

**OUTCOME**

**2**

**Australians informed about and provided access to consular and passport services in Australia and overseas**

**OUTPUT 2.1**

**EFFECTIVENESS**

Consular services

Passport services

**QUALITY AND QUANTITY**

**ADMINISTERED ITEM**

## PERFORMANCE INFORMATION FOR OUTCOME 2

### EFFECTIVENESS INDICATORS—OVERALL ACHIEVEMENT OF THE OUTCOME

Indicators to assist in assessing the success of the department's contribution to the achievement of this outcome are:

- Delivery of comprehensive, responsive, high-quality consular and passport services
- 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 to international crises or natural disasters to help Australians affected by them.

## Outcome 2: Financial and staffing resources summary (Table 10)

Australians informed about and provided access to consular and passport services in Australia and overseas.

	Budget* 2002–2003 (\$'000)	Actual expenses 2002–2003 (\$'000)	Variation (expenses less budget) (\$'000)	Budget** 2003–2004 (\$'000)
<b>Administered expenses</b>				
Emergency advances to Australian travellers	3 337	1 140	(2 197)	200
<b>Total administered expenses</b>	<b>3 337</b>	<b>1 140</b>	<b>(2 197)</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>Price of departmental outputs</b>				
Output 2.1—Consular and passport services	132 854	132 857	3	139 944
Revenue from government (appropriation) for departmental outputs	132 854	132 857	3	139 944
Revenue from other sources	3 725	4 177	452	3 856
<b>Total price of departmental outputs</b>	<b>136 579</b>	<b>137 034</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>143 800</b>
<b>Total resourcing for Outcome 2</b> (Price of departmental outputs plus administered expenses)	<b>139 916</b>	<b>138 174</b>	<b>(1 742)</b>	<b>144 000</b>

\* Full-year budget, including additional estimates.

\*\* Budget prior to additional estimates.

	2002–2003 Budget	2002–2003 (Actual)	2003–2004 (Estimate)
Average staffing level (number) *	610	630	629

\* Includes overseas locally engaged staff.

**Output 2.1** Consular and passport services

## 2.1.1 CONSULAR SERVICES

## 2.1.2 PASSPORT SERVICES

**Overview**

The tragic bombings in Bali on 12 October 2002 had a major impact on the department's work in delivering consular services to Australians. The crisis itself imposed unprecedented demands on Australia's consular and emergency services. The department played a pivotal role in the Government's response, coordinating the emergency medical evacuation and responding to 30 000 calls from concerned Australians about the welfare of friends and family members in Bali. The Consul-General was helping Australians at the scene within half an hour of the bombings, and our Crisis Centre was activated within hours. Support for the survivors and families and friends of the victims has been a major priority for the department in Canberra and Bali since October 2002.

A downturn in international travel, resulting from uncertainty particularly following the bombings, the war on terrorism and the spread of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus, resulted in an eight per cent decline in the number of passports and travel documents issued. We took a number of initiatives during the year to improve our passport services, including introducing a half-price seniors' passport and a priority processing service. The Passports Australia website delivered more than 35 000 page-views a week and the Australian Passport Information Service effectively handled over 1.1 million inquiries during the year—although this represented a decrease from the previous year, again reflecting the downturn in international travel.

Against the backdrop of heightened concern about security, the department devoted considerable effort to developing a new security-enhanced passport, which is on track for release in December 2003. Plans to incorporate facial recognition technology into passports were also advanced. In May 2003, our biometric identification initiative received a boost when the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) adopted facial recognition as the international standard for travel documents. This decision was based on a technical report written by the department on behalf of ICAO's New Technologies Working Group.

We planned carefully to prepare for possible consular emergencies in the event of conflict in the Middle East, and our Crisis Centre was activated again during the military campaign in Iraq. Detailed contingency planning was also in place to protect Australians visiting Turkey for Anzac Day ceremonies.

