

Delivery of Australia's Consular Services

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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Canberra ACT
10 February 2015

Dear Mr President
Dear Madam Speaker

The Australian National Audit Office has undertaken an independent performance audit in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade titled *Delivery of Australia's Consular Services*. The audit was conducted in accordance with the authority contained in the *Auditor-General Act 1997*. I present the report of this audit to the Parliament.

Following its presentation and receipt, the report will be placed on the Australian National Audit Office's website—<http://www.anao.gov.au>.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Steve Chapman', is positioned above the printed name.

Steve Chapman
Acting Auditor-General

The Honourable the President of the Senate
The Honourable the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

AUDITING FOR AUSTRALIA

The Auditor-General is head of the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). The ANAO assists the Auditor-General to carry out his duties under the *Auditor-General Act 1997* to undertake performance audits, financial statement audits and assurance reviews of Commonwealth public sector bodies and to provide independent reports and advice for the Parliament, the Australian Government and the community. The aim is to improve Commonwealth public sector administration and accountability.

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Abbreviations and Glossary

ANAO	Australian National Audit Office.
CAP	Crisis Action Plan.
CCD	Consular and Crisis Management Division.
CCP	Consular Contingency Plan.
CMIS	Consular Management Information System.
Consular assistance	One of the consular services provided by DFAT. Consular assistance describes the help that DFAT provides to travellers who encounter difficulties overseas.
Consular Emergency Centre	Operates as a contact centre for all consular and passport-related enquiries from Australia and overseas 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is the initial contact for crisis enquiries until the Emergency Call Unit is activated.
Consular services	All of the travel-related services that DFAT provides to Australians both overseas and domestically. These include consular assistance, notarial services, crisis response, and travel advice and information services.
CPAT	Contingency Planning Assistance Team.
Crisis Centre	A purpose designed facility that can be activated by DFAT as the central crisis response coordination point.
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Emergency Call Unit	A purpose designed DFAT call centre to handle all crisis-related enquiries where the Consular Emergency Centre is not able to meet demand. DFAT maintains an agreement with the Department of Human Services to provide call centre services for a crisis response where demand exceeds the Unit's capacity.
ERT	Emergency Response Team. A team of DFAT officers able to be deployed to a post or location during a crisis.
FTE	Full-time equivalent (staff).
KPIs	Key performance indicators.
No double standards principle	A DFAT principle for travel advisories that states that no group or category of Australians should receive special or privileged advice, and that the advice provided by DFAT to the public should mirror that provided to DFAT staff, other government agencies and the private sector.
Notarial services	One of the consular services provided by DFAT. Notarial services relate to the authentication or certification of documents, including witnessing signatures, statutory declarations and affidavits.
ORAO	Online Register of Australians Overseas.
Regional Consular Officer	Experienced consular staff located in London, Dubai, Mexico City and Pretoria that support posts within their region. These staff can be deployed at short notice to assist posts in responding to a crisis event.
UAE	United Arab Emirates.
UK	United Kingdom.
USA	United States of America.

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

Introduction

1. Australia's consular services encapsulate the assistance the Australian Government provides to protect the welfare and interests of Australians travelling or residing abroad, and advice and information services provided to the Australian public. The provision of consular services to nationals within another country is governed by international laws and consular practice, including the *Vienna Convention on Consular Relations 1963* (which allows for a country to safeguard, help and assist its nationals abroad¹) and bilateral agreements between Australia and other countries.²
2. While the Australian Government may 'give humanitarian assistance to Australian citizens and permanent residents whose welfare is at risk abroad, while respecting their rights to privacy'³, the provision of assistance abroad is a discretionary service with no service standards or requirements mandated in legislation. In practice, however, there is a general expectation amongst the Australian public that the Australian Government, through its consular services, will provide a 'safety net' for its citizens while overseas.
3. The ability of the Australian Government to intervene in cases of Australians in difficulty abroad, particularly in serious cases such as imprisonment or child custody disputes, is limited. The Australian Government has no jurisdiction in a foreign country and Australian travellers are ultimately bound by the laws and requirements of the country in which they travel. While the Government provides advice and information to assist travellers in making safe travel decisions, travellers are ultimately responsible for their own safety and taking actions to mitigate their own travel risks.
4. As of June 2014, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) delivered Australia's consular services to Australians abroad through

1 *Vienna Convention on Consular Relations 1963*, Article 5, Consular Functions.

2 As at January 2015, DFAT advised that there were eight bilateral agreements with the countries of Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Russia, Vietnam and the United Arab Emirates, and two other consular-related agreements (relating to cooperation on protecting the welfare of children) with Egypt and Lebanon.

3 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Australian Consular Operations Handbook*, Chapter 4, Section 4.1 Consular role, February 2013.

167 diplomatic posts⁴, which are located in 121 countries around the world. Australia had a reciprocal consular sharing agreement with Canada, where Australians are able to access consular services from 14 Canadian missions, and an agreement with Romania to allow Australians to access services through that country's embassy in Syria. In countries without a DFAT presence and not covered by these agreements, services are provided by the nearest accredited post.⁵

Consular services

5. The term 'consular services' broadly describes three categories of activity: providing travel advice and information to travellers relevant to their safety and security while abroad; providing consular assistance to travellers abroad and their next of kin, including those in difficulty; and coordinating and responding to crisis events overseas that involve Australians, such as natural disasters or terrorist attacks. DFAT's overseas posts may also provide Australians with notarial services⁶, voting facilities, and the contact details of government authorities in Australia.

Travel advice and information

6. DFAT provides the Australian public with travel advisories and information on countries to inform them of potential security risks and other relevant travel information on the *smartraveller.gov.au* website. Travellers are encouraged to register their travel plans on the website to enable DFAT to contact them in the event of an emergency. The department promotes these services, encourages the uptake of travel insurance, and raises awareness of consular issues commonly experienced by travellers via its *Smartraveller* public awareness campaign.

Consular assistance

7. DFAT's Consular Services Charter⁷ outlines the types of consular assistance that it can provide to Australian travellers, and the limitations of this

4 A diplomatic post refers to an Australian Embassy, High Commission, Consulate-General or Consulate. This figure includes 16 posts which are managed by the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade), the Australian Representative Office in Ramallah and the Australian Office in Taipei.

5 For example, Australians in Qatar receive consular services from DFAT's post in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

6 Notarial services include certifying copies of documents, witnessing signatures, statutory declarations, and affidavits. These services are also provided domestically in some DFAT state offices.

7 The Consular Services Charter is available from <<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/services/consular-services-charter.html>>.

assistance. Such assistance can include advice and support in cases of accident, serious illness, occurrence of a serious crime, or death, including providing lists of local support services (such as hospitals or lawyers); information, assistance and potentially evacuation in the event of a major crisis; and in some circumstances, as a last resort, financial assistance, including government-funded repatriation of Australians. Over the past 12 years, the number of cases of consular assistance provided to Australians in difficulty aboard has ranged from 11 000 to more than 30 000 per year.

Crisis response

8. DFAT is also responsible for the coordination of the Australian Government's response to consular crisis events abroad, such as a terrorist attack or suspected attack; conflict or civil disorder—actual or imminent; a transport or industrial accident; and natural disaster. This coordination role includes: crisis preparation, planning and readiness activities; the establishment and management of crisis response support teams to rapidly deploy to missions; and working with key Australian Government agencies. A recent example of a consular crisis is the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 incident in Ukraine in July 2014, that resulted in 298 deaths, including 28 passengers with Australian citizenship and a further 10 passengers residing in Australia. DFAT's crisis response involved the coordination of several stakeholder agencies such as the Australian Federal Police and Australian Defence Force, in addition to the department's own crisis response activities.

Demand for consular services

9. The demand for, and nature of, consular services has evolved over time, reflecting changes in traveller numbers and demographics. Changes in the travel industry, such as lower airfares and improved standards, has resulted in more Australians travelling abroad more often, including higher risk groups such as the elderly and children.⁸ These changes have led to a greater demand for consular services. Other key drivers for this increase include significant incidents that have impacted on travellers, such as:

- terrorist activities and natural disasters, where an intensive and rapid consular response is required; and

8 The elderly and children are considered by DFAT to be a higher risk category as they are more likely to require assistance due to medical emergency or family custody issues.

- the rising expectations of individuals and their families about the level of assistance provided, partly driven by media interest in higher profile cases.

10. Over the past 12 years, the number of Australian traveller departures has increased by around 170 per cent, from 3.4 million in 2002–03 to 9.2 million in 2013–14. Consistent with this increase, the number of travellers provided with consular services has steadily increased from 92 000 cases in 2002–03 to 236 600 cases in 2013–14.⁹ Meanwhile, funding for consular services, under Program 2.1: *Consular Services* of DFAT’s Portfolio Budget Statements, peaked in 2009–10 at \$83.5 million and steadily declined to \$72.6 million in 2012–13. The level of funding has since increased to \$76.2 million in 2013–14, and DFAT advised the ANAO that the total estimated cost of the consular services program for 2014–15 is \$85.0 million.

Audit objective and criteria

11. The objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s delivery of services to Australians travelling or residing abroad.

12. To form a conclusion against the audit objective, the ANAO adopted the following high level criteria:

- effective strategies were in place to support the delivery of consular services to Australians in selected countries;
- appropriate arrangements were in place to engage with, and provide, Australians travelling or residing abroad with information relevant to their safety and security;
- accessible consular services were provided for Australians travelling abroad who required assistance; and
- the capacity to respond to, and coordinate, a consular crisis had been established.

9 Consular services include consular assistance provided to Australians in difficulty, along with notarial services.

13. In conducting this audit, the ANAO observed the delivery of consular services in four of DFAT's overseas posts, and one Austrade post.¹⁰

Overall conclusion

14. The operating environment for consular services is complex and DFAT delivers these services through a global network of 167 posts. Each of the countries where Australia maintains posts has unique legal, logistical and security-related factors that influence the types of services and assistance that DFAT can provide. Demand for services is increasing, and the situations in which DFAT is called upon to provide consular assistance are becoming increasingly complex due to changes in Australian traveller demographics and behaviour.

15. DFAT's delivery of consular services to Australians travelling or residing abroad includes advising Australians of issues relevant to their safety and security overseas; providing consular assistance to Australians in difficulty; preparing and responding to crisis events; and developing strategies to manage these services in an environment of increasing demand and complexity. DFAT's capacity to intervene in individual cases is defined in the Consular Services Charter and, inevitably, perceptions as to the adequacy of the services provided to individual Australians will vary.¹¹ Within this context, DFAT's administration of consular services is broadly appropriate, and these services are generally delivered effectively. DFAT's dispersed network of service delivery locations, however, and the variety of work undertaken across this network, creates challenges for DFAT in ensuring that relevant policies and guidance are adhered to and accurate performance information is collected and reported to senior management and key external stakeholders, including the Parliament.

16. DFAT recently released its consular strategy for 2014–16.¹² Prior to this, DFAT had not articulated its strategic direction for consular services, nor

10 The ANAO conducted fieldwork in: Bangkok (Thailand); Vientiane (Laos); Abu Dhabi and Dubai (United Arab Emirates); and Beirut (Lebanon). These posts were selected because of high numbers of Australian travellers to environments where there can be unfamiliar legal, safety and other issues that may complicate the delivery of consular services.

11 DFAT's consular charter outlines the consular services the department provides and its limitations. The charter is not intended to provide strategic guidance.

12 The strategy was endorsed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in November 2014 and released publicly on 3 December 2014. The release of the strategy coincided with the release of an updated Consular Services Charter that aligns the two documents.

integrated its approach to engaging with consular stakeholders. The strategy sets its future focus and strategic direction for the delivery of consular services and also outlines plans to improve the targeting of services to those individuals most in need, including cost recovery or possible limitation of assistance to individuals who knowingly or repeatedly compromise their own safety. In introducing the new strategy (and proposed changes), it will be important to manage and, where necessary, adjust the expectations of the public, by ensuring the strategy is adequately communicated, and the circumstances in which cost recovery or service limitation might be applied clearly explained.¹³ DFAT intends to incorporate messages regarding the limits to consular assistance, and the need for traveller self-reliance, into the *Smartraveller* campaign in future.

17. The *Smartraveller* campaign, currently in its third phase, has raised awareness of DFAT's consular services among the Australian public. The campaign has been informed by several successive rounds of market research and evaluation and its overall administration is sound. Despite high levels of awareness, the department has experienced difficulty in translating this success into behavioural change by the travelling public. There would be merit in DFAT reviewing those messages of the *Smartraveller* campaign which have proven less successful, such as promotion of the traveller registration system. Despite high levels of awareness among the public, the system is poorly utilised and promotes an attitude of dependency among those who complete the process.

18. While DFAT has predominantly sound practices for the provision of most aspects of consular services, the rationale for and documentation of key decisions, such as those related to the provision of financial assistance, is inconsistent. Developing an annual, risk-based, quality assurance process for consular assistance functions would provide assurance that procedures are being consistently applied. Such assurance is particularly important in the case management context, due to the increasing complexity of consular cases, the unique nature of many cases, and the need to consider clients' welfare.

13 The Smartraveller advertising and awareness campaign, through which the department communicates key consular messages and travel safety information, is a potential vehicle for this process, and DFAT's communications strategy for Smartraveller Phase IV, scheduled to begin in 2015, provides options for managing the public's expectations accordingly.

19. There is also scope for DFAT to strengthen its oversight and coordination of the lessons that can be learned from consular crises and related contingency planning. Consular crisis events are unique, they are also comparatively infrequent and demanding, placing a premium on contingency planning prior to events and capturing the lessons learned after events occur. While DFAT has responded well to recent crises, stronger emphasis should be given to the consistent and coordinated implementation of departmental post-event review findings. Incorporating these findings into future assessments of risks, contingency planning, and crisis response exercises would better position DFAT to respond to future events.

20. DFAT's key performance indicators are aligned with its program objectives, but do not provide a clear and complete picture of overall program performance. The department also lacks accurate and reliable performance information necessary for informed management decision-making, and to provide assurance that service delivery standards are being met across the network. These shortcomings could, in part, be addressed through proposed improvements to DFAT's Consular Management Information System (CMIS) and improved data entry.

21. DFAT has acknowledged the need to improve its delivery of consular services, and has identified areas for improvement as part of its recently released consular strategy. To assist this process, the ANAO has made three recommendations relating to improving consular case management processes and crisis response arrangements, and performance reporting.

Key findings by chapter

Stakeholder Engagement (Chapter 2)

22. DFAT's consular stakeholders are diverse, including Australians travelling and residing abroad, Australians contemplating or planning travel, and the broader travel industry. DFAT engages with these stakeholders through its *Smartraveller* campaign and the Smartraveller Consultative Group of travel industry representatives. The department's ability to successfully engage with these target groups should reduce the need for consular assistance over time.

23. The *Smartraveller* campaign was launched in September 2003 and is one of DFAT's primary means of disseminating travel advice and information to the public, and encouraging safe travel practices. *Smartraveller* consists of a

website, www.smartraveller.gov.au, an advertising campaign (spanning radio, television, print and online media) and a social media presence online. The most recent phase of the campaign (*Smartraveller Phase III*) commenced in November 2011 and received funding of \$13 million over four years. *Phase III* focuses on three key behaviours: register travel plans; subscribe to travel advice updates; and insure yourself and belongings.

24. The *Smartraveller* campaign has generally been successful in raising the awareness of these three key focus areas. The ANAO's analysis found that the proportion of travellers subscribing to travel advisories has increased by 75 per cent between 30 June 2012 and 30 June 2014, from 100 subscriptions per 10 000 travellers to 175 subscriptions per 10 000 travellers. DFAT has also received anecdotal evidence from the travel industry suggesting greater use of travel insurance. The department's third message relating to registration, however, has proven less effective. Internal research commissioned by DFAT in 2013 indicates that 77 per cent of Australians recognise the importance of registering their travel itinerary, yet despite these high levels of awareness the use of the registration system remains very low.¹⁴ The research also indicated that registration could encourage a mindset of dependency that the department seeks to avoid.¹⁵ The ANAO's analysis of *Smartraveller* website data also suggests that travellers become disengaged during the registration process as only 20 per cent of those who visit the starting page complete the registration process.

25. Low levels of take-up of the registration process reduce its value in providing DFAT with the contact details of Australians in the event of a crisis or other emergency overseas. In addition, the system cannot be relied upon to accurately provide the number and location of those Australians abroad who have registered, because of the extensive error rate of registrations.¹⁶ While DFAT intends improving the ease of the registration process as part of its consular strategy, there would also be merit in the department conducting a

14 Quantifying the exact number of travellers who make use of the registration system is complex, as registrations do not directly correspond to traveller numbers (for example, one traveller visiting five countries is counted as five registrations). DFAT's 2012–13 Annual Report noted that registration remains limited to 'a minority of Australian travellers'.

15 According to internal research undertaken by the department prior to the commencement of *Smartraveller Phase IV*.

16 Such errors may include travellers providing their Australian address and contact details as their overseas destination, incorrect passport number or contact details. The ANAO also observed obvious data entry errors, such as implausibly early dates of registration (pre-1950's) and dates of travel from 1899. DFAT acknowledges that registration data is often incomplete or inaccurate.

broader review of its ongoing utility, particularly in light of moves by other countries such as the United Kingdom to abandon similar universal registration processes in favour of more targeted approaches that use mobile phone applications and social media to connect to their citizens when a crisis or other emergency occurs.¹⁷

26. The overall success of the *Smartraveller Phase III* campaign is difficult to determine as there were no specific targets set out in the beginning of the campaign. DFAT has outlined improved performance measures in its communications strategy for *Smartraveller Phase IV*.

27. DFAT's Consular Charter provides an overview of the department's role in providing consular services, and outlines the expectations the department has of travellers—such as making sensible safety arrangements—and the expectations travellers should have of DFAT. The department's consular strategy, released on 3 December 2014 outlines, for the first time, DFAT's future strategic direction for consular services, including plans to improve the targeting of services to those individuals most in need, and mechanisms to limit assistance to, or recover costs from, those who knowingly or repeatedly compromise their safety overseas. It will be important for the department to develop and communicate appropriate guidance (for DFAT staff), and outline to the public the circumstances when provisions will be used so that travellers' expectations of the department are properly managed.

Travel Advisories (Chapter 3)

28. DFAT issues travel advisories for more than 160 destinations that are intended to provide information to Australian travellers about safety and security, as well as practical advice on travel-related topics such as health, local laws and customs. Each advisory includes one of four advisory 'levels'¹⁸ to indicate the overall severity of safety and security risks to travellers, and a map of the destination.¹⁹ Travellers value travel advisories, with internal market research commissioned by DFAT finding that 83 per cent of surveyed

17 While a number of countries (such as Canada and the United States of America) operate similar registration schemes, the United Kingdom discontinued its scheme in 2013 due to limited use.

18 These levels are, in order of increasing severity: 'Exercise normal safety precautions', 'Exercise a high degree of caution', 'Reconsider your need to travel', and 'Do not travel'.

19 DFAT began upgrading travel advisory maps in November 2014 to incorporate the advisory level as colour-coded shaded regions.

travellers agreeing that the advisories provide practical advice about destination countries.

29. Younger travellers and the elderly comprise an increasing proportion of Australia's travelling demographic, and as of 2013–14 made up approximately 33 per cent of travellers. The department has also seen increases in travellers from non-English speaking backgrounds and a greater use of mobile devices such as smartphones to access travel advisory content.²⁰ DFAT has improved its engagement with younger travellers and those using mobile devices by developing a *Smartraveller* iPhone app and promoting advisory updates via social media.

30. The ANAO's analysis suggests that travellers are unwilling to invest the time needed to read the lengthy travel advisories. The average visitor to DFAT's travel advice pages spends less than a third of the time required to read an advisory in its entirety. For some high-risk destinations for which DFAT provides highly detailed commentary of the local security situation, the average time on the website is insufficient to read even the safety and security information. The ANAO found that this commentary is often lengthier than that of international counterparts; the United Kingdom's terrorism warnings for low risk countries were, on average, 50 per cent shorter than those issued by DFAT. Additionally, only eight per cent of travellers surveyed by DFAT in 2010 who accessed travel advisories indicated that they had changed their in-country behaviour as a result of the advice. Reducing the length of advisories, improving the conciseness of messages and using simpler language, would also make advisories more accessible to those with limited English language backgrounds.

31. DFAT's travel advisories are subject to ongoing change. New advisories are issued for new destinations, and existing advisories updated to include new information or changed to reflect a new travel advisory level. In 2013–14, DFAT made 877 updates to its travel advisories. Each overseas post is responsible for reviewing the content of their advisories, risk assessing local threats and providing updated text to DFAT's Consular and Crisis Management Division (CCD) for approval. CCD consults with other stakeholders (including external agencies, and policy areas within DFAT) to seek further input. DFAT's processes for developing and updating travel advisories are sound. However, to be

20 The ANAO's analysis of DFAT *Smartraveller* website analytics data showed an increase of approximately 650 000 visits from mobile devices between 2012 and 2013.

effective, these processes need to be followed consistently by DFAT's staff at its overseas posts, particularly in recording the rationale behind their risk assessments. The ANAO's examination of the documentation of risk assessments for five²¹ travel advisories found one instance where the travel advisory level had been downgraded with no risk assessment being provided to CCD, and a lack of documentation to support the rationale for maintaining current risk levels in all instances.

Provision of Consular Services Overseas (Chapter 4)

32. The demand for consular services continues to increase, in line with the increase in overseas travel by the Australian public. The assistance rendered by DFAT is often complicated by difficult overseas environments, and the needs of higher risk travellers such as the young and elderly. Consistent with these trends, the number of travellers provided with consular services has risen from 92 000 cases in 2002–03 to 236 600 cases in 2013–14.²² Over the same period, the number of consular assistance cases for Australians in difficulty has ranged from 11 000 to more than 30 000 per year.

33. Each consular assistance case presents unique service delivery challenges emphasising the importance of consistency and equity in service delivery. A sound administrative framework helps to ensure decisions are appropriate, clearly communicated and, where necessary, subject to review. While DFAT has internal guidelines that set out the assistance it can provide, the basis by which the department makes key decisions about the assistance that will (or will not) be provided was not always adequately documented. The ANAO's analysis of a sample of 35 consular repatriation cases from 2013–14, found that consular case documentation did not consistently provide a clear record of the reasons not to provide repatriation funding.²³ Although DFAT has in place informal oversight arrangements²⁴ to provide assurance to management that the decision making process by which it assesses the need for and provides consular assistance is sound, the management of the consular

21 These advisories covered the four countries visited by the ANAO (Laos, Lebanon, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates) and the United Kingdom.

22 Consular services include consular assistance provided to Australians in difficulty, along with notarial services.

23 The 35 repatriation cases examined were from Denmark, Laos, Lebanon, Thailand, UAE and USA.

24 The informal oversight arrangements include consular case management in CCD conducting regular meetings to review and compare consular cases, critique decisions, and identify areas for improvement.

assistance caseload is not currently supported by a quality assurance process that is independent from case decision making. An annual risk-based quality assurance process undertaken by the CCD teams²⁵ would provide greater assurance that the services DFAT delivers to its clients across the diplomatic network are equitable, and delivered in accordance with relevant policies and guidance.²⁶ Such a program could also highlight good practices and areas for improvement.

34. DFAT has identified that its Consular Management Information System (CMIS) is outdated, and efforts to replace it have been an ongoing process since 2003. CMIS has a limited ability to provide performance reporting information, and is inconsistently used. For example, in a sample of 20 prisoner cases, ANAO analysis showed that the 'date of the last consular visit' field was not completed in 30 per cent of the cases, while for those cases for which the field was completed, the recorded date varied by an average of 588 days from the date identified in the case notes.²⁷ As such, CMIS can offer little assurance to management as to the state of a post's workload and the service standards delivered at posts.

Crisis Readiness and Response (Chapter 5)

35. Under the Australian Government's Emergency Management Arrangements, DFAT has responsibility for managing the preparation for, and response to, an overseas crisis event in collaboration with other Australian and overseas stakeholders. DFAT has responded to several crises in recent times, including the October 2013 Lao Airlines aircraft (QV301) crash in Pakse, Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013, and most recently, the MH17 disaster in Ukraine in July 2014. Crisis preparations may also be activated in preparation for a major event (including sporting events such as the FIFA World Cup). DFAT continues to refine its framework for responding to such events in light of these experiences.

25 Canberra consular operations officers are allocated into two teams, with one team covering the Asia-Pacific region while the other team covers the rest of the world.

26 CCD's risk assessments could inform the selection of post casework, case types, and the elements within cases examined as part of the quality assurance activity.

27 Selected key case management fields for other case types had lower rates of completion. The 'name of hospital' field was completed in approximately 21 per cent of hospitalisation cases, and 'location of remains' field was completed in 5.6 per cent of death cases. No assault cases examined by the ANAO had completed the 'details of assault' field.

36. DFAT's network of overseas posts each prepare contingency plans for crisis events. The department has recently developed a new Crisis Action Plan (CAP) template, that combines posts' business continuity and consular contingency plans. This process has improved and simplified posts' crisis arrangements.²⁸ The earlier post consular contingency plans examined by the ANAO averaged 144 pages in length; the new CAPs average 53 pages. The new plans could be further improved by considering additional secondary risks that could complicate a crisis response. These risks are more localised and can relate to failures of key infrastructure (such as electricity or water supplies) or financial systems (necessitating a supply of available currency), problems with transportation, or lack of basic necessities such as food, water and hygiene equipment in a location.²⁹ It is recognised that many posts have informal arrangements to cooperate with consular partner nations on crises in their accredited countries, supplemented by a number of formal agreements with select nations in some areas. These have the potential to increase the scope of Australia's ability to respond to, and mitigate, crises overseas and should be included in the CAPs.

37. DFAT has several mechanisms to refine and review its crisis preparation, including the use of Contingency Planning Assistance Teams (CPATs) that work with posts to test and develop their existing contingency arrangements, and a formal lessons learned evaluation process that occurs at the end of every crisis event. While these processes have identified improvements that could be made to the department's contingency planning and crisis response arrangements, DFAT was not able to demonstrate that these issues had been addressed and the recommendations implemented, where relevant, across the network.³⁰ DFAT's existing processes for learning from crises would benefit from greater centralised coordination and oversight

28 The CAP plans cover topics such as staff roles and responsibilities in a crisis, resources posts have available to use in a crisis, contact information, arrangements to evacuate or relocate Australians, and other crisis-related material.

