it would be helpful to reach an agreed definition of public diplomacy which he stated can have 'a guiding overall principle'. He also spoke of the need for those involved in Australia's public diplomacy to have a common public diplomacy language. He then explained that DFAT wants to use the IDC to determine an agreed definition of public diplomacy. Having done so, to then 'bring those general policy objectives which are set by ministers for us more explicitly out into a set of agreed overarching public diplomacy objectives, much like what has happened with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in the United Kingdom.'<sup>33</sup>

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31 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, pp. 24–25.

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

33 *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2007, pp. 42–43.

### **Committee view**

8.30 Clearly, a number of submitters were of the view that coordination between departments and agencies could be improved. The committee is not convinced that the existing arrangements capitalise fully on the individual efforts of government departments and agencies. It notes, however, DFAT's intention for future IDC meetings to have a 'more strategic focus'. It also notes DFAT's intention to have agencies arrive at an agreed definition of public diplomacy and through the IDC to place general policy objectives within the overarching public diplomacy objectives. These are promising initiatives.

8.31 It may be, however, that other measures are required such as a higher level of representation on the committee and more detailed reporting on the results of meetings to enable the IDC to achieve a higher degree of coordination between the various departments. A more focused, high profile and accountable IDC would help to ensure that public diplomacy activities are complementary and, where possible, mutually reinforcing.

### **A special coordinating unit**

8.32 Some witnesses wanted to go further with the creation of a central public diplomacy coordinating body. Dr Alison Broinowski was of the view that 'Australia looks like little bits and pieces of little bits of departments instead of one identifiable thing'.<sup>34</sup> In her view a separate unit that would bring together all public diplomacy efforts would be more effective. Mr Trevor Wilson suggested that an answer to the disappearance of corporate memory and the need to respond 'much more on a short-term basis' would be an institutional unit of specialised people.<sup>35</sup> Mr Freeman who supported the proposal for an institutional unit, said that 'it need not be a whole-of-government approach that lays down concrete absolutes; it can be a whole-of-government advisory group or committee and so on that would give the broad guidelines and broader messages'.<sup>36</sup> He explained further:

...[it] would not be a dictatorial body but one that would set patterns, set directions and set guidance and would...include all the major practitioners. They would be mandated...in Australia we have the ministerial communications unit. We have a powerful ministerial committee. They basically oversight all these activities. I am not necessarily suggesting something as draconian as that, but certainly a requirement that any of the major operators who have many millions of dollars to spend should at least, well in advance, consult with the group about their plans, what they are proposing to do, and seek advice from DFAT and its posts about the likelihood of succeeding.<sup>37</sup>

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34 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 27.

35 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 20.

36 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 20.

37 *Committee Hansard*, 11 April 2007, p. 37.

8.33 Mr Kirk Coningham argued that, 'the function of public diplomacy needs to be passed to a new agency with an holistic all-of-government approach to delivering communications expertise and outcomes in the global village for all Australians'.<sup>38</sup> He stated:

Coordination is difficult, but it is nowhere near as difficult as it is fundamentally important to this function. If, as DFAT basically admitted, they cannot coordinate the activities of federal government, how can they possibly coordinate the disparate activities of state institutions and public institutions in a team Australia approach? The reality overseas at the moment is that we have bikini-clad girls competing with educational seminars, trade missions and investment seminars, and they are all competing against each other in a very noisy area to very poor effect, I believe, in the end for Australia.<sup>39</sup>

8.34 Media Gurus noted that Australia 'has a good and positive story to tell and can be a powerful, if niche influence in the world, if it harnesses its resources smartly'. In its view, 'A coordinated, committed high-level approach, along with a series of training programs is vital, if this story is to be told, and told well'.<sup>40</sup> It concluded:

Past experience has shown (as in the creation of the Policy Implementation Unit by PM&C) that coordination and commitment at the highest level is necessary, if the silos mentioned earlier are to be broken down and a 'team Australia' approach taken. We would recommend the creation of a high level Public Diplomacy Strategy Board along the lines of the U.K Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which is tasked along these lines.<sup>41</sup>

8.35 The Public Diplomacy Strategy Board was established following the Wilton Review of the UK public diplomacy.<sup>42</sup> The second review of the UK's public diplomacy, led by Lord Carter of Coles, found that the Board had led to better co-ordination between public diplomacy partners but that it 'operated as 'a "collective" without clear strategic direction, central control or accountability.' On the recommendation of the Carter review, a new Public Diplomacy Board was set up. It sets overall public diplomacy strategies, advises on resource allocation, performance management and monitoring.<sup>43</sup>

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38 *Submission 1*, p. [2].

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

40 *Submission 2*, p. 7.

41 *Submission 2*, p. 6.

42 UK Government, 'Changing perceptions: Review of public diplomacy', March 2002, p. 12. The report was produced by a team of three people: Chris Wilton of the FCO, Jonathon Griffin of the British Tourist Authority and Britain Abroad and Andrew Fotheringham of the British Council.

43 Foreign And Commonwealth Office, 'Promoting the UK', <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1035898725758> Public Diplomacy Review by Lord Carter, presented to the Foreign Secretary of the Treasurer on 13 December 2005, pp. 15–16.

8.36 There are six members of the board that is chaired by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister of State. The vice chairman is an independent member of the Board. Lord Coles argued that the Board should have a strong independent vice-chair who 'could probe, challenge and help to direct all the bodies, and who would have knowledge of the detail and enough standing to be taken seriously by all partners'.<sup>44</sup>

8.37 The Board is supported by a secretariat located in the Foreign Office. According to Lord Coles this unit would 'act as an executive to the Public Diplomacy Board, putting forward proposals for strategy, actions, specific plans, milestones and outputs'.

### ***Committee view***

8.38 The committee supports the general view that Australia needs a whole-of-government approach to its public diplomacy. It notes that a number of witnesses saw room to improve the coordination of government public diplomacy activities. The committee also believes that measures should be taken to make the IDC more effective as a coordinating body and in developing a broad strategy for the conduct of Australia's public diplomacy.

8.39 A number of witnesses favoured the establishment of a specialised unit that would have charge of coordinating Australia's public diplomacy effort. The proposals, however, were not fully developed with many questions remaining unanswered—the actual composition of such a unit, where it would be located in the departmental structure and the extent of its authority.

8.40 Before making recommendations regarding the IDC, the committee underlines the important role of public diplomacy in promoting and protecting Australia's interests overseas. Australia's public diplomacy is much more than involvement in international conferences, exhibits, visits, and exchange programs—it is a critical exercise of soft power and has a determining part in Australia's ability to pursue its international objectives. As noted earlier, public diplomacy creates an enabling or a disabling environment in which Australia pursues its international objectives.

8.41 When the committee refers to strategic planning, it takes account of this very serious side of public diplomacy, for example Australia's involvement in the battle of ideas with international terrorism. Therefore, any public diplomacy planning must benefit from engagement with Australia's foreign policy decision makers. At the moment the committee is not persuaded, firstly, that the IDC has formulated a strategic public diplomacy plan and, secondly, that it takes advice from or consults with relevant policy makers in DFAT. The following recommendation is intended to

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44 Public Diplomacy Review by Lord Carter, presented to the Foreign Secretary of the Treasurer on 13 December 2005, pp. 15–16.

rectify this disconnection and the reference to the formulation of a coherent public diplomacy strategy presupposes that key foreign policy makers are involved.

8.42 As a first step, the committee believes that the IDC should be allowed the opportunity to prove itself capable of leadership, of providing direction and setting clear objectives for DFAT and all its public diplomacy partners. The committee believes that the IDC should be an advisory body to all government departments and agencies on how best to coordinate and, where possible, complement each others activities. It should also take an active role in ensuring that there is a solid core of public diplomacy specialists available to advise, guide and assist agencies in their public diplomacy activities. Its first task would be to map out a long-term strategic public diplomacy plan.