A key priority over the past year has been our response to community interest in travel advice, which reached unprecedented levels following the attacks in Bali. The department performed strongly in meeting community needs with timely and accurate advice on a range of breaking issues, including terrorist threats, the Iraq crisis and the



*The Prime Minister, Mr Howard, inspecting the site of the Bali bombings. (Photo: Reuters)*

outbreak of the SARS virus. We gave particular priority to conveying clear and timely advice to Australians about credible information of terrorist and related security threats in South-East Asia, the Middle East and East Africa. We improved the dissemination of travel advice and strengthened our engagement with the travel industry—including through the launch of a new Government–Industry Charter for Safe Travel—to ensure this information is reaching Australian travellers.

In 2002–03 we helped more than 19 000 Australians in difficulty (compared to over 24 000 last year). This decrease reflects revised reporting requirements rather than a decrease in workload. Posts now report separately on consular casework and non-case-related consular activity such as travel advice.

The Australian National Audit Office undertook an audit to assess the effectiveness of the department's passport-issuing processes in Australia. It concluded that the Australian passport administration is regarded as a 'better practice provider' of passport services.

In December 2002, the department's Passports and Consular Branches were joint recipients of a Special Commendation in the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Sector Management.

## **Consular services**

### *Accessibility of consular services*

The department is continually striving to extend the reach of the consular network. At the end of 2002–03, Australians were able to seek help from 165 locations overseas, including Australian embassies, high commissions and consulates, as well as Canadian

consular posts in locations where we have no resident representation. Over 80 posts now facilitate after-hours assistance through free or reverse-charge connections to our 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre in Canberra.

Consular services include helping Australians hospitalised or imprisoned overseas, helping families when Australians die, are injured or go missing overseas, and, when required, coordinating evacuations from trouble spots.

### **Charter for Safe Travel**

On 11 June 2003, Mr Downer launched a new, voluntary government–industry charter to promote safe travel by Australians overseas. The Charter for Safe Travel is founded on the Government’s and travel industry’s shared commitment to help Australians travelling overseas keep informed about overseas conditions and return to Australia safely with an enthusiasm to travel again.

Under the charter, the Government and industry will work together to encourage travellers to consult the department’s travel advisories before they travel, and to provide clients with a copy of the travel advice when they book for countries with security problems. In particular, agents will draw our advice to the attention of their customers who intend travelling to countries where the department recommends the deferral of all or non-essential travel.

Under the charter, the Government and industry have pledged to strengthen the existing cooperative dialogue and to work together to address new and emerging issues affecting the safety of Australian travellers overseas.

While industry and Government have committed under the charter to promote jointly travel advice and safe travel messages, the charter recognises the fundamental responsibility of the individual to keep informed of developments overseas by monitoring closely the department’s travel advice both before and during travel.

The establishment of the charter marks a significant milestone in closer practical cooperation between the Government and the travel industry to ensure Australians are aware of the department’s travel advice as they prepare and undertake overseas travel.

#### *Travel advice: protecting Australians overseas*

The department’s consular information program, including travel advisories, was a key priority in 2002–03. While demand for travel advice has grown steadily over recent years, community interest in our safe travel messages reached unprecedented levels following the Bali bombings. We responded robustly to this interest, and improved the dissemination of our advice. Our travel advice service represents international best practice and our record in alerting Australians to risks overseas is strong.

The closest attention continues to be paid to information about terrorist and related security threats that could endanger Australians overseas. The department has increased the number of destinations covered by travel advisories from 109 to 139. Our travel advice warned of the risk of terrorist attacks in Mombasa three weeks before the 29 November 2002 attack, and of the imminent threat of an attack in Riyadh four days before the 12 May 2003 attack. Careful monitoring and up-to-date advice was also provided to the Australian public about credible threats against Australian interests in a number of countries in South-East Asia, the Middle East and East Africa—regions where the threat of terrorist action has been of greatest concern—as well as other regions.

