Administration of Consular Services Follow-up Audit

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Canberra   ACT
4 December 2003

Dear Mr President
Dear Mr Speaker

The Australian National Audit Office has undertaken a performance audit in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in accordance with the authority contained in the *Auditor-General Act 1997*. I present the report of this audit and the accompanying brochure. The report is titled *Administration of Consular Services Follow-up Audit.*

Following its tabling in Parliament, the report will be placed on the Australian National Audit Office's Homepage—http://www.anao.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

P. J. Barrett
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

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Abbreviations

AFTA	Australian Federation of Travel Agents
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
CEC	Consular Emergency Centre
CME	Contingency Planning, Crisis Management and Evacuation Manual
CMIS	Consular Management Information System
CMS	Consular Management Section
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
ECU	Emergency Call Unit
ORAO	Online Registration for Australians Overseas
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SATIN	Secure Australian Telecommunications and Information Network
YHA	Youth Hostels Association

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

Background

1.   Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) Audit Report No.31 2000–01, *Administration of Consular Services*, examined the adequacy of administration of consular services by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The audit made six recommendations to improve the management, administration and delivery of consular services to Australian citizens, all of which were agreed by DFAT. The purpose of the follow-up audit was to assess the extent to which DFAT has implemented the recommendations of the 2000–01 audit.

2.   DFAT provides consular services to protect the welfare and interests of Australians travelling and living overseas, and their next of kin in Australia. Each year DFAT receives over 100 000 calls for assistance and manages over 20 000 substantial consular cases. Overseas, services are provided through a network of 166 posts, which includes diplomatic missions and honorary consuls. Twenty-four hour service is also available through a Consular Emergency Centre (CEC) located in DFAT's Consular Branch in Canberra.

Key findings

3. Key findings against specific recommendations of the previous audit are summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Progress in implementing recommendations of the previous audit

Subject of previous audit recommendations	Progress of implementation
Recommendation 1 **Client communication:** Develop (a) a client communication strategy and (b) methods to assess the penetration and effectiveness of travel advice.	**Implemented** DFAT has developed a communication strategy and is building on this to meet changing client needs for information. Methods are in place to monitor dissemination and effectiveness of publications and travel advice.
Recommendation 2 **Travel warnings:** Strengthen management of travel advisories, including (a) systematically applying procedures for assessing and documenting the need for travel advisories and (b) ensuring travel warnings are highlighted and clear.	**Substantially implemented** Processes for risk assessment are in place. Travel advisories largely meet a three-month target for review and warnings are more clearly defined. Decisions 'not to issue travel advisories' for some countries need to be documented to ensure accountability of process.
Recommendation 3 **Case management information system:** Implement a case management information system. The system should enable recording and transmittal of consular case information, and facilitate collection of information for caseload analysis and performance management.	**Substantially implemented** DFAT has developed a case management information system and its implementation at overseas posts is due to finish by mid-2004. System components to enable caseload and performance reporting are scheduled for development in 2003–04.
Recommendation 4 **Performance management:** Strengthen performance management for consular services. To include (a) a wider range of performance information to assess outcomes (b) caseload information (c) targets (d) systematically assessing client satisfaction and (e) a consular complaints handling system.	**Not implemented** Apart from progressing the measurement of client satisfaction, DFAT has not met key requirements of the recommendation. DFAT's performance framework does not adequately facilitate reporting against core consular service outcomes, and no formal complaints handling system is in place.

Subject of previous audit recommendations	Progress of implementation
Recommendation 5 **Contingency planning:** Management arrangements for contingency planning ensure post contingency plans (a) protect the interests of Australians travelling and residing abroad (b) are based on systematic and regular analysis of risks (c) are up to date and (d) are supported by up to date guidelines.	**Substantially implemented** DFAT has developed new guidelines, which are assisting posts to develop plans of higher quality and consistency. Posts undertake more rigorous risk assessments and plans are more focussed on protecting Australians overseas. Further administrative improvements are required to ensure that plans are kept up to date.
Recommendation 6 **Registration of Australians abroad:** (a) review the categorisation of posts to ensure appropriate categorisation and (b) monitor the effectiveness of registration efforts.	**Partially implemented** DFAT reviewed post categorisation, but the methodology for risk assessment was not clear. Substantial progress was made in developing a publicly accessible registration system, which should facilitate central monitoring of registration of Australians overseas.

4.   This follow-up audit also found that over the last two years, DFAT has responded to changes in global security by expanding public access to travel information and consular assistance, particularly during crisis situations. New systems are in place to centralise monitoring of key consular activities, to improve risk assessment, and to assist posts in reviewing their contingency plans.

5.   However, the audit found that some aspects of project management, and documentation of key consular processes and decisions, could be strengthened for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Conclusion

6.   DFAT has implemented Recommendation 1 and is making good progress towards implementing Recommendations 2, 3, and 5 of the previous audit. However, key components of Recommendation 4 and 6 are still to be addressed.

7.   DFAT has strengthened its risk assessment processes for travel advisories and contingency planning. However, with respect to Recommendation 6, DFAT has not established a clear methodology for determining post risk categorisation for the purpose of registration of Australians overseas. This could well diminish DFAT's capacity to provide assurance that posts are appropriately categorised.

8.   The quality, range and dissemination of DFAT's travel advice have improved. This should progress further with the Government's new initiatives for raising public awareness of travel advice. However, more thorough documentation of the risk assessment and decision making process in countries

where travel advisories are not on issue, would improve accountability. Also, improvements to administrative processes are necessary to fulfil DFAT's requirement that post contingency plans are kept up to date.

9. The development of the Consular Management Information System (CMIS) has improved consular case management. However, to date, CMIS does not have a sophisticated capacity for collecting and reporting of information for performance management purposes. Further development of CMIS is planned for 2003–04, including a module to facilitate reporting of data for caseload analysis and performance management, and a crisis management module to assist in case management during crisis situations.

10. The ANAO has made two Recommendations in the follow-up audit. These cover CMIS project management and contingency planning. The recommendations are outlined on page 15 of the report.

DFAT's response

11. DFAT's response to the follow-up audit can be found in full at Appendix 7. DFAT also provided the following summary.

> The international security environment has changed significantly since the ANAO's 2001 audit. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States and 12 October 2002 in Bali have fundamentally changed the environment in which Australians travel overseas and in which consular services are delivered. Responding to this changed environment, the Department has accelerated an ongoing process of reform and made significant improvements to the way it delivers consular services overseas. New priority is being given to the provision of travel advice and other consular information, to strengthened contingency planning and crisis management arrangements, and to refining our case management systems.

> The Department accepts both recommendations in this report and notes that significant progress has been made towards implementing them. A working group has been established to oversee the ongoing development of the Consular Management Information System, under the PRINCE2 project management model. Contingency plans have been audited and are being systematically reviewed. A model contingency plan is being developed and planning is under way for further contingency planning assessment visits to priority posts.

Recommendations

Set out below are the ANAO's recommendations with report paragraph references.

Recommendation No.1
Para. 5.43

The ANAO recommends that DFAT develop a systematic and accountable process for managing the Consular Management Information System project, that:

a) sets development milestones, monitors and documents progress of the project;

CMIS

b) meets DFAT's key business requirement to guarantee data integrity; and

c) improves system design and administration to achieve accurate reporting of consular statistics and performance information.

DFAT response: Agreed.

Recommendation No.2
Para. 7.39

The ANAO recommends that DFAT ensure that post contingency plans are reviewed at least annually and that appropriate management and coordination procedures are in place to allow effective review, coordination and availability of contingency plans.

Contingency Planning

DFAT response: Agreed.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of consular services, recent reviews, and key events that have impacted on consular functions. It also outlines the purpose, scope and methodology of the follow-up audit and the structure of this report.

Consular services

Protecting the interests of Australians abroad

1.1   The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is responsible for providing consular services to protect the welfare and interests of Australian citizens residing or travelling overseas. In 2001–02, an estimated 720 000 Australians were residing in countries outside of Australia. In 2003–04 over 3.4 million[1] Australians made trips overseas (see Figure 1.1 and Appendix 1).

Figure 1.1

Number of Australians travelling overseas
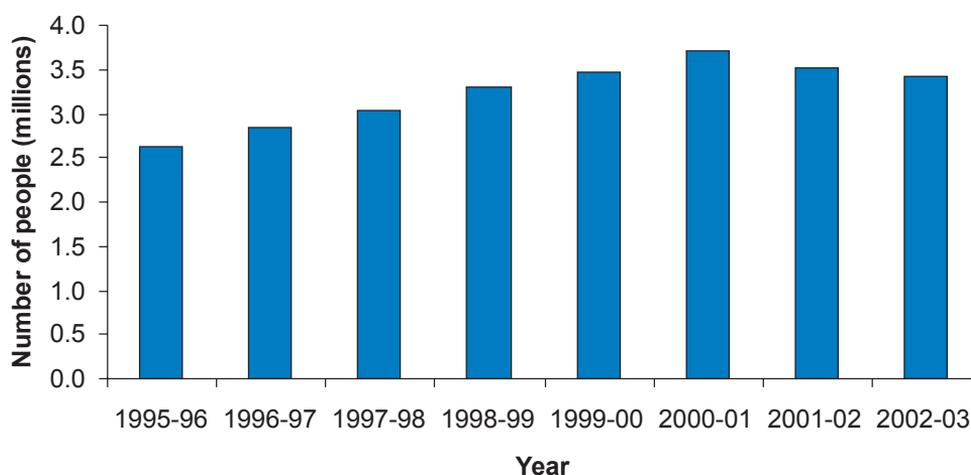
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

1.2   DFAT encourages Australians to make adequate preparations for overseas travel, and to avoid known or potential trouble spots. In pursuit of this, DFAT provides a range of information to help travellers make informed decisions about travel. For example, it currently issues travel advisories[2] for 141 countries, as well as bulletins and general information for travellers. DFAT also provides an

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[1]   Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003, *Year Book Australia 2003–Tourism (International Outbound Tourism)*.

[2]   Current advice, including travel warnings, specific to a country. These are accessible through DFAT's website <http://www.dfat.gov.au/travel/>.

online registration facility to assist in locating Australians overseas in the event of emergency situations.

1.3   However, some Australians still encounter problems while overseas that they cannot resolve through their own resources, for example, a lost passport, arrest or imprisonment, hospitalisation, or death. These situations often require consular assistance. DFAT has a range of access points through which Australians can obtain the information and assistance they require (see Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2
Consular services

Access points

Public information outlets

Consular Emergency Centre

DFAT website

Travel industry

Consular Branch in Canberra

State and Territory Offices

Overseas posts

Consular services provided

Travel advice and publications

24 hour emergency assistance

Crisis support

Registration overseas

Notarial services

General inquiries

Client needs
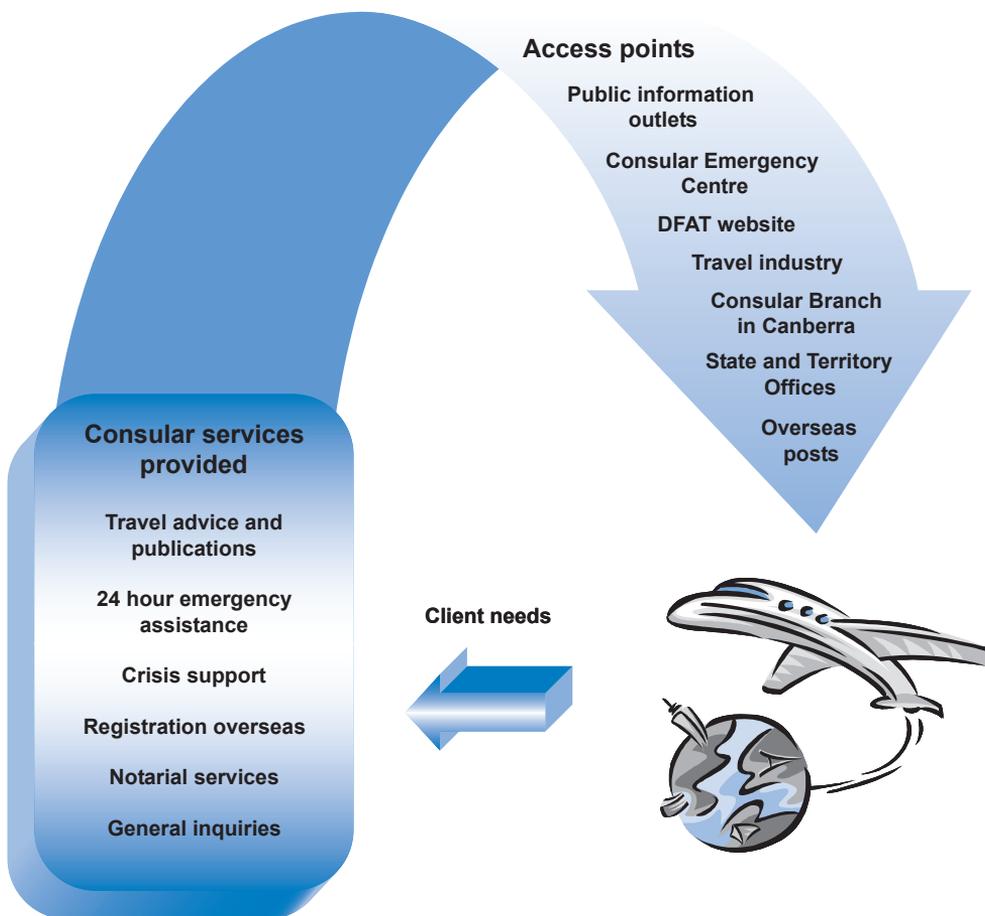
Source: ANAO based on DFAT information

Nature and scope of consular services

1.4   The provision of consular services is governed by international laws and consular practice; bilateral agreements between Australia and other countries; and Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation. DFAT's provision of consular services is also subject to the *Privacy Act 1988*, which protects the privacy of those who receive consular assistance.

1.5   A *Consular Services Charter* outlines the range and limitations of consular services DFAT provides (see Appendix 2). Overseas posts undertake routine notarial, passport and consular services. More substantial and time-consuming consular matters may involve prison visits, whereabouts inquiries, and support in the event of an accident, serious illness or death overseas.

1.6   Consular Branch in Canberra has a pivotal role in supporting and coordinating activities across the consular network. It is the central repository for consular case records, and is responsible for compiling and disseminating travel information, including travel advisories. Consular Branch also manages the annual review of post contingency plans, coordinates DFAT's response to overseas crises, and operates the 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre (CEC).

1.7   In 2001–02, DFAT dealt with 24 158 substantial consular cases[3], a rise of 11 per cent on 2000–01 (see Figure 1.3). DFAT's 2002–03 statistics show an apparent decrease of about 20 per cent in the number of substantial consular cases. This was largely due to a change in DFAT's statistical collection methods (see footnote 4). Whereabouts inquires rose by over 200 per cent in 2002–03, reflecting the impact of the Bali bombings in October 2002. This impact can also be seen in the rise of hospitalisations (up by 20 per cent) and medical evacuations (up by 75 per cent).

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[3]   The term 'substantial consular cases' is used in this report to refer to the more significant types of consular assistance listed in Figure 1.3, as opposed to consular services of a routine and minor nature.

Figure 1.3
Substantial consular assistance provided to Australians overseas

Case type	Nature of consular assistance provided	Number of cases			
		1999–00	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Welfare	Australians given general welfare guidance and assistance	16 085	16 975	19 194	10 129[4]
Travellers emergency loans	Australians in financial difficulties lent public funds to cover immediate needs	775	738	739	610
Whereabouts	Inquiries made about Australians overseas who could not be contacted by their next of kin	1 850	1 712	1 838	5 767
Hospitalisation	Hospitalised Australians given guidance and assistance	656	766	722	864
Medical evacuation	Australians evacuated to another location for medical purposes	103	138	116	203
Death	Next of kin given guidance or assistance with disposal of remains in relation to a death overseas	604	547	639	681
Repatriation	Australians having difficulty arranging their own return to Australia given guidance and assistance	60	71	81	109
Arrest	Australians arrested overseas given assistance	453	568	649	649
Prisoner	Australians in prison overseas given assistance	155	208	180	184
Total number of cases involving Australians in difficulty		**20 741**	**21 723**	**24 158**	**19 196**

Source: DFAT consular statistics

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4   This figure reflects changes made in statistical collection to better record consular case work of a more serious nature. Non-case consular work of a more general nature is now reported in quantity indicators as 'overseas post non-case inquiries'. This is reflected in DFAT's 2002–03 Annual Report. Previous year's figures include responses to general non-case enquires, for example on travel advice.

Previous audit

1.8   The previous audit of the administration of consular services[5] concluded that most aspects of consular services were satisfactorily administered. The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) found that DFAT was focused on providing responsive consular services to Australian travellers and residents overseas, and to their next of kin. DFAT had improved its provision of services over recent years. Notwithstanding this, the ANAO identified weaknesses in the management processes and administrative systems supporting the provision of consular services, and made six recommendations. These covered:

- client communication (Recommendation 1);

- travel advice (Recommendation 2);

- a case management information system (Recommendation 3);

- performance management (Recommendation 4);

- contingency planning (Recommendation 5); and

- registration of Australians abroad (Recommendation 6).

1.9   DFAT agreed to all six recommendations. Appendix 3 to this report provides a summary of the ANAO's assessment of DFAT's progress in implementing the recommendations.

Developments since the previous audit

New demands in the changing consular environment

1.10   The global security environment has changed in the last two years, placing additional demands on consular services. Through extensive media coverage, Australians witnessed terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on 11 September 2001, and subsequent 'white powder' (anthrax) incidents in many countries. The Bali bombings of 12 October 2002 further highlighted the potential risks of overseas travel (see Figure 1.4). These events heightened awareness of traveller safety and security among governments, the travel industry and the Australian public.

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[5]   ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, *Administration of Consular Services—Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, Canberra.

Figure 1.4
Changing consular environment

Pictured above (from top right, clockwise): security precautions against exposure to anthrax spores in New York; the Bali bombings in October 2002; Crisis Centre DFAT, Canberra; terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001; and wreaths at the Australian Consulate-General building in Bali.