29 DFAT's response to the Pakse disaster involved secondary risks including the lack of banking facilities. Staff responding from nearby posts were required to bring their own bottled water, basic supplies and personal protective equipment because of the limited supply of these items at the site. Expenses at the crash site (such as food and temporary accommodation) had to be paid for in cash (in some cases, this was with officers' personal funds).

30 For example, DFAT's lessons learned processes identified 13 lessons and made four recommendations following the Pakse disaster, and 23 lessons and three recommendations following Typhoon Haiyan.

to help ensure that any improvements resulting from these exercises and CPAT visits are implemented by the relevant overseas posts.

Consular Performance Monitoring and Reporting (Chapter 6)

38. DFAT's performance framework for consular services consists of four key performance indicators (KPIs) relating to service delivery, provision of travel advice, contingency planning and crisis response. There are no targets or definitions to support the KPIs.

39. While DFAT's KPIs provide useful information regarding trends in consular service delivery, they lacked sufficient detail, and do not provide a basis to enable the department, and other key stakeholders including the Government and the Parliament, to assess the extent to which the objectives for the delivery of consular services are being achieved. Other countries, such as Canada and the United Kingdom, make use of other performance measures including client satisfaction, response times to client assistance needs, and the ratio of travellers requiring consular assistance. There would be merit in DFAT considering international experience in reviewing its performance measures.

40. DFAT's reporting against these KPIs did not include results (or quantifiable targets) in both 2012–13 and 2013–14, and was limited to providing consular activity metrics, such as the number of consular cases and phone calls received from the public.

Summary of entity response

41. DFAT's summary response to the proposed report is provided below, with the full response at Appendix 1.

DFAT notes the ANAO's conclusion that DFAT's administration of consular services is broadly appropriate and that services are generally delivered effectively. The audit report provides assurance to the government, DFAT's Senior Executive and the travelling public that the delivery of consular services is efficiently managed by the department.

DFAT accepts the ANAO's three recommendations and will work towards implementing them. DFAT notes that a number of the findings in the audit were addressed in the department's Consular Strategy 2014–16, which was commenced by the department in November 2013 and launched by Ms Bishop in December 2014.

Recommendations

Recommendation No. 1

Paragraph 4.59

To strengthen the management and oversight of consular services to Australians abroad, the ANAO recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:

- improves the recording of key consular case management information in the relevant case management system; and
- implements an annual risk-based quality assurance process by the Consular and Crisis Management Division operations teams for consular cases.

DFAT's response: *Agreed*

Recommendation No. 2

Paragraph 5.44

To strengthen its crisis preparations and response capabilities, the ANAO recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:

- includes in post crisis contingency planning risk assessments an assessment of, and strategies to mitigate, secondary risks; and
- strengthens the arrangements for implementing and monitoring the recommendations resulting from lessons learned evaluations and visits by the Contingency Planning Assistance Teams.

DFAT's response: *Agreed*

Recommendation No. 3

Paragraph 6.15

To improve the transparency and reporting of consular service delivery, the ANAO recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:

- develops appropriate key performance indicators and targets; and
- reports against these the extent to which its objectives for consular services are being achieved.

DFAT's response: *Agreed*

Audit Findings

1. Background and Context

This chapter outlines the background of Australia's consular services and the focus of the audit.

Introduction

1.1 Australia's consular services encapsulate the assistance the Australian Government provides to protect the welfare and interests of Australians travelling or residing abroad, and advice and information services provided to the Australian public.

1.2 The provision of consular services to nationals within another country is governed by international laws and consular practice, including the *Vienna Convention on Consular Relations 1963* (which allows for a country to safeguard, help and assist its nationals abroad³¹) and bilateral agreements between Australia and other countries.³²

1.3 While the Australian Government may 'give humanitarian assistance to Australian citizens and permanent residents whose welfare is at risk abroad, while respecting their rights to privacy'³³, the provision of assistance abroad is a discretionary service with no service standards or requirements mandated in legislation or law. In practice, however, there is a general expectation amongst the Australian public that the Australian Government, through its consular services, will provide a 'safety net' for its citizens while overseas.³⁴

1.4 The ability of the Australian Government to intervene in cases of Australians in difficulty abroad, particularly in serious cases, such as imprisonment or child custody disputes, is limited. The Australian Government has no jurisdiction in a foreign country and Australian travellers are ultimately bound by the laws and requirements of the country in which

31 *Vienna Convention on Consular Relations 1963*, Article 5, Consular Functions.

32 As at January 2015, DFAT advised that there were eight bilateral agreements with the countries of Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Russia, Vietnam and the United Arab Emirates, and two other consular-related agreements (relating to cooperation on protecting the welfare of children) with Egypt and Lebanon.

33 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Australian Consular Operations Handbook*, Chapter 4, Section 4.1 Consular role, February 2013.

34 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade reported in the *Issues Paper: Development of a new Consular Strategy 2014–16* that, during the closure of the Bangkok international airport in November 2008 (due to political unrest), many younger Australian travellers commented to consular officers that they have a 'right' to consular assistance, regardless of the circumstances.

they travel. While the Government provides advice and information to assist travellers in making safe travel decisions, travellers are ultimately responsible for their own safety and taking actions to mitigate travel risks.

Consular services—helping Australian travellers

1.5 As at 30 June 2014, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) delivered Australia's consular services to Australians abroad through 167 diplomatic posts³⁵ in 121 countries across the world, including an Honorary Consul network and 16 posts managed by the Australian Trade Commission (Austrade). In addition, Australia has a reciprocal consular sharing agreement with Canada, where Australians are able to access consular services from 14 Canadian missions³⁶, and an agreement with Romania to allow Australians to access services through the Romanian embassy in Syria. The delivery of consular services by diplomatic posts is supported by a Consular Emergency Centre located in Canberra, which provides a 24 hour, seven day a week service for Australians abroad and/or their next of kin in Australia.³⁷

Consular services

1.6 DFAT uses the term 'consular services' to describe all travel-related services provided to Australians both overseas and domestically. The consular services provided by DFAT fall into three core activities:

- providing travel advice and information to travellers relevant to their safety and security while abroad;
- providing notarial services and consular assistance to travellers abroad, and their next of kin, including those in difficulty; and
- coordinating and responding to crisis events overseas that affect Australians, such as natural disasters or terrorist attacks.

Travel advice and information

1.7 DFAT provides the Australian public with travel advisories and information on countries, issues and events to inform them of potential safety

35 A diplomatic post refers to an Australian Embassy, High Commission, Consulate-General or Consulate. Consular services are also available from the Australian Office in Taiwan and the Australian Representative Office in Ramallah.

36 These missions are largely located in Africa and the Caribbean, where Australia has minimal or no diplomatic presence.

37 In 2013–14, the Consular Emergency Centre received 53 049 calls.

and security risks and other relevant travel information on the *smartraveller.gov.au* website. Travellers are also encouraged to register their travel plans on the website to enable DFAT to contact them in the event of an emergency.

1.8 DFAT promotes these services, encourages the uptake of travel insurance, and raises awareness of consular issues commonly experienced by travellers via the *Smartraveller* public awareness campaign. As part of the *Smartraveller* campaign, DFAT is using various channels to target and inform Australian travellers, including commercial television advertising, printed media advertising and social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

Consular assistance and notarial services

1.9 DFAT's Consular Services Charter³⁸ outlines the types of consular assistance that DFAT can, and cannot, provide to Australian travellers, with assistance including the provision of:

- advice and support in case of accident, serious illness, occurrence of a serious crime, or death, including providing lists of local support services (such as hospitals or lawyers);
- information, assistance and potentially evacuation in the event of a major crisis;
- notarial services, voting facilities, and the contact details of government authorities in Australia; and
- in some circumstances, as a last resort, financial assistance, including government-funded repatriation of Australians.³⁹

1.10 Notarial services (such as certifying copies of documents and witnessing signatures, statutory declarations and affidavits) account for the majority of consular services provided, with 222 000 of the 236 600 cases in 2013–14. Consular assistance cases—categorised by DFAT as 'assistance to Australians in difficulty'—were around 14 600 for the same period.

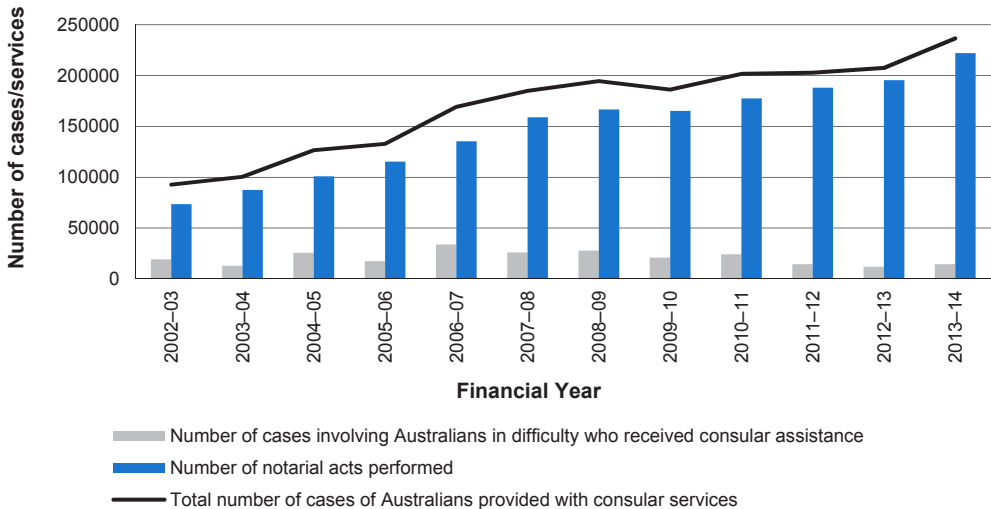
1.11 Consistent with the increase in Australian travellers over the past 12 years, the number of travellers provided with consular services has steadily

38 The Consular Services Charter is available from <<http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/services/consular-services-charter.html>>.

39 Appendix 2 provides a listing of services that can and cannot be provided.

increased from 92 000 cases in 2002–03 to 236 600 cases in 2013–14 (as shown in Figure 1.1). Over the same period, the number of consular assistance cases has ranged from 11 000 to more than 30 000 per year. This variability is largely due to the number of inquiries about Australians abroad who could not be contacted by their next of kin in Australia during a crisis event.⁴⁰

Figure 1.1: Total number of Australians provided with consular services (2002–03 to 2013–14)



Source: DFAT annual reports.

Crisis response

1.12 DFAT is also responsible for the coordination of the Australian Government’s response to consular crisis events abroad.⁴¹ This coordination role includes: crisis preparation, planning and readiness activities; the establishment and management of crisis response support teams to rapidly deploy to missions; and working with key Australian Government agencies. Recent consular crises have included:

- the Lao Airlines aircraft (QV301) crash in Pakse, southern Laos on 16 October 2013, resulting in 49 deaths including six Australian citizens;

⁴⁰ DFAT advised that, while the number of cases of clients in difficulty has declined over recent years, the complexity of these cases has increased.

⁴¹ A consular crisis event is a major overseas incident such as a terrorist attack or suspected attack; conflict or civil disorder—actual or imminent; transport or industrial accident; and natural disaster. Incidents affecting small numbers of people, such as kidnappings, can also be considered a consular crisis under certain circumstances.

- Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines on 7 November 2013, which resulted in around 5700 casualties, including two Australian deaths; and
- the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 incident in Ukraine in July 2014, resulting in 298 deaths, including 28 passengers with Australian citizenship and a further 10 passengers residing in Australia.

1.13 In each of the above crises, DFAT coordinated the response to the disaster with staff, both in Canberra and at the scene of the crisis, from several stakeholder agencies, such as the Australian Federal Police and Australian Defence Force.

Consular demand

1.14 The demand for, and nature of, consular services has changed over time, reflecting changes in traveller numbers and demographics. Changes in the travel industry, such as the lower cost of air travel and improved standards, has resulted in more Australians travelling abroad more often, including higher risk groups such as the elderly and children.⁴² These changes have led to a greater demand for consular services. Other key drivers for this increase include significant incidents that impact on travellers, such as:

- terrorist activities and natural disasters, where an intensive and rapid consular response is required; and
- rising expectations from individuals and their families about the level of assistance provided, partly driven by media interest in higher profile cases.

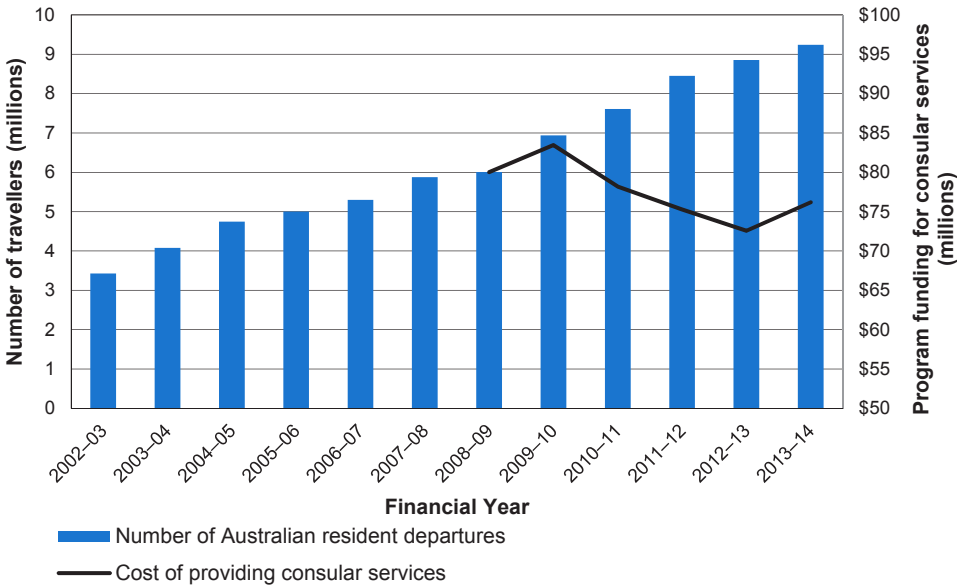
1.15 Over the past 12 years, the number of Australians travelling abroad has increased by around 170 per cent, from 3.4 million traveller departures in 2002–03 to 9.2 million in 2013–14. Meanwhile, funding for consular services peaked in 2009–10 at \$83.5 million and steadily declined to \$72.6 million in 2012–13.⁴³ The level of funding has since increased to \$76.2 million in 2013–14, and DFAT advised the ANAO that estimated costs for 2014–15 will be

42 The elderly and children are considered by DFAT to be a higher risk travel category as they are more likely to require assistance due to medical emergency or family custody issues.

43 According to DFAT's Portfolio Budget Statements, Program 2.1: *Consular Services*. Funding figures incorporate Budget Estimates variations.

\$85.0 million. The increase in Australian travellers over time and the budget to provide consular services is shown in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: Number of Australian traveller departures (2002–14) and cost of consular services (2008–14)



Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT Annual Reports and Portfolio Budget Statements.

Note: Prior to 2008–09, the reported budget for consular services was combined with passport services. Since 2008–09, the budget for consular and passport services has been reported separately.

Stakeholder entities

1.16 While DFAT is primarily responsible for the provision of consular services, the following government entities are involved in supporting DFAT’s consular activities:

- Austrade: delivers consular services at several of its overseas posts;
- Department of Defence: contributes to DFAT’s contingency planning for crisis events and, in some cases, logistic and evacuation support in the event of a crisis;
- agencies in the intelligence, security and law enforcement community that may assist in responding to crisis events, and through the National

Threat Assessment Centre⁴⁴ contribute to risk assessments used to inform travel advisories;

- Department of Health: provides advice regarding disease outbreaks and public health issues that may be included in travel advisories;
- Emergency Management Australia: has ownership of several whole-of-government crisis response plans, and responsibility for receiving repatriated casualties from overseas in the event of a mass casualty event;
- Department of Immigration and Border Protection: assists with the processing of returning Australians in the event of a crisis; and
- Department of Human Services: provides support to repatriated Australians and, through Centrelink, supports DFAT in responding to telephone enquiries during a crisis event.

1.17 More broadly, DFAT's external consular stakeholders include the travel industry, travel associations, the media, Australian businesses operating overseas, and the general public. DFAT engages with several of these stakeholders via a forum established as part of the *Smartraveller* campaign, known as the Smartraveller Consultative Group.⁴⁵

Audit coverage

1.18 The provision of Australia's consular services by DFAT has previously been examined in the following ANAO audit reports:

- Audit Report No.31 2000–01 *Administration of Consular Services*; and
- Audit Report No.16 2003–04 *Administration of Consular Services Follow-up Audit*.

1.19 The initial ANAO audit in 2000–01 followed a Parliamentary Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee June 1997 report, *Helping Australians Abroad—A Review of the Australian Government's Consular Services*. The Committee's report included 23 recommendations to improve

44 The National Threat Assessment Centre is located within the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, and provides assessments of individuals or groups that could pose threats to Australia. It operates on a 24/7 basis and includes representatives from several intelligence and law enforcement agencies.

45 The group is discussed further in Chapter 2.

consular services. The ANAO audit included the review of DFAT's progress in implementing these recommendations.

1.20 The audit found that, in general, consular services were satisfactorily administered and that DFAT had strengthened the arrangements to prevent Australians from experiencing difficulties abroad by focusing its staff on the provision of consular services. Notwithstanding these improvements, the audit found weaknesses in supporting management processes and administrative systems, including: travel advice and information arrangements; the case management system; performance management arrangements; and contingency planning. The audit made six recommendations to address these weaknesses.

1.21 The 2003–04 follow-up audit reviewed and reported DFAT's progress in implementing the six recommendations from the previous audit. The audit concluded that DFAT had implemented one recommendation and was in the process of implementing another three recommendations. Two of the recommendations—relating to performance management and registration of Australians abroad—had not been addressed by DFAT. The follow-up audit made two further recommendations in relation to the new consular case management system and contingency planning.

Audit objective, criteria and methodology

1.22 The objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's delivery of services to Australians travelling or residing abroad.

Audit criteria

1.23 To form a conclusion against the audit objective, the ANAO adopted the following high level criteria:

- effective strategies were in place to support the delivery of consular services to Australians in selected countries;
- appropriate arrangements were in place to engage with, and provide, Australians travelling or residing abroad with information relevant to their safety and security;
- accessible consular services were provided for Australians travelling abroad who required assistance; and

- the capacity to respond to, and coordinate, a consular crisis had been established.

Audit methodology

1.24 In conducting this audit, the ANAO: interviewed DFAT officers; reviewed DFAT files and documents and analysed relevant data; and observed the delivery of consular services in four of DFAT's overseas posts, and one Austrade post.⁴⁶ The audit team also invited contributions to the audit from members of the Smartraveller Consultative Group, and members of the public via the ANAO's Citizen Input Facility.

1.25 The ANAO also analysed a sample of 245 consular case management records (approximately 15 per cent of cases under management) from Abu Dhabi, Atlanta, Bangkok, Beirut, Copenhagen, Dubai, London, Los Angeles, New York and Vientiane. These cases spanned the variety of case types managed by DFAT, including prisoner and arrests, hospitalisation, welfare, child abduction, death, assault, general enquiries and notarial services, theft, whereabouts and repatriation.⁴⁷

1.26 The audit was conducted in accordance with the ANAO Auditing Standards at a cost to the ANAO of \$590 000.

46 The ANAO conducted fieldwork in: Bangkok (Thailand); Vientiane (Laos); Abu Dhabi and Dubai (United Arab Emirates); and Beirut (Lebanon). These posts were selected because of high numbers of Australian travellers to environments where there can be unfamiliar legal, safety and other issues that may complicate the delivery of consular services.

47 The case types examined at each post varied by post's workload and recording practices, as some posts do not record minor enquiries and notarial services in the case management system.

Report structure

1.27 The structure of this report is shown below:

Chapter	Chapter Overview
Chapter 2: Stakeholder Engagement	This chapter examines DFAT's strategies for delivering consular services, including engagement and communication with stakeholders.
Chapter 3: Travel Advisories	This chapter examines the arrangements established by DFAT to provide Australians travelling and residing abroad with information relevant to their safety and security.
Chapter 4: Provision of Consular Services Overseas	This chapter examines the arrangements that DFAT has in place to manage access to, and the provision of, consular services, including case decision-making and the management of case information.
Chapter 5: Crisis Readiness and Response	This chapter examines DFAT's arrangements for preparing and responding to consular crisis events, including contingency planning undertaken at Australia's overseas posts, the management of crisis events by DFAT Canberra and the evaluation of these events.
Chapter 6: Consular Performance Measurement and Reporting	This chapter examines the performance measurement and reporting arrangements supporting DFAT's delivery of consular services.

2. Stakeholder Engagement

This chapter examines DFAT's strategies for delivering consular services, including engagement and communication with stakeholders.

Introduction

2.1 DFAT's consular stakeholders are diverse, including Australians travelling and residing abroad, their families and friends, Australians contemplating or planning travel, and the broader travel industry. Promoting safe travel behaviours requires DFAT to tailor messages and communication methods to appropriately target each stakeholder group. DFAT's ability to successfully engage with these groups should minimise the need for consular assistance over time.

2.2 The primary means by which DFAT engages with target groups is through information disseminated to, and accessed by, consular stakeholders via: the *Smartraveller* campaign, including internet content and advertising activities that are managed centrally by CCD. Individual posts communication with Australian travellers and residents is through post websites, email lists, social media accounts and printed material.

2.3 The ANAO examined DFAT's strategies for the delivery of consular services and its engagement with stakeholders, including through its *Smartraveller* campaigns and post communications.

Consular strategy

2.4 As discussed in Chapter 1, the consular services that Australians can expect to receive from DFAT are outlined in the Consular Services Charter. The Charter provides an overview of DFAT's role in providing consular services, includes the services DFAT can and cannot provide⁴⁸, the expectations the department has of travellers—such as making sensible safety arrangements—and the expectations travellers should have of DFAT.

2.5 In late 2013, DFAT identified the need for, and commenced developing, a consular strategy to outline the focus and strategic direction for the delivery

48 These services are outlined in Appendix 2.

of consular services over the period 2014–2016.⁴⁹ The strategy was endorsed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in November 2014, and is intended to assist the department to manage broader public expectations, and to provide strategic direction to DFAT’s consular activities. The consular strategy focuses on the following five areas:

- promoting a culture of responsible travelling and self-reliance;
- raising public awareness and informing the public of travel issues;
- providing more assistance to those who need it most, including vulnerable clients;
- striving to improve Australia’s consular services; and
- improving the training, development and skills of consular officers.

2.6 The strategy also introduces the possibility of limiting consular assistance to those clients who knowingly engage in behaviour that is illegal, or to those who deliberately or repeatedly engage in reckless or negligent behaviour that puts themselves or others at risk. As part of the process of developing the strategy, the department also revised the Charter, to align the two documents.

2.7 The recent release of the consular strategy on 3 December 2014 will better place DFAT to manage the delivery of consular services within a changing global environment. However, in introducing possible limits to the services provided and cost recovery arrangements, it will be important that the department develops guidance for DFAT staff to ensure that consular assistance is consistent and equitable across the network. Advising the public as to when such provisions may be applied will also be necessary if travellers’ expectations of the department are to be adequately managed. DFAT advised the ANAO that such provisions are expected to apply in ‘a very small minority’ of cases, and that decisions to limit assistance would in most cases be made in consultation with the Minister.⁵⁰

49 The development of the consular strategy involved consultation with: the public; consular officers in Canberra and across the diplomatic network; and stakeholders.

50 The department further advised that it expects its promotion of the Consular Strategy launch event to raise significant public awareness, and that such messaging will be incorporated into future consular communications activities (such as *Smartraveller*, discussed later in this chapter). The department has also provided advice to all DFAT and Austrade posts regarding the new strategy, in addition to those Canadian posts that provide assistance to Australians (this arrangement is discussed in Chapter 4).

Consular communications strategy

2.8 In October 2014, as part of its preparations for the next phase of the *Smartraveller* campaign (*Smartraveller Phase IV*) scheduled to launch in 2015, DFAT finalised a new consular communications strategy. This strategy primarily discusses how DFAT will promote its revised *Smartraveller* campaign (discussed below), but also explores how the department intends to work with other consular stakeholders to promote its key messages. Mechanisms the department intends to use during *Phase IV* include targeted paid advertising (particularly television and digital); enhanced use of social media and mobile messaging to disseminate key messages (including sending ‘alerts’ in a crisis); engagement with the travel industry through partnerships, public relations activity and an expanded *Smartraveller* Consultative Group⁵¹; outreach programs to engage with travellers at key points in their travel planning; and development of resources and publications that target segments with special travel needs.

2.9 The communications strategy is supported by research, planning, evaluation and dedicated funding, as discussed later in this chapter. However, some elements of DFAT’s consular communication activities, such as those conducted by posts, are not explicitly incorporated into *Smartraveller* communications planning. Articulating the role that post activities have in the *Smartraveller* communications strategy will help ensure that consular communication activities are aligned and focused on key objectives.

Smartraveller campaign

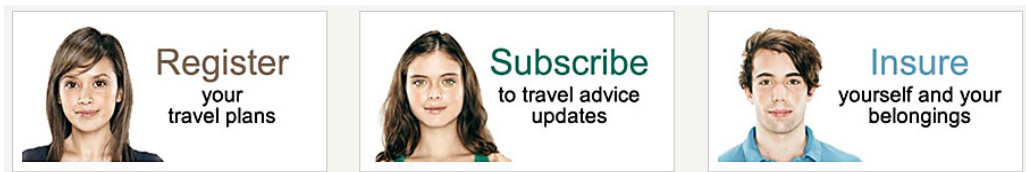
2.10 The *Smartraveller* campaign was launched on 7 September 2003 by the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, with the campaign being conducted in a series of phases, each running for several years. The current phase, *Phase III*, commenced in November 2011. Broadly, the campaign phases focused on the following themes:

- *Phase I*: Raising awareness of *Smartraveller*;
- *Phase II*: Raising awareness and promoting behavioural change; and
- *Phase III*: Building on levels of awareness to focus on behavioural change.