### **Recommendation 6**

**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:**

- (a) more senior representation on the IDC than is currently the case— Departments should be represented at the Deputy Secretary level;**
- (b) 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;**
- (c) 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;**
- (d) the IDC produce a coherent public diplomacy strategy that outlines priority objectives for public diplomacy along the lines of the UK Public Diplomacy Board;**
- (e) 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;**
- (f) 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';**
- (g) some cross membership on the IDC and the Australia International Cultural Council;**
- (h) the IDC produce a report on discussions and decisions taken at its meetings to be published on its website;**
- (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.**

8.44 The committee does not intend the IDC to encroach on the independence of statutory bodies such as the ABC or of NGOs 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**

**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.**

8.46 The following section looks at the coordination of public diplomacy activities between local councils and the Australian Government.

### **State and local councils**

8.47 The committee did not receive submissions from state governments or from local councils with the exception of the City of Melbourne Council. It did receive submissions from state-funded bodies such as the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the National Gallery of Victoria. They are considered in the chapter dealing with cultural institutions.

8.48 The committee notes that the overall lack of response from government bodies in all likelihood is consistent with the general low level of awareness in Australia about public diplomacy and what it means. The evidence provided by the City of Melbourne, however, provides insight into the potential for local councils to contribute to Australia's public diplomacy.

8.49 The Council informed the committee about the significant role that local government councils have in promoting and strengthening international relationships on behalf of their constituencies. The Melbourne City explained that it is committed to developing its relationships with overseas cities beyond a 'civic ceremonial basis into productive connections of broad social, economic and cultural benefit to Melbourne'. According to the Council, it:

...continues to build broad-based relationships with cities and countries, networks and organisations around the world to maximise opportunities and leverage benefits for all partners. Overall the City of Melbourne embraces a global role in a range of ways (summarised under the following themes):



- *Building Prosperity*—sourcing tangible export/import opportunities for Melbourne businesses (primarily from China, India and the United States).
- *World Harmony and Global Fellowship*—participation in municipal, cultural, education and sporting exchange, and building humanitarian links.
- *City Governance and Urban Living*—building Melbourne’s strong international reputation in city design and city management—sourcing opportunities in new urbanising economies and participating in technical exchanges to further strengthen Melbourne’s expertise in this field.
- *The Environment*—international exchange and advocacy in areas such as climate change, urban environmental policy and sustainable built form.<sup>45</sup>

8.50 The Council stated that it often 'provides a conduit at the grassroots level to other levels of government and supports a broader base of community involvement in its international relationships'.<sup>46</sup> In its view, the partnerships it has formed offer an excellent model for relationship building that warrants consideration by other national, state and capital governments.<sup>47</sup>

8.51 Although the Council expressed its appreciation for the continuing assistance and support provided by DFAT, it proposed a number of measures that could be taken to encourage increased and more productive involvement of local councils in Australia's public diplomacy. It drew attention to the need:

- for greater recognition of the role of capital city governments, in Australia's public diplomacy;
- for a review of opportunities for federal and state funding to be directed towards supporting and developing the activities of local government in facilitating Australian public diplomacy; and
- to explore further opportunities for collaborative public diplomacy activity between Australian capital city governments promoting the attributes of Australia's cities internationally.<sup>48</sup>

8.52 The Centre for Local Government at the University of Technology Sydney is also very conscious of the work that local councils do in the area of public diplomacy.

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45 *Submission 11*, p. 2.

46 *Submission 11*, p. 3.

47 *Submission 11*, p. 6. It stated: 'We believe the Council’s international framework offers significant opportunity to contribute positively at a broader level in Australia’s public diplomacy programs, particularly as a capital city government.'