Source: DFAT

1.11   DFAT advised that, in 2001–02, it received 104 693 calls for assistance from the public. This was an increase of 17 per cent on calls in 2000–01. In 2002–03, the Bali bombings alone generated in excess of 30 000 inquiries, 10 000 of which were received within the first 24 hours of the crisis. The extent of consular services required following the Bali bombing was unprecedented, both in volume and complexity. The response to this is discussed further in paragraph 2.20.

1.12   The ANAO observed that DFAT has revised many of its consular operations to meet the increasing demand. It now places greater emphasis and resources on preventive measures such as travel advisories and contingency planning. It has strengthened its crisis management infrastructure, and is introducing new communication strategies to improve dissemination of information to target groups.

Bali-related reviews

1.13   At the request of the Prime Minister, the Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security undertook a review of all relevant intelligence available to Australian intelligence and security agencies. The review, which included DFAT, aimed to establish whether there was any information that warned of the bomb attacks on Bali. His report, presented to the Prime Minister in December 2002, concluded that there was no material available that specifically warned of the attack.[6]

1.14   In March 2003, the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee commenced an inquiry into the performance of DFAT and other relevant Commonwealth agencies in assessing and disseminating threats to the security of Australians in South East Asia in the period from 11 September 2001 to 12 October 2002.[7] This inquiry includes an examination of the differences between DFAT's travel advisories, travel bulletins and Embassy bulletins, and between assessments of threat made by Australia and overseas governments. The Senate Committee is due to complete its inquiry and report to the Senate in November 2003.

Increased budget funding

1.15   The 2003–04 Federal Budget provided additional funding of $9.7 million over four years[8] to improve dissemination of travel advice. Measures include a public information campaign; the introduction of touch screen travel advice kiosks in airports and Australian passport offices; and increased cooperation with the Australian travel industry.

Follow-up audit

Audit objective and scope

1.16   The objectives of the follow-up audit were to assess DFAT's implementation of the six recommendations made by the ANAO in the previous audit. It also sought to determine whether implementation of these recommendations, or alternative action, had improved DFAT's administration of consular services.

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[6]   Inspector-General of Intelligence and Security 2002, *Bali Terrorist Attack of 12 October 2002*–public extract. Tabled in House of Representatives on 10 December 2002.

[7]   On 24 March 2003 the Senate referred *Security Threat to Australians in Southeast Asia* to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee for inquiry and report.

[8]   The period of funding was subsequently reduced from four years to three years.

1.17   The audit focused on management processes and supporting systems for the delivery of consular services. It also reviewed DFAT's implementation of recommendations of the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee that were outstanding from the previous audit.[9]

1.18   The audit criteria are provided in Appendix 4.

Audit methodology

1.19   The audit was conducted in accordance with ANAO auditing standards and was completed for a total cost of $378 880.

1.20   DFAT provided a written submission, updating the ANAO on progress made in implementing the recommendations of the previous audit. This submission was considered, along with other key documents, databases and files examined as part of the audit fieldwork and analysis.

1.21   Fieldwork was conducted largely within the Consular Branch of DFAT's central office. Interviews were also held with key stakeholders, including the Australian Federation of Travel Agents (AFTA), Qantas, Austrade, and the Canadian High Commission in Canberra. Overseas posts were consulted through an ANAO questionnaire on specific issues pertaining to the Consular Management Information System (CMIS).

DFAT approach to monitoring the implementation of recommendations of the previous audit

1.22   In assessing DFAT's implementation of the recommendations of the previous audit, the ANAO noted that the DFAT Audit Committee kept track of implementation of the recommendations through reporting from the line area. Reporting to the committee ceased at the end of 2001 upon receipt of advice that the recommendations had been implemented or appropriate action taken. However, the current follow-up audit concluded that key components of two recommendations are still to be addressed.

1.23   There would be merit in DFAT reviewing its arrangements for monitoring of action by line areas to implement ANAO audit recommendations, to ensure progress is appropriately reported through its Audit Committee.

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[9]   Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee June 1997, *Helping Australians Abroad. A Review of the Australian Government's Consular Services*.

Report structure

Figure 1.5
Structure of the report

Chapter 2 *Access to Consular Services*
Chapter 3 *Client Communication* Previous Recommendation 1
Chapter 4 *Travel advisories* Previous Recommendation 2
Chapter 5 *Case Management Information System* Previous Recommendation 3
Chapter 6 *Performance Management* Previous Recommendation 4
Chapter 7 *Contingency Planning* Previous Recommendation 5
Chapter 8 *Registration of Australians Overseas* Previous Recommendation 6

2. Access to Consular Services

This chapter examines changes in access to consular services since the previous audit. It discusses the expansion of DFAT's network of overseas posts to provide more service delivery points. It also highlights changes to crisis management that aim to improve access to consular assistance during major overseas crises.

Background

2.1   The previous audit found that DFAT placed considerable importance on the delivery of a wide range of quality consular services. With Australian travellers facing a more threatening international environment, access to consular services remains a high priority. This chapter discusses how Australians can gain access to a range of consular services, which are the subject of subsequent chapters.

2.2   DFAT has two main arms of consular service delivery: its network of overseas posts; and Consular Branch in Canberra, which includes a 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre (CEC). Both fulfil an essential role as points of contact for travellers and their next of kin in need of consular assistance.

2.3   Demand for consular services has increased in recent years, particularly during crisis situations. In response, DFAT has continued to expand the consular network. It has established an Emergency Call Unit (ECU) to supplement the CEC during crisis situations. It has also made several operational changes to improve accessibility and delivery of consular services to the public.

Expanding the overseas consular network

2.4   As at June 2003, DFAT had expanded its overseas consular network to 166 overseas posts, an increase of 8 per cent since the last audit (see Figure 2.1). As discussed below, most of this growth is due to additional honorary consuls.

Figure 2.1
Consular network

Type	Number of posts	
	2000	**2003**
DFAT-managed posts	78	80
Austrade-managed posts	17	17
Honorary consuls	42	50
Canadian posts	16	19
Total	**153**	**166**

Source: DFAT

Consular sharing arrangements

Previous audit

Australia's only formal consular sharing arrangement was with Canada. In 1997 the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee had asked that DFAT continue to explore arrangements to increase the reach, effectiveness and efficiency of Australia's consular services.[10]

The United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States of America are also consular partners to Australia, providing consular services to Australians on an informal basis. The ANAO considered there would be merit in DFAT examining the potential benefits and costs of entering into consular sharing arrangements with other countries. The aim was to extend the reach of Australia's consular services to some of the more remote parts of the world, without requiring significant additional DFAT outlays.[11]

2.5   Australia continues to have a formal consular sharing arrangement with Canada. Canada provides consular services to Australians in 19 countries, mainly in Africa and South America, where Australia does not have posts. Australia reciprocates by providing Canadians with access to consular services in 21 countries, mainly in the Asia–Pacific region (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2

Places where Australia and Canada have consular sharing arrangements

Places where Canada provides consular services to Australian citizens	Places where Australia provides consular services to Canadian citizens
❖ Burkina Faso ❖ Cameroon ❖ Costa Rica ❖ Côte d'Ivoire ❖ Cuba ❖ Democratic Republic of the Congo ❖ Ecuador ❖ Ethiopia ❖ Gabon ❖ Guatemala ❖ Guinea ❖ Mali ❖ Morocco ❖ Niger ❖ Senegal ❖ Syria ❖ Tanzania ❖ The Gambia ❖ Tunisia	❖ Bali ❖ Burma ❖ Cambodia ❖ East Timor ❖ Federated States of Micronesia ❖ French Polynesia ❖ Guam ❖ Hawaii ❖ Kiribati ❖ Laos ❖ Marshall Islands ❖ Nauru ❖ New Caledonia ❖ Nusa Tenggara Barat ❖ Northern Marianas ❖ Palau ❖ Papua New Guinea ❖ Samoa ❖ Solomon Islands ❖ Tonga ❖ Vanuatu

Source: DFAT Annual Report 2001–02

[10]   Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 1*, paragraph 2.31.

[11]   ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 2.6–2.12.

2.6 The ANAO found that both DFAT and the Canadian High Commission in Canberra were satisfied with the current consular sharing arrangements. The Canadian High Commission commented to the ANAO that DFAT provided 'outstanding consular services' to Canadians in Bali following the bombings and kept the Canadian Government well informed.

2.7 DFAT has not pursued formalising consular sharing arrangements with other countries. The United Kingdom, New Zealand and the United States of America continue to be consular partners to Australia, providing consular services to Australians on an informal basis. DFAT advised the ANAO that the informal arrangements work well and that it is the collective judgement of the consular partners that there has been no need to formalise these arrangements.

2.8 DFAT advised that it remains open to expanding the scope of informal arrangements with key consular partners where there is a clear case that it would benefit from such arrangements. DFAT also encourages posts to look at informal arrangements that can be formalised on a case-by-case basis.

Austrade posts

Previous audit

At the time of the last audit, Austrade-managed posts operated in 17 locations. The Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee had previously commented that Austrade had not identified consular funding separately in its Portfolio Budget Statements.[12]

The ANAO also considered that an agreement covering service provision, resourcing, performance information and accountability for the delivery of consular activities at Austrade-managed posts would provide improved governance arrangements.[13]

2.9 Austrade continues to manage 17 consulates, providing consular services such as notarial acts, medical evacuations, jail visits, and general advice and assistance to Australians overseas.

2.10 In response to the Senate Committee recommendation, Austrade now separately identifies funding for consular, passport and immigration services at its overseas offices.

2.11 The ANAO commented in the last audit that recognised better practice is for provider and client agencies to have agreements covering service provision, resourcing, performance information and accountability reporting. A service level agreement was under consideration by DFAT at the time of the previous audit. However, negotiations between DFAT and Austrade on the service level agreement have been ongoing since then.

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[12] Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 2*, paragraph 3.21.

[13] ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 2.13–2.16.

2.12 At the conclusion of the current audit, DFAT advised the ANAO that discussions to finalise a service level agreement with Austrade had recommenced. One of the issues remaining to be resolved is funding for, and access to, DFAT's Consular Management Information System (CMIS).

Honorary consuls

Previous audit

The ANAO considered that, given the cost-effectiveness of such appointments, there would be merit in DFAT re-assessing its ability to further expand the honorary consul system. Also, DFAT should monitor the need for supplementary funding for administrative support where honorary consuls have demonstrably high consular caseload.[14]

2.13 Honorary consuls are appointed by the Australian Government in countries where there is a demonstrated need for consular assistance that cannot be met efficiently or economically by a post or another Commonwealth consular service. Applications for new or continuing honorary consuls are considered by DFAT against specific criteria. Since the previous audit, the honorary consul network has expanded from 42 to 50 honorary consuls.

2.14 In 2002 DFAT conducted a review of the honorary consul program budget to eliminate discrepancies in the allocation of honoraria and administrative budgets. The review also sought to ensure that a more rigorous approach was adopted in considering: recommendations for new Honorary Consul positions; applications for renewing Honorary Consul appointments; and additional funds for administrative costs.

2.15 Following this review, DFAT implemented a new funding formula. This provides an honorarium of $5 000 per consul, with posts able to request additional funds for administrative expenses on a case-by-case basis. The ANAO found that DFAT has allocated extra funds for administrative support where there was evidence of a higher consular caseload.

2.16 DFAT advised the ANAO that it also plans to undertake a review of the honorary consul program during 2003–04. Details of the review were not available at the time of the audit.

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[14] ibid., paragraphs 2.21–2.24.

24-hour consular assistance

Previous audit

The ANAO found DFAT had substantially enhanced after hours telephone access to consular assistance by introducing a free-call service and a 24-hour Consular Operations Centre. However, DFAT did not have adequate performance information on usage and service quality of the centre. DFAT advised that it proposed to introduce call analysis software to provide this information.[15]

Consular Emergency Centre

2.17   The Consular Operations Centre has been renamed the Consular Emergency Centre (CEC). The CEC provides 24-hour access to consular assistance though a toll-free 1300 number. Staffed at all times by at least one consular officer, the CEC is expanded rapidly in response to crisis situations. Over 80 posts are connected to the CEC, either through direct transfer or reverse charge phone call. This is an increase since the previous audit, when 57 posts were connected. DFAT advised that it is investigating ways to connect all other posts to the CEC.

2.18   A call monitoring system is in place, which allows the recording of CEC calls by case type and generation of summary reports for analysis. The system does not facilitate analysis of the quality of service provided through the CEC. However, the ANAO found that DFAT had been able to assess quality aspects of service through its evaluation of crisis response (see paragraph 2.19).

Crisis management

2.19   Each crisis provides DFAT with an opportunity to evaluate and improve its services on the basis of actual experiences. The ANAO found that DFAT has no documented guidelines for evaluation and reporting following a crisis. Nonetheless, it has engaged in various forms of operational review after major crises. Reporting of outcomes varies in structure and mechanism, but in general has realised some useful changes in crisis management and access to consular assistance during a crisis (see Figure 2.3).

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[15]   ibid., paragraphs 2.25–2.26, 2.28.

Figure 2.3
Recent operational changes to improve crisis response

- ❖ Following the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks, DFAT established an Emergency Call Unit (ECU) with a toll-free 1800 number. It can be activated to supplement the 24-hour CEC toll-free 1300 number during periods of heightened activity or crisis. The ECU provides direct access to up to date information and assistance during a major consular crisis, including to Australians who need to trace the whereabouts of family members travelling overseas.
- ❖ A review of the Bali crisis resulted in the ECU's capacity being doubled, with 24 consular officers able to receive calls at one time. Further improvements include arrangements with the Australian Passports Information Service call centre to take overflow calls.
- ❖ After the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks, the Temporary Emergency Consular System database was developed. When a call is made to the CEC or ECU during a crisis, consular staff are able to quickly record details in this database. The Temporary Emergency Consular System enables DFAT to track the whereabouts and status of Australian citizens overseas in a single database. It also allows DFAT to manage a large number of cases that accumulate rapidly during a crisis.
- ❖ An ongoing training program has been established in Canberra to secure a reserve of trained staff for the ECU in preparation for crises.
- ❖ More formal and transparent mechanisms are also in place to allow the rapid engagement of commercial airlines for evacuation purposes.

2.20 The ANAO examined DFAT's management of some recent crises. The following case study illustrates DFAT's response to the Bali bombing in 2002, and demonstrates the types of services activated during a crisis (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4
Case study–Bali crisis response

The Bali bombing in October 2002 presented DFAT with a crisis of unprecedented magnitude and complexity. Three explosions occurred early on the morning of Sunday 12 October. One was in the vicinity of the US Honorary Consul's office. The other two were at the Sari Nightclub and Paddy's Bar in Kuta, causing extensive damage. The bombing claimed the lives of 88 Australians, with many more suffering severe injuries.

Canberra was advised of the tragedy at 3.15am. By 5.00am DFAT had activated its Crisis Centre to coordinate information flows to relevant government agencies, expediting a whole-of-government response. In the 24 hours following the bombing, DFAT had:

- identified the number of Australians injured, through a check of Bali hospitals by the Consulate-General in Bali;
- handled more than 10 000 calls relating to 4 700 Australians;
- chartered flights to transport the five most critically injured to Perth. Additional flights were arranged with Qantas to return distressed Australians to Australia;
- mobilised four C-130 aircraft with medical teams to evacuate casualties to Australia in cooperation with Defence;
- contacted and engaged Kenyon International, an international disaster relief firm, to prepare bodies of Australian nationals for transportation; and
- provided additional consular staff from Jakarta and Canberra, as well as Australian Federal Police staff to assist on the ground in Bali.

DFAT handled over 30 000 phone calls in the two and a half weeks following Bali. This included enquiries on about 5 000 individuals. DFAT and Defence coordinated a medical evacuation within 36 hours of the bombing.

Source: DFAT

Lawyers lists

Previous audit

DFAT required overseas posts to maintain up to date lists of lawyers for Australians who may need legal assistance. The Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee had previously recommended that posts ensure that, as far as practicable, lawyers lists identify lawyers who are reputable and show the court jurisdiction in which they could practise.[16] However, the ANAO found that these lists were not up to date and did not always indicate whether lawyers practised in a particular court jurisdiction.[17]

2.21 DFAT's *Australian Consular Handbook* states that 'while posts must not recommend a legal advisor, they are required to hold and maintain lists of local lawyers', and 'except where posts have forwarded a current list within the previous six months, a copy of the current list is to be forwarded to consular

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[16] Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 15*, paragraph 6.61.

[17] ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 3.74–3.78.

operations by the end of December each year'.[18] In the current audit, the ANAO examined 153 lawyers lists provided by DFAT and found that not all lists were up to date (see Figure 2.5).

2.22 At the conclusion of the previous audit, DFAT advised the ANAO that overseas posts had been tasked to include details of the court jurisdiction of lawyers in post lists. The current audit found that about 40 per cent of lawyers lists still did not include the court jurisdiction.

Figure 2.5
Currency of lawyers lists at May 2003
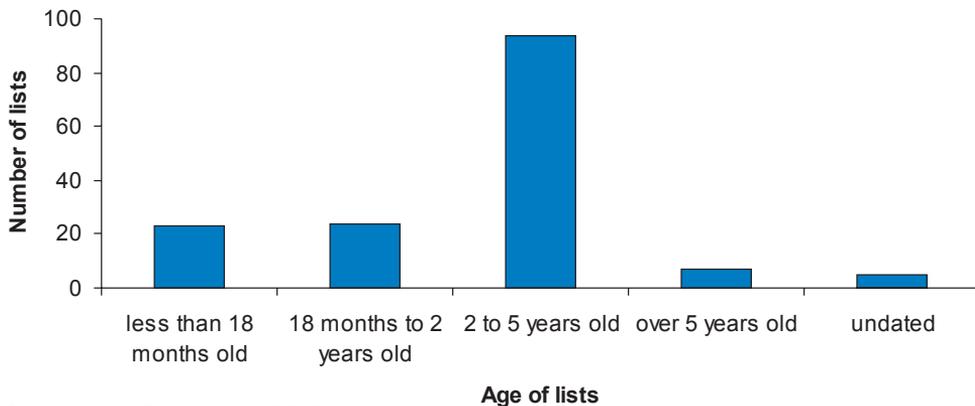
Source: ANAO analysis of DFAT data

Overall assessment

2.23 The ANAO concluded that access to consular services has continued to improve since the previous audit. DFAT has expanded the overseas consular network from 153 to 166 service points and now has over 80 posts connected to the CEC. DFAT has also established an ECU to extend its capacity to manage incoming calls during crisis situations. Lessons learned from DFAT's management of crises in the last two years informed procedural and infrastructure improvements, culminating in greater opportunity for clients to access consular services.