We delivered regularly updated and accurate advice to Australians in response to the spread of the SARS virus, in the lead-up to Anzac Day ceremonies in Gallipoli, and on other occasions such as the Cricket World Cup in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

We have strengthened our engagement with the travel industry to ensure that this information readily reaches Australian travellers. This culminated in Mr Downer's launch of a new Government–Industry Charter for Safe Travel in June (see box on page 128). We began to roll out a network of automated consular information kiosks that provide up-to-date travel advice to people in international airports and other venues. Work on a new domestic public information campaign on travel advice, to be launched in 2003–04, is well advanced. Further activity on this important priority will be underpinned by new funding announced in the 2003–04 budget of \$9.7 million over the next four years.

We made other important advances in improving the dissemination of travel advice. It remains easily accessed by Internet, phone and fax, and the number of subscribers to electronic travel advice updates has increased from 3000 to over 25 000. We enhanced our travel advice website by including clearer explanatory information about how travel advice is produced and what it means. A feature is a new seven-tier travel advice scale that helps our clients better to assess the safety and security conditions between different countries. This process of product enhancement is continuing, drawing on client feedback. The number of visits to our consular pages on the Internet ([www.dfat.gov.au/travel](http://www.dfat.gov.au/travel)) trebled. In the aftermath of the bombings in Bali, access to the web page was running at over 518 000 page-views per day.

Demand for travel advice via telephone inquiries and to our faxback service was strong, reflecting wider community concern about the security environment overseas. Media interest in travel advice remained at a heightened level, with an average of ten articles appearing a week in the print media, compared with three articles a week the previous financial year.

In addition to travel advice, we have continued to disseminate to the Australian community a range of special topic consular brochures. We publish 15 different brochures, dealing with issues such as dual citizenship, living and working overseas, and death overseas. In 2002–03, we distributed over 1.2 million paper brochures, a 14 per cent decrease on the previous year. This decrease is attributable to an overall slowing in the number of Australians travelling overseas, the drop in the number of passports issued to which we attach our *Hints to Australian travellers* brochure, and greater access to publications online.

### **Responsiveness to consular crises**

The terrorist attacks in Bali on 12 October 2002 resulted in the largest loss of Australian lives overseas in Australia's peacetime history. The department responded quickly. Within three hours of the bombings, at 5am AEST, our Crisis Centre was activated to coordinate the whole-of-government response to the crisis (see box on page 131).

The department gave close attention to contingency planning and crisis management throughout 2002–03. Careful planning was undertaken to prepare for possible consular emergencies in the event of conflict in the Middle East, and to protect Australians visiting Turkey for Anzac Day ceremonies. The Crisis Centre was again activated for the duration of the military campaign in Iraq, and played a key role in the Government's successful management of the consular implications of the conflict through the Middle East region.

The department convened inter-departmental emergency taskforces to address the terrorist threat to Australian interests in East Timor (September 2002) and the Philippines (December 2002), both of which required the temporary closure of Australia's embassies.

### **Assisting Australians overseas**

The difficult international environment continues to present challenging situations for consular officers. During the year we managed a range of difficult cases, including retrieving the body of an Australian journalist killed during the conflict in Iraq and returning the body to Australia for burial. In an operation requiring unprecedented cooperation between the governments of Australia, China and Nepal, we coordinated the rescue of three Australian climbers and the recovery of their colleague who had been killed in a mountain climbing expedition in Tibet. We helped a number of children caught in international custody disputes to return to their families in Australia.

The Australia–Thailand Prisoner Transfer Treaty, on which the department and the Attorney-General's Department cooperated closely, came into force in September 2002. The first transfer to Australia under the agreement took place in April 2003. This treaty—and Australia's accession in January 2003 to the Council of Europe Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons—provides the basis for the prospective transfer of Australian prisoners serving sentences in as many as 52 countries.

The consular role includes the provision of a wide range of services to Australians travelling, working or with business interests overseas, including on behalf of other government agencies. In 2002–03, we provided electoral facilities for the Victorian and New South Wales state elections in many of our overseas posts. In recognition of the need for continuous improvement in the provision of the wide range of consular services, we completed a comprehensive revision of the guidelines for consular work overseas in 2002–03.