51 The *Smartraveller* Consultative Group is discussed later in this chapter.

2.11 Total funding for *Smartraveller Phase III* is \$13 million over four years and is separate from general consular services funding. The Consular and Crisis Management Division (CCD) is responsible for managing the campaign. *Phase III* focused on three key behavioural messages for the travelling public, which are outlined in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: DFAT's *Smartraveller* messages



Source: www.smartraveller.gov.au.

2.12 The ANAO examined the department's approach to raising awareness of *Smartraveller* among travellers, consultation with the travel industry, communicating the key messages, and how the performance of the campaign has been measured.

Raising awareness

2.13 The website *smartraveller.gov.au* is DFAT's primary tool for conveying consular information. It consists of the primary website and a mobile sub-site *m.smartraveller.gov.au*, which features the same content in a form more suitable for viewing on a mobile device. DFAT has also produced a *Smartraveller* iPhone app, which in addition to providing the standard content of the mobile website, also features a simplified process for users to register their travel itinerary.⁵²

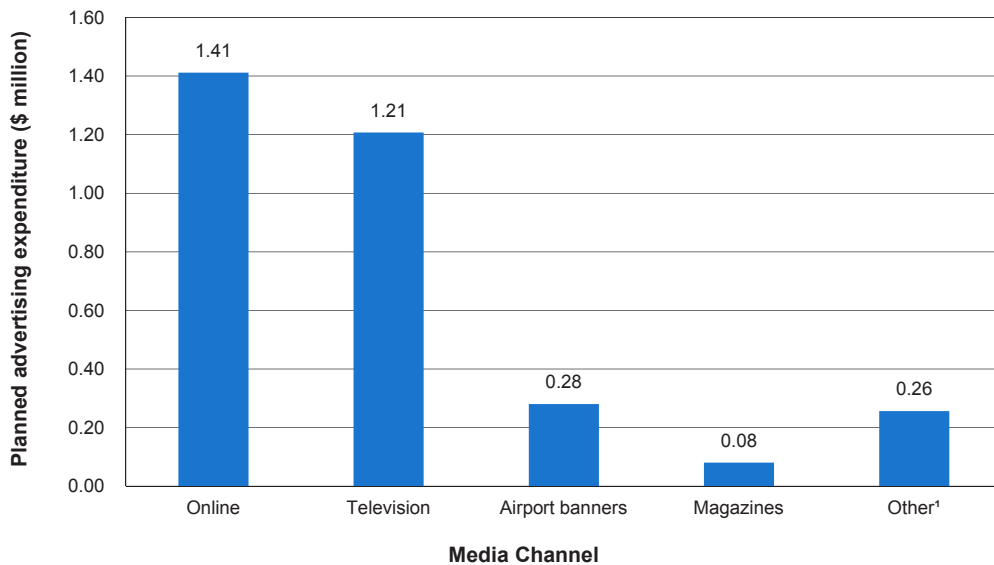
2.14 The *Smartraveller* websites provide a variety of content for Australian travellers, including travel advice for selected countries, travel bulletins for major events and specific incidents and specialised guidance for select demographics (for example, business people; children; persons with dual nationality; lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex individuals; seniors; youth; and women).

52 DFAT plans to develop an app for Android-based devices as part of *Smartraveller Phase IV*.

Campaign Advertising

2.15 The *Smartraveller* campaign aims to raise travellers' awareness of consular issues through a range of advertising media, including radio, television, print, and online advertising. DFAT has also sponsored travel industry events as avenues to promote the *Smartraveller* brand and messages, and provided free wireless internet in Australian airports during peak holiday periods as a promotional tool. Figure 2.2 shows the 2013–14 *Smartraveller* advertising expenditure across the various media channels.

Figure 2.2: Planned *Smartraveller* advertising expenditure by channel (2013–14)



Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT *Smartraveller* media plan.

Note 1: 'Other' includes advertising in languages other than English, and advertising targeted to hearing impaired audiences.

2.16 DFAT's advertising method selection and expenditure is based on the recommendations of contracted media consultants, with the booking of advertising space managed through whole-of-government advertising arrangements.⁵³

53 Additional information on Australian Government advertising arrangements is available from the Department of Finance's website <<http://www.finance.gov.au/advertising>>.

Social media

2.17 Online social media platforms, while presenting risks, also provide opportunities for agencies to engage with their stakeholders in new, and more active, ways. DFAT operates *Smartraveller*-themed social media accounts, controlled centrally by CCD, to promote and share safe travel practices, information, and *Smartraveller* resources. DFAT uses Facebook and Twitter accounts to post brief summaries and provide links to advisories and other information. A selection of *Smartraveller* video content, including advertisements and country travel advice and information has also been added to DFAT's YouTube channel.

2.18 The department takes a relatively passive approach to the interactive capabilities inherent in social media platforms. The ANAO examined DFAT's Facebook account activity for a one-month period.⁵⁴ During this period, DFAT made 68 posts and received 1179 public comments in response. Of these, 26 asked a question of DFAT, to which the department made nine replies.⁵⁵ The ANAO also observed three instances where members of the public disputed elements of DFAT's travel advisories, or advised travellers that the local situation was less dangerous than outlined in the advisory. DFAT did not respond to these comments and advised the ANAO that responding to every comment would be resource prohibitive, but that responses will always be given to questions or when an Australian is in trouble.

2.19 In November 2014 DFAT hosted a live forum on its *Smartraveller* Facebook account, in which consular and passports officers responded to questions from participants on a range of issues. The initiative is a positive example of two-way engagement and, if done on an occasional basis, could potentially improve DFAT's social media presence and offer value to the public with minimal implications for the department's resource position.

2.20 The use of multiple communication channels also creates challenges in delivering a consistent message across all platforms. The ANAO observed that information presented by social media is not updated as frequently as DFAT's travel advisories on the *Smartraveller* website and, as a consequence, may not

54 The period examined was 20 June to 22 July 2014.

55 DFAT's internal guidance does not stipulate the extent to which officers are expected to participate in social media conversations. Most of the questions sought additional information or clarification regarding the content of travel advisories and bulletins, while others related to overseas entry and exit requirements, travel insurance, security screening arrangements and passports.

be consistent with this advice. For example, the DFAT YouTube channel contains *Smartraveller*-branded 'travel advice' videos featuring a consular officer discussing local conditions for 11 countries. As at June 2014, these videos had not been updated since March 2012, with one video continuing to advise that 'thousands' of Australians travelled to a location 'and generally have a great time' despite that country being subject to DFAT's current travel advice level of 'Reconsider Your Need to Travel'. During the course of the audit DFAT informed the ANAO that the outdated content would be removed.

2.21 DFAT recognises that social media enables the department to enhance its engagement with its stakeholders, but also requires a clear strategy that articulates how these platforms will be used, taking into account resource implications and the ongoing investment in maintaining consistency of messages. The *Smartraveller Phase IV Communications Strategy* incorporates the results of market research from media and advertising agencies that found that users of DFAT's Facebook page did not express a preference for more interactive content, but identified that the department may experience resource pressures managing its social media presence, particularly in crisis situations, as users expect their comments and messages to be responded to promptly. Additionally, the provision of inconsistent advice has the potential to adversely affect the reliance placed on travel advisories, and while it may not always be appropriate to engage with social media participants, there is a risk that incorrect or inappropriate user comments may be perceived to be 'endorsed' by the department if some form of response is not forthcoming.

Television media

2.22 In 2014, DFAT provided a commercial television network with access to the consular and passports areas of the Bangkok embassy, to produce a television documentary series covering incidents of Australians receiving consular services in Thailand. The series aired nationally in late 2014, and has provided DFAT with a vehicle to promote its consular function, and safe travel messages, to a wide audience.

Travel industry consultation

2.23 The *Smartraveller Consultative Group* was established by DFAT in 2004 as a joint initiative between the Government and the travel industry to enhance and promote safe travel messages. The group meets on a biannual

basis, is chaired by DFAT and includes senior representatives from various bodies in the travel industry.⁵⁶

2.24 The feedback provided to the ANAO on the *Smartraveller* campaign indicated members are generally satisfied with the operation of the consultative group. Notwithstanding this view, there were a number of suggested improvements, including the broadening of the involvement of the group to include consular issues more generally—as the group’s current focus is limited to the *Smartraveller* campaign—and expanding the membership to include online travel providers. The recently released consular strategy highlighted DFAT’s intention to expand the role and membership of the group to become the key stakeholder outreach body on consular matters.

Key *Smartraveller* messages

Traveller registration

2.25 Registering travel plans is one of the three key *Smartraveller* messages, with DFAT encouraging travellers to provide details of their itinerary prior to departure. This process is promoted as a means to allow DFAT to contact or locate Australians abroad, particularly in an emergency. Registration is available via the Online Register of Australians Overseas (ORAO), an online form on the *Smartraveller* website, in person at DFAT’s overseas posts, or by mailing a form to CCD. In addition, travel groups—such as tour groups or schools—can email travel details to DFAT for manual entry into ORAO. The cost of operating ORAO in 2013–14 was \$189 147.⁵⁷

2.26 While ORAO is used by DFAT to locate Australians during an emergency and to estimate the number of Australian travellers visiting, or residing in, an overseas location at a point in time, the rates of registration across the traveller community are generally low. In 2012–13, DFAT reported a total of 1 179 000 registrations⁵⁸, compared to 8 856 000 Australian resident

56 'Represented bodies' include travel agents, associations and tour operators, insurers, airlines, academics, interest groups representing major travelling demographics, and internet search providers.

57 This figure relates to the cost of the ORAO helpdesk officer who responds to client enquiries and manually processes some registrations. As ORAO's supporting IT infrastructure is shared with other systems, this cost has not been included.

58 'Reported registrations' does not accurately represent the number of travellers making use of the registration service as each registered destination on a travel itinerary is counted separately. For example, one traveller visiting five countries is counted as five registrations. However, five travellers travelling as a family (registered with a single registration) visiting one country is counted as one registration.

departures. The department noted that ‘it remains the case that only a minority of Australian travellers register their travel’⁵⁹, with ORAO registrations typically understating the actual number of Australians in a location by a factor of between five and 10. Registration figures do, however, typically increase during a consular crisis.

Barriers to travel registration

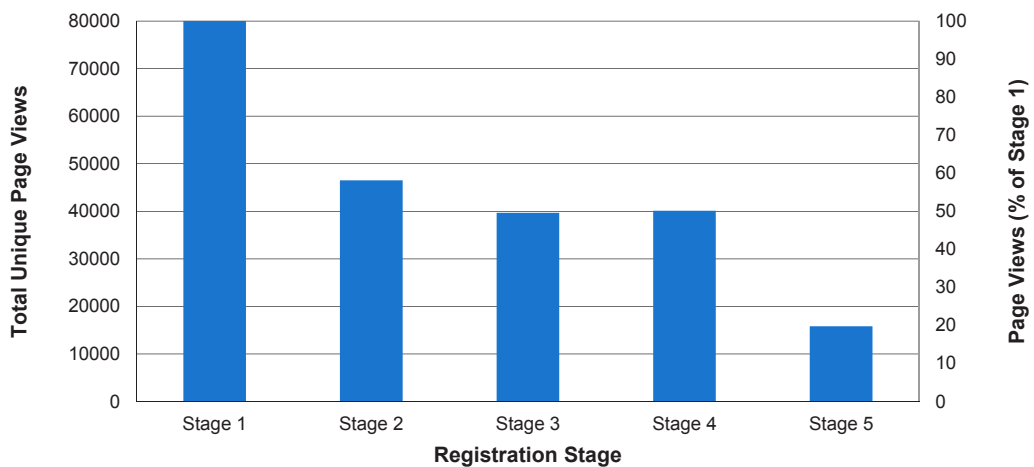
2.27 Market research commissioned by DFAT in 2013 indicated that 77 per cent of Australians recognise the importance of registering their travel itinerary. However, surveyed travellers indicated they would be more likely to register if the process:

- was simple, took minimal effort and was convenient;
- articulated and provided a compelling benefit;
- was promoted during the booking process;
- provided guarantees of privacy protection; and
- was automatically linked to information collected at the time of departure.

2.28 The ANAO’s analysis of DFAT’s *Smartraveller* website data suggests that, while travellers may be initially interested in registering, many become discouraged during the process, which requires travellers to complete questions on a series of online pages. Only 20 per cent of those travellers who visit the starting page progress to the final page, as outlined in Figure 2.3. The department advised that it has recently launched a new starting page (in November 2014) highlighting the importance of registration and the information required to complete the process.

59 The number of registrations for 2012–13 increased from 943 000 in 2011–12. DFAT did not report registration numbers in the 2013–14 annual report but advised the ANAO that 2 042 821 traveller registrations were present in the registration system during 2013–14. This number does not directly correspond to the 2012–13 figures as it includes registrations made prior to 2013–14 relating to long-term residents abroad, and trips still in progress during the year.

Figure 2.3: Smartraveller website registration progression



Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT website data.

2.29 Selecting a travel destination in ORAO is also difficult for users. For example, travellers are required to select their destination from a single list of 603 options which are neither filtered nor limited by location. Of these 603 choices, 182 are duplicated variations.⁶⁰ Filtering the list of destinations, such as by region, then country, and removing potentially confusing duplicate options may assist travellers to more efficiently complete the registration process. DFAT’s consular strategy has flagged that the department will introduce modifications to the registration system to make it easier to use.

2.30 Research conducted during *Smartraveller Phase III* indicated that travellers would value an automated registration system that is integrated with travel booking arrangements, for example the ability to share itineraries from agents/airlines/other intermediaries at the point of booking. DFAT is not, however, able to accept automated registration information from travel agents and other providers because of limitations to the current Consular Management Information System (CMIS).⁶¹ As DFAT is intending to replace the ORAO system as part of its redevelopment of CMIS, there would be merit in exploring the costs and benefits of receiving registration data from approved agents as part of the new system.

60 For example, ‘New York’ and ‘USA – New York’.

61 DFAT uses CMIS to manage cases of consular assistance and crises, store the details of Australians who have registered with ORAO, and contact travellers with emails and SMS messages. CMIS is discussed further in Chapter 4.

2.31 In 2010, the department commissioned an evaluation of the *Smartraveller Phase II* campaign, and research for the forthcoming *Phase III* campaign. The research found that the benefits of registration were not clear to travellers. Many travellers considered that they achieved a similar benefit by informing their family and friends of their travel plans, and maintaining contact via social media, and did not perceive an additional benefit in registering with DFAT. Further, the research found that encouraging registration created a perception that the Government would provide a ‘safety net’ in the event of an emergency, and that this perception may conflict with the attempts by DFAT to encourage self-sufficiency.

2.32 The value of registering travel details is adversely affected where incorrect information is entered. Many registration fields, such as contact addresses and passport numbers, are free-text fields, which may result in travellers registering with erroneous information.⁶² DFAT is aware of these issues, and acknowledges that data is often incomplete or inaccurate, undermining its usefulness, and is often of limited value except as a starting point for following up whereabouts inquiries. The department has also considered the possibility that registration encourages complacency, by implying a level of assistance that may not be available.

2.33 DFAT informed the ANAO that it intends to address data integrity issues during its redevelopment of CMIS, by making greater use of drop-down menus and data verification where possible. While the recently released consular strategy states that it intends to review the ease of use of the traveller registration system, the department is yet to clearly articulate how it intends to address broader issues regarding the value of registration information and the behavioural effects on travellers of providing a registration service.

2.34 Research completed in 2010 also suggested that providing registration facilities in airport departure areas post-check-in—such as *Smartraveller* ‘kiosks’—may encourage travellers to register at a time when few other activities are available. Such kiosks were trialled by DFAT in 2003 but were limited to providing travel advice, and were ultimately withdrawn due to low usage rates. More recently, DFAT has explored areas of potential collaboration

62 Such errors may include travellers providing their Australian address and contact details as their overseas destination, incorrect passport number or contact details. The ANAO also observed obvious data entry errors, such as implausibly early dates of registration (pre-1950’s) and dates of travel from 1899.

with the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (Customs), including the use of Customs-provided kiosks for registration services, but no formal arrangements or plans are currently in place.

International registration systems

2.35 Consular partner nations—Canada, New Zealand, the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK)—also operate similar traveller registration systems:

- the Safetravel registration system from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade⁶³;
- the Registration of Canadians Abroad service, delivered by Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada⁶⁴; and
- the Smart Travel Enrolment Program delivered by the USA State Department.⁶⁵

2.36 Until May 2013, the UK operated a comparable system called LOCATE. However, the UK discontinued this system as less than one per cent of UK nationals abroad were found to use it.⁶⁶ Instead, the UK has promoted subscription to travel advisories, and the use of mobile applications and social media registration tools that are activated when a crisis or similar emergency occurs. There would be benefit in DFAT considering the experiences of international partners when reviewing the future direction for the traveller registration system.

Subscriptions to travel advisories

2.37 DFAT allows travellers to subscribe to email notifications that travel advice has been updated, and this service forms one of the key *Smartraveller* messages. The service is provided independently of travel registration—registering an itinerary with DFAT will not subscribe a traveller to travel advice updates for the countries selected. Travellers can also subscribe to travel advisories using the *Smartraveller* iPhone app, which can send a notification to

63 Additional information available from <<https://register.safetravel.govt.nz>>.

64 Additional information available from <http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/goc/registration_canadians_abroad.shtml>.

65 Additional information available from <<https://step.state.gov/step/>>.

66 Figures for the usage of Safetravel, Registration of Canadians Abroad and the Smart Travel Enrolment Program are not publicly available.

the user's device when an advisory is updated. Travel advisories are discussed in Chapter 3.

Travel insurance

2.38 Under the *Smartraveller* campaign, DFAT encourages travellers to purchase comprehensive travel insurance to mitigate the financial costs that they may incur should they experience accident or injury overseas. The department does not offer its own travel insurance products, nor does it endorse products from a particular insurer. It does, however, try to assist travellers in selecting the most appropriate product for their needs. For example, in October 2014 DFAT undertook a joint initiative with the consumer group Choice to release a travel insurance buyer's guide, which was published on the *Smartraveller* website, to assist consumers in this process. Additionally, DFAT is exploring options for collaborating with the Insurance Council of Australia, a member of the *Smartraveller* Consultative Group, to conduct research into the uptake of travel insurance among the Australian public.

Smartraveller campaign performance

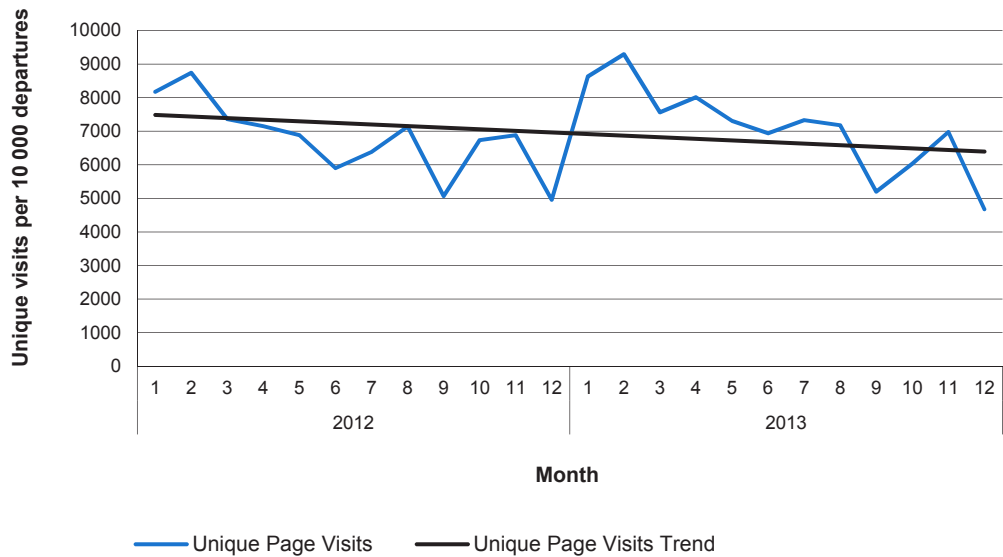
2.39 The effectiveness of the *Smartraveller* campaign is intended to be measured through several metrics. In evaluating the effectiveness of the *Phase II* campaign, DFAT's market researcher observed in March 2010 that the absence of overt targets for the campaign's performance 'means that it is not possible for us to say definitively whether the campaign was a success'. The research recommended that DFAT examine how key measures have changed over the course of the campaign, and in turn develop more specific, quantifiable objectives.

2.40 In response, *Smartraveller Phase III* outlined five metrics against which the success of the campaign would be measured.⁶⁷ Notwithstanding the development of metrics for *Phase III*, DFAT is yet to develop specific and quantifiable targets for the overall *Smartraveller* campaign or for the metrics identified for *Phase III*. In the *Smartraveller Phase IV* communication strategy, DFAT has set out several specific, measureable metrics for assessing campaign performance, and committed to developing measurable targets for each, based on campaign objectives.

67 The metrics included 'website traffic, registrations, subscriptions, Insurance Council of Australia for travel insurance, and independent tracking research'.

2.41 In the absence of reporting against the performance metrics for *Phase III*, the ANAO reviewed the performance of the *Smartraveller* campaign in terms of website traffic, subscriptions and registrations. The ANAO’s analysis indicated that awareness and use of the *Smartraveller* resources is increasing in absolute terms, but remained stable as a proportion of travellers because of increases in travel volume. The number of unique visitors to all *Smartraveller* website landing pages⁶⁸ compared with total outbound passenger movements is shown in Figure 2.4.

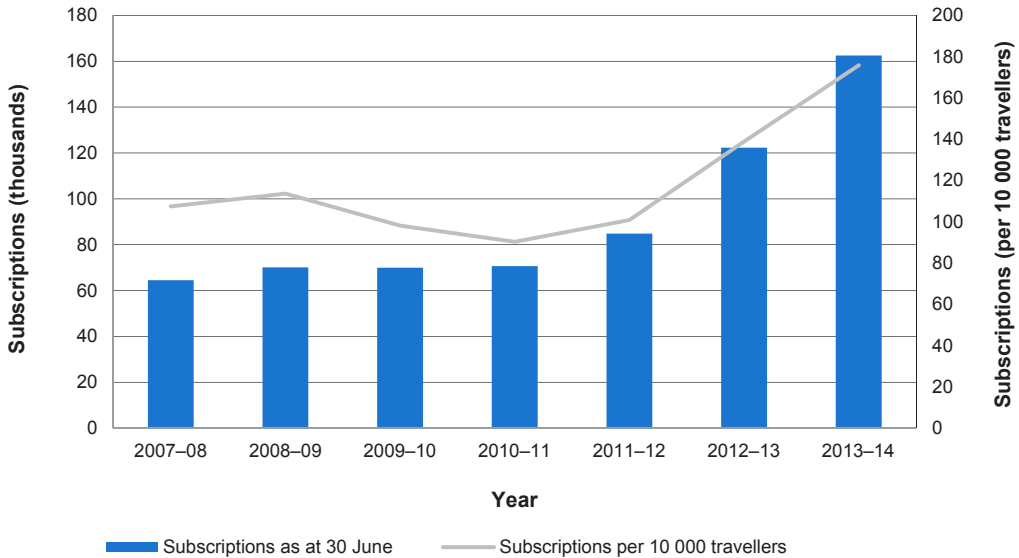
Figure 2.4: Unique visitors to all *Smartraveller* landing pages as a proportion of total resident departures during *Smartraveller Phase III*



Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT website data and overseas departures data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

2.42 DFAT has, however, been more successful in improving the uptake of its travel advisory subscription service. Subscribers as a proportion of travellers have been increasing since 2011, after experiencing two years of slight decline, as reflected in Figure 2.5.

68 A landing page is the first page a reader ‘lands’ on when visiting a website.

Figure 2.5: Travel advisory subscriptions relative to travel departures

Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT subscription statistics and overseas traveller departures data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

2.43 As DFAT is not able to determine the uptake of travel insurance among Australian travellers, it relies on anecdotal evidence from industry, as stated in DFAT's 2012–13 annual report:

Anecdotal reports from industry sources indicate a subsequent increase in insurance take-up by Australian travellers.⁶⁹

2.44 While the ANAO's analysis and anecdotal evidence indicates the *Smarttraveller* campaign has contributed to improved awareness and behavioural change, DFAT would be better placed to determine the extent to which campaign objectives have been achieved if it established and reported against relevant, reliable and complete performance indicators.

Overseas post communications

2.45 Overseas posts are responsible for managing communication with Australians resident in their accredited countries, and are often the first point of contact for travellers who experience difficulty while abroad. Communication methods and activities vary between posts and can include:

⁶⁹ DFAT *Annual Report* 2012–13, p. 134.

- websites that are separate from the DFAT central and *Smartraveller* websites, with local management responsible for their content and structure;
- social media accounts, which can include Facebook and/or Twitter, with the use of social media at the discretion of local management, under general guidance provided by DFAT officers in Canberra;
- email and contact lists, which can include lists of resident Australians that are used to distribute information; and
- material available and/or displayed at the post chancery⁷⁰, including brochures, posters and other promotional material.

2.46 The ANAO examined how each of the above communications channels is used by posts to communicate with Australians abroad.

Websites

2.47 Each post is required to maintain a public website, which is to be used for public diplomacy purposes.⁷¹ While these websites are required to use a consistent graphical theme, which was established in the early 2000's, decisions as to the content and structure of the website are the responsibility of local management. The overall design of post websites has not generally kept pace with contemporary trends in online activity—such as the increasing prominence of mobile browsing. Additionally, the functionality and content of post websites is variable, and often dependent upon the skills and availability of post staff. The ANAO examined a selection of six websites⁷² and noted differences in the consular content and information provided, as shown in Table 2.1.

70 'Chancery' refers to an Embassy, High Commission or Consulate-General building.

71 Post websites include content such as information on obtaining Australian entry visas, studying in Australia, services the post provides to Australians abroad, conducting business with Australians, and general news information about diplomatic work undertaken by the post.

72 The websites examined were those of Abu Dhabi, Bangkok, Beirut, Vientiane, Pretoria and London posts.

Table 2.1: Consular content featured on six selected post websites

Selected Content	Number of Post Websites Featuring Content
Link to, or description of, consular privacy collection statement ¹	4
Link to, or list of, fees for notarial services	2
Link to consular services charter	4
Link to <i>Smarttraveller</i> iPhone app	1

Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT websites.

Note 1: The consular privacy collection statement outlines how DFAT collects, uses, discloses and stores personal information related to consular cases in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988*.