2.24 As found in the previous audit, the lawyers lists held by DFAT continue to be out of date. Over 40 per cent do not include the court jurisdiction. Consistent with requirements in the *Australian Consular Handbook,* consular services would be assisted by more up to date lawyers' lists.

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18   DFAT, *Australian Consular Handbook*, October 2002, p.402.

3. Client Communication

This chapter examines DFAT's progress in implementing Recommendation 1 of the previous audit, which related to client communication and effectiveness of travel advice.

Background

3.1 DFAT offers a range of information to Australians on how to avoid problems while overseas, and what to do if they encounter difficulties. Information is available to individuals and the travel industry through DFAT's booklets, brochures and newsletters (see Figure 3.1). DFAT also provides information through its website, mail-out facilities, facsimile and e-mail subscription (see Appendix 5). Travel advisories, a key source of up to date information for travellers, are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Figure 3.1
Examples of DFAT publications

Source: DFAT

Previous audit

DFAT did not have an explicit and coherent client communication strategy, which would help direct, coordinate and evaluate its consular information activities. Also, DFAT did not have adequate, systematic information on the extent to which its travel advice and consular information was reaching clients and influencing their actions.[19] The ANAO therefore made the following recommendation.

Recommendation 1

The ANAO recommends that DFAT:

    a) develop a client communication strategy to assist in the production and distribution of information to target client groups; and

    b) develop methods to assess the penetration and effectiveness of travel advice to ensure that client information needs are met and the risks to their safety and welfare are minimised.

Client communication strategy–Recommendation 1(a)

3.2   The ANAO found that DFAT had implemented part (a) of Recommendation 1. Specific findings of the audit are outlined below.

Progress of the communication strategy

3.3   At the conclusion of the previous audit, DFAT had developed a communication strategy to assist in the production and distribution of information to target client groups. The communication strategy focussed on four key elements:

- liaison with the media, travel industry and travelling public;

- improved presentation, profile and accessibility of DFAT's website;

- improved presentation, profile, accessibility and range of consular publications; and

- use of advertising to fund information program projects and expand the reach of messages.[20]

3.4   The current audit found that DFAT has built upon these elements, developing a public communication strategy able to respond to the changing needs of clients in the current global environment. The DFAT website provides a central public access point for travel advisories and information on how to obtain consular services. In addition to general information, the web site is a valuable source of up to date bulletins, which Australians overseas or within Australia, can refer to during major consular crises. Greater involvement of the travel industry also opened up additional avenues for distribution of travel advice, and for feedback on client information needs.

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[19] ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 3.3–3.6, 3.10–3.14.

[20] *Hints for Australian Travellers* now includes advertisements.

3.5   DFAT's approach to client communication was expanded in January 2003, when the Minister for Foreign Affairs launched new initiatives designed to boost the Australian public's awareness of travel risks. The 2003–04 Federal Budget provided DFAT with an additional $9.7 million for the period 2003–04 to 2005–06, for these new initiatives.[21] DFAT's summary of these initiatives is shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2
Initiatives in DFAT's client communication strategy

❖ **Public information campaign**

This aims to ensure all Australians intending to travel are informed about travel advice and how to access it. This includes advertising in the travel media, promotion in international airports, and brochure displays in Australia Post outlets where Australians apply for passports.

❖ **Promotional program**

For expanded cooperation with the travel industry, and for new partnerships to encourage the travel industry's delivery of travel advice to Australians before they travel overseas. This includes a *Charter for Safe Travel*.

❖ **Dissemination of travel advice**

To improve dissemination of travel advice via:

- touch screen consular kiosks in passport offices and airports;
- expanded electronic delivery systems including the smartraveller 1300 telephone number; and
- expanded production and delivery of publications.

Source: DFAT

Information to target client groups

Identifying key target groups through focussed client research

Previous audit

In the previous audit, the ANAO commented that recognised better practice in client communication includes identifying client groups and their information needs, and utilising appropriate and cost-effective media to communicate with those client groups. The ANAO considered that focused client research into these areas would support DFAT efforts to communicate key messages to higher-risk groups more effectively.[22]

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[21] DFAT, Portfolio Budget Statements, 2003–04, p.53. Also refer to footnote 8 of this report.

[22] ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 3.7–3.9.

3.6   When the current audit began in March 2003, the ANAO found that DFAT had not pursued focused client research as part of its communication strategy. However, in May 2003, as part of the new initiative to develop a public information campaign (see Figure 3.2), DFAT engaged a consultant to undertake client research.

3.7   This process sought public input through: group discussions and interviews with travellers, travel agents who deal directly with the public, dual nationals, and the broader travel industry. By the conclusion of the audit, DFAT was using this information to refine messages to travellers and potential travellers, with the aim of influencing attitudes and behaviour at the right time in their travel planning. Key target audiences identified by DFAT are listed below.

- First time overseas travellers
- Young travellers
- Backpackers
- Senior travellers
- Families
- Working holiday makers
- Business travellers
- Dual nationals

Source: DFAT[23]

Brochures targeted to specific client groups

Previous audit

At the time of the previous audit, DFAT had 10 brochures available to Australians travelling and living overseas, and their next of kin. However, DFAT did not have publications specifically addressing some significant groups of Australians who may be at risk while abroad. For example, elderly travellers, adventure travellers and Australians resident overseas. The ANAO considered that there would be merit in DFAT producing additional brochures for these client groups.[24]

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[23]   One of the new touch screen travel advice kiosks which are located in international airports and priority Australian passport offices. Kiosks provide travellers with online access to the most up to date travel information from the DFAT website.

[24]   ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 3.65–3.68.

3.8   The ANAO found that DFAT has taken action to better address the needs of key client groups. From late 2001, it reviewed and redesigned its range of consular brochures, increasing the number of publications to 15. These included brochures entitled:

- *For the Travelling Senior;*

- *Death overseas;*

- *Travelling well;* and

- *Living and working overseas.*

3.9   In March 2002 DFAT also launched a major new publication, *Assisting Australians Overseas.* The new publication outlines the range of services offered by DFAT and what Australians can do to minimise difficulty experienced overseas.

> **Previous audit**
>
> The Senate Committee recommended that DFAT investigate the possibility of producing *Travelling overseas?* in languages other than English.[25] In the previous audit, the ANAO did not find documentary evidence that this recommendation had been fully addressed and DFAT agreed to reconsider the recommendation.[26]

3.10   Following fresh consideration of the Senate Committee's recommendation, DFAT decided that *Travelling overseas?* was a lower priority for translation than the *Dual nationality* brochure. DFAT has since translated the *Dual nationality*[27] brochure into Croatian, Greek, Arabic, Serbian and Vietnamese. The Vietnamese brochure is only available in hard copy. The others are available on the DFAT website, but not in hardcopy. DFAT advised the ANAO that it also intends to translate the brochure into Mandarin.

Assessing the penetration and effectiveness of travel advice–Recommendation 1(b)

3.11   The ANAO found that DFAT had implemented part (b) of Recommendation 1. Specific findings of the audit are outlined below.

3.12   At the time of the previous audit, DFAT did not systematically collect information to demonstrate the extent to which its travel advisories, general travel advice and consular information met the information needs of clients. Such information aids in assessing outcomes, and identifying means of improving the quality and effectiveness of communication strategies and

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[25] Senate Committee Report, *Senate Committee Recommendation 6*, paragraph 5.38.

[26] ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 3.69–3.72.

[27] The *Dual nationality* brochure has been renamed *Travel information for dual nationals–What it could mean for you when travelling overseas?*

consular information.

3.13 The ANAO found that, as part of its overall communication strategy, DFAT has implemented methods to assess the penetration and effectiveness of its travel advice. These methods generally fall into three categories:

• mechanisms to improve dissemination of information;

• enhanced monitoring of the distribution of information; and

• more structured methods to obtain client feedback on the usefulness of travel publications and client information needs.

Improving dissemination of information

3.14 Given the increasing demand for travel advice by the public and travel industry, DFAT has adopted additional avenues for disseminating information to its key client groups (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3
Mechanisms to improve dissemination of travel advice

The ANAO found that DFAT uses the following mechanisms to enhance dissemination of travel advice to clients.

❖ Increased use of its web site.

❖ Increased liaison and collaboration with the travel industry leading to;

  - use of the travel industry's webmail alert system to extend dissemination of travel advisories; and

  - launch of the *Charter for Safe Travel* in June 2003.

❖ A new travel information campaign, *Smartraveller*[28], in which DFAT is using television, other media and a 1300 telephone travel advice service to deliver key messages to the public.

The details and outcomes of these activities are discussed below.

Website

3.15 DFAT's consular webpages contain travel advisories, travel bulletins, contact details of Australian missions overseas, and publications. Travellers may also register their presence in a particular country through the DFAT website. DFAT considers the consular webpages to be the primary means through which Australian travellers access travel advice. The ANAO observed that DFAT has

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[28] On 7 September 2003 the Minister for Foreign Affairs launched the *Smartraveller* campaign.

expanded its use of the website since the last audit. There is a wider range of information available through the website and it is updated more frequently.

Liaison with the travel industry

3.16 The ANAO found that DFAT has strengthened its working relationship with the travel industry, including travel agents, travel insurance companies and Qantas. For example, Qantas ticketing refers to the DFAT website; some travel agents list the Government's travel advisories in booking conditions to clients; and *QBE Insurance* travel cards issued to travel insurance policy holders recommend that Australians consult DFAT's travel advisories.

3.17 Since October 2002, DFAT has also delivered updated travel advisories to the travel industry by a webmail alert system endorsed and managed by AFTA. This enables DFAT to distribute its travel advisories to more than 4 300 of Australia's registered travel agents.

3.18 DFAT, together with AFTA, launched a *Charter for Safe Travel* on 11 June 2003. The voluntary charter recognises the shared interest that DFAT and the travel industry have in assisting Australians overseas to adhere to the principles of safe travel. Travel agents who register with the charter are required to:

- provide travellers with DFAT travel advice;

- encourage travellers to get adequate travel insurance;

- inform travellers of the preparations they need to make before travelling; and

- work with DFAT and other partners to promote safe travel.

3.19 The ANAO found support amongst the travel industry for the charter. According to industry representatives, it provides an avenue for the travel industry to provide feedback to DFAT on travel advice.

Smartraveller campaign

3.20 On 7 September 2003, the Minister for Foreign Affairs launched a travel advisories public information campaign, *Smartraveller*. The campaign will promote information about travel advisories through:

- national television advertising;

- a targeted print media campaign;

- community announcements broadcast on ABC; and

- advertising in airports including the use of consular kiosks.

Distribution of information

3.21   The ANAO found that DFAT monitors this distribution to determine trends in uptake of information. For example, in 2001–02 DFAT reported a 253 per cent increase in the number of accesses on the consular webpages. Other examples of DFAT's monitoring of information are provided in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4

Examples of DFAT distribution of information

- ❖ One million publications distributed with new Australian passports each year.
- ❖ 15 consular publications with distribution of over 400 000 in 2001–02, compared to 270 000 in 2000–01.
- ❖ The *Consular Newsletter* distributed to 4 000 members of the travel industry and media, amounting to 60 000 distributed annually.
- ❖ In excess of 50 000 DFAT brochures distributed annually by the Youth Hostels Association (YHA) of Australia.
- ❖ Use of mass media to amplify public awareness. In the first eight months of 2002–03 there were 221 stories on travel advisories, compared with 150 in 2001–02.
- ❖ An Electronic Consular Bulletin e-mailed to 40 representatives of the travel media and travel industry each month.
- ❖ An e-mail subscription service had approximately 23 000 people registered in April 2003.
- ❖ An increase in the number of registered accesses to DFAT's consular webpages, with 5.5 million hits in 2001–02, compared to 1.5 million in 2000–01.
- ❖ Ongoing monitoring of website accesses. For example, during the week of the Bali bombings in 2002, usage peaked at more than 500 000 accesses.

Source: DFAT

Assessing the effectiveness of information

Figure 3.5
Monitoring the penetration and effectiveness of DFAT publications for key client groups

The ANAO found that DFAT has used the following mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of its publications and information on key client groups:

❖ survey of the travel industry to obtain the attitudes and responses from travel advisories;

❖ sought feedback from the public, including through a survey of its key publication *Hints for Australian Travellers (Hints);* and

❖ engaged a consultant to conduct client focused research, to refine messages for specific target audiences, in order to influence attitudes and behaviour.

DFAT also advised the ANAO that it has engaged a consultant to conduct a benchmarking survey to measure public awareness of travel advisories as the *Smartraveller* campaign progresses.

Travel industry survey

3.22   In January 2003, DFAT surveyed the attitudes and responses of members of the travel industry to travel advisories. The survey indicated that there was a growing interest in the information contained in travel advisories. Some 95 per cent of respondents encouraged clients to 'inform themselves about personal security awareness before travel to any country they believed to carry security risks' and considered that their clients' awareness of travel advisories was 'significantly' or 'moderately' greater than 12 months ago. However, it was unclear whether the travel industry comments had been used to inform information strategies.

3.23   Comments from such surveys can add value in enhancing travel advisories to meet user needs. The suggestions made by the travel industry to improve information in travel advisories included:

• make information more specific and not generalised for the whole country;

• ensure that the public is aware that not every travel advisory is a warning of imminent threat to their safety; and

• distinguish between general warnings and maintaining a 'level of security', for example, between pickpocketing and serious terrorist threats.

3.24 These comments were consistent with suggestions made by the ANAO in the last audit and are discussed further in Chapter 4. DFAT needs to ensure that comments from consumer surveys are given adequate consideration when revising and updating travel advisories.

Feedback from the public

3.25 The ANAO found that DFAT seeks public feedback through three main mechanisms.

- *Hints:* in 2000–01 DFAT established a feedback page in its primary publication *Hints*, asking users to provide suggestions on ways to improve future editions. However, this had a low take-up rate, with most travellers using the facility to ask travel related questions rather than comment on *Hints*.

- **E-mail feedback facility:** DFAT established an e-mail feedback facility on its website. DFAT advised that feedback through this mechanism has been useful. It has led to modification of its travel advisories, making the messages clearer and easier to follow.

- **Overseas posts:** a feedback form is available to the public at overseas posts. DFAT advised that it encourages posts to collect and collate information and return a summary to Consular Branch in Canberra. However, DFAT advised that this does not occur on a regular basis. This issue is discussed further in paragraph 6.18.

Survey of Hints for Australian Travellers

Previous audit

The previous audit found that DFAT had not undertaken an evaluation of *Hints*, its key publication on general travel advice and consular services. The ANAO considered that an evaluation of *Hints* would be appropriate, to assess whether client information needs were being met and its key messages were reaching clients and influencing their actions.[29]

3.26 DFAT undertook a survey to assess the use of *Hints* in March 2001. The survey used a sample group of 1 350 people who received passports. The survey showed that 90 per cent of respondents thought the publication was useful. 78 per cent intended to carry it with them during overseas travel. However, this survey is not conducted on a regular basis.

3.27 In August 2001 and July 2002, DFAT reviewed *Hints* to improve its content, presentation and readability. This led to several improvements in the publication.

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[29] ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 3.61–3.63.

3.28 Since late 2001, DFAT has also been working with YHA of Australia to reach key client groups, such as first time travellers and backpackers, with key consular messages. YHA has distributed in excess of 20 000 *Hints* booklets each year through its membership packs for new members and information nights.

Overall assessment

3.29 The ANAO considers that DFAT has implemented Recommendation 1. DFAT has enhanced its communication strategy in response to recent global events and increasing public and government awareness around security and safety issues for Australian travellers overseas. Travel advice is now a more central component of the communication strategy, with initiatives to improve targeting, dissemination and uptake of travel advisories. Further initiatives include a public information campaign, promotional program with the travel industry, and more measures to improve dissemination of travel advice.

3.30 DFAT has utilised surveys and other feedback mechanisms to assess the penetration and effectiveness of its key publications. Ongoing monitoring of the dissemination of DFAT's publications and travel advisories should ensure that user needs for information are being met.

4. Travel Advisories

This chapter examines DFAT's progress in implementing Recommendation 2 of the previous audit. It reviews DFAT's management of travel advisories, including assessment of risk and explanation of travel warnings.

Background

4.1   At May 2003, DFAT had 141 travel advisories on issue. The purpose of travel advisories is to protect the welfare and interests of Australians overseas. They provide travel information to alert Australian travellers to the potential risks in visiting particular countries, and advice on how to avoid trouble spots. Figure 4.1 details how to obtain travel advisories.

Figure 4.1
How to obtain travel advisories

❖ Visit the DFAT website.

❖ Use the faxback system by telephoning a dedicated fax number for travel advice.

❖ Subscribe by e-mail through the DFAT website.

❖ Telephone DFAT or part of its overseas consular network of embassies, high commissions or consulates.

❖ Use the 1300 smartraveller telephone travel advice service.

Source: DFAT

Previous audit

In the previous audit, the ANAO found that the underlying approach for assessing the need for travel advisories was sound. However, it was not sufficiently supported by systematic documented analysis, and travel warnings were not highlighted or clearly explained.[30] The ANAO therefore made the following recommendation.

Recommendation 2

The ANAO recommends that DFAT strengthen its management of travel advisories to ensure that it is able to provide adequate assurance that Australians are appropriately advised of travel risks by:

    a) systematically applying procedures for assessing the need for travel advisories, and appropriately documenting the assessment; and

    b) ensuring that travel warnings in travel advisories are highlighted, and their severity clearly explained.