48 *Submission 11*, p. 2.

It noted that a substantial number of local councils have moved on from Sister City links to much more robust technical and economic partnerships.<sup>49</sup> It stated:

...local government across the world is playing an increasing role in international relations. This reflects the patterns of globalisation and the resulting trend for cities and regions to deal with each other rather than rely exclusively on connections via national and/or provincial governments.<sup>50</sup>

8.53 The Centre identified a number of areas where the work of councils, such as the City of Melbourne, could be used to better effect in promoting positive messages about Australia and in deepening and broadening the relationships that they have developed. It suggested that:

- The Australian government should systematically explore the potential for enhancing current public diplomacy programs by engaging more effectively with local government's international activities, and set clear objectives for the contribution local government could and should make to national efforts.
- Similarly, the Australian government should identify a range of specific opportunities for local government involvement in priority regions such as the Pacific.
- Enhanced arrangements for public diplomacy should include local government wherever appropriate and should recognize the role played by the Australian Local Government Association. There needs to be a direct relationship between the Australian government and local government, given that the states offer little support for local government's international activities and may in some cases see local government as a competitor rather than ally.
- Additional resources should be directed to local government programs in priority regions, recognising that funding needs to be maintained for extended periods to achieve sustainable outcomes. As the Melbourne experience shows, in the area of trade and economic development, there are also opportunities to capitalise on expanded private sector involvement at local and regional levels, in partnership with local government.<sup>51</sup>

8.54 Looking more broadly at the state level, Asialink noted:

There is scope for greater co-ordination between the federal agencies involved in public diplomacy and between the federal and state agencies. An example is Asialink's Visual Arts Touring program where a planned and collaborative approach from DFAT's Foundations, Councils and Institutes and Cultural Relations Branch would enable us to significantly

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49 *Submission 11A*, p. 1.

50 *Submission 11A*, p. 1.

51 *Submission 11A*, p. 3.

expand the reach and impact of the program through strategic regional or multilateral touring.<sup>52</sup>

8.55 While the committee is disappointed that it did not receive direct evidence relating to state government involvement in Australia's public diplomacy, members are aware from anecdotal evidence that the involvement of other city councils in promoting Australia's public diplomacy is extensive. The committee believes that this is a resource that should be effectively harnessed to the advantage of its broader foreign policy.

### ***Committee view***

8.56 Much of the evidence presented in this chapter relied on that provided by the City of Melbourne. The enthusiasm shown by this council in developing its public diplomacy and its keenness to publicise its work, however, speaks volumes for its awareness of international trends and its astuteness in giving high priority to building an international reputation.

8.57 The committee notes the commitment by the City of Melbourne to public diplomacy and appreciates that its active involvement in this area places it in a good position to offer constructive advice on how the Australian Government could work with councils to improve Australia's overall public diplomacy. It also notes the recommendations by the Centre for Local Government which supported those of the City of Melbourne. The committee supports these recommendations but notes in particular the call for greater recognition by the Australian Government of the role of capital city governments in Australia's public diplomacy and for it to engage more effectively with local governments' international activities. It also draws attention to the suggestion that the Australian Government explore opportunities for collaborative public diplomacy activity between Australian capital city governments involved in promoting their city internationally.<sup>53</sup>

### **Recommendation 8**

**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.**

### **Conclusion**

8.59 The committee recognises the contribution that government departments and councils such as the City of Melbourne make to project a positive image of Australia overseas. Their activities inform overseas audiences about various aspects of Australia and establish strong links with particular organisations or groups of people overseas. The committee is of the view, however, that there is potential for these individual

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52 *Submission 8*, p. 6.

53 *Submission 11*, p. 2.

efforts to connect better with one another and to make an even greater contribution to Australia's public diplomacy. The committee believes that the government should consider measures that would make the IDC a more effective coordinating body before considering establishing a specialised whole-of-government public diplomacy unit.