### **Consular response to the terrorist bombings in Bali**

The terrorist bombings of 12 October 2002 killed and injured many Australians and other nationals. This tragedy imposed unprecedented demands on the department's consular services in Bali and Australia. Our consular crisis machinery was activated within three hours of the bombings.

The Inter-Departmental Emergency Taskforce, chaired by a Deputy Secretary of the department, met within hours to coordinate a whole-of-government response. A major medical evacuation of Australian citizens began within hours of the bombings and was completed within 36 hours. A total of 66 injured Australians were evacuated. The department's Emergency Call Unit handled over 30 000 telephone calls in the first days of the crisis and recorded details of almost 5000 individuals for whom family members or friends had concerns.

The magnitude of the response required a concerted effort from all areas of the department. Over 700 staff volunteered to work in the Crisis Centre and Emergency Call Unit. In Bali and Jakarta our posts moved quickly to respond to the unique demands placed on them. Experienced consular, medical, military and policy personnel were immediately sent to Bali. The department helped Australian medical, police, forensic and other experts in their critical role in assisting Indonesian authorities put in place appropriate disaster response arrangements, including for the identification of victims' remains. In all, 32 departmental officers served in Bali.

Direct feedback we received reflected an overwhelmingly positive response from family members and the public for our efforts to assist Australians. We provided help on the ground to other consular partner governments, including New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States.

After reviewing our response to the Bali bombings, we made a number of improvements to our crisis management machinery. We strengthened the management and operation of our Crisis Centre, including revisions to its guidelines and to the contingency planning and crisis management and evacuation manual.

Since this unprecedented crisis we have established a 'consular reserve' of staff who have been trained in crisis management and are now on an on-call register. In response to the need for additional capacity to respond to inquiries about family and friends, we doubled the size of the Emergency Call Unit and instituted arrangements to handle any overflow more efficiently.

**Passport services**

*Client access*

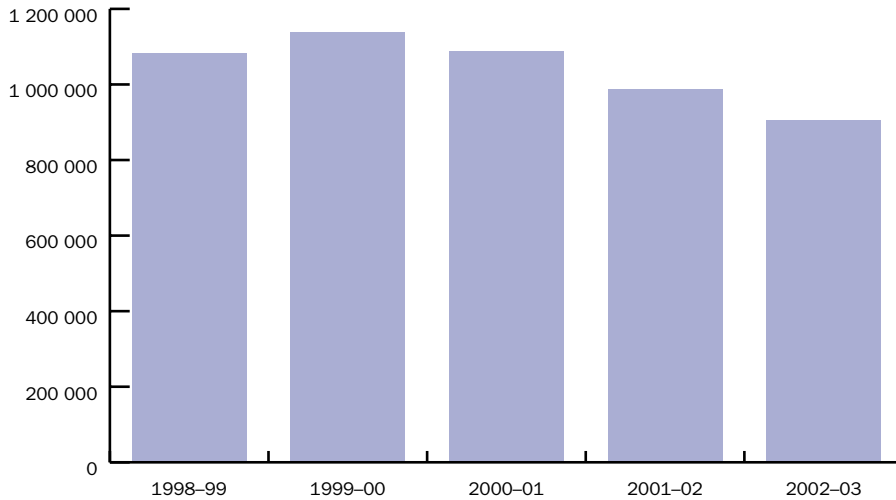
Passport offices in nine cities around Australia and diplomatic and consular missions overseas provide Australian citizens with passport services under the *Passports Act 1938*. Australia Post conducts interviews throughout Australia on behalf of the department and information about the passport issuing process and requirements is readily available from the Australian Passport Information Service and the passports website.

A downturn in international travel, resulting from uncertainty, particularly following the Bali bombings, the war on terrorism and the spread of the SARS virus, resulted in an eight per cent decline in the number of passports and travel documents issued by the department: 906 049 in 2002–03 compared to 986 316 in 2001–02.