Changes to the management of travel advisories since last audit

4.2   The ANAO found that the management of travel advisories has changed and strengthened in the last two years. For Australian travellers, up to date, accessible travel advisories have become an increasingly important resource, particularly in alerting them to trouble spots overseas. Management of crisis situations has also become a more dominant aspect of DFAT's consular work, with preparation and dissemination of timely travel advisories demanding additional attention and resources. Following major overseas crises such as the Bali bombings, travel advisories have been the subject of more frequent public and parliamentary scrutiny.

4.3   These factors have led DFAT to revise its processes for reviewing and issuing travel advisories, especially in the decisions around travel advice. DFAT also implemented operational changes to improve the quality and dissemination of travel advice, and to meet public and parliamentary demand for information.

Applying procedures for assessing the need for travel advisories–Recommendation 2(a)

4.4   The ANAO found that DFAT has substantially implemented part (a) of Recommendation 2. Assessment of the need for travel advisories is being more systematically applied and documented. Specific findings of the audit are outlined below.

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30   ibid., paragraphs 3.35–3.41, 3.44–3.51.

Process for reviewing and issuing travel advisories

4.5   At the time of the previous audit, DFAT required travel advisories to be reviewed at six-monthly intervals. The current audit found that this had improved. DFAT's *Australian Consular Handbook* now requires posts to review and re-issue travel advisories at least every three months, or sooner if local risks change. This process also applies to countries for which DFAT has no travel advisory on issue. DFAT's revised process for review is outlined in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2
Review of travel advisories

- ❖ **Reminder:** Consular Branch in Canberra reminds posts every three months (via cable) to review or update a travel advisory.
- ❖ **Risk assessment:** the post conducts a risk assessment, which includes consideration of:
    - the nature of the threat posed to Australians;
    - the number of Australian visitors to the country;
    - local capacity to deal with law and order situations; and
    - reliability of information on which assessments are based.

    The review is based on an evaluation of information from four main sources (see Figure 4.3).
- ❖ **Review:** the post cables the assessment and revised travel advisory to Consular Branch, which reviews the travel advisory and seeks input and advice from the relevant geographic desk.
- ❖ **Decision:** the post, geographic desk and Consular Branch liaise to agree on the content of the travel advisory, including the level of warning, and decide whether an existing travel advisory should be:
    - re-issued in its current form;
    - amended to reflect an improvement or deterioration in the security situation;
    - re-issued with no substantive change; or
    - withdrawn.[31]
- ❖ **Clearance:** the travel advisory is cleared by the DFAT Executive. It is subsequently approved by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, or the Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Affairs, prior to public release.
- ❖ **Release:** the travel advisory is disseminated, including by posting on the DFAT website; dissemination to travel agents via webmail; and e-mail to other government agencies.

Source: Compiled by the ANAO based on DFAT data

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[31] *Australian Consular Handbook*, op.cit., p.70.

4.6   The four key sources of information used by DFAT in reviewing travel advisories are summarised in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3

Sources of information for review of travel advisories

- ❖ **Overseas consular assessments**

  Assessments from Australian embassies, high commissions and consulates overseas about security conditions in their countries of responsibility.

- ❖ **Client feedback and DFAT experience**

  DFAT experience in the consular field, of difficulties experienced by Australians overseas. This includes issues of concern, as reflected in the questions asked by the general public on the free-call lines and e-mail.

- ❖ **Intelligence reports**

  From various sources, and with particular weight given to threat assessments provided by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation.

- ❖ **Partner governments**

  The advisory setting of DFAT's partner governments–the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand–each of which has a similar travel advisory service. DFAT does not always provide exactly the same advice as these governments, as each needs to address the particular circumstances facing their citizens.

Source: DFAT

4.7   Travel advisories that identify new threats to Australians overseas may be issued in conjunction with a media release, and provided to 130 members of the Canberra press gallery. Overseas posts may also disseminate travel advisories through their warden networks[32] and lists of registered Australian nationals. DFAT's communication strategy provides additional avenues for dissemination of travel advice.

Managing and documenting the review process

4.8   The ANAO assessed a sample of travel advisories and found that, generally, the new procedures for review of travel advisories are followed and documented. There was also a higher level of interaction between posts and DFAT compared with the previous audit. Posts provide regular situation reports on local incidents and security concerns. A heightened level of liaison was also

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[32] To facilitate communications with the Australian community, posts may institute warden networks whereby selected members of the community are each allocated a number of other members to notify of advice received from the post.

noticeable between DFAT and partner governments (the United States of America, United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand), the travel industry (for example, Qantas and AFTA), and other government agencies.

4.9 In the previous audit, the ANAO found that 33 per cent of travel advisories were more than three months old. The current audit found this situation had substantially improved, with the introduction of a three-month performance target. Of 141 travel advisories examined by the ANAO, 87 per cent met the three-month target. Only seven per cent were more than four months old. No travel advisories were more than seven weeks out of date.

Crisis and emergency situations

4.10 The process for reviewing travel advisories also accommodates crisis and emergency situations, where travel advisories need to be updated more frequently. For example, during the outbreaks of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in several countries in March 2003, the ANAO observed:

• frequent liaison between DFAT and the Department of Health and Ageing;

• regular updates from posts on the impact of SARS in their regions;

• monitoring of travel advisories issued by partner governments and consideration of these in updating Australian travel advisories;

• timely revision and dissemination of updated travel advisories; and

• sound documentation of changes made to travel advisories.

4.11 More rigorous management and documentation of travel advisories was also evident in the lead-up to, and during, the Iraq war in early 2003. In particular, DFAT enhanced its monitoring of travel advisories issued by partner governments for 15 Middle East countries, using a matrix to assist in tracking developments. Australia's travel advisories were updated several times during this period to keep Australians well informed of changing situations overseas.

Countries where there is no travel advisory on issue

4.12 As mentioned in paragraph 4.5, DFAT also requires posts to examine their risks and re-assess the need for a travel advisory every three months, even if there is no travel advisory on issue. However, the ANAO found that information provided by posts often lacked sufficient detail of the risk assessment conducted by the post (see Figure 4.4). In these instances, the ANAO could not determine whether the post had undertaken a risk assessment.

Figure 4.4

Examples of responses received by Consular Branch from posts when a travel advisory is not considered necessary

Examples of responses from posts included:
- ❖ **Post 1:** Further to discussions on the matter of the issuing of a travel advice, upon checking the British Foreign Office, Canadian and other travel advices, the post reiterates the fact that at this point in time we do not require a travel advice. To date we have not had any significant consular matter including passport thefts, street crime and safety issues.
- ❖ **Post 2:** Post has reviewed the need for a travel advice in consultation with Consul-General and concludes that one is not warranted at the moment. Nil return.
- ❖ **Post 3:** Travel advice is not considered warranted at this time.

Source: DFAT

4.13 To fully address part (a) of Recommendation 2, the ANAO suggested that DFAT consider instituting arrangements, such as a checklist, for posts to report the findings of their risk assessments. This would provide consistency of reports from the posts and greater assurance that potential risks were appropriately assessed prior to a decision to either issue or not issue a travel advisory.

4.14 In response to the draft audit report, DFAT advised that it has established a new formal risk assessment checklist for posts to use in making quarterly recommendations on the need for new travel advisories.

Clarity of travel warnings–Recommendation 2(b)

Previous audit

At the time of the previous audit, DFAT employed four levels of warning in travel advisories. However, DFAT's general travel advice and website did not expand upon, nor refer to, the four warning levels. The ANAO considered that further explanation was required to help clients appreciate the severity of the warning.

The ANAO also found that, while most travel advisories stated the key travel warning in the opening paragraph, the warning was woven into the text rather than printed in bold or otherwise highlighted.[33]

The ANAO recommended that travel warnings be highlighted and their severity clearly explained.[34]

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[33] ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 3.44–3.51.

[34] Previous ANAO audit report Recommendation 2, part (b).

4.15 The ANAO found that DFAT has implemented part (b) of Recommendation 2. Specific findings of the audit are outlined below.

Severity of warning levels

4.16 Since the previous audit, DFAT has increased the number of warning levels from four to seven (see Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5
Changes to DFAT warning levels for travel advisories

Warning levels prior to June 2003
- ❖ Exercise care.
- ❖ Maintain a high level of personal security awareness.
- ❖ Consider deferring holiday or non-essential business travel.
- ❖ Defer all travel.

Expanded warning levels as of June 2003
- ❖ **Exercise good personal security awareness**.
- ❖ **Be especially alert to their own security**.
- ❖ **Exercise caution and be aware of developments that might affect their safety**.
- ❖ **Exercise a high degree of (or 'extreme') caution**. If the Australian Government judges that the overall threat environment in a country is high, we will at a minimum advise Australians to exercise a high degree of caution.
- ❖ **Defer non-essential travel** (in some cases, we may only encourage Australians to 'consider' deferring non-essential travel). We may also advise Australians in the country to consider leaving unless they have compelling reasons to stay.
- ❖ **Defer (or avoid) all travel**. We may also advise Australians in the country to depart as soon as possible using available commercial means.
- ❖ **Not to travel and, for Australians in the country, to depart immediately by whatever means available**. In some situations, such as ongoing or imminent conflict, we may alternatively tell Australians in the country to remain indoors in as safe a place as possible.

Source: DFAT

4.17 In June 2003, DFAT placed a link to a document *Travel advice explained: frequently asked questions* on its website. The document provides information on how DFAT prepares travel advisories, and an explanation of the seven warning levels contained in travel advisories.

4.18 The increase in the number of travel advisories and the explanation of the seven warning levels on the DFAT website have improved the clarity of some of the warnings contained in travel advisories. However, the ANAO considers that DFAT should also include an explanation of the first three warning levels, providing examples of how a traveller: exercises 'good personal security awareness'; can be 'especially alert to their own security'; and exercises 'caution'. These are distinctions that the traveller may not fully appreciate. Further clarification of the fourth warning level would also assist a traveller to distinguish between 'exercise caution' and 'exercise a high degree of (or 'extreme') caution'.

4.19 At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT added to its website a list of countries for which it advises against 'all travel' and 'non-essential travel'. The list links to the travel advisories issued by DFAT for those countries.

Travel warnings highlighted

4.20 DFAT has revised the format of travel advisories to highlight the warning level in the opening paragraph in bold text. However, the ANAO found that the key warning level contained in travel advisories does not always correlate with just one of the seven warning levels. The ANAO found instances of travel advisories containing language from two or three of the warning levels. DFAT commented that it uses language that is best suited to a specific situation and provides the most practical advice.

4.21 The ANAO acknowledges the need for DFAT to maintain flexibility in the use of language in travel advisories. However, these practices may introduce confusion or lack of consistency into travel advisories. Providing specific examples and further clarifying the meaning of the warning level may be a better means of addressing DFAT's aim for flexibility.

4.22 Notwithstanding the above issues, the ANAO considers that DFAT's actions since the previous audit have helped to clarify the severity of the travel warnings. This should improve public understanding of travel advice and warning levels.

Additional issues raised in the previous audit

Inclusion of general information in travel advisories

Previous audit

The previous audit found that about 20 per cent of travel advisories did not include advice on travel and medical insurance. At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that this was being addressed.

About 25 per cent of travel advisories contained routine travel information, for example, advice on taxi use, restaurant overcharging, currency exchange and visa issue. The ANAO commented that the inclusion of this information could detract from the key warning. [35]

4.23   In this follow-up audit, the ANAO found that all travel advisories now contain standard text on travel and health insurance.

4.24   However, travel advisories continue to contain routine travel information, such as advice on currency exchange, the use of ATMs, and the need to carry only sufficient cash for daily needs. DFAT advised the ANAO that the inclusion of some routine travel information is intended to reduce the consular workload at overseas posts.

4.25   Notwithstanding this, the changes in DFAT's operational environment and the rise in public awareness around travel advisories, the ANAO suggests that DFAT keep routine travel information in travel advisories to a minimum to avoid distraction from key warnings. This view was also expressed by the travel industry in response to a DFAT survey in January 2003 (see paragraph 3.22).

Overall assessment

4.26   The ANAO concluded that DFAT has substantially implemented Recommendation 2. It has strengthened management of travel advisories and has a more systematic process for assessing and documenting travel advisories. However, for countries where there is no travel advice on issue, more rigorous documentation of the risk assessment process undertaken by the posts would provide greater assurance that the decision for 'no travel advisory' is appropriately supported, consistent with the ANAO recommendation.

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[35]   ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 3.53–3.55.

5. Case Management Information System

This chapter examines DFAT's progress in implementing Recommendation 3 of the previous audit. It assesses the development and performance of a new case management information system, including the system's ability to transmit, store, retrieve and monitor information on consular cases.

Background

5.1   Each year DFAT manages about 20 000 substantial consular cases. These range from emergency loans, to arrests and imprisonment, medical evacuations, and deaths overseas. The complex nature of many of these cases often results in multiple consular services or tasks, both by Consular Branch in Canberra and at overseas posts.

5.2   Case management systems can improve the efficiency of consular service delivery by assisting consular staff to coordinate efforts and monitor the progress of cases. These systems can also improve accountability and provide a good basis for collecting and analysing consular information.

> **Previous audit**
>
> The ANAO found that DFAT did not have an integrated case management system. Locally developed systems at overseas posts were resource-intensive and did not capture comprehensive case information or adequately support case actioning and monitoring. Consular Branch's case management database had limitations as a case management tool, and the branch did not have real-time information sharing with the posts.
>
> The audit also found that there was no common system to collect performance data, which hampered effective performance management of consular services. [36]
>
> The ANAO made the following recommendation.
>
> **Recommendation 3**
>
> The ANAO recommends that DFAT ensure that it has a case management information system that:
>
> a) enables the recording and transmittal of sufficient information to facilitate the actioning and monitoring of cases at both the post and in Canberra;
>
> b) overcomes weaknesses in existing case management and data collection systems, that were identified in the course of the audit; and
>
> c) facilitates the collection of consular caseload and other performance information.

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[36]   ibid., paragraphs 4.3–4.11.

Development of the Consular Management Information System

5.3   DFAT has developed a case management information system, which is named the Consular Management Information System (CMIS), to address the limitations and weaknesses identified in the ANAO's previous audit. Implementation of CMIS has been central to addressing the ANAO's recommendation.

System design and specifications

5.4   CMIS has several modules designed to assist staff in managing consular cases and other consular services. Central to CMIS is a Case Management Module. This accommodates the recording, storage, retrieval and monitoring of information on consular cases by consular staff, both in Consular Branch and at overseas posts.

5.5   CMIS was developed locally on Lotus Notes. This enables users to operate within DFAT's Secure Australian Telecommunications and Information Network (SATIN)[37], and to interface with other DFAT systems.

5.6   High-level user requirements for CMIS are summarised in Figure 5.1. The ANAO examination of CMIS project specifications showed that developments to date, meet these high-level user requirements.

Figure 5.1

High-level user requirements for the Consular Management Information System

The development proposal for CMIS specified seven high-level user requirements. The ANAO found that CMIS has, to date, met these requirements.

- ❖ 'a consolidated information management system in Canberra and a standardised version for posts;
- ❖ ability to capture consular cable traffic automatically;
- ❖ make information whenever entered available globally in close to real-time;
- ❖ ability to continue work when communication links are unavailable;
- ❖ manage data in accordance with security and privacy guidelines;
- ❖ integrate with SATIN platform and corporate applications; and
- ❖ capacity to cope with the growth in numbers of the Australian travelling community and the requisite consular information requirements.'

Source: DFAT

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[37]   The telecommunication system linking DFAT's network of Australian consular posts is being upgraded to SATIN. Rollout of SATIN to all posts is due to be completed by mid-2004 . CMIS is being rolled out with SATIN.

5.7   However, the ANAO found that CMIS does not fully meet DFAT's business requirements (see shaded area of Figure 5.2). This was largely due to changing priorities, weaknesses in project management, and funding shortfalls (see paragraph 5.29 for further discussion).

Figure 5.2

Status of CMIS development

Key business requirements	ANAO assessment of progress
Modules	
Case Management Module	Implemented, with ongoing modification. All cases stored in Canberra and at post. Replication of data occurs on a half-hourly basis.
Online Registration of Australians Overseas (ORAO)	Implemented with ongoing modification. Centralised database is replicated back to posts. Standardised registration details available at posts. System has central monitoring capacity.
ORAO mass communication module	Implemented. The mass mail-out facility was made available to CMIS-linked posts in July 2003.
Notarial database	Implemented with updating as required.
Crisis Management Module	Not implemented. Draft specifications under consideration.*
Financial Module	Not implemented. During the audit DFAT reported it had ceased work on the Financial Module. Alternative measures are under way.
Reporting Module (to enable central reporting of consular statistics)	Not implemented. Reporting Module not developed and specifications had not been included in key project planning and design documents. Only limited reporting of cases available from CMIS at the time of audit, and these contained errors.
Audit trail of access and configuration actions	Not switched on due to impact this logging may have on system performance. DFAT reported that Case Management Module records and SATIN activity log provide an audit trail.
Other business requirements	
Guaranteed data integrity	Not achieved. Errors were detected in form mapping and in case data stored in the Case Management Module. Data cleansing was not adequately performed prior to data migration, resulting in carry-over errors from another database. DFAT was addressing these issues at the time of audit.
Privacy and confidentiality controls	Implemented.
24-hour, 7 days per week operation	Implemented.
Compatibility with DFAT hardware, software and communications infrastructure	Implemented.

Source: ANAO analysis based on DFAT information

   * DFAT reported delays also due to unavailability of resources.

Rollout of CMIS to posts

5.8   The rollout of CMIS has been incorporated into the SATIN deployment program, which is due to be completed by mid-2004. This is a longer timeframe for CMIS implementation than first envisaged by DFAT.[38] However, DFAT reported that this approach has efficiencies, for example, by using SATIN deployment teams for installation and provision of CMIS training at posts.

5.9   Rollout of CMIS commenced in February 2002, with pilot installations at DFAT's post in Kuala Lumpur and in Consular Branch. By May 2003 DFAT had installed the CMIS package, consisting of the Case Management Module, the Online Registration of Australians Overseas, and the notarial database, at 34 overseas posts.[39] DFAT advised that a further 58 posts will be linked by mid-2004.