2.48 While officers with website responsibilities are provided with training in the maintenance of websites, feedback from local management has indicated that the maintenance of post websites can be onerous. DFAT has advised the ANAO that shortcomings in the current post websites and the ongoing maintenance required are intended to be addressed as part of a broader replacement of DFAT's web hosting platform with a contemporary solution. As part of this process, responsibility for static content, such as general information and policy documents, will be centralised in Canberra, while posts will retain ownership of dynamic content, such as local news updates and photos. DFAT expects that these changes, once complete, will provide an enhanced and consistent experience for the public, as well as reducing the administrative burden on posts. Replacement of post websites is expected to occur in tranches over the next year.

Social media

2.49 Social media accounts are used by posts to communicate consular related information, particularly information specific to the post's location, such as latest travel advisories. Approximately half (48) of DFAT's overseas posts use social media platforms to engage with the public, with each post managing the account and posted content. The majority of these posts used Facebook and/or Twitter, however, posts can seek approval to use other social media platforms, such as Flickr, YouTube, Sina Blog and Microblog (Weibo), and Youku, which may be more appropriate to the post's local environment.

2.50 Coordination and oversight of posts' social media presence is devolved to post management, although posts must present a business case to be granted approval to use social media accounts. DFAT's policies regarding the use of social media accounts is limited to generic guidance, as found in DFAT's

conduct and ethics manual, in addition to that issued by the Australian Public Service Commission.⁷³

2.51 DFAT has advised that it informally monitors social media content and usage by posts, and contacts post management directly to discuss issues of concern. While this approach allows posts the flexibility to focus social media communications on issues of local relevance, the ANAO identified risks in overall content and account credentials management.⁷⁴ DFAT does not currently have in place a mandatory system for managing social media account credentials for those accounts established by posts. While staff are encouraged to register accounts using DFAT email addresses, this is not strictly enforced, and management of account credentials varies across posts.

2.52 Recognising these risks, DFAT has procured access to an online social media management platform and is trialling this platform over a two year period. The platform will enable central oversight of social media account credentials, account content, and evaluation tools that can identify types of content relevant to the public. As of October 2014 there were 32 post and three corporate accounts managed through the trialled platform, with an additional nine posts undergoing training in preparation for using the platform.⁷⁵

Other post communications

2.53 Posts have developed a range of consular communication materials, including email and contact lists, and localised consular promotional materials. Posts develop these materials at their discretion, but are encouraged to do so where possible. The capacity of posts to develop these materials is dependent on the workload and resources of the post, the local security situation, and the number of Australians in the post's accredited countries.

2.54 Posts have produced flyers, cards and other materials to inform Australians of the consular assistance and encourage Australians to register their contact details and/or subscribe to travel advice. Figure 2.6 shows an example where a post had developed, in partnership with partner nations, a

73 Such as the Australian Public Service Commission circular 2012/1 *Revisions to the Commission's guidance on making public comment and participating online*.

74 Social media account credentials, such as account user name and password, are managed by post management, and in cases, like Twitter, managed individually. This presents risks in DFAT not being able to access accounts where individual officers change or become unavailable.

75 Participation by posts is not mandatory during the trial.

single business card with each Embassy's contact details to be distributed to police and prison authorities to be provided to detained nationals.

Figure 2.6: Example of post developed consular communications in partnership with partner nations



Source: Australian Embassy to the United Arab Emirates.

2.55 While the communication materials developed by each post are generally tailored to local conditions, there would be merit in CCD facilitating the sharing of locally developed communications concepts and ideas across its network of posts.

Conclusion

2.56 The delivery of Australia's consular services is supported by a Consular Services Charter to manage public perceptions and expectations of the consular services provided abroad. In addition, DFAT has developed a consular strategy to underpin the delivery of consular services into the future. The strategy proposes changes to service delivery, such as the option to recover costs as well as limit services to clients who engage in risky or illegal behaviours. This information will need to be effectively communicated to the public if expectations are to be managed. DFAT's *Smarttraveller* campaign and the communications activities undertaken by the posts could be used for this purpose.

2.57 DFAT has developed an appropriate communications strategy to support its *Smartraveller* campaign. The campaign, which began in 2003, has been conducted in phases. *Phase III* (the current phase) focuses on target groups and uses a range of communications and advertising media to deliver its key messages. Communication research commissioned by DFAT has shown that the campaign has generally been successful in raising awareness of key consular messages. However, public uptake of the services these messages promote has been mixed. While travel advisories and insurance have increased in usage, the registration system remains under-utilised and unreliable as a source of information. Those travellers that do make use of the system may also believe that they will receive a degree of assistance that the department is unable to provide. While DFAT intends to review the ease of use of the registration system as part of the next *Smartraveller* campaign phase, there would be merit in the department reviewing the continued use of the system in its current form. Such a review could consider whether DFAT's aim of promoting safe travel behaviours could be better achieved through other messaging. DFAT would also be better placed to assess the effectiveness of the *Smartraveller* campaign if clear performance measures and targets were developed for future phases of the campaign.

3. Travel Advisories

This chapter examines the arrangements established by DFAT to provide Australians travelling and residing abroad with information relevant to their safety and security.

Introduction

3.1 DFAT issues travel advisories for more than 160 destinations that are intended to provide information to Australian travellers about safety and security, as well as practical advice on travel-related topics such as health, local laws and customs.⁷⁶ In doing so, the department aims to assist Australian travellers to make well informed decisions and to mitigate the risks they may encounter while abroad, reducing the likelihood of travellers requiring consular assistance.

3.2 Each travel advisory comprises a summary of key safety and security issues, along with an overall travel advisory 'level' that provides an indication of the level of risk the destination presents to travellers. Information on a range of other matters relevant to that destination, such as entry and exit, local travel, laws, health, where to get help and any additional information is included, as well as a high-level map of the country or area, and links to content provided by third parties, such as foreign embassies.⁷⁷

3.3 Since November 2011, DFAT has provided four travel advisory levels, representing low to high risk travel destinations (see Table 3.1 on next page). Travel advisories are intended to inform travel decisions and travellers are ultimately responsible for their own safety.⁷⁸ Adverse travel advisories—those with a 'do not travel' level—do not constitute a ban on Australians travelling to a particular destination. Travel advisories are primarily published on the DFAT *Smarttraveller* and mobile websites. An example of a travel advisory, including advisory levels is shown in Figure 3.1.

76 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Travel Advice Explained*, DFAT, available from <<http://smartraveller.gov.au/travel-advice-explained.html>> [accessed 30 June 2014].

77 In addition to country travel advice, DFAT also provides general information for travellers in demographics who may experience additional risks, such as the elderly or travellers with children. For special events likely to attract a significant number of Australian tourists, such as the 2014 Brazil World Cup, DFAT may also issue a travel 'bulletin' that provides advice specific to that event.

78 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Travel Advice Explained*, DFAT, available from <<http://smartraveller.gov.au/travel-advice-explained.html>> [accessed 30 June 2014].

Table 3.1: DFAT travel advisory levels

Level	Explanation
Exercise normal safety precautions	Exercise common sense and look out for suspicious behaviour, as you would in Australia.
Exercise a high degree of caution	Pay close attention to your personal security at all times and monitor the media about possible new safety or security risks.
Reconsider your need to travel	There is a high level of risk in the country/area. This may be due to a very high threat of terrorist attack or a volatile and unpredictable security situation. If you are already in a destination where we advise you to "reconsider your need to travel" and you are concerned about the security situation, you should consider leaving.
Do not travel	The security situation is extremely dangerous. This may be due to a very high threat of terrorist attack, widespread armed conflict and or dangerous levels of violent crime. If you are already in a destination where we advise that you "do not travel" you should consider leaving unless you have compelling reasons to stay.

Source: DFAT.

Figure 3.1: Travel advisory page layout (with sub-level advisories)

 Summary	Entry and exit	Safety and security	Local travel	Laws	Health	Where to get help	Additional information
Uganda overall							
Exercise normal safety precautions Exercise a high degree of caution Reconsider your need to travel Do not travel							
Areas bordering the Democratic Republic of the Congo							
Exercise normal safety precautions Exercise a high degree of caution Reconsider your need to travel Do not travel							
Karamoja region and areas bordering South Sudan							
Exercise normal safety precautions Exercise a high degree of caution Reconsider your need to travel Do not travel							

Source: DFAT travel advisory for Uganda (as at 9 October 2014).

3.4 Travellers can receive notifications of updates to travel advisories by subscribing to email lists, via a notification to their mobile phone (if using the *Smartraveller* iPhone app), and via the DFAT social media accounts, such as Facebook and Twitter. Where the travel advisory level is raised, posts are directed to draw the revised travel advisory to the attention of registered Australians.⁷⁹

79 This is typically undertaken by bulk email to travellers who have registered their travel details with DFAT.

3.5 The ANAO examined the administrative arrangements supporting travel advisories, the risk assessment process underpinning an advisory, and the content of advisories.

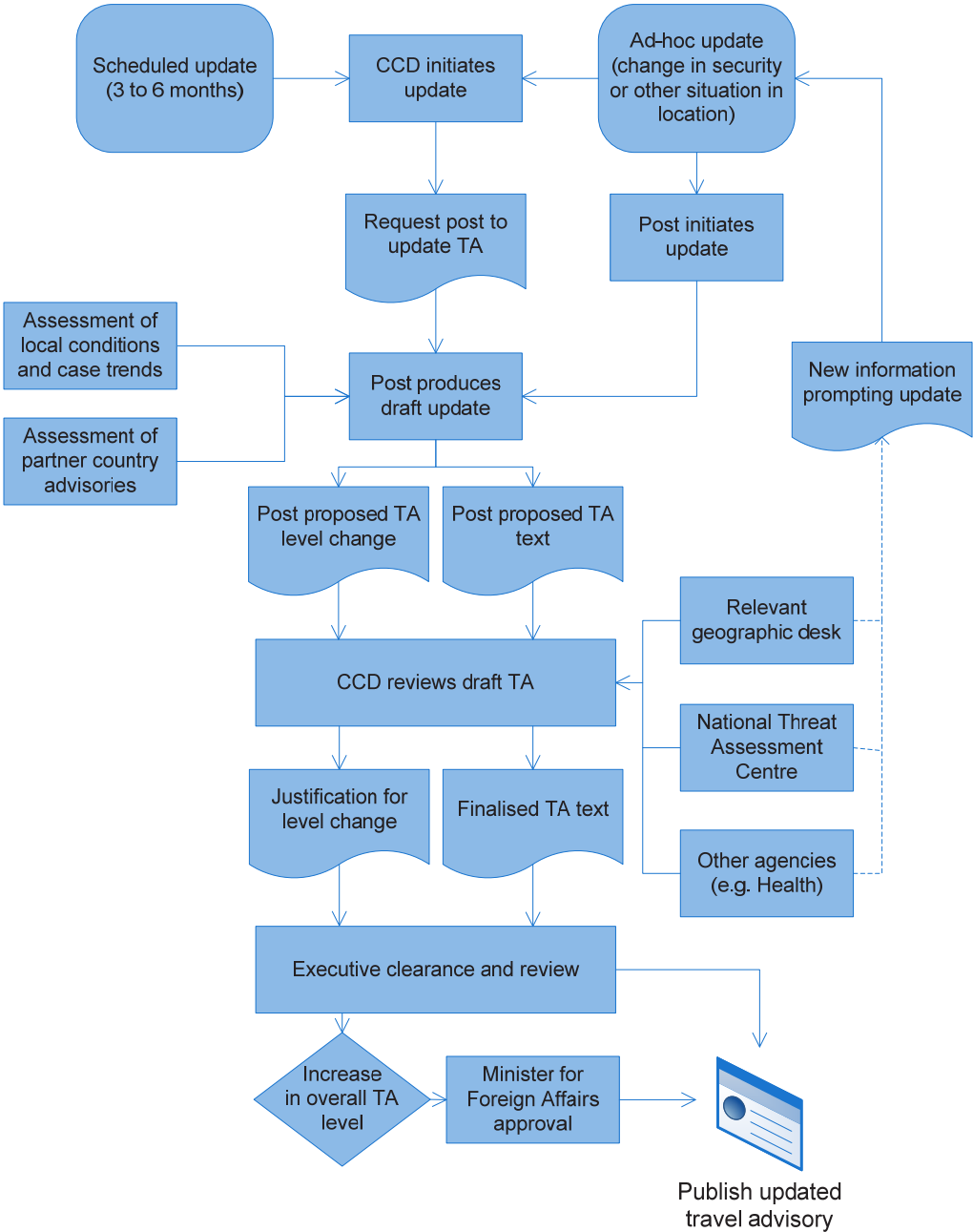
Administrative arrangements

3.6 DFAT's travel advisories are subject to ongoing change, with advisories issued for new destinations, updated to include new information, or changed to reflect a travel advisory level. Each post is responsible for reviewing the content of their advisories and providing draft advisory text to CCD. DFAT provides local post management with guidelines on the standard format, language and content that should be included in a travel advisory. In developing a travel advisory, posts draw upon assessments of the local environment—including political and security considerations, media reporting, consular case feedback, and advice provided by likeminded countries.⁸⁰

3.7 When considering the text proposed by a post, CCD consults with the relevant geographic policy area within DFAT, and may seek input from external stakeholders, such as the National Threat Assessment Centre (about destinations with significant security risks) and the Department of Health (about disease outbreaks, such as the recent Ebola outbreak in West Africa). Responsibility for approving a travel advisory, including the downgrading of an advisory level, rests with DFAT's executive. However, an increase to the overall risk level of an advisory requires the approval of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The process for developing and approving an advisory is illustrated in Figure 3.2.

⁸⁰ Likeminded countries include, but are not limited to: UK, USA, Canada, and New Zealand. The countries consulted will vary based on the extent to which they are represented in a particular location.

Figure 3.2: Travel advisory update process flowchart



Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT policies and procedures.

Frequency of updating

3.8 While travel advisories are routinely reviewed at intervals ranging from three to six months—based on destination risk—DFAT’s guidance for travel advisories also provides for travel advice to be updated ‘in response to an escalation of threat, or significant change in circumstances’. ‘Significant change’ is not further defined, and is at the discretion of the posts to determine. In the event such a change in circumstances occurs outside of standard business hours, the Consular Emergency Centre contacts a consular duty officer, who is responsible for coordinating the clearance of an emergency advisory update through an abridged process. Table 3.2 illustrates the frequency that advisories have been updated for five selected countries over a 12 month period.

Table 3.2: Frequency of updating selected travel advisories (May 2013–May 2014)

Country	Number of Advisory Updates	Average Number of Weeks Between Update
Laos	4	13
Lebanon	13	4
United Arab Emirates	3	17.3
UK	3	17.3
Thailand	39	1.3

Source: ANAO analysis.

3.9 It is important for DFAT to strike an appropriate balance when determining the frequency of updates, as issuing updates too frequently can result in travellers becoming desensitised to warnings. The coverage of frequently changing events, such as the location of protests, may be better provided by linking to local news services as an alternative to issuing a travel advisory, recognising that the reliability of the source is an important consideration. Updates issued after an event has occurred may be of limited value where the travel advisory already provides comprehensive warning of the risk of an event occurring.⁸¹ DFAT advised the ANAO that it only updates

81 For example, the ANAO observed that the travel advisory for Lebanon was updated to advise of bombings that had already taken place, despite the advisory already warning of the risk of these events.

after an event in a small minority of cases and is intended to assist travellers planning to travel to make safe travel decisions.

‘No Double Standards’ principle

3.10 The preparation of travel advisories is informed by material obtained from a variety of sources, including intelligence assessments. When preparing a travel advice, careful consideration must be given to disclosing sufficient information to the public to enable informed decisions to be made, while still maintaining confidentiality over potentially sensitive intelligence or security information.⁸²

3.11 The release of information in DFAT’s travel advisories is guided by a principle known as ‘No Double Standards’. This principle provides that no group or category of Australians should receive special or privileged advice, and that the advice provided by DFAT to the public should mirror that provided to DFAT staff, other government agencies and the private sector. Adopting this principle helps to ensure that the general public receives sufficient information to make an informed choice, and may reduce the incentive for the public to contact DFAT in an attempt to seek additional information. It may also provide comfort to the public if they are aware that DFAT officers are equally reliant on travel advice for their own safety and security.

3.12 As an employer, DFAT has obligations under relevant workplace health and safety legislation to inform its staff of safety issues for which it becomes aware in a timely manner.⁸³ During the audit, the ANAO noted an example of a DFAT post becoming aware of an imminent security risk relevant to local staff that would normally also result in a change to the travel advisory. In this case, the notification to staff was delayed while DFAT worked to update the travel advisory. In strictly applying the No Double Standards principle, DFAT staff were put at greater risk than would otherwise apply. DFAT advised in October 2014 that:

82 Posts must clear any safety and security-related consular information they intend to issue locally through CCD unless it repeats what is contained in the travel advisory.

83 Under Section 19(2) of the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 2011*, businesses (including Commonwealth agencies) are required to ensure the provision of any information, training, instruction or supervision that is necessary to protect all persons from risks to their health and safety arising from work carried out as part of the conduct of the business or undertaking.

By the nature of the travel advisory process, it will always take longer for an advisory to be updated, than advising staff of a security risk. Posts should always warn staff in the first instance, and then send an alert email/SMS to registered Australians. The advisory would/should then be updated as soon as possible. Updates could be slowed as other stakeholders such as NTAC or the Department of Health are involved in the update.

3.13 As there is no provision in the current guidance for posts to issue security-related information locally in parallel with updating the travel advisory through CCD, this guidance should be revised in accordance with the department's advice to the ANAO.

Risk assessment and coverage

3.14 The preparation of each travel advisory and subsequent updates involves a risk assessment by posts to inform the travel advisory level. Additional risk assessments are required for those countries where no travel advisory is currently issued.⁸⁴ Posts assess local circumstances, having regard to the:

- nature of threats posed to Australians;
- number of Australian visitors to the country; and
- capacity of local law enforcement and emergency services to respond to critical incidents.

3.15 The risk assessment focuses on threats to personal security and places less emphasis on other factors, such as cultural issues and differences in legal systems, that may ultimately affect the safety and wellbeing of Australian travellers. This distinction is not made clear within the travel advisory framework, in which the risk assessment is portrayed as an 'overall' rating.⁸⁵ For example, the ANAO observed that some destinations are rated as 'Exercise Normal Safety Precautions', however, travellers are advised to take precautions that are not normal within Australia. In these cases, there is a risk that Australian travellers may not fully understand that the advisory level relates predominantly to personal security, and may expect that behaviours

84 As at October 2014, there were 41 destinations or countries for which DFAT did not provide a travel advisory.

85 DFAT's 'Travel Advice Explained' page states that the risk assessment refers to the local security situation, but accessing this page requires additional navigation of the *Smartraveller* website.

considered normal in Australia are acceptable in the destination in question. The following case study provides an example of these differences.

Case Study		
The ANAO examined the travel advisory of a country rated 'Normal Safety Precautions' to consider the extent to which the precautions listed in the advisory would be considered 'normal' by an Australian traveller. The destination is experiencing increasing Australian resident, tourist and transit passenger visitors. The table below outlines several precautions that apply to visitors to the country that would not apply in Australia.		
Precaution	Destination	Australia
It is possible that victims of sexual assault may face criminal prosecution rather than being considered the victim of a crime.	✓	✗
Medication available over the counter or by prescription in Australia may be illegal or considered a controlled substance.	✓	✗
Behaviour that would be considered offensive or anti-social, but not criminal in Australia, could be considered as a very serious matter by local authorities.	✓	✗
Liquor licences are required to consume or possess alcohol and penalties may include arrest and imprisonment.	✓	✗
Death penalty applies for some serious crimes.	✓	✗
Homosexual acts are illegal and may lead to severe punishment, including imprisonment and fines.	✓	✗
Sex outside of marriage is illegal and may lead to severe punishment, including imprisonment and fines.	✓	✗

Source: ANAO analysis of a selected DFAT travel advisory.

3.16 DFAT’s guidance requires posts to consider their own political assessments, local media reporting, consular case feedback and consular partner advice in developing travel advisories. In general, posts are not consistently documenting the assessments that they have undertaken when proposing changes to travel advisories. Further, the ANAO’s examination of travel advisory risk assessment documentation from five⁸⁶ selected countries over a 12 month period found:

86 These advisories covered the four countries visited by the ANAO (Laos, Lebanon, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates) and the United Kingdom.

- one instance in which the level of a travel advisory was downgraded without evidence of a documented risk assessment from the post being provided to CCD; and
- clearance documentation routinely did not mention the basis for posts maintaining the current risk level for a travel advisory.

3.17 DFAT policy also requires posts to complete a ‘non-travel advisory checklist’ for destinations for which a travel advisory is not required. However, the ANAO’s analysis of three recent cases showed that, where a travel advice had not been issued, only one post had submitted the completed checklist to CCD. The absence of supporting documentation reduces DFAT’s assurance that posts are adequately undertaking assessments of the need for travel advisories.

Content of travel advisories

3.18 DFAT policy states that the purpose of travel advice is to help Australians avoid common dangers and difficulties and, in turn, reduce the number requiring consular assistance. As the primary means by which DFAT seeks to modify traveller behaviour, the content of travel advisories should be targeted appropriately to key audience demographics, aligned with their intended purpose, and be easily accessible.

Audience

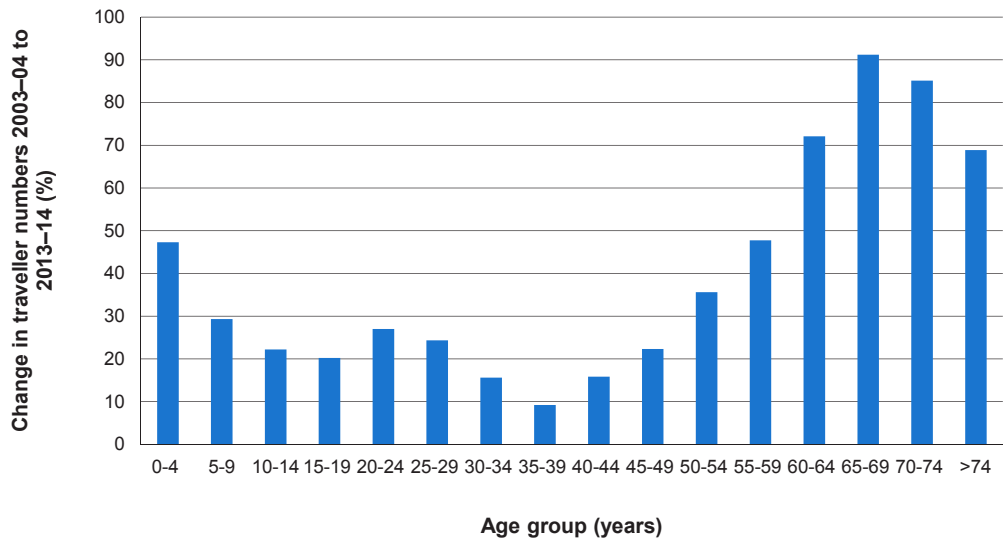
3.19 The target audience for travel advisories is Australians travelling or residing abroad, their families and those who are yet to travel. This audience is constantly changing as reductions in travel costs, changes in travel preferences, and improved accessibility of travel have enabled certain demographics, such as the young and elderly, to travel more often, leading to significant increases in travel overall. According to data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics⁸⁷, travellers aged less than 25 years old accounted for approximately 22 per cent of travellers in 2013–14, an increase of 27 per cent over the previous 10 years. Travellers in this age group also represented the highest volume of consular cases.⁸⁸ Travellers aged 25 to 50 increased by 18 per cent over the same period.

⁸⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Overseas Arrivals and Departures, Australia, Jun 2012*, cat. No. 3401.0, ABS, Canberra, 2012.

⁸⁸ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Issues Paper: Development of a New Consular Strategy 2014–16*, DFAT, Canberra, 2014, available from <<http://www.dfat.gov.au/dept/consular/issues.html>> [accessed 24 June 2014].

Travellers aged 65 and above accounted for approximately eight per cent of travellers in 2003–04, increasing to 11 per cent of travellers in 2013–14. Figure 3.3 shows the percentage change in overall travel volume of Australian travellers by age over the period 2003–04 to 2013–14.

Figure 3.3: Change in travel volume by demographic (2003–04 to 2013–14)



Source: ANAO analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics data.

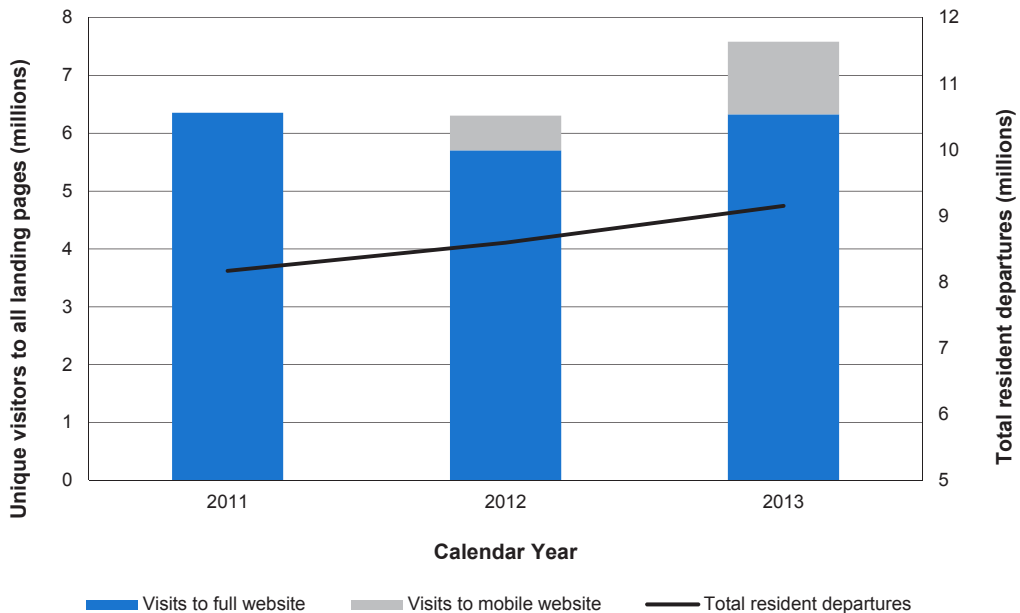
3.20 As part of the *Smartraveller* campaign, DFAT has identified the need to further engage with travellers from non-English speaking backgrounds, as these travellers have been found by DFAT to have heightened expectations of consular assistance overseas. Notwithstanding this identified issue, DFAT does not provide travel advisories in languages other than English.⁸⁹ In 2013–14 DFAT issued 877 travel advisory updates, and it would be impractical for the department to translate this volume of content in a reasonable timeframe with its current resourcing. However, engaging with a non-English speaking audience with a single travel advisory could still be effective if the content was clear and concise, and the language used was as simple as possible.