With more than 1600 outlets nationwide, Australia Post provides most Australians with ready access to passport services. In 2002–03, the number of Australians using Australia Post to lodge their passport applications in regional and rural areas increased slightly to 84.5 per cent of all applications lodged, compared to 82 per cent in 2001–02.

The Australian Passport Information Service (APIS), which provides an accessible service to all Australians for the cost of a local call, handled 1 123 133 calls in 2002–03. This represents a seven per cent decrease from the previous year. The majority of calls related to travel document renewals. APIS met or exceeded all contractual performance standards and continues to play an important and cost-effective role in passport service delivery.

**Figure 14. Number of travel documents issued 1998–99 to 2002–03**



Source: Compiled by DFAT from departmental data

### *Enhancing our services*

The department continued to enhance the standard and consistency of service provided to passport clients by Australia Post through an outreach training program covering a wide range of metropolitan and rural centres. We expanded a random review of postal outlets under a 'mystery shopping' program, whereby employees of the department sought to obtain passport services from post offices without identifying themselves. These programs gave us an independent assessment of service levels and contributed significantly to a national reduction in Australia Post error rates.

Two new passport services introduced in July 2002 were well received by the travelling public. A total of 6140 applicants over the age of 75 took up the offer of a half-price seniors' passport and 112 525 applicants opted to pay the \$60 priority processing fee to have a passport issued within 48 hours. Of those paying the priority processing fee, 546 applicants subsequently obtained reimbursement on approved grounds: compassionate travel (433); passport not produced within 48 hours (24); and others (89).

During 2002–03, the department further advanced the 'passports online' strategy. This initiative will provide clients with enhanced access to a wide range of interactive passport information, services and forms, including the ability to submit certain information online. The project is due for completion in late 2003. The Passports Australia website continued to be popular with an average of 35 000 page-views recorded per week.

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) completed a performance audit of passport services in April 2003. The auditors found the department operated sound processes for the delivery of passport services. It concluded that international benchmarking and other relevant feedback indicated that the Australian passport administration was regarded as a 'better practice provider' of passport services. The ANAO made four recommendations relating to performance management, performance monitoring, IT security procedures and operational processes. The recommendations will be considered for incorporation into the continuous improvement program conducted by the department's Passports Branch.

In December 2002, the department's Passports and Consular Branches were joint recipients of a Special Commendation under the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Public Sector Management.

### **Passport security**

The development of the 'M' series of Australian travel documents continued throughout 2002–03. The first release of the booklets is scheduled for December 2003. They will incorporate new and enhanced security features, ensuring that Australian travel documents remain among the most secure in the world.

We began to develop a centralised production centre for passports, selecting a site in Canberra where around 80 per cent of all passports will be personalised. Overseas, we have identified two regional production centres, London and Washington, to personalise passports applied for overseas, and work has begun to ensure they will be operational in time for the release of the 'M' series documents.

The 2002–03 Budget provided the department with \$3 million for research and development of a biometric identifier for the Australian passport (see box on page 135). The aim is to determine whether biometric technology can be used to strengthen identity verification processes and fraud detection capabilities. Proof of concept has been achieved, with research during 2002–03 showing that facial biometrics matching does work. Further funding to continue the project was obtained in the 2003–04 Budget. A case for implementation in 2004–05 will be put to the Government.

The department's initiative to use registered mail as the standard mail delivery system for Australian passports in Australia has proven successful. The average monthly number of passports reported missing in the mail in the second half of 2002–03 was 21, compared to a monthly average of 162 in 2001–02, when this system was not in use. While this initiative has significantly improved the security of passport delivery to clients, we are continuing efforts to improve the system.

We took or advanced a number of important policy initiatives in the passports area. We began a review of the *Passports Act 1938*, with a particular focus on security aspects and strengthening of sanctions for wrongdoers. The online validation service with state registrars of births, deaths and marriages was extended to Victoria and negotiations to extend it to other states and territories continue. We made considerable progress on the development of new passport application forms that include strengthened requirements for proof of identity. The new forms will be introduced globally from September 2003.