5.10   Other CMIS modules, including one for crisis management, and the statistical Reporting Module, were not developed at the time of the audit (see Figure 5.2). DFAT advised that these two modules are a priority for 2003–04, and will be implemented as their development is completed.

Actioning and monitoring cases through CMIS–Recommendation 3(a)

5.11   DFAT has implemented part (a) of Recommendation 3. The Case Management Module of CMIS facilitates the actioning and monitoring of consular cases at overseas posts and by Consular Branch.

5.12   DFAT requires all consular cases and associated consular services to be entered into the Case Management Module. For those posts not yet connected to CMIS, Consular Branch enters the case information from records sent to them by the post. This enables Consular Branch to maintain central access to all case records.

5.13   Entries are stored as chronologies, a sequential and detailed history of each consular case. CMIS integrates cables and e-mails, thereby reducing double keying and overall time on administrative aspects of case work. The system also provides a resubmit function, listing of current cases and other options to assist consular officers in monitoring cases.

5.14   The Case Management Module is based on a distributed model, which means that posts hold the application and their own data, and Consular Branch holds data for all posts. Every half-hour a replication process updates data between the posts and Consular Branch, thereby providing near real-time sharing of the latest case information.

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[38]   In the previous audit, DFAT reported that it expected to rollout CMIS to posts in 2001–2002.

[39]   This package of applications is Phase 1 rollout to posts.

User satisfaction with the CMIS rollout package

5.15   DFAT advised that it encourages feedback from consular staff on the performance of CMIS. The ANAO found that DFAT also provides online assistance for CMIS users and keeps a log of problems and suggestions for improvements. However, DFAT has not conducted any formal surveys to assess user satisfaction with CMIS in overseas posts.

5.16   The ANAO therefore conducted a short questionnaire across 31 posts to see if CMIS met user needs. The results of the questionnaire are in Figure 5.3. Twenty-six posts (84 per cent of the sample) responded. Of these, 88 per cent were satisfied with the Case Management Module and 85 per cent considered that CMIS had improved administration and accountability associated with consular case management.

Figure 5.3
User satisfaction with CMIS

Subject of question	Responses from 26 overseas posts			
	Number of responses (per cent of total posts responding)			
	Yes	No	Undecided	N/A*
Case Management Module is useful	23 (88)	0	1 (4)	2 (8)
Introduction of CMIS helped accountability and administration of case management	22 (84)	0	2 (8)	2 (8)
	Adequate	Good	Excellent	N/A*
Satisfaction with Consular Branch assistance	4 (15)	10 (39)	7 (27)	5 (19)
Satisfaction with training in CMIS	17 (65)	7 (27)	1 (4)	1 (4)

Source: ANAO questionnaire information from posts

* N/A results were mainly due to posts recently connected to CMIS not wishing to comment on some functions, as they had little experience of the system.

5.17   DFAT advised that SATIN deployment teams provide posts with basic training in CMIS when SATIN and CMIS are installed. The ANAO found the training material to be well presented and easy to follow. However, several posts commented that more extensive training should be made available, and that posts would benefit from business rules describing how CMIS fits in with records management. The ANAO considered that including additional information on these topics in training documents would help to address these issues.

5.18   At the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that it has allocated an additional $50 000 to update training materials in 2003–04. Posts concerns on training and business rules would be taken into consideration during this process.

Overcoming weaknesses–Recommendation 3(b)

5.19   DFAT has substantially implemented part (b) of Recommendation 3.

5.20   The ANAO found that CMIS addressed most of the weaknesses previously identified in DFAT's case management and data collection systems, as summarised in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4
Addressing weaknesses identified in the previous audit

Weakness identified in previous audit	ANAO findings in current audit
Case management systems at overseas posts lack commonality.	CMIS facilitates commonality across all DFAT posts. DFAT is still to finalise negotiations with Austrade regarding access to CMIS at Austrade-managed posts.
Systems do not adequately support case actioning and monitoring.	CMIS has improved case actioning and monitoring of individual cases through the Case Management Module. Cross-checking to DFAT's Passport Issue and Control System assists in verifying identity, nationality and status of client. Training posts in CMIS use could be strengthened.
DFAT was not utilising available features such as recording more details and checking the status of active cases.	Level of detail is improved by Case Management Module chronologies. Case Management Module resubmit functions prompts consular officers when case actioning is required. Consular Branch's central access to case records helps to ensure that all cases are followed up.
Cable transmittal of case information does not provide real-time information sharing.	The cable system is now integrated into CMIS and this has improved efficiency and accessibility to case information. CMIS provides real-time information sharing, although replication errors need to be addressed to avoid duplication of case records.
DFAT does not have a common system for collecting statistics on consular caseload and for preparing estimates of staff resource usage on consular cases.	CMIS has a compulsory field in which consular officers are required to enter time spent on a case. However, this data is not sufficiently detailed to provide caseload reports. Errors are occurring in Case Management Module data. To avoid inaccurate data, this should be addressed before further developing the statistical reporting module.
Consular Branch database has limitations as a case management tool.	The Case Management Module has replaced the consular database. The Case Management Module is a better case management tool, in particular: • staff at posts and in Consular Branch can view individual case summaries and have search facilities to view all related cases; • it provides status and a more thorough history of cases; and • it facilitates coordination of cases between Consular Branch and posts, as both can enter information into the chronologies and view the latest action taken on a case.

Source: ANAO analysis

Performance information and reporting– Recommendation 3(c)

5.21 DFAT has partially implemented part (c) of Recommendation 3.

5.22 The ANAO found that CMIS has largely been designed to manage and monitor cases, a function it is able to fulfil well. However, at the time of the audit, CMIS had limited provision for analysis and reporting of information on caseload and for performance management. Further, the database contains errors that reduce the accuracy of data reporting (see paragraph 5.26).

Collection, extraction and reporting of data

5.23 The Case Management Module captures information on individual consular cases through its case chronologies. Two reports are currently available from this data: cases by type and cases by post. These reports provide quarterly reporting of consular statistics. However, the ANAO found errors in the data extraction for these reports that will lead to under-reporting of cases and inaccurate reporting of time spent against each case type. For example, where a case category is changed from an arrest to a prison case, it is only counted once rather than in each category.

5.24 The only data collected on caseload by CMIS is the accumulated time per case. This is logged into the case chronology by a consular officer when they action a case. This data does not link to staff numbers, or any case severity or complexity index, nor provide a breakdown against tasks.

5.25 The ANAO found that DFAT has not developed the Reporting Module, which is required to extract data to meet consular reporting requirements. DFAT advised that delivery of performance information through CMIS would be a high priority in 2003–04, and that testing of CMIS data against manually collected data is to commence in July 2003. The ANAO suggests that DFAT maintain the manual system for collecting consular statistics for at least 12 months to ensure continuity of data and to facilitate validation of data collected through CMIS.

Data integrity

5.26   The ANAO examined CMIS data integrity. A summary of types of error identified in CMIS data is provided in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5
CMIS data integrity

The following errors in CMIS data will result in inaccurate reporting of consular statistics:

❖ errors in *case by type* and *case by post* reports resulting from changes to case type by CMIS operators will lead to incorrect case numbers in some categories of cases;

❖ lack of data validation rules gives wrong age calculation and leads to skewing of reports by age (e.g. DOB 23/8/2025);

❖ test cases exist in the production database which will inflate consular statistics;

❖ duplicate person IDs or case IDs due to unresolved replication or save conflicts. These result when two or more editors change a record simultaneously, leading to a duplicate or out of date case being counted;

❖ incorrect spelling of case types has not been cleansed from the system, and can lead to some cases not being included in statistics (e.g. 2421 closed cases under 'Welfare/Other Serious Metters' instead of 'Welfare/Other Serious Matters');

❖ errors in case sub-types (e.g. theft as a sub-type of illness/hospitalisation) will cause the case to be counted incorrectly.

Source: ANAO analysis of data from the Case Management Module

5.27   The ANAO concluded that DFAT could have avoided many of these errors by more rigorous project management and maintenance of the Case Management Module database. In particular, improvements to data validation are necessary to ensure that accurate information is entered and stored in CMIS. A data cleansing process would also provide assurance that data is correct prior to the CMIS Reporting Module being implemented.

5.28   By the conclusion of the audit, DFAT advised that errors in the data were being corrected, and measures were under way to address the other issues raised during the audit.

Project management

Previous audit

The ANAO found that there were a number of aspects of project management and planning which needed to be further addressed to achieve effective outcomes for the project. In particular, the ANAO found that no clear parameters for the cost and implementation timeframe had been set for the CMIS project.[40]

5.29 The ANAO examined DFAT's planning and management of the CMIS project, particularly in terms linking of funding to project deliverables, rolling out CMIS to overseas posts, and documenting and monitoring progress of the project.

5.30 DFAT engaged a contractor for initial development work (referred to as Phase 1). The contract identified CMIS products (deliverables) against timeframes and cost. Using PRINCE2 project management methodology, a project board was also established to oversee the design, development and release of CMIS. Phase 1 products were delivered to DFAT in June 2002 in accordance with the contract.[41] DFAT advised the ANAO that, at this point:

- deployment of CMIS became part of the SATIN project;

- the project board was disbanded; and

- DFAT moved the management of CMIS implementation and enhancements, and development of the Crisis Management Module, in-house.

5.31 Expenditure for CMIS for 2000–01 to 2003–04 is about $2.45 million (see Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6

Expenditure on CMIS development

	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04*
Total expenditure	$375 274	$925 662	$604 920	$547 000*

Source: DFAT

  *Estimated figure

Note: The figure for 2002–03 includes depreciation expenses of $237 000. Estimated expenditure for 2003–04 includes an estimated depreciation expense of $300 000. Depreciation is not included in the previous years figures.

5.32 The ANAO found weaknesses in planning and project management. For example, DFAT had little documentation to link expenditure to specific project

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[40] ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 4.19, 4.21.

[41] These were the Case Management Module, ORAO and notarial database rolled out to posts, commencing in February 2003.

deliverables over the life of the project. Also, when asked by the ANAO, DFAT did not have a current development and implementation plan providing timeframe and budget against products. DFAT also had difficulty in locating key documents.

5.33   However, DFAT provided a project outline for 2003–04 by the conclusion of the audit. This indicated that there could be a shortfall in funding for further CMIS development in 2003–04.

5.34   The ANAO found that documentation did not adequately reflect changes in CMIS planning and priorities. For example, DFAT had re-prioritised its CMIS work to accommodate rapid development of the Temporary Emergency Consular System database[42] following the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks. This delayed other CMIS components, but planning documents had not been updated to reflect this.

5.35   Documentation did not reflect that DFAT had decided to delay planned work on the Financial Module and initiate alternative arrangements. The ANAO also noted that the notarial database integration had been rolled out to posts under Phase 1 implementation, although project plans had indicated that this would be developed later.

5.36   The ANAO concluded that more robust project documentation would substantially improve overall project management.

Management of priorities and system modifications

5.37   DFAT has a process for logging problems and requests for modifications to CMIS, and responds to those matters it considers most urgent. However, the ANAO found that DFAT did not have a clearly defined process for prioritising system modifications. The ANAO noted that DFAT had made many changes to CMIS to meet user needs, but there was a backlog of system modifications and problems requiring follow-up action.

5.38   Responses to the ANAO questionnaire on CMIS revealed that some posts considered that Consular Branch did not give adequate feedback on their comments. These problems, together with the absence of adequate documentation about variation from specifications in DFAT's planning documents, led the ANAO to conclude that DFAT's project management could benefit from a more rigorous and accountable process. This would include a project plan that clearly defines development phases, milestones, a budget, and all changes made to the system outside of its approved specifications.

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[42] This database was developed for crisis situations, in the absence of a Crisis Management Module in CMIS.

5.39   The ANAO noted that, in February 2003, DFAT formed a committee to oversee development and maintenance of CMIS. DFAT advised that this committee is focused on monitoring and improving CMIS project management.

Overall assessment

5.40   DFAT has substantially implemented Recommendation 3 with the development of CMIS. CMIS has improved recording, monitoring and retrieval of individual case information. It strengthens case management and information sharing between Canberra and the overseas posts, and facilitates more timely consular assistance to Australians in need overseas.

5.41   However, part (c) of the recommendation had not yet been fully met. As it currently stands, CMIS delivers only limited consular statistics and performance information and errors in the database will result in inaccurate reporting of data. DFAT is still developing key modules of CMIS, which are required for statistical reporting, and addressing problems with data integrity.

5.42   To ensure that the ongoing development of CMIS meets key business and user requirements, a more rigorous approach to project management is necessary. This should include a clear process for priority setting, and an implementation plan indicating timeframes and budget against deliverables.

Recommendation No.1

5.43   The ANAO recommends that DFAT develop a systematic and accountable process for managing the Consular Management Information System project, that:

- sets development milestones, monitors and documents progress of the project;

- meets DFAT's key business requirement to guarantee data integrity; and

- improves system design and administration to achieve accurate reporting of consular statistics and performance information.

DFAT response

5.44   Agreed. The Department notes that the development of the CMIS platform undertaken by IBM from 2001 was managed and fully documented under the PRINCE Project Management System. That part of the project was delivered on time and on budget in July 2002. Further development of CMIS since that time has continued in-house, focused on the development of supplementary modules and other system enhancements and maintenance. Project management of CMIS

was accorded a lower priority in the period following the September 11 attacks and the Bali bombings when Consular Branch resources were heavily focused on the consular demands of these events, but steps have been taken since February 2003 to strengthen oversight and management of ongoing CMIS development. A joint working group has been established by Consular Branch and Information and Communication Technology Branch which has decided to adopt a project management system based on the PRINCE system to manage the remaining elements of CMIS development, which is being taken forward with a modest budget.

6. Performance Management

This chapter examines DFAT's progress in implementing Recommendation 4 of the previous audit, which concerned strengthening DFAT's performance management for consular services.

Background

6.1 Performance information allows an agency to demonstrate its achievements against defined organisational or program objectives. Agencies report externally through such avenues as the Portfolio Budget Statements and Annual Reports. This reporting facilitates greater accountability and transparency of an agency's progress against its planned outputs and outcomes.

6.2 Performance information is based on the distillation and analysis of data collected by an agency for core activities or functions. Such data may be quantitative or qualitative, for example, service delivery statistics or client feedback.

Previous audit

The previous audit concluded that some of DFAT's effectiveness indicators were not supported by quality and quantity indicators needed to effectively assess and report on the achievement of planned outcomes. Also, while some useful statistics on consular caseload and staff resource usage were collected from overseas posts, this information was not routinely analysed or used for performance management purposes.

The ANAO also found that DFAT did not have a structured approach to consular complaints handling, nor did it gauge client satisfaction in a structured way.[43]

The ANAO made the following recommendation.

Recommendation 4

The ANAO recommends that DFAT strengthen performance management for consular services by:

    a) specifying a wider range of performance information that can be used to readily assess and report on planned outcomes for the consular function;

    b) establishing service performance targets for high-volume, more routine consular services and the initial stages of more complex casework[44];

    c) making more effective use of information on consular caseload for performance management purposes;

    d) systematically measuring and/or assessing client satisfaction; and

    e) establishing a consular complaints handling system to deal with client complaints in a timely and effective manner and to capture information to facilitate appropriate performance improvement.

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[43] ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op. cit., paragraphs 5.6–5.7, 5.12–5.19, 5.33–5.36.

[44] The order of the recommendation has been changed; part (c) was dot point two and part (b) was dot point 3 of Recommendation 4 in Audit Report No.31.

Performance information–Recommendation 4(a)

6.3   DFAT has not implemented part (a) of Recommendation 4.

6.4   Figure 6.1 shows DFAT's performance management framework for consular services.

Figure 6.1
Performance framework for consular services 2003–04
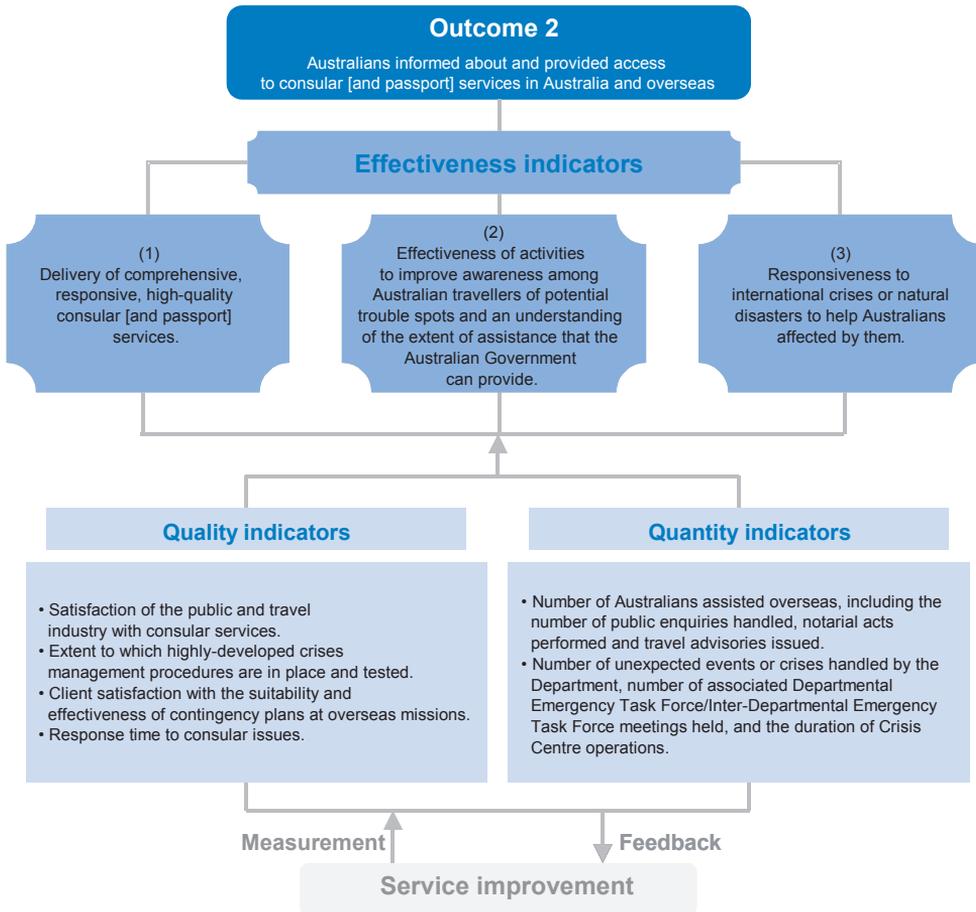
Source: DFAT Portfolio Budget Statements 2003–04 Outcome 2.1, pp. 55–56, and ANAO

6.5   Since the previous audit, DFAT has reduced the number of its effectiveness indicators for consular services from six to three (see Appendix 6 for a four-year comparison). The current effectiveness indicators still cover the delivery, quality and responsiveness of consular assistance, and address planned outcomes for major aspects of consular services.