3.21 As outlined earlier, travellers primarily access travel advisories through the *Smartraveller* website. Travel advisories can also be provided in hardcopy

⁸⁹ DFAT does, however, provide its 'Information for Seniors' and 'Information for Dual Nationals' travel tips series in seven languages in addition to English.

by posts and travel agents, or by mail from CCD—for those without internet access. Travellers are also increasingly using mobile devices to access content, including travel advisories. Figure 3.4 shows the total number of unique visitors to the *Smartraveller* website and mobile website. The figure shows that unique visits have increased in 2013 primarily because of the increased access by visitors using mobile devices.

Figure 3.4: How travellers are accessing *Smartraveller* web pages



Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT website analytics data.

3.22 An evaluation of the *Smartraveller* campaign commissioned by DFAT in 2010, identified that travel advisories are generally viewed positively by the travelling public, with 83 per cent of surveyed travellers agreeing that travel advisories provide practical advice to help understand issues in a destination. However, satisfaction varied between demographics, with older travellers generally more satisfied with the current style of advisory, and younger travellers finding the messages excessively lengthy and conservative in nature. Furthermore, across all demographics, only eight per cent of travellers who accessed travel advisories indicated that they had changed their in-country behaviour as a result of the advice. These statistics suggest that, while travel advisories provide information to inform travellers of relevant issues, they also highlight challenges in engaging with certain demographics, and in advisories achieving their intended purpose of effecting behavioural change.

Promoting safe travel behaviours

3.23 Travel advisories should promote safe travel behaviours. The ANAO examined the approach adopted by DFAT to describe the risks in selected low-risk countries⁹⁰ designed to reduce consular workload by influencing traveller behaviour. Approximately half of the examined low-risk advisories featured advisory content that was non-specific and, rather than promoting a specific course of action, was of a general nature. While appropriate for raising awareness of some risks, advice that does not effect behavioural change will have minimal impact on overall traveller safety. Examples of such content from countries with the lowest advisory risk rating are shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Examples of travel advisory content for low-risk countries

Behaviour-orientated language	Non-behaviour orientated language
'Exercise common sense and look out for suspicious behaviour, as you would in Australia.'	'<location> government authorities cannot rule out the threat of terrorism in <location>.'
'We advise you to exercise normal security precautions. Pay close attention to your personal security and monitor the media for information about possible new safety and security risks.'	'In recent years, terrorist attacks have occurred in a number of European cities, such as Glasgow, London, Madrid, and Moscow. Targets have included public transport and transport hubs, and public places frequented by foreigners. In addition, a number of planned attacks have been disrupted by European security services, underscoring the continuing interest of terrorists in attacking European locations.'

Source: ANAO analysis of three DFAT travel advisories.

3.24 Research commissioned by DFAT prior to the commencement of *Smartraveller Phase III* identified that young high-risk travellers, who represent the largest proportion of consular cases, would prefer to obtain information in a manner more orientated to specific behaviours:

Participants felt that in this context they would be interested in a simple list of things to do and things to be aware of: more of an education in how to develop their “street smarts” than a list of prohibitions, through a channel that is simple and easy to find and use, with information presented in a tone and

90 The advisories for low-risk countries examined by the ANAO were France, Germany, Japan, Laos, New Zealand, Norway, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Vanuatu, UAE, USA. At the time of the audit, these countries had the lowest advisory rating of 'Exercise Normal Safety Precautions'.

manner that is less formal, less authoritative and more tailored to younger people.⁹¹

3.25 It is also important that the content of an advisory is aligned with its overall ranking. Generic advice regarding risks such as terrorism is often provided for countries rated ‘Normal Safety Precautions’. Internationally, some consular partners, such as Canada, do not provide such generic terrorism advice for countries with the lowest risk rating, allowing readers to focus on specific risks. Other countries, such as the UK provide these warnings for low-risk destinations, however, the average length of terrorism warnings in low-risk country advisories sampled by the ANAO was approximately 50 per cent shorter than those issued by DFAT. An example of terrorism warnings from the UK and DFAT, for the same low-risk destination, is shown in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4: DFAT and UK terrorism warnings for a selected low-risk destination

DFAT	UK
Terrorism is a threat throughout the world. You can find more information about this threat in our General advice to Australian travellers. <location> government authorities cannot rule out the threat of terrorism in <location>. As a counter-terrorism precaution, the <location> government has, since July 2005, implemented heightened security measures at key facilities including on public transport and at ports of entry.	There is a low threat from terrorism, but you should be aware of the global risk of indiscriminate terrorist attacks, which could be in public areas, including those frequented by foreigners.

Source: ANAO analysis of travel advisories issued by DFAT and the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

3.26 Providing information without defining a desired change in behaviour is unlikely to reduce DFAT’s consular assistance case load. Additionally, by providing overly cautious advice, DFAT risks the credibility of more serious threats to travellers. Internal *Smartraveller Phase III* research noted that among youth travellers ‘the advice seemed “overdramatised” or “unrealistic”, and therefore not “credible”.’

3.27 There would be benefit in DFAT reviewing its approach to the development of travel advice for low-risk countries, in particular, ensuring

91 *Smartraveller Phase III* exploratory research report.

that the advice provided encourages the desired behavioural change where possible.

Accessibility

3.28 DFAT provides one travel advisory per country that must cater for all *Smartraveller* audiences. It is therefore important that the advisory is broadly accessible to a range of demographics. The ANAO assessed the readability, overall length, and the use of visual aids of a sample of DFAT advisories covering 22 destinations⁹², and compared this sample to advisories from UK and Canada for the same locations.

Readability

3.29 In order to assess the ease with which travel advisories can be read, the ANAO calculated the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level⁹³ of its sample of travel advisories, including travel advisories from the UK and Canada. On average, the sampled DFAT travel advisories received a school grade level of 12.8, suggesting readers require a tertiary education to comprehend the travel advisory. DFAT's advisories are generally more difficult to read than those of international counterparts, with the UK and Canada each receiving an average school grade level of 11.

3.30 While travel advisories are on occasion required to describe complex geopolitical events, international experience suggests that it may be possible for DFAT to express the content in a manner more broadly accessible to the travelling public. In particular, travellers from non-English speaking backgrounds may experience difficulty understanding advisories with overly complex language.

Length

3.31 DFAT's travel advisories contain a considerable volume of information, with the average length of the advisories examined by the ANAO exceeding 3600 words. DFAT's average advisory length is comparable with the travel advisories of Canada (3500 words), however, longer than the UK (2100 words). While travellers benefit from being provided with comprehensive information about the destination, there is a risk that travellers may be reluctant to read a

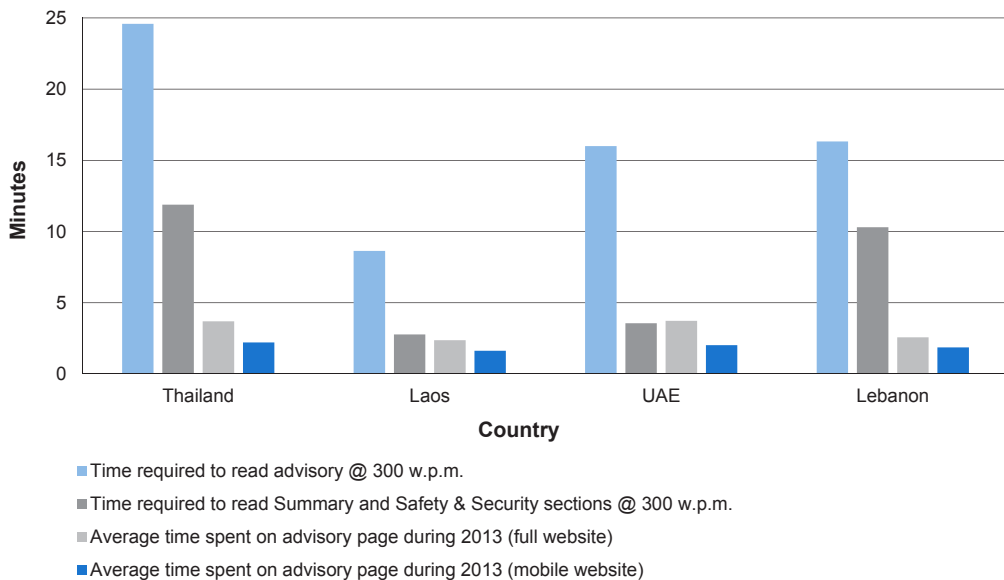
92 A list of the advisories examined is provided in Appendix 3.

93 The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level assigns text a numerical score broadly equivalent to a school grade reading level.

lengthy advisory due to the time investment required, and that excessive information may obscure key messages.

3.32 The ANAO compared the average time readers spent on four travel advisory web pages against the time required to read each advisory, based on an average adult human reading speed of 300 words per minute. The analysis, reflected in Figure 3.5, shows that for some locations, the time required to read the travel advisory is substantially greater than the time spent on the advisory webpage by the average visitor.

Figure 3.5: Reading time of selected travel advisories



Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT website statistics and travel advisories.

3.33 Average visit times to all of the four sampled advisories indicates that visit times were insufficient to read the entire advisory. Further, the average visit duration for Thailand and Lebanon was insufficient to read the Summary and Safety and Security sections of the travel advisories, which are the most important sections for overall traveller safety. The ANAO acknowledges that visitors to travel advisory pages have different needs, and may not intend reading the full advisory. DFAT provides the overall travel advisory level ‘at a glance’, through the use of colour-coded level continuum bars (as shown in Figure 3.1) and, from November 2014, colour-coded maps. However, the bulk of content remains in the text body of the advisory, and there would be merit in DFAT reviewing the structure and content of its travel advisories to maximise the limited time spent by the average reader.

Visual aids

3.34 Travel advisories lend themselves to simplification via visual aids, such as maps, diagrams, or icons. Some consular partner nations, such as the UK include maps for those countries with complex security environments and share areas to indicate the differing security advisory levels.⁹⁴ This approach contrasts with DFAT's travel advisories for destinations that have differing travel advisory levels. Where travel advisory levels vary by location within a destination, DFAT has the ability to specify advisory sub-levels for regions, such as a state, city, or other geographic area, as shown earlier in Figure 3.1.⁹⁵

3.35 Presenting information in a graphical format, such as a map provides simple, accessible information for travellers, particularly those who may not be familiar with the location of landmarks described in the travel advisory text. In the past, DFAT's use of maps was limited, with advisories providing an overall map of the country and identifying major cities and borders. In response to the audit, DFAT began developing colour-coded maps that include shaded areas corresponding to travel advisory levels. DFAT advised the ANAO that replacing existing maps is expected to be completed by the end of February 2015.⁹⁶

Visually impaired users

3.36 The *Smartraveller* website provides an embedded text-to-speech functionality for travel advisories that provides assistance to visually-impaired users with a supported web browser. This functionality enhances the accessibility of advisories to visually-impaired travellers.

Feedback on travel advisories

3.37 DFAT provides travellers and other interested stakeholders with the ability to provide feedback on travel advice via a link on the *Smartraveller*

94 For example, the UK travel advisory for Lebanon, available from: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/lebanon>

95 The number of sub-levels DFAT can show on an advisory is limited to four. Hence, if more than four sub-regions must be listed, DFAT must aggregate regions with the same sub-level together, even if they are not in geographic proximity.

96 As of 24 November 2014, DFAT had developed maps colour-coded by risk for 71 locations.

website.⁹⁷ In its 2014–16 Consular Strategy, DFAT stated that it intends to broaden the membership and remit of the Smartraveller Consultative Group to become the key stakeholder outreach body on consular matters. Including travel advisories in this expanded role would enable industry stakeholders to provide feedback on the content and usefulness of travel advisories.

3.38 DFAT has received feedback on its travel advisories through its *Smartraveller* campaign activities. As discussed in Chapter 2, members of the public have provided feedback on travel advisories via *Smartraveller* social media channels. Research commissioned in planning and evaluating the *Smartraveller* campaign has also sought feedback on travel advisories. Older travellers typically perceive the travel advice to be a credible and reliable source, while younger travellers consider the advice they receive to be overly cautious. DFAT has developed additional youth-orientated areas of the *Smartraveller* website to improve engagement with younger travellers, but is yet to evaluate the impact (if any) of these changes.

Conclusion

3.39 DFAT's process for developing and updating travel advisories is generally sound. However, guidance and oversight could be improved to provide greater assurance that the processes undertaken by posts to review and assess travel advisories is consistent with existing procedures. There is also scope for DFAT to better tailor travel advisories to match evolving technology and changing traveller demographics. While providing a depth of information, the travel advisories sampled by the ANAO were generally complex and lengthy, which can result in advisories that are more difficult for travellers to read. There would be merit in the department giving further consideration to targeting and presenting information most relevant to the needs of Australian travellers, to encourage behavioural change.

⁹⁷ DFAT advised the ANAO that the department responded to 235 travel advice-related enquiries received through this facility in 2014, in addition to informal comments received via social media and public engagement at travel events. DFAT further advised that overseas posts may also seek feedback from stakeholders (such as host governments, and Australian travellers and businesses overseas) as part of the process for reviewing and updating advisories.

4. Provision of Consular Services Overseas

This chapter examines the arrangements that DFAT has in place to manage access to, and the provision of, consular services, including case decision-making and the management of case information.

Introduction

4.1 As previously discussed, DFAT provides consular services to Australians travelling or residing abroad through its network of diplomatic posts. Each consular case is assigned to the relevant post⁹⁸ to manage, while consular officers in the Consular Operations Section in Canberra provide oversight, and liaise with family or next-of-kin in Australia.⁹⁹ All consular cases are recorded in DFAT's Consular Management Information System (CMIS), with the exception of minor enquiries that a consular officer is able to resolve quickly.

4.2 In 2013–14, DFAT managed 14 588 consular cases, with some cases spanning multiple years. Table 4.1 gives the breakdown by case type for the five year period 2009–10 to 2013–14. The table shows that the majority of consular services provided to Australians abroad are classed as 'notarial acts', which includes authenticating documents, witnessing signatures on documents and other similar functions for Australians travelling or residing abroad.

98 The relevant post will be the post where the consular assistance was sought, or which has responsibility for the country/location that the consular client is seeking assistance.

99 Canberra consular operations officers are allocated into two teams, with one team covering the Asia-Pacific region while the other team covers the rest of the world.

Table 4.1: Consular cases by type for the period 2009–10 to 2013–14

Consular Case Type	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14
Australians hospitalised given general welfare and guidance	1467	1203	1265	1372	1330
Australians evacuated to another location for medical purposes	29	28	24	28	27
Next of kin of Australians who died overseas given guidance or assistance with disposal of remains	1143	1142	1138	1247	1215
Australians having difficulty arranging their own return to Australia given guidance and assistance	29	478	46	53	47
Whereabouts – inquiries made about Australians overseas who could not be contacted by their next of kin	9310	12 899	4154	1829	4794
Australians arrested overseas	1086	1069	1181	1136	1185
Australians in prison	324	313	326	343	339
Australians given general welfare and guidance ⁽¹⁾	7679	7054	6440	5919	5621
Total cases involving Australians in difficulty who received consular assistance	21 067	24 186	14 574	11 927	14 558
Notarial acts	165 240	177 474	188 149	195 470	222 042
Total cases of Australians provided with consular services	186 307	201 660	202 723	207 397	236 600
Australians in difficulty who received Travellers Emergency Loans ⁽²⁾	286	345	365	298	239

Source: DFAT Annual Report 2013–14.

Note 1: The welfare and guidance figure includes the following sub-categories: general; welfare and other serious matters; theft against an Australian; assaults against an Australian; and welfare of children.

Note 2: A traveller emergency loan is a form of financial assistance available to posts in certain circumstances. Loans of up to \$150 can be approved by posts; larger loans require the approval of CCD. In 2012–13, DFAT issued 298 traveller emergency loans amounting to \$209 126. During the same period, DFAT recovered \$242 415 in traveller emergency loan debts, improving on the prior year's recovery rate.

4.3 The ANAO examined access to, and management of, consular services through DFAT's network of overseas diplomatic posts; the case decision making process; and the recording of case information.

Overview of the consular network

4.4 Australians requiring assistance overseas are able to access consular services from DFAT's overseas posts, and in some countries, those of consular partner nations. DFAT has responsibility for ensuring that diplomatic offices are adequately resourced and appropriately located to facilitate the provision of consular services.¹⁰⁰ DFAT must also balance the demands of consular services against those of Australia's broader diplomatic objectives.

Australia's network of diplomatic posts

4.5 As at June 2014, Australians could receive consular services from a network of 167 posts, located in 121 countries.¹⁰¹ This network is comprised of 102 Embassies, High Commissions, Consulate-General and Consulate posts where full consular services are provided, the Australian Representative Office in Ramallah and the Australian Office in Taipei, and 63 Consulates headed by an Honorary Consul that provide a limited level of consular services.¹⁰² For those the countries where DFAT does not have a physical presence, Australians are provided with consular services from the nearest accredited post¹⁰³, and can also seek consular services in a further 17 countries from 14 Canadian and one Romanian embassy. Countries that have strong links with Australia, along with significant numbers of Australians travelling to or residing in, can have multiple diplomatic posts—for example the USA has eight diplomatic posts across the country, including an Embassy, five Consulate-Generals and two Consulates. DFAT advised the ANAO that the total estimated cost of providing consular services for 2014–15 is \$85.0 million.

4.6 Over the past 15 years, the number of Austrade managed diplomatic offices and Canadian serviced countries has remained relatively consistent,

100 While the decision to open or close an overseas post is made by Government, DFAT is responsible for identifying the need to open or close a post.

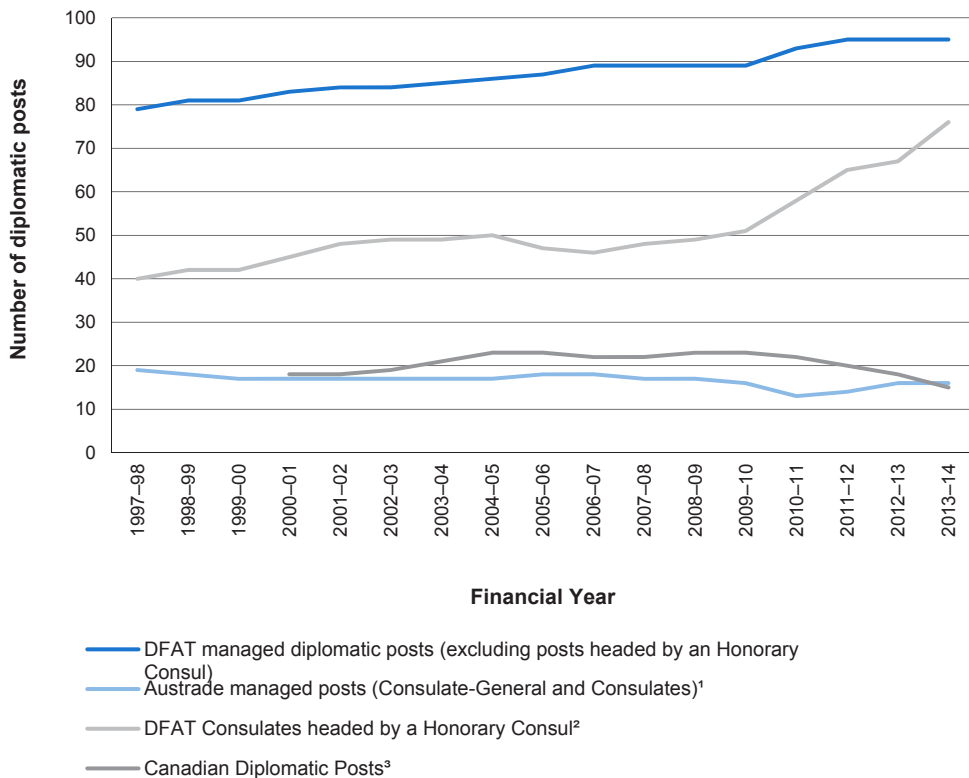
101 Embassies and High Commissions are diplomatic posts in the capital cities of non-Commonwealth and Commonwealth countries respectively. Consulate-Generals provide consular services in non-capital cities, while Consulates are headed by an Honorary Consul, engaged to represent Australia in specific locations.

102 These figures include 13 Consulates-General and Consulates managed by Austrade and three Consulates run by Austrade-managed Honorary Consuls. As at October 2014, an additional six Consulates were headed by Honorary Consuls pending appointment, and seven Consulates headed by Honorary Consuls were temporarily closed as at 30 June 2014. These posts have not been included in the totals.

103 For example, Australians in Qatar receive consular services from DFAT's post in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

with the number of DFAT managed diplomatic offices increasing since 2009–10. This increase is largely the result of the expansion of the limited service Consulates headed by an Honorary Consul (see Figure 4.1). Australians are also able to seek assistance from the Canberra-based Consular Emergency Centre. The Centre is discussed later in this chapter at paragraph 4.21.

Figure 4.1: DFAT’s diplomatic network (since 1997–98)



Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT annual reports.

Note 1: In 1997–98, and 1998–99 respectively, there were two and one Austrade offices managed by the then Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.

Note 2: Includes temporarily closed Consulates, or those where an Honorary Consul is yet to be appointed.

Note 3: These are the Canadian missions that Australians can seek consular assistance from under the consular agreement with Canada.

Austrade managed posts

4.7 As outlined earlier, Austrade manages 16 diplomatic offices, Consulates-General and Consulates, in locations where Austrade has an interest in promoting trade, investment and international education, and where DFAT does not maintain a diplomatic office. The provision of consular services at the

Austrade managed posts is governed by the *Memorandum of Understanding on the Delivery of Consular and Passport Services* (Austrade MOU).¹⁰⁴ The purpose of the MOU is to help ensure that consular services that are provided by Austrade and DFAT posts are aligned.¹⁰⁵ Austrade is also supported by DFAT's Canberra staff through the provision of consular training, procedures and policies, systems and data. In 2013–14 Austrade provided consular assistance, under the supervision of a DFAT post, to 808 Australians.

4.8 The ANAO reviewed two DFAT annual performance reports, for 2011–12 and 2012–13, to determine its level of satisfaction with Austrade's delivery of consular services.¹⁰⁶ The reports collate a brief performance summary for each Austrade office by each of the supervising DFAT offices. While the reports indicate that, overall, DFAT views the work of Austrade positively, they do not address the performance measures set out in the MOU such as the frequency with which plans and documents are updated, satisfaction of clients (as opposed to DFAT supervising staff), and timeframes for service delivery.

4.9 Overall, the framework supporting the delivery of consular services at Austrade managed offices helps to deliver efficiencies through consistent policies and administrative arrangements and, importantly, provides for a uniform level of service for clients regardless of whether they seek assistance from DFAT or Austrade. There is, however, scope to improve the consular performance reporting for Austrade managed offices, and better align the Austrade MOU performance indicators to those developed by DFAT to measure and report its own consular service delivery performance.¹⁰⁷

Honorary Consul network

4.10 As previously noted, DFAT operates a network of appointed Honorary Consuls in countries and locations that have no Australian diplomatic

104 The *Memorandum of Understanding on the Delivery of Consular and Passport Services* was revised in 2012 and signed in November 2012. The MOU includes agreed outputs, performance measures and reporting arrangements, as well as outlining the consular, administrative, policy and technical support provided to Austrade by DFAT.

105 In addition, Austrade managed posts are supported by the DFAT Regional Consular Officer in the region, where available.

106 Each report covers all 16 Austrade managed posts.

107 For example, DFAT's third Key Performance Indicator for *Program 2.1: Consular Services* states that consular contingency planning will be 'tested and reviewed' regularly. While the Austrade MOU requires the review of contingency plans, there is no requirement for Austrade's plans to be tested.

presence.¹⁰⁸ Honorary Consuls head an Australian Consulate in a representational capacity and, therefore, provide a limited range of consular services.¹⁰⁹ Appointed Honorary Consuls are usually prominent individuals of that country and have interests relating to Australia—many are Australian expatriates or have business relationships with Australians. Honorary Consuls are not required to be Australian nationals.

4.11 DFAT's 2013–14 annual report listed 63 operational Honorary Consuls, including three managed by Austrade. There were also six pending approval¹¹⁰ and seven closed¹¹¹, representing a total of 76 Honorary Consul positions. Each DFAT Honorary Consul receives an annual remuneration of \$7500, with up to \$10 000 remuneration for higher demand or cost locations—currently six positions. In 2013–14, Honorary Consuls assisted with 387 consular cases¹¹², and the total budget for DFAT Honorary Consul positions during this period was \$547 000.

4.12 The ANAO reviewed nine of the Honorary Consul positions¹¹³ to determine whether appropriate procedures were followed when the position was established and the Honorary Consul appointed, recent performance reviews, training records, and, where relevant, justification for closing the position. DFAT was not, however, able to locate all establishment documentation for four of the positions that had been established between 1989 and 1999.¹¹⁴ Of the nine positions reviewed, six were actively providing services, with five having undertaken consular training.¹¹⁵ The remaining

108 Honorary Consuls are appointed by the Australian Government and approved by the host government.

109 Generally, Honorary Consuls can provide limited consular assistance, which is dependent on their location and availability. Supervising posts can task Honorary Consuls to assist on consular cases, such as verifying the welfare of arrested or hospitalised clients. Honorary Consuls are unable to issue emergency travel documents, passports or financial assistance. The Australian Passports Office funds two Honorary Consul positions to enable passport services to be delivered in high passport demand locations.

110 Approvals can include host government approval of the Consulate or Honorary Consul, and the DFAT approval of the Honorary Consul appointee.

111 Honorary Consul positions can be closed where DFAT makes an assessment that the position is no longer required. Inactive or closed Honorary Consul positions are not cancelled with the host government, as this allows DFAT the flexibility to reappoint an Honorary Consul to the position in future where a need arises.

112 DFAT advised that this figure excludes a significant number of routine enquiries from Australian citizens that are not counted as consular cases.