6.6   However, DFAT still has a relatively narrow range of quality and quantity indicators in support of its effectiveness indicators. The ANAO found that, in

some instances, DFAT's quality and quantity indicators did not provide the opportunity to report key consular achievements or under-achievements. For example, DFAT reports in its Annual Report, on the number of publications disseminated and 'accesses' to the consular pages of its website. Moreover, these statistics are not included in the performance management framework.

6.7   The ANAO suggests that DFAT continue to revise the performance management framework to allow more balanced and detailed reporting of consular activities. This would allow DFAT to evaluate performance against its indicators as well as provide a useful measure for performance feedback and continuous improvement.

Establishing performance targets–Recommendation 4(b)

Previous audit

The ANAO found that DFAT did not set explicit performance targets to focus staff and client attention on the quality of service it expects to provide to consular clients.

DFAT expressed reservations about the efficacy of service performance targets for the consular function, given the diversity of consular cases and the range of environments in which consular services are delivered worldwide. However, the ANAO considered that performance targets were practicable for high-volume, more routine consular services, and the initial stages of more complex casework.[45]

DFAT agreed to the ANAO's recommendation to establish performance targets.

6.8   DFAT has not implemented part (b) of Recommendation 4. DFAT advised that it still had reservations about the efficacy of specific performance targets for the consular function.

6.9   The ANAO remains of the view that there are a number of consular activities undertaken by DFAT that would lend themselves to target setting to assist in performance assessment. This would assist management to make informed decisions about performance, problems and issues. For example, DFAT already requires travel advisories to be reviewed every three months, and consular contingency plans updated annually (see paragraph 4.5 and paragraph 7.4 respectively). Setting percentage targets for these benchmarks and reporting against those targets would provide assurance that consular documents are up to date, and encourage revision and improvement. It would also facilitate benchmarking against appropriate comparatives, including overseas experience.

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[45]   ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 5.26–5.27.

6.10 DFAT could consider setting targets, for example, on preparedness and the quality of infrastructure available for crisis relief or case management. This could include reporting against indicators such as:

- the amount of downtime experienced with CMIS;

- the number of trained crisis centre and call centre staff available at short notice;

- the time taken by consular staff to notify next of kin in Australia about family members in difficulty abroad; and

- the percentage of overseas consular service points with access to CMIS.

Using consular caseload information– Recommendation 4(c)

6.11 DFAT has not implemented part (c) of Recommendation 4.

6.12 DFAT's *Australian Consular Handbook* states that statistics are primarily used as a guide to the consular workload of a post and as an indicator of changing caseloads.[46] The ANAO found that consular statistics are still collected manually at posts.

6.13 DFAT has increased the range of data collected and posts provide more detailed information on cases and time spent on each type of case. DFAT advised that consular statistics are an important tool for performance and related management purposes, including training, briefing heads of mission on management of consular issues at particular posts, and contingency planning. However, the ANAO found that consular statistics are not centrally or systematically used by DFAT for caseload analysis.[47]

6.14 DFAT advised that CMIS will facilitate improvements to data collection and use of consular statistics for performance management. Responses to the ANAO's questionnaire to posts on CMIS indicated a considerable interest amongst posts in using CMIS to collect and retrieve consular statistics. However, as discussed at paragraph 5.25, the Reporting Module had not been developed at the time of audit. DFAT advised that the module is a high priority and will be available in CMIS later in 2003–04.

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[46] DFAT *Australian Consular Handbook*, op.cit., p.69.

[47] Some posts do use this data to analyse fluctuations in caseload for their own internal planning.

Assessing client satisfaction–Recommendation 4(d)

6.15   DFAT has partially implemented part (d) of Recommendation 4.

6.16   DFAT's 2001–02 Annual Report reported positive feedback from the general public. This was based on 153 items of unsolicited correspondence received by DFAT in 2001–02, representing 0.6 per cent of the 24 158 travellers assisted that year. DFAT has work under way through its new communication strategy that may elicit greater public feedback in the future (see paragraph 3.25).

6.17   DFAT has introduced some new avenues for feedback since the ANAO's last audit, such as a feedback page within its primary publication *Hints.* However, use of this data for performance improvement has been limited.

6.18   Client feedback forms are also available through overseas posts. However, the ANAO found that posts do not pass the results to Consular Branch. As there is no central collection and analysis of post-level client feedback, this source of public opinion is not being effectively captured and analysed. The ANAO suggests that DFAT address this weakness by improving mechanisms to collect client feedback from posts, and to centrally collate and analyse this data for performance improvement purposes.

Consular complaints handling system–Recommendation 4(e)

6.19   DFAT has not implemented part (e) of Recommendation 4. The ANAO found there has been no substantial change to DFAT's procedures for complaints handling since the previous audit. DFAT does not have systematic records of consular complaints received across the consular service network and DFAT continues to have local ad hoc procedures for dealing with individual complaints. There are no guidelines to assist staff in handling complaints and no target timeframes for responding to complaints.

6.20   DFAT advised the ANAO that all complaints are resolved in a timely manner. DFAT's Annual Report indicates that 4 per cent of correspondence received expressed dissatisfaction with the level of service provided.

6.21 The ANAO considers that a more systematic approach to complaints handling would improve DFAT's ability to identify and manage recurring problems across the consular network. It would also ensure a higher level of accountability. A suitable approach would be for DFAT to develop a clearly defined protocol for handling complaints, and establish a complaints register, consistent with better practice principles.[48] The ANAO also suggests that DFAT include reference to its system for handling complaints, in the *Consular Services Charter*.

Overall assessment

6.22 DFAT has not implemented key elements of Recommendation 4. Parts (a), (b), (c) and (e) of the recommendation have not progressed and part (d) is partially implemented.

6.23 Specific qualitative and quantitative indictors and the introduction of service performance targets would improve DFAT's ability to demonstrate performance in core consular functions. While DFAT has increased the range of data collected from posts, these data are not used systematically for caseload analysis or performance management.

6.24 DFAT has mechanisms in place to collect feedback from clients. However, this does not extend to overseas posts, which account for a large proportion of DFAT's consular service delivery points. A more systematic approach to handling complaints and analysing client feedback would facilitate ongoing response to client needs.

6.25 To fully address Recommendation 4, DFAT needs to strengthen performance management for consular services by:

- developing qualitative and quantitative indictors that support the evaluation of effectiveness;

- establishing service performance targets to enable monitoring of service delivery, and inform management about areas for improvement in consular services; and

- developing a complaints handling system to capture information for performance improvement purposes.

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[48] For example, Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office 1997, *A Good Practice Guide for Effective Complaint Handling*, Canberra.

7. Contingency Planning

This chapter assesses DFAT's progress in implementing Recommendation 5 of the previous audit. It examines the steps taken by DFAT to improve risk analysis and management of contingency planning at overseas posts.

Background

7.1   DFAT is responsible for responding to threats or crisis situations where there is a need to protect the interests of Australian citizens travelling or residing overseas (see Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1
DFAT's role in contingency planning and crisis response

The Australian Government, the general public and the media expect the Department to respond promptly and effectively to assist Australians in need overseas—particularly in situations of natural disaster or where law and order have broken down. It is therefore vital that the Department and its overseas missions [posts] have in place systems to deliver rapid and comprehensive responses, including advice to Government during a crisis. Contingency plans are a key mechanism for managing a crisis situation and should therefore be accurate and as comprehensive as the circumstances require.

Source: DFAT *Contingency Planning, Crisis Management and Evacuation Manual* (CME), February 2002

7.2   To ensure a state of preparedness, DFAT requires all overseas posts to have an up to date contingency plan. The plans are intended to provide essential information, policy and procedural guidance to consular staff at posts and Consular Branch in Canberra, so that appropriate protection and assistance can be provided to Australians in an emergency. Coordination and management of contingency plans is one of the tasks undertaken by Consular Branch in preparation for crisis management (see Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2

Responsibilities for managing overseas crises involving Australians

The Consular Branch of the Public Diplomacy, Consular and Passports Division:

❖ stores in Canberra copies of all post contingency plans;

❖ confirms that plans are realistically able to respond to assessed threats and comply with DFAT guidelines;

❖ coordinates responses to crises, including chairing the Departmental Emergency Task Force/Inter-Departmental Emergency Task Force; and

❖ reports on the effectiveness of any emergency response, including the evacuation of Australians and other approved nationals.

Source: DFAT

7.3   Management of contingency planning at overseas posts is the responsibility of the post's Head of Mission. The Head of Mission needs to prepare flexible contingency plans to meet specific needs of the post. DFAT requires posts to consider actual or potential risks in their regions, and to develop practical contingency measures to help deal with a crisis should it occur.

Previous audit

The previous audit found weaknesses in the coordination, monitoring and review of contingency plans. The guidelines underpinning contingency planning were out of date and not useful to posts. Contingency plans did not give sufficient attention to the protection of Australians overseas. DFAT had not consistently and actively monitored post contingency plans to ensure that they were up to date. The quality of contingency plans varied across posts, in terms of both consistency of planning information and the coverage of risk. A more rigorous and systematic approach to risk assessment by the posts was required to ensure that risks are being identified and appropriately treated in post contingency plans.[49]

The ANAO therefore made the following recommendation.

Recommendation 5

The ANAO recommends that DFAT ensure that its management arrangements for post contingency plans provide for appropriate coordination, monitoring and review. In particular, DFAT should ensure that:

a) guidelines on the preparation of contingency plans are kept up to date;[50]

b) post contingency plans protect the interests of Australians travelling and residing overseas as well as those of the missions;

c) posts undertake regular, systematic analysis of their risks; and

d) post contingency plans are kept up to date.

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[49]   ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 6.22, 6.26–6.29.

[50]   Parts (a) to (d) of Recommendation 5 have been re-ordered for the current audit. Part (a) was originally the fourth dot point; (b) was the first dot point; (c) was the second dot point; and (d) was the third dot point.

Contingency planning guidelines–Recommendation 5(a)

7.4 DFAT has implemented part (a) of Recommendation 5 by developing a *Contingency Planning, Crisis Management and Evacuation Manual* (CME)[51], which incorporates updated guidelines on contingency planning. At least annually, DFAT asks posts to review their risks and revise the contingency plans. DFAT expects all posts to develop their contingency plans according to the CME.

New guidelines underpin contingency planning

7.5 The CME replaced the Emergency Response Program guidelines that had underpinned DFAT's management arrangements for threats and crises, including the preparation and content of contingency plans, since 1987.[52] Compared to the previous guidelines, the CME is more user-friendly, and provides posts with a more structured and consistent foundation for preparing their contingency plans. It consolidates into a single source, DFAT's broader corporate directions, roles and responsibilities, as well as updated instructions on contingency planning and crisis management. Figure 7.3 shows the objectives of the CME.

Figure 7.3
CME objectives

❖ Safeguarding Australian citizens and protect their interests by coordinating consular activities, including evacuation where necessary; and

❖ ensuring efficient coordination of the Government's response to a crisis overseas, involving Ministers, other government departments and authorities and our consular sharing partners (i.e. United States, United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand).

Source: DFAT CME, February 2002

7.6 The CME includes a contingency planning template constructed around eight modules, each dealing with an essential component of planning. The template assists posts in developing consistent contingency plans. Each module is supported with additional notes to describe to the user the information required. The template is available electronically, facilitating e-mail transfer of completed plans to Consular Branch.

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[51] The CME provides guidance on preparing contingency plans, responding to crisis situations overseas, and evacuation procedures.

[52] ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraph 6.31.

Updating the CME

7.7   DFAT has made minor updates to the CME since its introduction. Posts are also encouraged to suggest improvements. However, the ANAO suggests that DFAT adopt a more proactive approach to engage posts in updating the CME. For example, DFAT could review the CME in conjunction with the annual review of contingency plans. This could help to ensure that the guidelines do not become outdated as requirements change at overseas posts or in Consular Branch.

Usefulness of CME guidelines in improving consistency and quality of contingency plans

7.8   DFAT asked posts to review their contingency plans and convert them into the CME format in September 2001. Since then, the structure and format of contingency plans has become markedly more consistent.

7.9   The ANAO examined 81 contingency plans and found that all but a few follow the structure and format of the CME, and provide at least basic information against each module of the template. The ANAO concluded that the CME has assisted in raising the overall quality and consistency of plans and, to this end, has met the purpose for which it was designed.

7.10   The ANAO noted that the CME template is intended to be flexible, to be modified to suit specific situations and requirements of posts. As a result, variation in detail, quality or volume of information provided by different posts is expected. Even so, the ANAO found that information was often insufficient in the template modules on 'tourist profile', 'local contact base' and 'arrangements with other countries'.

7.11   The ANAO suggests that DFAT provide posts with examples of well-constructed contingency plans, as models of good practice. This could assist some posts in better understanding DFAT's expectations for the quality plans.

Protecting Australians overseas–Recommendation 5(b)

Previous audit

This part of Recommendation 5 was based on the previous audit finding that contingency plans focused predominately on the protection of post staff and families, and were not sufficiently focused on the protection of Australians travelling and residing overseas. In particular, post contingency plans did not give adequate attention to identifying arrangements for contacting and assisting Australian travellers and residents abroad in the event of a crisis.[53]

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[53]   ibid., paragraphs 6.4–6.5.

7.12   DFAT has implemented part (b) of Recommendation 5.

7.13   The objectives of the CME (see Figure 7.3) reflect DFAT's intention to better focus contingency plans on Australians travelling and residing overseas, rather than just on protecting staff at overseas posts.

7.14   The previous audit had commented that post contingency plans did not give adequate attention to identifying arrangements for contacting and assisting Australian travellers and residents abroad in the event of a crisis. In the current audit the ANAO found that the CME template requires posts to provide details of Australian tourists and residents overseas; measures the post is taking to monitor these numbers; and ways of contacting Australians in their region.

7.15   The ANAO examined 22 post contingency plans to determine whether posts were providing this information. It found that about 25 per cent of these posts had not fully completed one or more of the sections of the CME template relating to the Australian Community (which require information, for example, on registered residents, tourist traffic and tourist profile).

7.16   The ANAO considers that closer monitoring of contingency plans by DFAT would provide greater assurance that these areas of the CME template are addressed. Also, sharing best practice examples from posts with higher registration rates, or with innovative mechanisms for contacting Australians overseas, may help to improve the quality of information in this area.

Review of risks–Recommendation 5(c)

Previous audit

The previous audit found that DFAT's process for reviewing the risks at posts employed some elements of an effective risk management approach, but that a more rigorous and systematic approach to risk management by the posts would be required to provide an assurance that risks are being identified and appropriately treated in post contingency plans.[54]

7.17   DFAT has implemented part (c) of Recommendation 5.

Mechanisms for reviewing risk

7.18   Posts now undertake more regular reviews of their risks, particularly as part of the annual review of contingency plans, and through the three-monthly review of travel advisories (see paragraph 4.5). High-risk posts undertake frequent risk assessments and may amend both travel advisories and contingency plans more often in response to changing threats.

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[54]   ibid., paragraphs 6.14–6.18.

Figure 7.4

DFAT's mechanisms for reviewing risks at posts

DFAT provides opportunities for posts to review known and potential risks through the following mechanisms.

❖ Annual review of the CME. A requirement monitored by the Consular Management Section (CMS) of DFAT.

❖ Regular visits program by contingency planning experts. Teams review contingency and evacuation planning on the ground. Usually comprise representatives from DFAT and the Department of Defence.

❖ Preparation of post personal security, staff briefing notes and post threat assessments. These summarise the security climate existing at the post. While not a part of the CME process, they are another mechanism for reviewing the post's general security environment.

❖ Quarterly review of post travel advisories (see paragraph 4.5).

Source: DFAT

7.19   The ANAO found that, collectively, these measures constitute a more systematic and rigorous approach to risk management than previously used by DFAT. To determine if the elements of the risk management processes were being implemented at posts and in Consular Branch, the ANAO examined post contingency plans and individual post files. The findings are discussed in paragraphs 7.21 and 7.23.

Emergency response triggers

7.20   The CME contingency planning template incorporates a more structured approach to the identification and management of risks by requiring posts to identify emergency response 'triggers'. Triggers are the likely or potential threats to the post or to Australians within their jurisdiction (see Figure 7.5). Posts are required to build scenarios around each trigger to assist in planning appropriate action for each possible emergency situation.

Figure 7.5

Examples of emergency response triggers

Natural disasters	Civil or military hostilities	Major accidents
Earthquakes Volcanic eruptions Hurricanes/Typhoons Other	Riots Coups Civil war Foreign invasion Other	Aircraft crash Marine disaster Other

Source: DFAT

7.21 The ANAO found that, while all posts provide information on triggers in their contingency plans, the detail of the information varies across posts. The ANAO considers that more rigorous checking and clearing of contingency plans by Consular Branch would contribute to risks being appropriately identified.

7.22 Given the importance that identification of triggers has for post contingency planning, the ANAO suggests that DFAT more frequently update the CME to reflect new types of threats. For example, include biological threats, particularly in light of the SARS outbreaks in 2003 and anthrax ('white powder') incidents that occurred in the aftermath of the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks. Revision of the triggers table and explanatory notes in the CME should assist posts in thinking about these issues when next revising their plans.

The role of expert advice and situation reports in risk assessment

7.23 The ANAO noted that DFAT engaged in more frequent updating of contingency plans in response to situation reports and other intelligence that identified changing risks at posts. The ANAO also found that in the last two years, Joint DFAT/Department of Defence Contingency Planning Assistance Teams visited several high-risk posts to assist them identify emergency response triggers, assess risks, and develop emergency response plans and contingency plans.

7.24 At several posts, additional incident-specific plans were developed to provide more detailed information for responding to high-risk incidents typical to the country or region, such as kidnapping or cyclones. These are usually annexes to the post's contingency plan.

7.25 Contingency Planning Assistance Teams are able to advise posts of deficiencies or strengths in current contingency plans. They therefore have a valuable role in the planning process, particularly in raising awareness and focusing contingency planning efforts. The ANAO considered that there could be benefit in wider sharing of the suggestions of the Contingency Planning Assistance Teams across posts.

Keeping contingency plans up to date– Recommendation 5(d)

7.26 DFAT has partially implemented part (d) of Recommendation 5.

Monitoring and review of contingency plans

7.27 It is a requirement of the CME that posts review their contingency plans annually. Heads of Missions must certify their compliance as part of routine reporting through the Administrative Procedures Checklist[55] to the Secretary each month.

7.28 Consular Branch coordinates the monitoring and review of contingency plans. Once plans are revised, posts forward them to Consular Branch for checking and approval. Copies of all contingency plans, and any accompanying documents such as maps are held by Consular Branch, and should be readily available.

7.29 The ANAO examined contingency plans to determine if they were accessible, up to date, and appropriately checked and cleared by DFAT. The ANAO's findings are presented in Figure 7.6.

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[55] DFAT Administrative Circular No. PO362, 15 October 2001.

Figure 7.6

ANAO findings of DFAT's process for managing contingency plans

Accessibility of contingency plans

❖ From a sample of 81 posts the ANAO found inconsistencies in availability of contingency plans:

- 61 plans (75 per cent) were available in hard copy; and

- 20 plans (25 per cent) were available in electronic form only.

❖ Plans were not co-located, and sometimes were not filed appropriately, leading to delays in accessing them.

Currency of contingency plans

❖ About 30 per cent of plans were more than 12 months old (see Figure 7.7).

❖ About 50 per cent of plans did not have maps and some maps were not marked with evacuation points or location of posts.

Clearance process

❖ DFAT had not always checked the content of the plans, or provided timely feedback to posts on their updated plans.

❖ There were weaknesses in control arrangements, with plans being incorrectly dated, undated, having insufficient version control or no approval signature.

Source: ANAO analysis

Figure 7.7

Comparison of the age of post contingency plans, 2000 and 2003
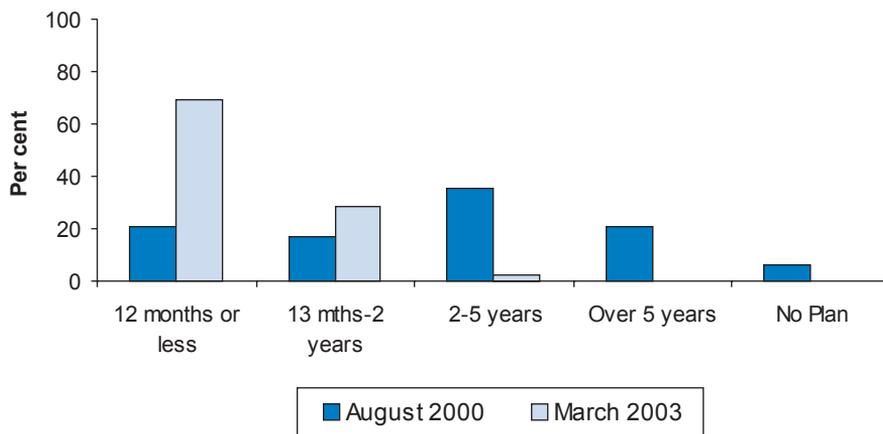
Source: ANAO analysis

7.30   The ANAO found that 30 per cent of contingency plans were over 12 months old. This is an improvement on the last audit, which found that 20 per cent of contingency plans held in Consular Branch were less than one year old, and a further 20 per cent were more than five years old (see Figure 7.7). However, this still falls short of meeting DFAT's 12-month benchmark.

7.31   Further analysis of the out of date plans showed that a higher percentage of contingency plans for category B and C posts were more than 12 months old, compared to those of category A posts (see Figure 7.8).

Figure 7.8

Age of contingency plans for risk category A, B and C posts, 2003
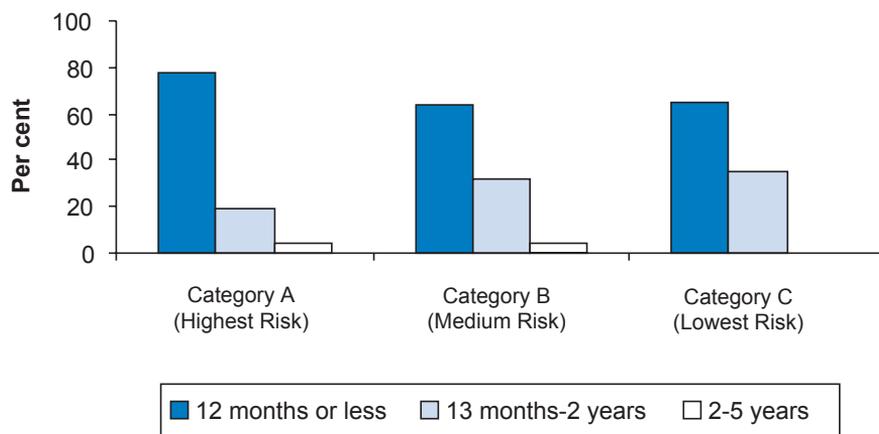
Source: ANAO analysis based on DFAT data

7.32   The ANAO also noted that some posts, particularly in category A, updated their contingency plans more often than annually. For example, tensions in the Middle East led some posts in that region to update their contingency plans many times in the six months prior to the March 2003 war in Iraq.

Maps

Previous audit

The previous audit emphasised the importance of up to date city and country maps in contingency plans. The ANAO had found that some maps were not up to date or marked to show the location of the mission and possible evacuation points in the event of a crisis.[56]

7.33   The problem with maps identified in the previous audit still prevails. Some countries provide up to date maps with key locations and landmarks clearly marked, while others lack this information and the maps are often out of date, or undated.

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[56]   ANAO Report No.31, 2000–01, op.cit., paragraph 6.9.

7.34   The ANAO suggests that DFAT consider including a checklist in the CME, outlining the basic requirements that maps should meet.

Improving management of contingency plans

7.35   The ANAO considers that improvements to monitoring and management of contingency plans are necessary to meet DFAT's requirements for these plans. In particular, there would be benefit in developing an electronic tracking and storage system for contingency planning documents, for example, through CMIS, to assist in monitoring the status and location of plans.

7.36   At the conclusion of fieldwork, DFAT reported that it had allocated funds for 2003–04 to develop an electronic-based management system. DFAT also reported that a recent reorganisation of the Consular Branch and allocation of additional resources to contingency planning would address the weaknesses identified by the audit.

Overall assessment

7.37   The ANAO concluded that DFAT has substantially implemented Recommendation 5. The CME provides improved guidelines for contingency planning. This is translating into improvements in the currency, consistency and quality of contingency plans. Contingency plans are more focused on the protection of Australians travelling and residing overseas and contingency measures are developed through a more rigorous process of risk assessment.

7.38   However, almost 30 per cent of contingency plans were still greater than 12 months old. Also, there was still variation in the quality of information contained in contingency plans across posts. Strengthened coordination and administrative processes would assist DFAT in ensuring that all post contingency plans are kept up to date, and appropriately monitored, pursued, approved and held in Consular Branch.

Recommendation No.2

7.39   The ANAO recommends that DFAT ensure that post contingency plans are reviewed at least annually, and that appropriate management and coordination procedures are in place to allow effective review, coordination and availability of contingency plans.

DFAT response

7.40 Agreed. Considerable priority is being given to strengthening our contingency planning arrangements. A reorganisation of Consular Branch in July 2003 established a new Consular Policy and Crisis Management Section (CMS), in part to ensure better ongoing management of post contingency plans. A global audit of these plans has been completed and all plans are being critically reviewed. Further contingency planning assessment team visits are planned for 2004 (jointly with the Department of Defence) and a model contingency plan is being developed to better ensure consistency and utility across all post plans.

8. Registration of Australians Overseas

This chapter discusses action taken by DFAT to address Recommendation 6 of the previous audit. It examines recent action to improve registration of Australians overseas.

Background

8.1   Australian expatriates and those travelling overseas may register their presence in a particular country with the relevant post, or via DFAT's web-based Online Registration for Australians Overseas (ORAO). Registration is promoted through DFAT's travel advisories, the *Hints* booklet, and locally by the overseas posts.[57] The objective of registration is to facilitate contact with Australians overseas, particularly in emergency or crisis situations.

8.2   DFAT recognises that some high-risk posts face a higher likelihood that crisis situations will arise. It expects these posts to actively pursue Australians to register their presence. DFAT classifies posts into one of three categories, indicating the extent to which posts are expected to pursue registration of Australians in their region (see Figure 8.1). The same categories were in use at the time of the previous audit.

Figure 8.1

Categorisation of posts for registration purposes

Post requirement for registration of Australian citizens	Categorisation of post	Number of posts 2003 (2001)
Registration to be pursued actively	High-risk (A)	35 (24)
Registration to be pursued at the post's discretion	Medium-risk (B)	56 (68)
Registration not to be pursued	Lower-risk (C)	46 (44)

Source: DFAT, *Australian Consular Handbook*, October 2002

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[57]   DFAT, *Australian Consular Handbook*, op.cit., p.72.

Review of post categorisation–Recommendation 6(a)

8.3   DFAT has partially implemented part (a) of Recommendation 6.

8.4   The ANAO found that DFAT had undertaken a review of all overseas posts for registration purposes. In August 2001, posts were sent a revised list showing the categorisation of each post following the review. However, DFAT could not provide the ANAO with a final report of the review. Nor could DFAT provide details of the methodology or criteria used in the risk assessment process to categorise the posts. Therefore, the ANAO is unable to comment on the quality or consistency of the results.

8.5   Posts may have their classification amended, depending on local conditions.[60] However, no methodology for this reassessment was available. The ANAO considers that DFAT's process could be strengthened by clearly defining criteria for assigning posts to category A, B or C and by adequate documentation of the review process. It would be useful for this information to be included in the CME to facilitate consistent review practice.

Level of risk in travel advisories compared to posts

8.6   DFAT's travel advisories should convey the level of risk and the relative need for Australians to register their presence in a category A, B or C country (see Figure 8.1). In the previous audit, half of the travel advisories on issue for category A (high-risk) posts had recommended that Australians should register with the post. The current audit found this had improved, with all 33 travel advisories for category A posts at least referring to ORAO and indicating the need to register. However, the wording in the travel advisories varied in strength: encouraged (8); strongly encouraged (1); advised (7); strongly advised (13); should (3); or may register (1).

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[58]   ANAO Report No.31 2000–01, op.cit., paragraphs 6.32–6.39.

[59]   The recommendation has been broken into parts (a) and (b) to facilitate clearer discussion.

[60]   DFAT, *Australian Consular Handbook*, op.cit., p.72.

8.7   The ANAO also found instances where a post's classification was out of step with its travel advisory. For example, Bali and Kuala Lumpur were classified as posts that pursue registration of Australians on a discretionary basis (category B), despite high warning levels in travel advisories for Indonesia and Malaysia.

8.8   The ANAO concluded that DFAT would benefit from conducting regular reviews of post categorisation and issuing new category listings to posts more frequently. This would give greater assurance that each post's classification accurately reflects its current risk profile, and would enable appropriate and ongoing coordination with travel advisories and contingency plans. Such a formal review process could be incorporated into the annual review of post contingency plans, or undertaken more frequently if circumstances dictate.

Monitoring the effectiveness of registration efforts– Recommendation 6(b)

8.9   DFAT has substantially implemented part (b) of the Recommendation 6.

Online Registration for Australians Overseas

8.10   The ANAO found that DFAT's approach to registration had substantially changed since the last audit. It has developed and implemented ORAO, a centrally based online registration service. ORAO was launched in March 2002 and is being rolled out to posts as part of the SATIN deployment program.

8.11   ORAO incorporates:

- a public website for collecting public registrations;

- a central database for collating and storing registration data; and

- a system to distribute the data to posts.

8.12   Australians residing overseas for substantial periods of time, and those travelling in countries of high risk, can voluntarily register their details on ORAO though the DFAT website. This information is available to posts and Consular Branch to help locate Australians in the event of a natural disaster, medical emergency, civil disruption or personal tragedy.[61]

8.13   ORAO centralises registration and reduces the need for many overseas posts to maintain independent registration systems, which are often manual and time-consuming.

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[61]   DFAT Annual Report 2001–02, p.134.

8.14 The ANAO noted some weaknesses in the current system, which it suggests DFAT correct and monitor, to provide a higher level of assurance of ORAO's effectiveness as a registration system. For example, the ANAO observed: errors in traveller destinations due to incorrect entries into free-text field; and registration details remaining in the system after the travellers had returned to Australia, resulting in incorrect and inflated registration figures. DFAT advised the ANAO that these matters are being rectified.

Monitoring registration efforts at posts

8.15 The ANAO found that DFAT is taking a more proactive approach to registration of Australians overseas. The implementation of ORAO is central to this approach. DFAT also seeks to promote registration through its website, travel advisories, and initiatives with the travel industry.

8.16 Action by DFAT to improve registration efforts is most evident at the high-risk posts. This has particularly been the case since the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks and the subsequent review of contingency plans. DFAT has since emphasised the importance of registration and asked posts to be innovative in developing new methods to contact Australians in their precincts. Despite this, the ANAO found that some post contingency plans still indicated quite low registration rates.

Other mechanisms to improve registration

8.17 The previous audit considered that clarification of the warden role by DFAT would assist posts to utilise this potentially valuable resource.[62] In the current audit, the ANAO found that DFAT is encouraging posts to establish and maintain working warden systems. The aim of this is to assist in disseminating information and keeping in contact with Australians in their vicinity. Many post contingency plans include details of warden systems. However, this is still an area of contingency planning that is variable between the different posts.

8.18 Posts also have other strategies under way to increase registration rates and improve methods for contacting Australians. For example, communication systems through e-mails, mobile phone messaging systems, and fax. This is one aspect of registration efforts that DFAT could further enhance, possibly through including additional information in the CME.

Overall assessment

8.19 Overall, DFAT has made substantial progress against part (b) of Recommendation 6 by improving registration efforts through the development and ongoing implementation of ORAO. This system will facilitate centralised monitoring of registration.

8.20 With respect to part (a) of the recommendation, DFAT undertook a review of the categorisation of posts. However, the ANAO was unable to provide assurance that posts were appropriately classified as the review was not well documented or supported by a systematic risk assessment. A more systematic process of review and documenting reasons for assigning posts to registration categories is warranted to provide greater assurance and management accountability.

Canberra ACT

4 December 2003

P. J. Barrett

Auditor-General

Appendices

Appendix 1

Main destinations of Australians travelling overseas

Main destination	1999–2000	2001–02	Numerical change ('000s)
	Number ('000s)	Number ('000s)	
Southeast Asia			
Indonesia	261.7	270.9	9.2
Thailand	147.8	163.4	15.6
Singapore	145.9	163.2	17.3
Malaysia	126.3	109.5	−16.8
Philippines	55.6	58.3	2.7
Viet Nam	50.0	67.9	17.9
Other	13.5	27.7	14.2
Total	**801.0**	**860.9**	**60.1**
Oceania & Antarctica			
New Zealand	506.7	592.2	85.5
Fiji	107.2	113.3	6.1
Papua New Guinea	43.6	30.6	−13.0
Vanuatu	36.7	30.8	−5.9
Norfolk Island [c]	27.7	25.0	−2.7
New Caledonia	14.4	18.5	4.1
Other	40.5	33.2	−7.3
Total	**776.8**	**843.7**	**66.9**
Europe and the former USSR			
United Kingdom	330.2	308.0	−22.2
Italy	64.7	70.8	6.1
France	44.3	45.2	0.9
Greece	42.1	38.2	−3.9
Germany	39.5	43.5	4.0
Ireland	25.9	26.1	0.2
Netherlands	19.5	13.2	−6.3
Spain	14.7	16.5	1.8
Switzerland	12.4	11.7	0.7
Poland	8.5	10.4	1.9
Other	101.4	101.1	−0.3
Total	**703.3**	**684.8**	**−18.5**

Main destination	1999–2000 Number ('000s)	2001–02 Number ('000s)	Numerical change ('000s)
The Americas			
United States of America	373.7	276.0	–97.7
Canada	62.5	64.2	1.7
Other	31.5	30.7	–0.8
Total	**467.7**	**370.8**	**–96.8**
Northeast Asia			
Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China)	149.7	142.0	–7.7
China	86.3	121.3	35.0
Japan	64.6	71.6	7.0
Taiwan [d]	34.9	35.4	0.5
Korea	19.8	23.9	4.1
Other	1.8	1.9	0.1
Total	**357.0**	**396.1**	**39**
Southern Asia			
India	41.2	44.8	3.6
Sri Lanka	14.8	13.4	–1.4
Other	21.1	17.1	–4.0
Total	**77.2**	**75.3**	**–1.8**
Middle East and North Africa			
Lebanon	18.9	17.1	–1.8
Turkey	15.9	19.2	3.3
Israel	8.3	5.5	–2.8
Other	33.7	35.3	1.6
Total	**76.8**	**77.0**	**0.3**
Africa (excluding North Africa)			
South Africa	35.5	35.7	0.2
Other	22.1	21.1	–1.0
Total	**57.6**	**56.8**	**–0.8**
Not stated	**15.0**	**2.5**	**–12.5**
OVERALL TOTAL	**3332.3**	**3367.9**	**35.5**

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Notes: (a)   Numbers may not add due to rounding.

   (b)   Statistics relate to Australian residents intending to stay overseas for less than 12 months.