113 These positions were Asuncion, Boston, Cape Town, Houston, Kampala, Kingston, Lae, Oslo and Yaounde.

114 These positions were Boston, Houston, Lae and Oslo.

115 The five Honorary Consuls who had completed training were Asuncion, Houston, Kampala, Kingston and Lae.

Honorary Consul (in Oslo) retains a staff member to provide consular services, with the supervising post reporting that consular training at post and on-site had been provided.

4.13 Posts supervising Honorary Consuls are required to complete an annual performance assessment, covering five criteria.¹¹⁶ The annual performance reports for the six active Honorary Consul positions were inconsistent, and generally lacked relevant performance information. Only one of the reports provided sufficient detail, such as a listing of tasks undertaken and approximate time worked, to enable an assessment of workload and performance. An additional report provided an estimate of hours allocated to consular services, while financial reports were included in two instances. One of the reports did not comment on how the Honorary Consul was benefiting or advancing Australia's interests or justify whether the position should be continued.

4.14 Appointing an Honorary Consul is an efficient means of providing an appointed Australian representative in countries or areas that do not have an Australian diplomatic office. They can assist DFAT to progress both bilateral and multilateral objectives, and provide enhanced consular services in countries and areas that previously did not have diplomatic representation. Improved annual performance reporting would better position DFAT to monitor the demand for consular services and the quality of the service provided by the Honorary Consul network.

Canadian post network

4.15 Australia formalised a consular sharing agreement with Canada in 1986 under the *Exchange of Notes constituting an Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of Canada for Sharing Consular Services Abroad* (Australia-Canada Consular Agreement). This agreement facilitates the provision of consular services to nationals from the other country in identified locations where only one country has diplomatic representation. The agreement is supported by an MOU that outlines the consular services to be provided and countries covered.

¹¹⁶ These criteria relate to the extent to which the Honorary Consul is benefiting or advancing Australia's interests, significant increases or changes in workload, training and assistance required and provided during the reporting period, details of any provisional travel documents issued, and a statement as to whether or not the position should be retained.

4.16 DFAT's 2012–13 annual report noted that Canada assisted Australians in 18 countries (focused in Africa and the Americas), while Australia provided assistance to Canadians in 22 countries (focused in the Pacific and South East Asia). In the 2013–14 report, the scope of this agreement was reduced to 17 and 21 countries respectively. DFAT meets with Canadian counterparts annually to discuss the delivery of consular services under the agreement, resolve any issues and amend the countries where services are provided.¹¹⁷ DFAT was not able to provide details of the volume of services provided to Australians by Canadian posts. However, the department advised that, following consultations with Canada at the most recent annual meeting, Australian supervising posts had been instructed to begin collecting this data for the first quarter of 2015.

4.17 The Australia-Canada Consular Agreement enables DFAT to provide consular assistance to Australians in a greater number of countries by capitalising on the partner country's diplomatic network in regions where Australia has no or low diplomatic representation. There would be merit in DFAT reviewing the costs and benefits of formalising consular sharing arrangements with other partner countries as a means of expanding the network of countries and locations that Australians can access consular services.

Provision of consular services by Romania

4.18 In January 2013, through an exchange of diplomatic notes, Romania agreed to provide limited emergency consular assistance to Australians through its embassy in Syria, including dual nationals, in conjunction with the Australian Embassy in Cairo. There are no Australian posts that provide reciprocal services to Romanian nationals. DFAT advised the ANAO that as of December 2014, the Romanian Government has made enquiries with Syrian authorities in relation to six Australians on behalf of the Australian Government, and one Australian in Syria was referred to the Romanian Embassy for consular assistance.

117 For example, these meetings have explored opportunities for Australian and Canadian consular staff to attend the consular training programs of each country; expand cooperation on crisis and contingency matters; and share feedback on shortcomings in guidance and procedures.

Consular outreach programs

4.19 Delivering consular outreach programs can provide a further opportunity to ensure that consular services are accessible to Australians abroad. The ANAO observed that one of the diplomatic offices visited (Abu Dhabi) had a scheduled program of consular visits to a country (Qatar) within its area of accreditation to provide consular and passport services to a number of Australian residents.¹¹⁸ The management of the post advised the ANAO that feedback received from the Australians serviced by the consular visits was positive, and that the consular visits provided a valuable service to Australians, as accessing services from the closest diplomatic office would require an international flight.

4.20 The use of consular outreach programs can be a useful and efficient means to provide consular services in countries or locations that have a number of Australians, and do not have a local diplomatic office. The delivery of a program of consular visits can, however, have resource impacts, particularly for small to medium diplomatic posts.

Consular Emergency Centre – 24 hour access

4.21 The Canberra-based Consular Emergency Centre provides a continuous—all-hours—contact centre for Australians experiencing difficulties overseas, or family and friends in Australia, to access consular assistance or information. Australians contacting a diplomatic office by telephone outside of local business hours are redirected to the Centre, which can record the traveller's details and provide initial support and advice. In an emergency situation where immediate assistance is required, the Centre is able to contact consular officers overseas. Families of travellers in Australia can contact the Centre to report a consular issue should they become aware of a matter affecting a relative abroad. The Centre received 53 049 calls in 2013–14. DFAT advised the ANAO that it is unable to provide details of the country from which the calls originated or the type of enquiries received.

118 The extent to which this practice occurs at other posts varies. The ANAO observed that other posts, such as Bangkok, have also performed visits to other locations within the same country (such as Phuket) to provide services to Australians there.

Resourcing the consular network

4.22 DFAT's consular officers include Australian (A-based) and locally engaged staff at posts, along with staff located in CCD in Canberra. As at 30 September 2014, DFAT estimated it had a total of 254 full-time equivalent (FTE) officers providing or supporting the delivery of consular services to Australians abroad, and their families in Australia. Approximately 75 per cent of these FTEs are located at posts overseas, with the remainder located in Canberra.¹¹⁹ Within the Canberra-based staff, most are consular case officers, while the remainder have management, policy, training and consular information responsibilities.¹²⁰

Regional Consular Officers

4.23 In 2007, DFAT established four consular positions at overseas posts known as Regional Consular Officers. While these officers are based at a specific post, they are experienced officers who provide support to all posts in an assigned region. This support may include temporary staffing assistance in times of crisis, replacement of staff who are on extended leave, assisting with training or answering queries, or assistance with planning and preparing for a major event. The four current officers cover the Middle East, Africa, Europe and the Americas.¹²¹

Consular resourcing at posts

4.24 Consular resourcing at posts is based on a devolved model, where each Head of Post is responsible for ensuring sufficient resources are available to undertake the required functions of the post, including the provision of consular services. DFAT advised that current post resourcing levels are largely historical, based on decisions in respect of each post over time rather than on a systematic and network-wide assessment of consular demands and future trends.

4.25 There are also arrangements in place for heads of post to seek adjustment(s) or supplementation to funding or resourcing levels through an

119 The majority of DFAT officers perform mixed duties, including passports, finance, human resources, security, property and consular functions. In many cases, consular services represent about half of an FTE A-based officer's duties.

120 Some of these officers may assist in case management tasks during a consular crisis.

121 There are no Regional Consular Officer positions located in the Asia-Pacific region, with DFAT advising that posts in this region can be provided support from Australia where required.

annual budget and resourcing framework. Through this framework, heads of post must provide justification and present a business case for additional, or adjustment to, post resources, including for the delivery of consular services.¹²²

4.26 Comparing consular workloads at posts, and determining an appropriate level of consular resourcing, is complicated by the limitations of CMIS. Consular case types vary, along with the effort required, and CMIS does not have the capacity to record the amount of time spent by consular staff on specific case activities.¹²³ Additionally, CMIS cases are typically assigned to the post with accreditation for the country in which the client requires assistance, even if the bulk of consular effort is undertaken by staff based in Canberra.¹²⁴

4.27 Because of the difficulties involved in using case volumes as a measure of workload, DFAT has used other metrics as proxy measures. As part of a process to identify suitable posts to trial a replacement version of CMIS¹²⁵, DFAT examined post workload by examining both the volume of consular cases and case chronologies¹²⁶ assigned to each post. The ANAO compared these results with the FTE resourcing of DFAT's posts, shown in Table 4.2, which lists the five DFAT posts with the highest and lowest workload (measured by volume of case chronologies) according to CMIS case data. DFAT advised the ANAO that these workload figures may be influenced by a number of factors, such as posts listed as being responsible for a number of crisis-related 'whereabouts enquiries' that were managed from Canberra, the practice of some posts creating consular case records for notarial services, or the inclusion of large numbers of low-complexity cases (such as theft reports).

122 DFAT does not centrally allocate or record post FTE resources based on functions, such as consular services. DFAT was able to provide the ANAO with an estimate of the consular related FTE resources at each DFAT post. DFAT did not hold information on the number of consular FTE resources for the Austrade managed posts.

123 CMIS can record an estimate of the time taken to resolve 'quick cases', which are single-issue cases that are immediately closed (such as minor enquiries). This functionality is not available for ongoing cases.

124 For example, in the MH17 disaster, family liaison activities were undertaken by Canberra-based consular staff, instead of staff in the accredited post.

125 The replacement of CMIS is discussed later in this Chapter.

126 A case chronology is an entry on the case's electronic record, such as a note made by a DFAT officer, a record of a cable or other communication, or a document attachment.

Table 4.2: Top five highest and lowest workload posts as identified by consular case chronologies

Post	Rank	Chronologies per FTE	Cases per FTE
Manila	1	1762.4	57.5
The Hague ¹	2	9350.9	1286.4
Bangkok	3	950.4	59.1
Bali	4	1188.0	69.0
Ho Chi Minh City	5	1050.9	68.9
Apia	87	65.5	5.5
Brussels	88	40.0	6.9
Nauru	89	150.0	13.3
Bandar Seri Begawan	90	52.5	8.8
Canakkale	91	40.0	6.7

Source: ANAO analysis of consular cases and chronologies for DFAT posts (excluding Honorary Consulates) for 2014; and consular FTE by post (DFAT estimates) as at September 2014.

Note 1: DFAT advised the ANAO that figures for The Hague are affected by the inclusion of cases relating to the MH17 incident, which were predominantly managed by CCD in Canberra.

4.28 The primary role of CMIS is as a case management system, and it has limited functionality to provide performance information for management decision making. There would be merit in DFAT taking steps to enhance its oversight of the distribution of consular resources among posts to enable a network-wide assessment of consular demands and future trends. The redevelopment of CMIS (discussed later in this Chapter) also provides an opportunity for the department to improve consistency in the reporting of consular case loads, which would provide more reliable management information.

Consular case decision making

4.29 Responsibility for the management of consular cases is split between the consular operation teams in Canberra and post consular officers. DFAT's consular officers are expected to exercise their own initiative and judgement, and deal with most issues without reference to Canberra. It is only in exceptional circumstances that consular officers are expected to contact case officers in Canberra, or the Consular Emergency Centre (outside of Canberra office hours). Some consular assistance decisions do, however, require the approval of senior

management in Canberra, with the consular operations teams managing the requests from posts for these case decisions. These cases are primarily those requiring significant financial assistance, such as repatriation or emergency loans in excess of \$150.

4.30 The ANAO examined the documentation supporting 35 cases¹²⁷ in which an Australian abroad required repatriation to Australia.¹²⁸ Generally, the ANAO found that repatriation was treated as a 'last resort' by DFAT's consular officers, as outlined in the guidance material. Only 21 per cent of clients requesting repatriation received financial assistance from DFAT.¹²⁹ In those cases where financial assistance was provided, this assistance was generally documented in accordance with the requirements of DFAT's policies. However, the ANAO observed three instances, from the same country but different posts, in which case documentation raised questions about the consistency and equity of decision making. The first case study involves a family of four, who sought repatriation assistance.

Case Study – Family

The family, consisting of two adults and two children, contacted DFAT in 2013 seeking repatriation back to Australia from a developed country. The family had entered the country temporarily to visit an ill relative and extended their original length of stay by three months. The family claimed that the airline had initially agreed to reschedule their return fare, but subsequently advised this was not possible and cancelled the flights. The family had insufficient funds to purchase new tickets.

Over the course of the next two weeks the family suffered medical conditions requiring hospitalisation, experienced difficulty raising sufficient funds to purchase food, and was at risk of homelessness due to an inability to afford accommodation. The family was unsuccessful in obtaining funds from family and friends and advised that it was not eligible to access superannuation. The DFAT post formally requested government-funded repatriation for the family, and noted in a case chronology:

Post believe Client X and his spouse ... have been proactive in attempting to seek financial assistance but have now exhausted all avenues for securing funds to RTA [return to Australia]. Post is worried for the well-being of the family, and in particular their young children. All family members are ill ... but have not returned to the medical centre as their funds are negligible.

Continued on next page

127 The 35 cases were randomly selected cases covering activity within the past 12 months, from across the five posts visited by the ANAO and a selection of posts from Europe and North America.

128 Repatriation cases were selected because they generally involve judgements by DFAT's consular officers, the costs involved can be significant, and because the decision making process to approve a repatriation includes senior management in Canberra.

129 Of the remainder, not all clients requested or were eligible for financial assistance from DFAT. Many clients were able to repatriate via their own means, such as through funds received from travel insurance and the help of family and friends.

Case Study – Family (continued)

The post estimated that the repatriation would cost \$3821. The repatriation was not approved, although the basis for this decision is not available on the CMIS case file. The family was directed to again attempt to access superannuation and, after 66 days, was able to withdraw funds and return to Australia.

Note: The Department of Human Services may approve early access to superannuation funds on compassionate grounds in specific circumstances.

4.31 The second case study involves a single client, who also sought assistance from a post in the same country as the previous family, approximately six months later.

Case Study – Client

The client approached a DFAT post in early 2014 seeking assistance to return to Australia. She advised the post that she had entered the country three months prior to start a business with no return airfare, was now out of funds and was experiencing mental health issues.

The client was advised by the Department of Human Services that she was not eligible for assistance from Centrelink or for early withdrawal of superannuation. The post did not pursue this option further. The client was able to partially fund repatriation with \$500 from family and friends, and was subsequently approved for a government-funded repatriation for the estimated remaining cost of \$600. This was subsequently increased to \$1930 as she was unable to access the funds in a timely manner, and costs were greater than anticipated. The client was provided a further \$100 loan at the airport to cover excess baggage fees. The provision of loans to the client was documented in accordance with DFAT's procedures and authorised by the appropriate delegate (the Assistant Secretary of Consular Operations).

4.32 The ANAO also observed a third instance (in the same country) in which a consular client received a traveller emergency loan of \$500 for excess baggage fees.¹³⁰ The basis of this decision, which was verbally approved, was not documented. There was also no written record that approval had been provided by CCD, as required by guidance material.

4.33 While some elements of the two case studies differ, both had broadly similar eligibility for consular assistance, demonstrated health and welfare concerns, and experienced difficulty funding their return to Australia. Individual circumstances of consular cases vary, and unique characteristics

¹³⁰ This case occurred in 2010. The client suffered from mental health issues and was repatriated to Australia at the expense of family, with assistance from DFAT consular staff at the nearest post. At the airport, the client's excessive baggage weight and bulky sporting equipment (including water skis) resulted in the airline charging an excess baggage fee. The client refused to depart without all baggage, which resulted in the consular officer seeking verbal approval from CCD to provide an emergency loan for the fees.

will result in differing levels of assistance. These circumstances mean that documenting decisions should be an important consideration. The consular case documentation on CMIS did not provide a clear record of:

- why the family was directed to contact its superannuation provider twice, while the single client was not;
- whether the post's request to repatriate the family was presented to senior DFAT management for decision, and the rationale as to why the request for repatriation was not approved; and
- the basis on which DFAT satisfied itself as to the welfare of the family's children, given the post's concerns, during the 66 days it took to repatriate the family since those concerns were first identified.

4.34 DFAT's case documentation did not sufficiently demonstrate that the decisions made in the three instances were consistent and provided outcomes of comparable equity. DFAT acknowledged that the reasons for declining repatriation loan requests were not always clearly stated in case notes, and advised the ANAO that the differential treatment of the two case studies 'could be explained by relative assessments of the family's and client's access to resources and acuteness of medical and mental health concerns'.¹³¹ DFAT further advised that one member of the family held dual citizenship for the country in which the family was located, and that may have been a factor in the decision to refuse assistance¹³²; that the decision not to repatriate the family was correct given they were eventually able to self-fund their return; and that 'while the period was rather long ... the case had a good outcome for the family and post and Conops¹³³ worked hard to help them'. However, the ANAO noted that:

- the family was not provided with financial assistance of any form, despite opportunities to provide assistance less than a full repatriation

131 DFAT's *Consular Operations Handbook: 4.17 Guidelines for assisting Australians with mental health concerns*, states that consular officers are not trained medical practitioners, mental health experts or social workers. Available from: < <http://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/consular-operations-handbook/part2.html#4-16> > [accessed 5 January 2015]. The diagnosis of the family's mental health issues by a medical practitioner did not change how the case was managed, and there is no documentation to suggest that mental health issues were considered.

132 There was no documentation to indicate that the dual-citizenship was considered in the decision not to provide assistance to the family. Additionally, the ANAO observed instances of dual-nationals being provided financial assistance, including in countries for which they hold citizenship (one instance is noted in paragraph 4.36).

133 Refers to the Consular Operations section in Canberra.

that would have expedited their return and assisted their welfare¹³⁴; and

- of the three cases, only the case involving the family had a documented diagnosis from medical professionals of mental health issues (in the form of a psychiatrist's report), but the family received the least financial assistance.

4.35 While DFAT's existing consular guidance is extensive, there would be merit in DFAT reinforcing to staff the importance of appropriately documenting consular case decisions and the rationale for the decision.¹³⁵ DFAT advised the ANAO that remedial measures would be implemented to ensure that all repatriation loan decisions, including the decision not to provide a loan, are fully documented.

Multiple repatriations

4.36 In its sample of 35 repatriation cases the ANAO noted two examples of clients who requested multiple DFAT-funded repatriations to Australia, although not in a manner inconsistent with the guidance. In the first instance, a client of dual-nationality sought assistance from DFAT in the country for which the client held citizenship. The client was provided an emergency loan of approximately \$250 and returned to Australia. Approximately four months later, the same client sought assistance in another country, and was provided a repatriation loan of approximately \$1100 to return to Australia.¹³⁶ This client was subsequently able to depart Australia again without repaying either

¹³⁴ For example, the family required a psychiatric report to obtain compassionate access to superannuation, but had insufficient funds to procure one. The amount required was the same as that provided to the third case for excess baggage fees, however the family was only able to access a psychiatrist after a member was hospitalised following deterioration of their mental health. According to DFAT's case notes, the family advised of their difficulty obtaining funds on four occasions over the 18 days that elapsed between the department notifying the family of the requirement for a report and the hospitalisation. Forty-three days elapsed between the department receiving the psychiatrist's report and the family completing the superannuation access process and returning to Australia.

¹³⁵ The ANAO also noted other instances of insufficient documentation in case types other than repatriation (see footnote 142).

¹³⁶ DFAT's case notes indicate that this assistance was provided as the client had insufficient funds to pay for medical treatment, was destitute, and could not obtain assistance from family and friends.

loan.¹³⁷ DFAT later rejected a third request for repatriation from this client as per its guidance.¹³⁸

4.37 The second case involved a client who had received seven repatriations. This client travelled to a developing country with their child on multiple occasions, and on each occasion subsequently became destitute, or the client and/or child required medical attention. The client and child were subsequently repatriated due to welfare concerns, and following repayment of the loan obtained a new passport and were able to travel again. The ANAO examined loan documentation from two of these repatriations and both were appropriately documented and authorised in accordance with guidance.

4.38 While DFAT may refuse a request to repatriate a client (as stated in DFAT's 2014–16 Consular Strategy), under current legislation the department has no basis for denying an Australian a passport once their loan to the department has been repaid.

Quality assurance mechanisms

4.39 Quality assurance processes are designed to ensure consistency in decision making. This provides assurance that the outcomes (in this case, the assistance provided to a traveller) are made on the same basis regardless of the officer or the post responsible for the case or who completes the assessment of the need for assistance. DFAT advised that it applies a number of quality measures to consular assistance cases, including pre-deployment training, procedures and guidance for staff, and management oversight.

Training

4.40 DFAT provides pre-deployment training for the officers that will be responsible for providing consular services and managing consular cases. These officers are required to complete a five-day consular training course prior to posting, which includes theoretical and practical components¹³⁹, and site visits to nearby mortuary and prison facilities, to provide officers with

137 DFAT treats the financial assistance it provides as loans to the individual, and it can cancel an existing Australian passport (and refuse to issue a replacement) until a loan is repaid. In this case, the client was of dual-nationality and was able to depart Australia on another passport.

138 DFAT's guidance does not prohibit the provision of financial assistance to travellers with outstanding loans, but states that assistance will generally not be provided to those whose financial difficulty arises from mismanagement or irresponsibility.

139 These practical components include role plays, videos of example consular case scenarios, presentations by former DFAT consular clients of their experiences, and group discussions by case workers from support and counselling services.

exposure to the operating environments they may encounter in their course of consular duties. Non-consular officers in smaller posts may also complete the course, as they may be required to assist with the consular services workload or crises events. The ANAO audit team completed the training program and found it to be well targeted and comprehensive, a view generally shared by those officers interviewed at posts.¹⁴⁰ An additional course on crisis planning and preparation is available for post management and staff with crisis response responsibilities. Other agencies with consular responsibilities, such as Austrade, manage their own training programs.

4.41 The nature of the consular role means that consular officers often interact with clients who require counselling support, have mental illnesses, or other significant emotional or psychological needs. While the consular course offered by DFAT provides broad, generalised training to its consular staff, the provision of specialised training on complex issues is conducted on an ad-hoc basis. For example, some consular officers, and case managers in Canberra, have received informational briefings from suicide prevention services in Australia. Some partner nations, such as the United Kingdom, maintain specialist consular teams who manage specific complex case types, such as forced marriage. DFAT is exploring options for expanding the training of its consular workforce as part of its 2014–16 Consular Strategy.

Procedures and guidance

4.42 DFAT has comprehensive policies and procedures for various case types and circumstances. While some tasks, such as those relating to financial assistance, are covered by detailed checklists outlining the requirements that must be met, others (such as whereabouts enquiries) are principles-based, which is reflective of the varying circumstances in which posts may be required to provide assistance. In addition to this guidance, officers can consult with the consular operation teams in Canberra to obtain advice and decisions in relation to specific cases. The operations teams can escalate decisions to higher levels of management.

140 The officers did note that the training was not a substitute for on-the-job experience.

Management oversight

4.43 Senior management in CCD conduct regular informal¹⁴¹ meetings to review and compare consular cases, critique decisions, and identify areas for improvement. Systemic issues are communicated via cable to the posts. Examples of such issues include:

- the need to complete and update fields, such as ‘bail status’ in prisoner cases, ‘date of formal sentence’ in arrest case types, and ‘cause of death’ in cases in which a client is deceased and the cause is known;¹⁴²
- cases being recorded under the ‘general’ case type, where a more specific case type should be used; and
- the need for posts to close cases in CMIS where the case was complete and CCD was not involved.

4.44 DFAT is, however, yet to establish a quality assurance program that includes the regular review of a sample of cases, which are analysed and reported to the relevant posts and DFAT management. Such a program could be undertaken by the two CCD teams¹⁴³ reviewing each other’s cases and would provide assurance that cases have been managed in accordance with established policies and procedures, as well as highlighting good practices and areas for improvement. Acknowledging that not all consular cases are of the same complexity or seriousness, quality assurance could focus on a sample of the higher-risk cases.¹⁴⁴ Reviews could, for example, include the: appropriateness of the consular assistance rendered; documentation of major decisions and consistency with procedural requirements; consistency of assessments of the assistance to be provided; and timeliness of the provision of certain consular services and assistance.

141 DFAT advised that it considers these meetings to be formal as they are regularly scheduled. However, the department further advised that minutes of the meetings are not taken, and DFAT was unable to provide documentary evidence of action items or other results of these meetings.

142 The ANAO noted that out of 10 prisoner, 13 arrest and 16 death cases that were active, or closed after this advice was sent, the issues raised had not been addressed in two prisoner, seven arrest and one death case.

143 Canberra consular operations officers are allocated into two teams, with one team covering the Asia-Pacific region while the other team covers the rest of the world.

144 High risk could relate to the complexity of the case, the volume of work undertaken at the post, or the amount of financial assistance provided. Selection of case types and posts would be informed by CCD’s risk assessments.

4.45 In addition, an annual quality assurance program could include:

- a streamlined automated sampling approach that gives DFAT a rolling sample at an acceptable level of statistical confidence;
- documented processes, that could include 'ratings' or a 'grading system' covering all elements of consular assistance; and
- an action plan for continuous improvement to track progress (against recommendations and suggested improvements) from a quality perspective.

Management of consular case information

4.46 DFAT uses several systems to manage information relating to consular clients and their associated case records. Case information is stored in CMIS, which is used by consular officers at posts and in Canberra.¹⁴⁵ CMIS contains six modules:

- case management, for recording information about consular cases;
- the Online Register of Australians Overseas (ORAO)¹⁴⁶;
- the Crisis Management Module, which stores details of crisis-related consular cases, and can receive traveller details exported from ORAO;
- the Consular Knowledge Base (KBase), which contains directories of country-specific information maintained by posts (such as lists of local lawyers);
- the Signatures and Seals database, used for document verification; and
- the Statistics database, through which posts provide reports on their consular workload.

4.47 The CMIS replacement project commenced in 2012 and is scheduled for completion in the second quarter of 2015 at a cost of approximately \$6 million. The project has, however, encountered timeframe and budget pressures, including: quality issues relating to the data exported from CMIS; issues with network connectivity to posts in some regions; and delays in development and

¹⁴⁵ Austrade managed posts have access to a web-based version of CMIS, known as the Consular Management Linked Information System (CMLIS), which provides similar functionality. Honorary Consuls do not have CMIS/CMLIS access and communicate with posts via email and telephone.

¹⁴⁶ ORAO was discussed in Chapter 2.

testing of software. Further delays resulted from a lack of availability of staff during DFAT's response to the MH17 crisis (discussed in Chapter 5). Supplementation of the CMIS replacement project budget of around \$1 million has been approved. DFAT advised the ANAO that the first stage of the project (relating to the case management module) was completed in October 2014 and initial feedback from users at posts has been positive.

Privacy of case information

4.48 Consular officers are regularly required to work outside of office environments, such as visiting consular clients in remote locations, in prisons and hospitals, or when searching for missing Australians. In these situations, access to DFAT's systems may be impossible or impractical, resulting in the use of alternative systems to facilitate communication. The ANAO examined notes from 250 cases for the presence of email addresses from commercial providers and identified a relatively small number of instances (five) in which details of consular cases were sent and received via commercial email services—such as Gmail. While many of these instances consisted of brief updates to other consular officers with minimal identifying information, one instance included a client's passport number, full name, and other details.

4.49 The Australian Signals Directorate Information Security Manual states that personal information (as defined by the *Privacy Act 1988*) must not be stored or processed in public cloud or offshore information and communications technology arrangements unless it meets the requirements outlined in guidance issued by the Attorney-General's Department.¹⁴⁷ DFAT advised the ANAO that it has yet to assess commercial email services against these requirements. The department has conducted limited trials of solutions to enable remote access to emails and other services, but these solutions are yet to be rolled out to all consular officers. To better support the operational needs of consular officers, there would be merit in DFAT exploring options to improve remote access to consular systems.

Case reporting capability

4.50 DFAT's case reporting primarily covers the volume of consular cases managed by posts. This information is reported via quarterly statistical returns, which comprise a brief report entered in the Statistics database in

¹⁴⁷ Specifically, the *Australian Government Policy and Risk management guidelines for the storage and processing of Australian Government information in outsourced or offshore ICT arrangements*.

CMIS. The returns provide the number of notarial services, non-case consular work taking more than 15 minutes to complete, and non-case consular work taking less than 15 minutes to complete, delivered for the preceding quarter. DFAT is also able to examine the number of cases created in CMIS by each post.

4.51 While CMIS reporting provides an activity level indicator of consular and notarial cases managed by each post, it does not provide insights into DFAT's individual case management performance. The limited functionality of CMIS reporting has been acknowledged by DFAT, and the department's policy states that, due to variations in individual approaches to consular work and 'particular local difficulties', no rigorous attempt is made to compare resources involved in casework post-by-post. DFAT uses these statistics primarily as a guide to the workload of a post and as an indicator of changing caseloads, and for reporting to Parliament in response to questions and in the annual report.

4.52 In addition to activity level data, CMIS contains useful fields that could potentially be used for individual case management reporting, although data to populate these fields is rarely entered. Table 4.3 shows the percentage of the 250 cases examined by the ANAO where selected key case management fields were completed across the various case types.

Table 4.3: Use of CMIS reporting fields

Case Type	Field Name	Sampled Cases with Completed Field	
		Count	%
Prisoner	Date of Last Consular Visit	14	70.0
Arrest	Alleged Offence Detail	18	62.1
Hospitalisation	Name of Hospital	7	20.7
Welfare	Details of Concern	1	2.7
Child Abduction	Current Location of Child	1	5.3
Death	Location of remains	2	5.6
Assault	Details of assault	0	0.0

Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT case management records.

4.53 In those instances where CMIS reporting fields were populated, the accuracy of the entered information was variable. The ANAO's analysis showed that of the 70 per cent of sampled prisoner cases with a completed 'Date of Last Consular Visit' field, the date recorded in the field in CMIS varied by an average of 588 days from the date of the last consular visit identified in

the case notes. Data integrity issues within CMIS means that CCD is unable to obtain from CMIS sufficient assurance that posts are conducting these visits.¹⁴⁸

4.54 While important case information is generally contained within the notes of each case file, the use of existing CMIS fields to capture this data would allow this information to be more easily accessed, particularly by consular officers that may not be familiar with the case. Some of the fields, such as dates of visits, also affect DFAT's ability to reliably report on, and assure itself of, the standard of service delivered to clients by posts.

Conclusion

4.55 The provision of consular services to Australians abroad is supported through Australia's diplomatic network of posts. DFAT has further expanded its consular reach through partnering with Canada to provide consular services to Australians in countries and regions where Australia has not established a diplomatic post. In addition, DFAT has increased the number of Honorary Consul positions, particularly in regions where Australia's diplomatic network is limited.

4.56 Local management at each post is responsible for assessing consular demand against allocated resources and where necessary seeking adjustments or supplementation of budgets from DFAT's central offices in Canberra (within available parameters). Improving the oversight of consular resources and workload, and the recording of case information in CMIS would allow the response to these supplementation requests to be made with greater certainty and accuracy.

4.57 Decisions relating to each consular assistance case are made on a case-by-case basis due to the range of factors that need to be taken into consideration. These include the unique case circumstances, constraints of the local operating environment, the needs of the client, and the resources available at the post. Notwithstanding the need to tailor decision making to individual circumstances, decisions should also be consistent and transparent. Emphasising to staff the importance of adequately and consistently

148 DFAT advised the ANAO that it makes use of other CMIS features, such as a 'resubmit' function that causes a case to reactivate at a specified time, and a process of recording the date of next action for hard copy files, to ensure that prison visits are conducted. DFAT further advised that, while the 'Date of Last Consular Visit' field may be overlooked, particularly if the post is subject to a high workload, the case management system ensures cases are monitored closely and visits are undertaken on a schedule.

documenting the basis for consular case decisions would enable DFAT to effectively demonstrate the basis on which decisions were made. Implementing a risk-based quality assurance process by the CCD teams would provide greater visibility of the decision making process, including the extent to which decisions are consistent and taken in accordance with DFAT's policies and procedures. It would also identify better practice and areas for improvement.

4.58 Management of consular cases is supported by a case management and information system, which has been scheduled by DFAT for replacement in 2014–15. The redevelopment of the consular information system is intended to better support the effective delivery of consular services. However, unless key information is consistently and accurately recorded, the benefits of the new system, from a management information perspective, will be considerably reduced.

Recommendation No.1

4.59 To strengthen the management and oversight of consular services to Australians abroad, the ANAO recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:

- improves the recording of key consular case management information in the relevant case management system; and
- implements an annual risk-based quality assurance process by the Consular and Crisis Management Division operations teams for consular cases.

DFAT's response: *Agreed*

a) In May 2015, the department is scheduled to roll out the Consular Information System (CIS), which will replace the current Consular Management Information System. One of the benefits of the new system will be an increased ability to run statistical reports to show posts' consular caseload. The department's ability to ensure posts record key case information in CIS in a timely fashion will also be enhanced in the new system.

b) The department will implement an annual, risk-based quality assurance process on a sample of consular cases.

c) The department will document decisions to not fund repatriations in the same way we currently document decisions to fund them.

5. Crisis Readiness and Response

This chapter examines DFAT's arrangements for preparing and responding to consular crisis events, including contingency planning undertaken at Australia's overseas posts, the management of crisis events by DFAT Canberra and the evaluation of these events.

Introduction

5.1 A consular crisis event is broadly defined as a major overseas incident such as a terrorist attack or suspected attack; conflict or civil disorder—actual or imminent; transport or industrial accident; and natural disaster. Incidents affecting a small number of people, such as kidnappings, can under certain circumstances also be considered a consular crisis. The Australian Government's preparation for, and response to, an overseas crisis event is managed by DFAT as part of the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (discussed in paragraph 5.3).

5.2 The effective coordination and response to a crisis event is dependent on an appropriate crisis management framework, contingency planning, and crisis response infrastructure and capability. The ANAO examined DFAT's crisis response framework.

Consular crisis response framework

5.3 The Australian Government's Crisis Management Framework (the framework) was first released in December 2012 to assist government agencies and Ministers when responding to any crisis incident in Australia or affecting Australians abroad. The framework clearly defines the roles, responsibilities and activities to be undertaken by DFAT and other key stakeholders (such as the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Attorney-General's Department, and other central agencies). As each major overseas incident or crisis event is different, the response required will differ and the framework needs to support DFAT's ability to respond flexibly. DFAT categorises major overseas incidents into three crisis response types: consular, humanitarian and national security.

5.4 The integration of the former AusAID and DFAT, on 1 November 2013, resulted in DFAT assuming new responsibilities when responding to a humanitarian crisis event. DFAT has subsequently taken steps to coordinate its

response to both consular and humanitarian crisis events to strengthen Australia's overall capability to respond to a crisis event abroad. Integration of capabilities is occurring over 2014, with all elements expected to be integrated by 2015. Key tasks include: consolidating emergency response and crisis centre teams; standardising training and exercises; and consolidating crisis equipment, where possible, for interoperability.

5.5 DFAT has developed guidelines to determine when a crisis response is required, as not all crisis events necessitate a significant response from the Australian Government due to a low level impact on Australians and/or Australia's national interests.¹⁴⁹ A whole-of-government response to a crisis event can include one or both response types, as assistance may need to be provided to affected Australians while also providing humanitarian assistance to local authorities.¹⁵⁰ When a coordinated whole-of-government crisis response is required, DFAT, through CCD, is responsible for coordinating and leading an Inter Departmental Emergency Task Force (IDETF).¹⁵¹ Figure 5.1 outlines the main overseas crisis stakeholders who may be required to contribute to a whole-of-government crisis response.

149 Some crisis events can be managed within existing DFAT business structures, such as within CCD or the Humanitarian Division, as the level and type of response required may not be significant.

150 Typhoon Haiyan, which affected the Philippines in November 2013, is an example of a crisis event that required both a consular and humanitarian response from the Australian Government.

151 Each IDETF is to include relevant Australian Government agencies, with the number and type of agencies participating depending on the type of crisis event and the response required, this can also include the states and territories where their services are required for returning Australians.

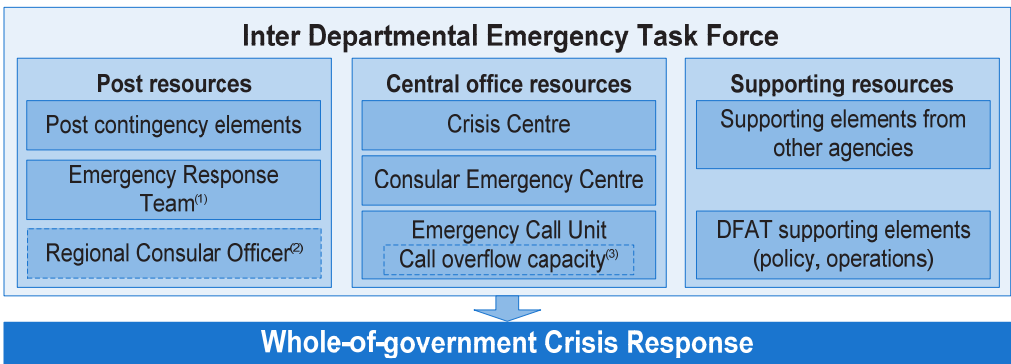
Figure 5.1: Whole-of-government crisis coordination stakeholders



Source: ANAO analysis.

5.6 Each IDETF is supported by a range of resources that can be employed as part of the whole-of-government response, as outlined in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Crisis response coordination of response resources



Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT policies and procedures.

Note 1: The ERT consists of Canberra-based staff with skills across policy, consular, media and communications functions; and, where appropriate, the Humanitarian Rapid Response Team (RRT).

Note 2: Regional Consular Officers are available to assist posts in some regions.

Note 3: DFAT has in place an arrangement to utilise Department of Human Services call centre services where the Emergency Call Unit capacity to take public enquiries related to a crisis has been exceeded.

5.7 During the course of the audit, DFAT activated the consular crisis management framework and consular crisis preparation arrangements when,

on the 17 July 2014, Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 was downed over a conflict zone in eastern Ukraine. The MH17 incident resulted in the death of 298 passengers and crew, including 28 passengers with Australian citizenship and 10 passengers residing in Australia. A summary of DFAT's consular crisis response to the MH17 incident is outlined on the following case study.

Case Study – Summary of DFAT's response to the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 incident

DFAT received notification of the MH17 incident at 1:20am on 18 July 2014, approximately two hours after it occurred. CCD had tasked posts to seek passenger manifests by 2:30am. The department produced whole-of-government talking points at 4:00am, followed by further talking points by 6:00am.

The Crisis Centre was operational by 9:00am, with staff from the Crisis Cadre⁽¹⁾ and sustained 24 hour operations for the next three weeks. A total of 115 DFAT officers filled 68 shifts, produced 50 whole-of-government situation reports, 70 sets of media talking points and a number of other briefing materials.

The Emergency Call Unit was operational by 6:00am on 18 July, and operated continuously for 33 hours. Over this period, the unit was staffed by 63 DFAT officers across six shifts. The unit responded to 2015 calls from the public, with DFAT also responding to a further 640 media enquiries and assisted families with media statements.

DFAT held seven IDETF meetings from 18 July to 15 August 2014, along with supporting twice weekly Inter Departmental Committee and daily Agency Head meetings (chaired by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet), which informed the National Security Committee of Cabinet meetings.

DFAT deployed five members of the Crisis Response Team to Ukraine less than 24 hours after the crash. By 19 July 2014, DFAT had established an office in Kyiv, and shortly after a presence in Kharkiv. The department subsequently deployed 56 officers to Ukraine to provide consular, media, political and technical support to the whole-of-government response. A further 18 officers were deployed to the Netherlands. The deployed officers were sourced from Canberra and from posts around the world, including locally-engaged staff and Regional Consular Officers.

On 21 July 2014, the Prime Minister appointed a Special Envoy to lead Australia's response on the ground in Ukraine.

At the peak of the response, the Australian Government had deployed over 500 officials from six agencies, including around 190 Australian Federal Police and 284 Australian Defence Force personnel.

Note 1: The Crisis Cadre is a list of trained staff who can be made available from their regular duties to fill Crisis Centre positions if needed.

5.8 DFAT advised the ANAO that the crisis response mechanisms worked well in the response to the MH17 consular crisis, demonstrating that improvements implemented since 2011 have enhanced the department's crisis response capabilities. DFAT also advised that it intends to undertake a formal evaluation of the crisis response once it is completed.

Learning from consular crisis responses

5.9 To improve its response to consular crises, DFAT advised that it conducts a lessons learned exercise once activities relating to the response have been finalised. The ANAO reviewed DFAT's lessons learned reports for the Lao Airlines aircraft crash in Pakse in October 2013 and the Typhoon Haiyan disaster in the Philippines in November 2013.¹⁵² The exercises were conducted through debriefing sessions with CCD and the Emergency Response Team (ERT) at the conclusion of the ERT's deployment in Canberra. The Pakse lessons learned report identified 13 lessons¹⁵³, and made four recommendations relating to the establishment of a clear set of requirements for ERT deployment, chain of command arrangements with local posts, greater communication with law enforcement agencies as to DFAT's consular role in a crisis, and purchase of additional clothing and equipment for the ERT. The Haiyan lessons learned report identified 23 lessons¹⁵⁴ and three recommendations, relating to the expansion of the ERT to include additional roles, including a section in post contingency plans describing how posts will deploy remote facilities if needed, and embedding media staff in deployed ERTs.

5.10 Departmental records did not indicate whether the implementation of these recommendations by posts was monitored or how other identified lessons were addressed to improve future consular crisis responses. DFAT advised the ANAO that at present, tracking of lessons is undertaken by individual officers and/or posts and is not coordinated centrally.

5.11 The lessons learned process for the incidents examined by the ANAO focused primarily on lessons from the ERT deployment. Opportunities to identify other potential lessons for future improvement across the other response areas, such as at overseas posts, and those learned by other stakeholder agencies, were not considered. There would be merit in DFAT

152 The Pakse aircraft crash in October 2012 was the first occasion on which the ERT was deployed since the establishment of the team in August 2012.

153 These lessons related to the deployment of the ERT and the manner in which it should work with other agencies and staff, developing standardised checklists for ERT deployments, reliability of ICT resources, suitability of team members' personal equipment for tropical and mortuary conditions, and communications with Canberra.

154 These lessons related to posts providing assessments of the likely consular consequences of a disaster where advance warning of the disaster is available; centrally registering available ERT skills; improving the self-sufficiency of ERT deployment kits; greater integration and consistency in procedures with the RRT; improving communication between post, ERTs and RRTs, CCD and the media; and ensuring staff welfare in high-stress environments during and following the crisis.

broadening the scope of the consular crisis response evaluation process to capture the full range of lessons from all crisis response activities. Further, it is important that DFAT disseminate the lessons to key crisis response stakeholders, such as posts, and establish appropriate processes to monitor the implementation of recommendations.

International consular crisis cooperation arrangements

5.12 A country's ability to respond and assist its nationals will vary depending on a range of factors, which can include regional proximity, scale of representation and/or activities in the country or region. Many countries, including Australia's partner countries, provide a similar crisis response to safeguard and, if needed, evacuate their nationals. In these circumstances, however, there is a risk that countries can be competing for the same resources during a crisis.¹⁵⁵

5.13 Within a particular region, one country will often be better placed to respond and assist its nationals than another country. Consequently, it is important for DFAT to continue to develop relationships with partner countries to optimise opportunities to coordinate assistance to Australians during a crisis event. This could include:

- sharing of contingency and crisis response resources, including: assembly and evacuation points, such as convention centres or hotels; assets and infrastructure, such as transport, including joint hiring of buses, ferries or aircraft during an evacuation; and on-the-ground resources, such as officers and emergency response teams;
- maximising partner country geographic advantages, for example Australia is better placed to respond to a consular crisis in the Pacific and South East Asia, while European countries are better placed to respond in Africa and the Middle East; and
- sharing of planning frameworks, processes and development of relationships that enable effective coordination during a crisis event.

5.14 DFAT works with consular partner countries—Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the USA—through an annual five country Consular Colloque

¹⁵⁵ For example, during the 2006 Lebanon Crisis, Australia and other nations were inadvertently competing for the same evacuation resources, complicating evacuation arrangements and increasing costs.

where common consular issues are discussed. Australia is also part of the Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation Consultative Group, which meets biannually to discuss major events and crisis response issues, with the aim of improving cooperation for crisis evacuation resources to minimise the likelihood of partner nations competing with each other during a crisis event, as occurred in the 2006 Lebanon crisis.

In-country crisis cooperation

5.15 As part of its visit to five posts during the audit, the ANAO observed that each post liaised with partner country missions, along with other missions, depending on the location, to discuss crisis preparations and share crisis planning information.¹⁵⁶ In general, the nature of relationships and the sharing of information varied between posts, however, as a minimum information on consular contingency assembly and evacuation locations was shared. Formal crisis cooperation arrangements also exist, such as the *Canada Australia Consular Services Sharing Agreement*, discussed in Chapter 4.

5.16 Other recent examples of formalised cooperation arrangements include:

- an Enhanced Diplomatic Network Cooperation agreement between the UK and Australia on crisis preparation and response, which was formalised in March 2014 at the Australia-UK Ministerial meeting. The agreement enables greater cooperation on a range of matters, including consular crisis preparedness and response. The first activity under the agreement occurred in April 2014, when DFAT participated in a UK led crisis response scenario exercise in Suva, Fiji. DFAT officers from the post and Canberra attended the exercise, which provided opportunities for both parties to identify best practices and areas of potential collaboration; and
- arrangements between France and Australia, where consular cooperation was proposed during the France-Australia annual meeting of senior government officials in March 2013. The focus of Australia's cooperation was to seek assistance for consular crises in some Central and West African countries, where France has a stronger diplomatic presence than Australia. In April 2014, the Minister for Foreign Affairs announced that Australia and France will establish a consular

¹⁵⁶ Liaison with other countries' posts included Japan, South Korea, and European Union countries such as France, Ireland and Germany.

cooperation agreement for crisis response in Francophone Africa and the South Pacific to improve consular support networks. The agreement also provides for cooperation and secondment of a DFAT officer into the French crisis centre. The agreement and secondment arrangements are yet to be finalised.

5.17 DFAT's approach to cooperating with partner countries on crisis preparedness and response arrangements has the potential to enhance Australia's ability to assist nationals in more regions during a crisis event.

Crisis planning and preparation

5.18 The responsibility for consular contingency planning is devolved to post management, while CCD's role is to assist posts to prepare contingency plans and provide quality assurance. DFAT supports officers to undertake crisis planning through training and guidance.

5.19 Consular crisis contingency plans serve two purposes—plans detail how a post will manage and respond to a crisis event, and also form a repository of post-specific information available to Canberra crisis officers. The plans also include a requirement for the head of post to certify to CCD that contingency arrangements have been exercised annually, although the nature of the exercise is left to the discretion of posts. Contingency plans set out a range of information relevant to a crisis scenario, including a risk assessment of likely scenarios, key post functions, roles and responsibilities of post officers, contact and location details for emergency services, infrastructure and/or services that maybe required in a crisis response. The ANAO examined the consular crisis planning and response arrangements for seven posts, along with CCD's review of post planning and preparations.¹⁵⁷

Post contingency and business continuity planning

5.20 As at July 2014, DFAT was replacing its consular contingency planning model with single all-hazards plans, referred to as Crisis Action Plans (CAPs). DFAT decided to introduce CAPs following a review of its previous Consular Contingency Plans (CCPs) and Business Continuity Plans that identified

¹⁵⁷ The documents were from the following posts: Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates), Dubai-Austrade (United Arab Emirates), Bangkok (Thailand), Vientiane (Laos), Beirut (Lebanon), London (United Kingdom) and Santiago (Chile).

duplication of information between the plans and a resource burden on posts in relation to the development, review and testing of plans each year.¹⁵⁸

5.21 The ANAO reviewed six current post CCPs and one of the new format CAPs—including those of the five posts visited during fieldwork.¹⁵⁹ In general, the CCPs varied in quality, structure and content, including the identification and assessment of risks. All CCPs and the CAP included details of the post crisis team, checklists, equipment and communications, staff lists and information on local authorities, service providers and hotels. Of the seven plans, two, including the new format CAP, did not include maps of key sites—such as the chancery, evacuation and assembly sites. While static maps of key sites are useful in a CAP, there would be also benefit in DFAT considering incorporating interactive mapping functionality. While this functionality may be unavailable to local staff if a crisis affects local telecommunications facilities, including hyperlinks to key crisis sites using an internet mapping solution would provide DFAT officers responding from other locations with important information in an interactive form.

5.22 In general, the CCPs were detailed and lengthy documents, each averaging 144 pages with one plan 241 pages in length.¹⁶⁰ In contrast, the CAP examined by the ANAO totalled 53 pages. The CAP format provides an improved structure and more concise format to capture and disseminate critical information in the event of a crisis.

Crisis risk assessment

5.23 Each of the plans reviewed included an assessment and ranking of key crisis risks. Under the revised CAP risk assessment, detailed guidance has been provided to posts to enable them to make a comparable assessment of risk. This guidance includes a risk assessment matrix that details consequences by categories—financial, key business function, national reputation and involvement of Australian nationals. Notwithstanding the provision of detailed guidance, the ANAO identified some variability in the assessment of crisis risks. In respect of the CCPs reviewed, two plans for the same country

158 The CAPs, introduced from January 2014, require posts to progressively merge existing post CCPs and Business Continuity Plans into a CAP.

159 The CAP was from Santiago de Chile while the CCPs were from the remaining posts (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Bangkok, Beirut and Vientiane).

160 This CCP related to a post with a large number of Australians travelling to, or residing in, the region for which it was responsible and also covered Honorary Consul locations.

gave three risks two different rankings¹⁶¹, while two plans lacked consistency between the risks identified in the register and in the detailed risk responses.¹⁶² This variability has the potential to adversely impact on developing appropriate strategies to effectively mitigate identified risks.

5.24 In preparing the CCPs, little consideration had been given to secondary or flow-on response risks. For example, a political or security crisis may lead to no, or limited, access to infrastructure, banking services, transport and/or essential commodities like fuel, water and food. Such secondary and flow-on risks can impact on DFAT's ability to effectively respond to a crisis, and can magnify the impact of the crisis.

5.25 There would be merit in DFAT undertaking a review of its crisis risk assessments when transitioning to the new CAP format. A key area of coverage for new CAPs is both the likely crisis risks—such as a natural disaster occurring, and likely secondary risks that could affect a response—such as borders being closed. Additional guidance in these areas would assist posts to identify, assess and rank both types of risks appropriately.

Post cooperative arrangements

5.26 Of the posts reviewed, those with established formal cooperative agreements referred to them in the contingency plan, and all plans outlined informal arrangements and relationships with partner nations. There would be merit in DFAT exploring, through the Consular Colloque meetings and with other partner nations, opportunities to formalise contingency planning and response cooperation arrangements at the post level to more clearly define the protocols that would apply when a crisis event occurs.

Major events preparations

5.27 Each post management is responsible for determining whether a Specific Event Consular Contingency Plan is required for major international events, such as the Olympic Games or FIFA World Cup, by assessing the risk of a crisis event occurring and the likely impact on Australians.¹⁶³

161 For example, the risk of 'foreign attack' was rated as low by one post, and high by the other, while aircraft crash and terrorism received differing ratings of medium and high.

162 One post discussed a risk of 'transiting evacuees' in body text, but did not include this in the risk register, while another post did not elaborate on the risk of 'disease epidemic/pandemic' in its detailed risk discussion.

163 Where a Specific Event Consular Contingency Plan is not required, the relevant CAP would provide the basis of the crisis response that would cover the event.

5.28 The ANAO reviewed the contingency plans for the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympic Games and the Sochi 2014 Paralympic Games held over February and March 2014, and the FIFA 2014 World Cup held in Brazil from June to July 2014. The contingency plans follow a similar structure and content of CCPs, but with a greater level of detail for each event, for example event risks, organiser contingency arrangements and local authority liaisons. A key focus of the plans related to additional support staff to provide consular services, including during a crisis response. The following case study provides an example of the deployment of additional officers to support a major international event.

FIFA 2014 World Cup Brazil – Deployment of additional staff

An additional five DFAT officers (from other posts and Canberra), one Austrade officer and two AFP officers were deployed to Brazil to support the event and the Australian Embassy in Brasilia. A Mobile Consular Team was deployed to each city several days ahead of a scheduled Socceroos match and remained for one or two days after. Another team of DFAT officers was co-located with the Australian organising body in Rio de Janeiro, while the two AFP officers were located in the International Police Cooperation Centre in Brasilia. DFAT also temporarily engaged two DFAT spouses, on long-term leave from their agencies, as consular and liaison officers to support operations in Brasilia.