   (c)   Norfolk Island is part of the Commonwealth of Australia.

   (d)   Australia does not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan. In Taipei, the Australian Commerce and Industry Office is maintained by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Appendix 2

Consular assistance for Australians overseas

DFAT's *Consular Services Charter* includes information on the consular services that DFAT can and cannot provide Australians overseas. These services are listed below.

What we can do for you

We provide a wide range of consular services to Australian citizens overseas. For example, we can:

- issue passports (applicant must provide relevant documentation and comply with procedures required by law), including emergency passports;

- provide advice and support in the case of an accident, serious illness or death, or if you are a victim of a serious crime, and arrange for next-of-kin to be informed;

- visit or contact you if you are arrested and arrange for your family to be informed if you wish;

- contact relatives and friends on your behalf to ask them to assist you with money or tickets;

- provide some limited financial assistance in real emergencies (subject to very strict criteria);

- provide a list of local doctors and lawyers;

- help during crises, such as civil unrest and natural disasters;

- witness and certify signatures and provide certain other notarial services (specified fees apply);

- provide the latest consular travel advices, which include information about security and health conditions in many parts of the world;

- provide voting facilities at federal and some state and territory elections.

Consulates headed by an honorary consul provide only some of the above services.

What we cannot do for you

The following are services we cannot provide:

- arrange visas, work or residence permits for other countries, or help you to obtain them;

- give legal advice, intervene in court proceedings or provide funds to pay your legal costs or fines;

- get you out of prison or obtain special treatment for you in prison;

- pay or guarantee payment of your hotel, medical or any other bills, including the cost of returning lost luggage to Australia;

- act as a travel agent, bank or post office, or store your luggage;

- become involved in commercial disputes or take up complaints about local purchases etc;

- provide translation, interpreter, telephone or photocopy services;

- pay pensions (although we can provide you with contact details of government authorities in Australia to help you to resolve payment difficulties);

- help find you a job overseas;

- investigate crimes in foreign countries.

However, we can advise you how to get help on these and other matters.

Source: DFAT's *Consular Services Charter*

Appendix 3

Assessment of implementation of previous audit recommendations

Legend

✓	Recommendation fully implemented.
S	Recommendation substantially implemented. One or more parts of the recommendation are still in progress.
P	Recommendation partially implemented. Key parts of the recommendation not addressed.
N	Recommendation not implemented.

Note: The ANAO recommended that DFAT give priority to Recommendations 2, 3 & 5 (shaded in blue).

Recommendations of Audit Report No.31, 2000–01, *Administration of Consular Services—Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*	Status	ANAO comments
Recommendation No. 1 Para 3.17 **Client communication**	The ANAO recommends that DFAT: a) develop a client communication strategy to assist in the production and distribution of information to target client groups; and	✓	DFAT has a client communication strategy in place. Current initiatives focus more on travel advisories in response to global events and heightened awareness of security and safety.
	b) develop methods to assess the penetration and effectiveness of travel advice to ensure that client information needs are met and the risks to their safety and welfare are minimised.	✓	DFAT has implemented several initiatives to meet the recommendation. Main areas of improvement have been liaison with the travel industry, media monitoring, and other media-based activities to raise awareness of travel safety. Public access to information has expanded through greater use of DFAT's website.

Recommendation No. 2 Para 3.59	The ANAO recommends that DFAT strengthen its management of travel advisories to ensure that it is able to provide adequate assurance that Australians are appropriately advised of travel risks, by:	S	Overall, the management of travel advisories and the process of risk assessment has improved. A three-month target for revision of travel advisories is in place, and this is largely adhered to.
Travel warnings	a) systematically applying procedures for assessing the need for travel advisories, and appropriately documenting the assessment; and	S	A systematic process is in place for assessing and documenting risk assessment for travel advisories. However, for countries that do not have travel advisories in place, improved documentation of the risk assessments undertaken would ensure greater consistency and transparency of the process.
	b) ensuring that travel warnings in travel advisories are highlighted, and their severity clearly explained.	✓	DFAT has taken steps to improve the clarity and highlighting of travel warnings. Explanation of the severity levels of travel advisories is available to the public through the DFAT website.
Recommendation No. 3 Para 4.27 **Case management information system**	The ANAO recommends that DFAT ensure that it has a case management information system that:	S	Overall, DFAT has made significant progress in implementing the recommendation, particularly with the ongoing development and implementation of the Consular Management Information System (CMIS). However, rollout of CMIS to posts will not be completed until mid-2004, and key modules are still under development.
	a) enables the recording and transmittal of sufficient information to facilitate the actioning and monitoring of cases at both the post and in Canberra;	✓	CMIS meets key user needs for case management, allowing for effective recording and retrieval of information on consular cases. It enables near real-time information sharing between posts and Canberra.
	b) overcomes weaknesses in existing case management and data collection systems, that were identified by the ANAO in the course of the audit; and	S	CMIS addresses many of the weaknesses of case management identified in the last audit. It operates within the SATIN environment, interfaces with other DFAT systems, and integrates cables and e-mails to reduce repetition.
	c) facilitates the collection of consular caseload and other performance information.	P	CMIS facilitates good collection of information on cases but little data on caseload. Errors in current case data were identified and the statistical reporting module is still to be developed.

Recommendation No. 4 **Para 5.42** **Performance management**	The ANAO recommends that DFAT strengthen performance management for consular services by:	**N**	DFAT has not implemented key elements of Recommendation 4.
	a) specifying a wider range of performance information that can be used to readily assess and report on planned outcomes for the consular function;	**N**	DFAT has not expanded its range of quantitative and qualitative indicators.
	b) making more effective use of information on consular caseload for performance management purposes;	**N**	While DFAT has increased the number of categories that posts report against, consular statistics are not used for caseload analysis or performance management purposes.
	c) establishing service performance targets for high-volume, more routine consular services and the initial stages of more complex casework;	**N**	DFAT has not set performance targets. While some internal targets exist, for example, revision of travel advisories every three months, these are not part of the formal performance management framework.
	d) systematically measuring and/or assessing client satisfaction; and	**P**	DFAT provides mechanisms for public feedback, for example, through *Hints* and the DFAT website. However, client feedback through the posts, a major service provider, is not centrally collated or analysed, and DFAT is currently using a research consultant to examine ways to improve feedback.
	e) establishing a consular complaint handling system to deal with client complaints in a timely and effective manner and to capture information to facilitate appropriate performance improvement.	**N**	Handling of complaints is largely the same as found in the previous audit. DFAT has not established a complaints register or a more formal method of monitoring or analysing complaints.

Recommendation			ANAO comment
Recommendation No. 5 Para 6.30 **Contingency planning**	The ANAO recommends that DFAT ensure that its management arrangements for post contingency plans provide for appropriate coordination, monitoring and review. In particular, DFAT should ensure that:	S	Overall, DFAT made substantial progress against this recommendation. The development of the CME improved consistency and quality of contingency plans. However, improvements in management and monitoring of contingency plans are required to ensure that all post plans are of a high quality and kept up to date.
	a) post contingency plans protect the interests of Australians travelling and residing abroad as well as those of the mission;	✓	Contingency plans are now focused on protecting all Australians overseas. There is still room for ongoing improvement and better monitoring of supporting information in contingency plans.
	b) posts undertake regular, systematic analyses of their risks;	✓	DFAT has implemented a risk assessment process through the new CME. Mechanisms are in place for annual review of risks. Strengthening of the monitoring and management of the review process would ensure greater consistency and quality of information in all contingency plans.
	c) post contingency plans are kept up-to-date; and	P	Currency of plans has improved since the previous audit, but about 30 per cent of contingency plans were still more than 12 months old.
	d) guidelines on the preparation of post contingency plans are kept up to date.	✓	DFAT has developed new guidelines (CME) for contingency planning.
Recommendation No. 6 Para 6.40 **Registration of Australians abroad**	The ANAO recommends that: a) DFAT review the categorisation of posts for registration purposes to ensure that posts are appropriately classified; and	P	While DFAT conducted a review of the categorisation of posts, the methodology for risk assessment was not clear or adequately documented.
	b) it monitor the effectiveness of post registration efforts.	S	DFAT developed ORAO, which should facilitate a more consistent approach to registration and enable centralised monitoring of registration efforts.

Appendix 4

Audit criteria

The following criteria were adopted for the audit:

- DFAT has implemented the recommendations or has undertaken alternative action to address the issues that led to the recommendations.

- DFAT has in place management arrangements to monitor, measure and manage consular services performance, and to assess the effectiveness of the actions undertaken in implementing the recommendations.

- The actions taken by DFAT have led to measurable improvements in the administration of consular services.

Appendix 5

Consular publications, websites and other communication channels

Consular publications			
2000		**2003**	
Name of publication	**Publication and distribution arrangements**	**Name of publication**	**Publication and distribution arrangements**
General publications			
Hints for Australian Travellers	• Booklet published biannually • Print run of 550 000 copies • Issued with passports	*Hints for Australian Travellers*	• Booklet published biannually • Print run of 500 000 copies • Issued with passports
Consular Newsletter	• Newsletter published quarterly • Print run of 7000 copies • Distributed mainly to travel agents	*Consular Newsletter*	• Newsletter published quarterly • Print run of 10 000 copies • Distributed mainly to travel agents
		Assisting Australians Overseas	
Brochures (Distributed in response to demand from the travel industry and the travelling public)			
General brochures *Travelling overseas? A moment please*	• Updated when required • Print run of 20 000 copies	**General brochures** *Travelling overseas – some things you should know before you go*	• Updated when required • Print run of 60 000 copies
Consular Services Charter	• Updated when required • Print run of 40 000 copies	*Consular Services Charter*	• Updated when required • Print run of 15 000 copies

| Travel tips

Backpacking overseas? Some tips

Travelling to Bali? Some tips

Tips for women travellers

Dual nationality

Working Overseas | • Updated when required
• Print run of 20 000 copies per brochure | Travel tips

Backpacking overseas? Some helpful tips

Travelling to Bali? Some tips

Tips for women travellers

Travel information for dual nationals – What it could mean for you when travelling overseas?

Living and working overseas – Essential information for the Australian Expatriate

Travelling well – Some tips for staying healthy

For the Travelling Senior – Some tips for a safe and healthy trip | • All updated when required
• Print run of 20 000

• Print run of 50 000

• Print run of 25 000

• Print run of 15 000

• Print run of 15 000

• Print run of 40 000

• Print run of 20 000 |
| Welfare advice

If you are arrested or jailed overseas

If you are the victim of sexual assault while travelling overseas

What to do when someone is missing overseas | • Updated when required
• Print run of 20 000 copies per brochure | Welfare advice

If you are arrested or jailed overseas

If you are the victim of sexual assault while travelling overseas

What to do when someone is missing overseas

Death overseas | • All updated when required
• Print run of 15 000

• Print run of 10 000

• Print run of 15 000

• Print run of 10 000 |

Websites	
DFAT websites	
Travel advice:	http://www.dfat.gov.au/travel
	http://www.smartraveller.gov.au
Visa information:	http://www.dfat.gov.au/visas
Links to travel advisories of consular sharing partners	
Canada:	http://www.voyage.gc.ca/dest/index.asp
UK:	http://www.fco.gov.uk
USA:	http://travel.state.gov/travel_warnings.html
Overseas posts with website	
Federal Government website listing:	http://www.fed.gov.au

Other channels for communicating travel advice	
Clients	**Communication channel**
The travel industry and media organisations alert system	Electronic distribution via webmail (travel industry) Fax distribution E-mail distribution
Australians registered with DFAT	E-mail distribution
Australians registered with posts	E-mail distribution at some posts
Smartraveller travel advice telephone service	1300 139 281

Source: DFAT, DFAT website and other sources

Appendix 6

Performance framework for DFAT consular services 2000–01 to 2003–04

Indicator	2000–01	2001–02 to 2003–04
Effectiveness indicators	Comprehensive, high-quality consular services provided to the growing number of Australians travelling overseas, including through the use of improved technology.	Delivery of comprehensive, responsive, high-quality consular and passport services.
	Awareness among Australian travellers of potential trouble spots and understanding of the extent of assistance that the Australian Government can provide.	Effectiveness of activities to improve awareness among Australian travellers of potential trouble spots and an understanding of the extent of assistance that the Australian Government can provide.
	Responsiveness of the Department to major international crises and natural disasters in order to help Australians affected by them.	Responsiveness to international crises or natural disasters to help Australians affected by them.
	Accessibility of advice to and support for Australians travelling overseas, as well as their families in Australia, through the Department's network of overseas posts and honorary consulates, the 24-hour Consular Operations Centre, and consular cooperation arrangements with other countries.	
	Improved consular information program, including upgraded consular travel advice system and better use of website.	
	Improved consular network, through widening of the 24-hour service overseas, more honorary consuls, greater cooperation with partner consular services and better consular case management.	

Consular services *Quality indicators*	Satisfaction of the public and travel industry with consular services.	Satisfaction of the public and travel industry with consular services.
	Extent to which highly developed crisis management procedures are in place and tested.	Extent to which highly developed crisis management procedures are in place and tested.
		Client satisfaction with the suitability and effectiveness of contingency plans at overseas missions.
	Response time to consular issues.	Response time to consular issues.
Quantity indicators	Number of Australians assisted overseas, including the number of public enquiries handled, notarial acts performed and travel advisories issued.	Number of Australians assisted overseas, including the number of public enquiries handled, notarial acts performed and travel advisories issued.
	Number of unexpected events or crises handled by the Department, number of associated Departmental Emergency Task Force / Inter-Departmental Emergency Task Force meetings held, and the duration of Crisis Centre operations.	Number of unexpected events or crises handled by the Department, number of associated Departmental Emergency Task Force / Inter-Departmental Emergency Task Force meetings held, and the duration of Crisis Centre operations.
Passport services *Quality indicators*		Satisfaction of the public and travel industry with passport services.
		Turn-around time for passport issue, including urgent issues.
Quantity indicators		Number of passport enquiries handled by the Australian Passport Information Service.
		Number of travel documents issued, including urgent issues.
Travellers' Emergency Loans *Quality indicators*		Travellers' Emergency Loans granted to Australian travellers in accordance with the guidelines laid down in the Consular Instructions.
Quantity indicators		Number of Australian travellers assisted by the receipt of emergency loans.
		Success of debt recovery activities.

Price	$39.039m	**2001–02: $137.266m** (including passport services and Travellers' Emergency Loans)
		2002–03: $143.324m (including passport services and Travellers' Emergency Loans)
		2003–04: $144m (including passport services and Travellers' Emergency Loans)

Source: DFAT Annual Report 2000–2001; DFAT Portfolio Budget Statements 2001–02, 2002–03, 2003–04

Appendix 7

Full response to the audit from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

The ANAO report correctly notes that the international security environment has changed significantly since the ANAO's 2001 audit. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States and 12 October 2002 in Bali have fundamentally changed the environment in which Australians travel overseas and in which consular services are delivered.

The Department has in this period accelerated an ongoing process of reform and made significant improvements to the way it delivers consular services overseas. Greater emphasis is being given to 'preventive' approaches, particularly the provision of travel advice and other consular information and to strengthened contingency planning, with corresponding increases in the resources devoted to these activities. Significant effort has also been devoted since the last audit to strengthening our crisis management arrangements and to refining our case management systems.

This ongoing process of reform has been driven by the demands of the prevailing international security environment, and by the lessons we have drawn from the management of recent consular crises, notably the Bali bombings. The report of the 2001 audit has been an important point of reference through this reform process, and discussion with the follow-up audit team has provided an additional and useful basis for testing the effectiveness of our reforms.

Against this background we note that the ANAO has concluded that the recommendations of the 2001 audit have been substantially implemented, with one exception relating to performance information. The Department has introduced a number of new performance standards since the audit, including minimum three–monthly reviews of travel advice and annual review of overseas post contingency plans. We note, however, that the utility of general performance targets—particularly in relation to case management—is greatly limited by the varying and unpredictable conditions in which consular work is undertaken from country to country. The effectiveness of our efforts in the field is heavily dictated by local laws, infrastructure and culture—factors that are beyond our control—and what is readily achievable in one country may be impossible or take years to achieve in another. This makes it difficult to establish realistic and meaningful performance targets, or to compare the work of one post against another. Nevertheless, the Department is committed to improving its performance in this area and notes that the commissioning of the statistics module of CMIS will generate more detailed consular statistics and provide a basis for improved performance information.

The Department's response to the two recommendations in the current report is as follows.

Recommendation 1: Agreed. The Department notes that the development of the CMIS platform undertaken by IBM from 2001 was managed and fully documented under the PRINCE Project Management System. That part of the project was delivered on time and on budget in July 2002. Further development of CMIS since that time has continued in-house, focused on the development of supplementary modules and other system enhancements and maintenance. Project management of CMIS was accorded a lower priority in the period following the September 11 attacks and the Bali bombings when Consular Branch resources were heavily focused on the consular demands of these events, but steps have been taken since February 2003 to strengthen oversight and management of ongoing CMIS development. A joint working group has been established by Consular Branch and Information and Communication Technology Branch which has decided to adopt a project management system based on the PRINCE system to manage the remaining elements of CMIS development, which is being taken forward with a modest budget.

Recommendation 2: Agreed. Considerable priority is being given to strengthening our contingency planning arrangements. A reorganisation of Consular Branch in July 2003 established a new Consular Policy and Crisis Management Section (CMS), in part to ensure better ongoing management of post contingency plans. A global audit of these plans has been completed and all plans are being critically reviewed. Further contingency planning assessment team visits are planned for 2004 (jointly with the Department of Defence) and a model contingency plan is being developed to better ensure consistency and utility across all post plans.

Significant advances have also been made in other areas of consular administration discussed in the report. Travel advisories are now in place for all countries that attract significant numbers of Australian travellers, and a checklist introduced for use by posts in assessing whether new travel advisories are required. All posts have been instructed to review and, where necessary, update their lists of lawyers. Close cooperation with the travel industry continues and benchmarking research has been commissioned as part of the *smartraveller* campaign to track the campaign's effectiveness. We are reviewing our complaints handling procedures with a view to introducing a formal complaints handling mechanism.

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