5.29 The specific event consular contingency plans clearly outlined how DFAT would provide consular services and prepare for an event related crisis. While the depth and detail of major event plans will inevitably vary depending on the event, and level of Australian participation, it would be of benefit for DFAT to align future specific event consular contingency plans with the new CAP structure and follow similar processes. DFAT advised that it intends aligning future contingency plans with the new CAP structure.

Post crisis event response

5.30 In general, post contingency plans adequately outlined equipment that would be required for a crisis response. This includes practical response equipment—such as ‘grab kits’¹⁶⁴, vehicles, crisis coordination points, communication equipment and service providers—such as transport and logistic providers. As noted earlier, post contingency plans do not provide an assessment of secondary or flow-on risks. For example, a crisis event may

¹⁶⁴ Grab kits are pre-prepared essential equipment and supplies for use by officers when responding to a consular crisis.

result in financial systems not operating, necessitating the need for posts to use cash to sustain both business-as-usual functions and any crisis response activities—such as securing fuel, water and food.¹⁶⁵

5.31 None of the six CCPs reviewed in the audit outlined crisis funding or banking arrangements. The reviewed CAP did, however, outline crisis funding arrangements, including cash advances and the passports cash floats held at post—which amounted to about \$1160.¹⁶⁶ As at July 2014, only 16 DFAT posts held contingency cash reserves with the amounts varying considerably. Two of the four posts visited by the ANAO held contingency cash, while the other two posts did not, aside from petty cash and passport floats.

5.32 DFAT informed the ANAO that the posts that hold contingency cash, including those that hold \$5000 or less, represent 17 per cent of DFAT posts. DFAT advised the ANAO that posts can use corporate credit cards to fund initial crisis response activities—subject to banking services being available. However, the use of locally issued corporate credit cards is at the discretion of post management.

5.33 A post can request an emergency cash advance (supported by a business case) at any time it assesses there is a need. DFAT also advised that:

Posts' emergency cash advances are for circumstances where there is an urgent or anticipated need to have a large sum of cash available to allow them to respond to various types of crises, including events which affect only part of post operations (e.g. failure of local banking operations) or wider events which require a business continuity and consular crisis response (e.g. major earthquake).

5.34 DFAT advised the ANAO that 'the new CAP structure requires posts to assess and advise how cash reserve requirements will be met during a crisis event'. However, the requirement to do so is not specified in the CAP template of accompanying guidance, and the CAP examined by the ANAO did not assess cash requirements.¹⁶⁷ Revising the CAP guidance and template to include consideration of contingency funding arrangements would provide

¹⁶⁵ For example, during the Pakse disaster, staff responding from nearby posts were required to bring their own bottled water, basic supplies and personal protective equipment due to limited supply of these items at the site. Expenses at the crash site (such as food and temporary accommodation) were paid for with cash (in some cases, officer's personal funds) due to the lack of reliable banking facilities.

¹⁶⁶ The CAP noted that the post was in the process of arranging corporate credit cards.

¹⁶⁷ The CAP identified the amount of cash the post had available, but did not discuss whether this amount was sufficient to cover post operating expenses in the event of a consular crisis.

assurance that the need and availability of contingency cash reserves has been addressed and aligned with identified risks. In response to the audit, DFAT advised the ANAO that the next version of the CAP guidance will be aligned in this manner.

Reviewing post contingency arrangements

5.35 DFAT also has in place a scheduled program of post visits by its Contingency Planning Assistance Team (CPAT), which is tasked with reviewing post contingency planning and preparations. CPATs include staff from both DFAT and Defence, with a range of technical skills to undertake assessments of various elements of post contingency planning and preparations.¹⁶⁸ Defence is responsible for preparing the CPAT reports, which summarises the activities of the CPAT and makes recommendations to improve crisis contingency planning. DFAT advised the ANAO that the CPAT visits are currently under review, to include incorporating humanitarian elements into the visits.¹⁶⁹

5.36 Over the past three years, DFAT has undertaken 21 CPAT visits, eight in 2011–12, seven in 2012–13 and six in 2013–14. The number of CPAT visits over this period means that about eight per cent of posts' crisis plans were reviewed each year. As of October 2014, DFAT had undertaken two CPAT visits in 2014–15, plus a DFAT-only CPAT to Fiji in advance of the September 2014 elections. An additional four visits are scheduled for the remainder of 2014–15.

5.37 DFAT's identification of posts for a CPAT visit each year is based on a range of factors.¹⁷⁰ These factors can include: a request from post management; the post's security or political environment; the likelihood of a natural disaster; the number of Australian tourists and residents; and upcoming major international events. Priorities for the annual CPAT program are established jointly with Defence in an Operational Synchronisation Meeting, which the

168 CPAT visits include a review of post contingency awareness and preparations, such as conducting detailed assessments of primary sites—evacuation centres, airports, hospitals and communications. Liaison is also undertaken with a range of local stakeholders, including the host government authorities, partner country missions, non-governmental organisations, key infrastructure managers and other service providers such as airlines.

169 For example, the CPAT visit to Nepal in May 2013 included the review of humanitarian crisis planning and preparedness.

170 The decision for a CPAT to visit a post is made by DFAT, in consultation with Defence and other stakeholders.

departments co-chair, and formalised with an exchange of letters between DFAT and Defence. DFAT advised that in the past it has documented the selection of posts and tracked previous CPAT visits through the minutes resulting from these meetings, but since early 2014 has incorporated a spreadsheet, jointly managed with Defence, into this process.

5.38 The ANAO reviewed 15 recent CPAT reports¹⁷¹ and found the recommendations to be practical and comprehensive. Each CPAT report made, on average, 20 recommendations to improve post contingency preparedness, and four recommendations directed to other stakeholders (such as DFAT and Defence) to improve future CPATs or operations in Canberra. The ANAO observed that many of these recommendations were common across multiple posts; a summary of these issues is shown in Table 5.1. Additionally, the ANAO noted that four posts were identified as having issues of sufficient severity¹⁷² to suggest that contingency preparedness was insufficiently developed and practiced.

Table 5.1: Themes in CPAT report recommendations

CPAT recommendation theme	Number of posts
Improve frequency of communications testing/training	3
Improve frequency of crisis testing/training generally	6
Increase engagement with partner nations	8
Increase engagement with local stakeholders such as local governments and businesses	13
Review adequacy of post contingency funds	2
Acquire additional crisis supplies (communications equipment, food, water) for post and/or staff residences	7

Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT CPAT reports.

5.39 DFAT does not currently monitor the implementation of the CPAT recommendations. The department advised the ANAO that its review of the CPAT arrangements will consider the follow-up of recommendations from CPAT visits. Given the importance of these reviews to the safety and security

¹⁷¹ For Chile, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Israel, Kenya, Nepal, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Samoa, Timor Leste, Tonga, Turkey, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

¹⁷² The reports for three of these posts stated that a 'cultural change' was required, whereby all elements of the post have responsibility and ownership of crisis planning and management. The report for the fourth post suggested that the post's CCP had not yet been completed.

of DFAT staff and Australian travellers during a crisis event, the ANAO considers that the implementation of recommendations should be monitored, particularly for those posts where the contingency planning has been identified as being deficient.

5.40 The ANAO also found that of the 15 CPAT reports examined, four of the reports had been issued by Defence around six months after the CPAT visit occurred—the average time to issue a CPAT report was around three months.¹⁷³ The benefits derived from a CPAT visit may be diminished where reports are not issued in a timely manner.

Conclusion

5.41 The Australian Government Crisis Management Framework and DFAT's crisis management arrangements provide a sound framework to coordinate and manage a whole-of-government response to a consular crisis event abroad. DFAT's cooperative arrangements with partner countries on crisis preparedness and response has also enhanced Australia's ability to respond across more regions.

5.42 Following the integration of the former AusAID, DFAT has taken steps to coordinate both humanitarian and consular crisis response arrangements, including moving towards a single multi-skilled crisis response team. DFAT has sought to improve its ability to respond to future consular crisis events through conducting a lessons learned evaluation at the conclusion of each crisis event. A program of visits to selected posts each year to review crisis planning and preparation is also undertaken. However, broadening the scope of the lessons learned process to include all response activities, and monitoring the implementation of recommendations from both of these exercises, would provide greater assurance that these improvements are being reflected in future crisis responses.

5.43 Crisis contingency planning arrangements for posts have benefited from the recent review by DFAT, and the streamlining of contingency plans to minimise duplication and improve the utility of plans for post management. Reviewing posts' assessment of crisis risks, including an assessment of

173 Two visits were conducted in December 2011, with the reports provided in June 2012, while two visits were conducted in November 2012 with the reports provided in May 2013.

secondary or flow-on risks that are likely to hinder a post's ability to respond effectively, would strengthen DFAT's ability to respond to major crises.

Recommendation No.2

5.44 To strengthen its crisis preparations and response capabilities, the ANAO recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:

- includes in post crisis contingency planning risk assessments an assessment of, and strategies to mitigate, secondary risks; and
- strengthens the arrangements for implementing and monitoring the recommendations resulting from lessons learned evaluations and visits by the Contingency Planning Assistance Teams.

DFAT's response: *Agreed*

a) Through the Crisis Action Plan (CAP) process, the department will work to ensure that strategies are in place to identify and address all risks at posts and their accredited countries. Version 2 of the CAP template will include an additional focus on identifying and assessing secondary risks. This is scheduled to be rolled-out to all posts in the first quarter of 2015.

b) Identifying, analysing and addressing lessons from previous crises and exercises will continue to be a priority for the department. Revised processes have been implemented to assign responsibility and track the implementation of recommendations.

The department has commenced a review of the Contingency Planning Assistance Team (CPAT) program. The review will consider and provide advice on how to best ensure CPAT recommendations are considered and implemented. The review is scheduled to be concluded by 31 March 2015.

6. Consular Performance Measurement and Reporting

This chapter examines the performance measurement and reporting arrangements supporting DFAT's delivery of consular services.

Introduction

6.1 Adequate performance information allows agencies to assess the impact and success of their programs, adjust management approaches as required, and provide advice to government on the success, shortcomings and/or options for revisions to current policies and programs. This information also allows for informed decisions to be made on the allocation and use of public resources. In addition, performance measurement and reporting enables the Parliament and the public to consider a program's performance, in relation to both the impact of the program in achieving the policy objectives of the Government and its efficiency.¹⁷⁴ The ANAO examined DFAT's performance measurement and reporting framework in relation to the delivery of consular services.

Key performance indicators

6.2 The performance framework for consular services includes the program's objective, four deliverables, and four key performance indicators (KPIs) that are outlined in DFAT's annual Portfolio Budget Statements, and that are reported against in DFAT's annual reports. These are outlined in Table 6.1, and have remained largely unchanged since 2009–10.

174 ANAO Audit Report No.21 2013–14 *Pilot Project to Audit Key Performance Indicators*, Canberra, p. 21.

Table 6.1: Consular services program objective and key performance indicators (2014–15)

Program 2.1 Objective	
To support and assist Australian travellers and Australians overseas through high-quality consular services, including accurate and timely travel advice, practical contingency planning and rapid crisis response.	
Program 2.1 Deliverables	
High-quality consular services to an increasing number of Australian travellers and Australian citizens living overseas, including notarial services and assistance with welfare issues, whereabouts enquiries, arrest or detention matters, deaths, medical emergencies and payment of travellers emergency loans to Australians in need.	
High-quality travel advisory services, including issuing accurate and timely travel information on travel destinations, promoting this information through the continuation of the Smartraveller campaign and effectively managing an online travel registration service.	
Effective consular contingency planning for major events or high-risk scenarios, including through regular reviews of procedures and available resources, training of staff, and coordination with other government agencies and foreign governments.	
Coordination of whole-of-government responses to large-scale crises involving conflict, civil unrest, natural disasters or terrorist incidents.	
Program 2.1 Key performance indicators	
KPI 1	The department's delivery of consular services is effective, efficient, timely and responsive, and within the scope of Australian Government responsibility.
KPI 2	Travel advisories are accurate and timely and provide clear guidance to a broad audience of potential risks and extent of Australian Government assistance; public use of the <i>Smartraveller</i> website and the online registration service continues to grow.
KPI 3	Consular contingency planning accurately anticipates high-risk events and scenarios, necessary resources for response are readily available, procedures and networks remain valid and viable, and plans are tested and reviewed regularly.
KPI 4	Timely and effective consular support to Australians through well-coordinated implementation of whole-of-government responses to large-scale crises.

Source: Portfolio Budget Statements 2014–15, Budget Related Paper No. 1.9, Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio, Outcome 2, Programme 2.1 Consular Services.

6.3 The ANAO assessed the appropriateness, accuracy, and completeness of the four consular services KPIs.¹⁷⁵ In general, the KPIs established by DFAT relating to the provision of consular services lack sufficient detail, and do not provide a clear basis on which to assess the extent to which the objectives

175 The criteria the ANAO uses to assess KPIs are described in two previous audit reports: Audit Report No. 28 2012–13 *The Australian Government Performance Measurement and Reporting Framework: Pilot Project to Audit Key Performance Indicators*, and ANAO Audit Report No. 21 2013–14 *Pilot Project to Audit Key Performance Indicators*.

established for the delivery of consular services are being achieved. The ANAO's analysis of each consular services program KPI is summarised in Table 6.2:

Table 6.2: ANAO assessment of DFAT KPIs

KPI	ANAO assessment
KPI 1	The KPI is not measureable as 'effective, efficient, timely and responsive' are not quantified.
KPI 2	Elements of the KPI, such as 'clear guidance' and 'potential risks' are ambiguous and not defined. Use of <i>Smartraveller</i> website and registration service is measurable, however no target is specified. 'Accurate and timely' travel advice is not quantified.
KPI 3	Elements of the KPI, such as 'accurately anticipates high-risk events and scenarios', are not measurable and are subjective. Targets for performance are not specified. 'Necessary resources' is undefined and subjective.
KPI 4	It is unclear if the KPI is a measure of coordination, speed of response, or effectiveness of response. 'Timely', 'effective' and 'large-scale' are not defined. There are no targets for performance. 'Well-coordinated implementation' cannot be quantifiably measured and is subjective.

Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT Portfolio Budget Statements.

6.4 Further, the department has not established targets for each KPI against which performance can be assessed. These shortcomings make it difficult for stakeholders, such as Parliament, to form an overall opinion on the performance of consular services and the success in achieving the program objective, based on publicly reported information.

Potential alternative consular performance measures for inclusion in public reporting

6.5 The ANAO examined the Canadian, New Zealand, and UK consular services performance indicators for 2013–14. Although developed to meet each respective government's requirements, the comparison provides a useful illustration of approaches to establishing measurable KPIs.

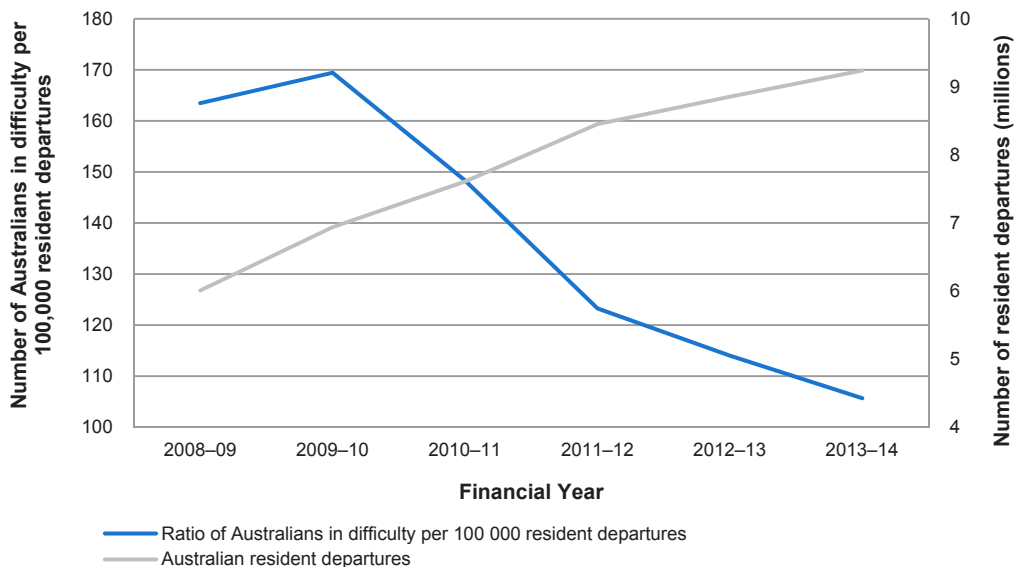
6.6 In 2013–14, all three countries reported against client satisfaction measures.¹⁷⁶ Canada and the UK also measured and reported against consular service response times, with the UK using the percentage of hospitalised or detained clients who were contacted within target timeframes, while Canada used the percentage of calls to the emergency number that met response

¹⁷⁶ DFAT collects client feedback at both posts and its Central Office in Canberra (CCD). However, there is limited coordination of client feedback results and, consequently, the department is not in a position to either use this information for process improvement purposes or for public reporting on consular services performance.

times.¹⁷⁷ Canada also reported on the ratio of nationals travelling abroad in distress situations as an indicator, while also outlining targets for each performance indicator.

6.7 While the selection of performance measures is ultimately a decision for public sector entities, the ANAO applied the Canadian measure of the ratio of nationals travelling abroad requiring assistance to the Australian context. The results provide an indication of how well Australians are informed and prepared to travel safely and responsibly abroad. This analysis shows that the proportion of Australians requiring assistance has decreased over time, while over the same period resident departures has increased (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: Ratio of Australians requiring assistance indicator



Source: ANAO analysis based on DFAT reported consular metrics in the DFAT Annual Reports for 2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14.

Note: 'Whereabouts' enquiries were excluded from the analysis due to the impact of significant increases in whereabouts enquiries during years when a major consular crisis event(s) occurred.

6.8 Although the ratio of Australians requiring assistance provides a measurable indicator that contributes to the overall assessment of consular performance, it does not currently align to the program objective or capture

¹⁷⁷ Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada reports against three performance indicators for the Canadian consular services and emergency management program, along with each sub-program containing sub-performance indicators.

other relevant consular case parameters, such as complexity of cases—which DFAT advised has increased over recent years. Measuring and reporting consular case effort—the number of hours spent on each case—could provide additional insights into changes in the complexity of consular cases. The development of new KPIs along these lines presents some challenges, as CMIS does not currently capture the total number of hours allocated on a case-by-case basis. The replacement of CMIS presents DFAT with the opportunity to review the performance information required to support consular case reporting and to incorporate the capture of this data within the new system.

Whole-of-government performance framework

6.9 Improvements to DFAT’s consular performance reporting will need to take into account the introduction of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) on 1 July 2014.¹⁷⁸ Implementation of the PGPA Act includes the introduction of the Commonwealth Performance Framework, which will:

provide a new whole-of-government approach for monitoring, reviewing and reporting the activities and results of government entities and their policies and programmes.¹⁷⁹

6.10 The Department of Finance has indicated that the revised framework will be in place from June 2015. The new performance framework requirements will provide DFAT with an opportunity to review the way the department measures consular performance and the performance data collected.

Reporting consular performance

6.11 DFAT reports annually on the delivery of consular services in its annual report under Program 2.1: *Consular Services*. The ANAO reviewed the current (2013–14), and previous four, DFAT annual reports and found consular reporting remained relatively consistent over this period. The reporting concentrates on consular activity metrics, such as the number of consular cases, phone calls made to the Consular Emergency Centre and travel advisories

178 The PGPA Act was the result of a review into Australian Government’s financial framework to provide a more modern and flexible legislative structure for agencies to operate within. Previously, there was no whole-of-government framework for Australian Government agencies to measure and report performance.

179 Department of Finance, *Commonwealth Performance Framework – Concept Paper*, June 2014, Canberra.

issued. Although useful in illustrating changes to client demand and the uptake of services, the metrics alone do not provide insights into how effectively consular services are being delivered.

6.12 In the 2013–14 annual report, the reporting against the four consular service KPIs was generally poor.¹⁸⁰ DFAT reported that all KPIs and deliverables had been ‘met’, but did not provide the basis for this assertion or the extent of any activity.¹⁸¹ Also, the KPIs did not include measureable targets against which performance could be compared.

Conclusion

6.13 While DFAT has in place consular services KPIs that are aligned to the program objective and deliverables, these indicators do not, at present, directly measure and provide an assessment of performance. The development of a set of KPIs, that measure key consular performance, provide a target for achievement, and illustrate trends over time, would better position DFAT and stakeholders, including the Parliament, to assess how effectively consular services are being delivered.

6.14 The consular services information reported annually by DFAT provides an overview of changes and trends in the services provided and activities undertaken. However, it does not allow stakeholders to assess the extent to which the delivery of consular services is meeting the program’s objective. It would be appropriate for DFAT, as part of its response to whole-of-government performance framework changes, to review its KPIs for consular services, and develop appropriate targets, to improve its reporting of consular service performance.

180 DFAT advised that the KPIs were in line with the department’s reporting requirements at the time, and that these requirements will be reviewed in line with the PGPA Act.

181 For example, in reporting achievement against KPI2 (use of the *Smartraveller* website and registration system), the department did not provide the number of travellers using these services, or discuss trends in their use. In previous reports, DFAT provided limited metrics related to the *Smartraveller* campaign, such as subscriptions to travel advisories and traveller registration numbers, but these figures were not provided in the 2013–14 report.

Recommendation No.3

6.15 To improve the transparency and reporting of consular service delivery, the ANAO recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade:

- develops appropriate key performance indicators and targets; and
- reports against these the extent to which its objectives for consular services are being achieved.

DFAT's response: *Agreed*

a) From 1 July 2015, DFAT will introduce new performance reporting which builds on and strengthens existing reporting methods in line with the new requirement included in the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013.

b) Reporting of consular service performance against these key performance indicators and targets will form part of the department's Corporate Plan and Annual Performance Statements.



Steve Chapman

Acting Auditor-General

Canberra ACT

10 February 2015

Appendices

Appendix 1: Entity Response



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

22 JAN 2015
2.00

Secretary

Telephone: 01 6261 2472
Facsimile: 01 6273 2081

File Number: 13/18485#10

21 January 2015

Mr Ian McPhee PSM
Auditor-General
Australian National Audit Office
GPO Box 707
Canberra 2600

19/2/15

Dear Ian

Thank you for your letter of 16 December 2014 attaching the ANAO's proposed audit report on the delivery of Australia's consular services, and the opportunity to respond to the report. My department welcomes the audit as an opportunity to further improve the quality of the consular services the government delivers to Australians abroad.

I am pleased that the ANAO found that DFAT's administration of consular services is broadly appropriate and that services are generally delivered effectively.

I note the three areas in which the ANAO has made recommendations for improving our delivery of consular services:

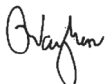
1. Strengthening the management and oversight of consular cases by improving the recording of key case information and implementing a quality assurance process of consular cases.
2. Strengthening our crisis preparations and response capabilities by including a review of secondary risks in post contingency planning risk assessments and monitoring recommendations stemming from Contingency Planning Assistance Team visits to posts.

R G Casey Building, Barton ACT 0221 www.dfat.gov.au

3. Improving the transparency and reporting of consular service delivery by developing and reporting the department's performance against appropriate key consular performance indicators.

The three recommendations are agreed. Attached to this letter are the department's summary response to the overall audit and a detailed response to each of the recommendations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Varghese', written in a cursive style.

Peter N Varghese AO

Appendix 2: Consular Services that can be provided by DFAT

DFAT can:

- in medical emergencies, provide lists of local doctors and hospitals and assistance in arranging a medical evacuation (at your expense) if required;
- in the event of war, civil unrest or natural disaster, provide current information and assistance in arranging an evacuation if appropriate and subject to the state of disruption of communications and transport on the ground;
- provide advice and support in the case of an accident, serious illness or death. We will also ensure nominated contacts are informed (if you give your consent, except in the case of a death where consent is not required);
- assist victims of serious crimes, including by arranging for nominated contacts to be informed (if you give your consent);
- assist if you are arrested overseas, by visiting or contacting you and by arranging for your family to be informed (if you give your consent). We also seek to ensure that you are treated fairly under the laws of the country in which you have been arrested;
- provide lists of local lawyers;
- assist in cases of missing persons;
- assist with arranging a replacement passport if yours has expired or been lost, stolen or damaged (fees apply);
- assist you to contact relatives or friends for help with money or tickets;
- provide small emergency loans in genuine emergency situations. (Note: Any financial assistance we may provide will generally be in the form of a loan, which is made on the basis of a signed, legal undertaking to repay in full. You may also be required to surrender your passport and you may not be issued with a replacement until the debt is repaid.);
- provide notarial services including witnessing and authenticating documents and administering oaths and affirmations (fees apply);
- provide travel advisories as one source of input to inform your travel plans;
- provide the opportunity for you to register your travel details with us so that we can try to make contact in case of emergency;
- provide voting facilities for federal and some state and territory elections; and
- assist with contact details of government authorities in Australia in the event of pension or social security payment difficulties.

Continued over page ...

DFAT cannot :

- provide legal advice;
- intervene in private court proceedings or legal matters including employment disputes, commercial disputes and family law matters;
- investigate crimes or deaths overseas;
- provide or pay for search and rescue services (although we can help you arrange these services);
- get you out of prison or seek special treatment for you;
- post bail or pay your fines or legal expenses;
- enforce an Australian or any other custody agreement overseas or compel a country to decide a custody case;
- provide or pay for medical or psychiatric services or medications;
- act as a travel agent, bank or post office, or store luggage;
- provide translation, interpreter, telephone or internet services;
- issue emergency loans, unless you have first exhausted other sources of support including insurance and family members;
- pay your pension or social security benefits;
- pay or guarantee payment of your hotel, medical or other bills;
- arrange visas, licences, work or residency permits for other countries or help you to obtain them;
- intervene in relation to customs or quarantine requirements and regulations of other countries;
- provide physical protection or security advice; and
- accept responsibility for the custody or safe return of lost property.

Source: DFAT, *Consular Services Charter*, October 2012.

Appendix 3: Travel Advisory Destinations Selected for ANAO Analysis

Countries	
France	Republic of Korea
Germany	Saudi Arabia
Indonesia	Sierra Leone
Japan	South Africa
Kenya	South Sudan
Laos	Sweden
Lebanon	Thailand
Mexico	United Arab Emirates
Norway	United States of America
New Zealand	Vanuatu
Peru	Yemen

Source: ANAO.

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Delivery of Australia's Consular Services

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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