The department implemented several initiatives during 2002–03 under a national strategy to detect and prevent passport fraud. These initiatives included the development of a reference CD on identity documentation for passports staff and involvement in Australian Government working parties to strengthen identification requirements and fraud detection. We made progress in fraud and review audit programs in state passport offices and in participation by passport fraud investigators in nationally accredited training programs. Significant progress was also made in data cleansing of passport information.

### **Passport Client Service Charter**

The department commissioned a client service survey to assess whether we were meeting our Passports Client Service Charter obligations. The overall results—89 per cent of customers rated the services as good or very good (the highest rating available in the survey) with only two per cent finding the service poor—indicated that our client service standards were met.

## Revised passport guidelines

A human error resulted in an Australian embassy issuing a passport to an Australian citizen facing serious criminal charges overseas. The department has since issued revised instructions to all overseas posts emphasising that under the *Passports Act 1938*, the Minister has the discretion to refuse a passport in certain situations, including where a person might endanger the health, safety or rights and freedoms of other persons either in Australia or abroad. The instructions also underline the requirement for such matters to receive high-level attention, including formal dialogue between the head of the post and senior officers in Canberra.

### Biometrics in Australian passports

Based on the results the department has achieved with biometrics, Australia is well placed to become the first country in the world to use facial recognition technology in its passports. Research has shown that facial biometrics matching does work and is able to detect persons who have applied for a passport in a false identity. Provided our development work is successful, a biometric could be a feature of Australian passports in the second half of 2004.

Under the proposed system, a person's passport photo will be used to create a detailed electronic portrait of their face. This portrait will be stored on a tamper-proof microchip inside the passport. A computer will then compare this portrait to the face of the person presenting a passport at a border control point.

If adopted, facial recognition will improve identity verification processes and reduce fraud. It will also allow for more efficient and secure passenger processing at entry points in Australia and aid other countries in their border security.

The department has been at the forefront of efforts to have this technology accepted worldwide as an effective means of boosting passport security. We wrote the technical report that formed the basis of the International Civil Aviation Organization's decision in May 2003 to adopt facial recognition as the international standard for biometric identifiers in travel documents. This means that all countries intending to use biometrics are now obliged to use the ICAO-approved identifier to enable worldwide interoperability.

As our work to date has been entirely consistent with the ICAO decision, Australia has a head start.

**Table 11. Consular services provided to Australian travellers**

	2002-03	2001-02	2000-01	1999-00	1998-99
Australian travellers	3 429 960 <sup>1</sup>	3 467 000	3 452 000	3 332 300	3 188 700
Australians given general welfare and guidance	10 129 <sup>2</sup>	19 194	16 975	16 085	15 551
Hospitalised Australians given general welfare and guidance	864	722	766	656	681
Australians evacuated to another location for medical purposes	203	116	138	103	107
Next of kin guided or assisted with disposal of remains in relation to overseas deaths	681	639	547	604	548
Australians having difficulty arranging their return to Australia given guidance and assistance	109	81	71	60	57
Inquiries made about Australians overseas who could not be contacted by next of kin	5 767 <sup>3</sup>	1 838	1 712	1 850	1 659
Australians arrested overseas	649	649	568	453	476
Australians in prison overseas (as at 30 June 2003)	184	180	208	155	158
Australians in financial difficulty who were lent public funds to cover immediate needs (travellers' emergency loans)	610	739	738	775	896
<b>Total number of cases involving Australians in difficulty</b>	<b>19 196</b>	<b>24 158</b>	<b>21 723</b>	<b>20 741</b>	<b>20 133</b>
Notarial acts <sup>4</sup>	73 514	74 932	67 319	64 889	40 285
Total number of Australians provided with consular assistance	92 710	99 090	89 042	85 630	60 418

1 From ABS data.

2 This figure reflects changes made in statistical collection to better record consular casework 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'.

3 This figure relates to inquiries about actual cases at posts. Total inquiries, including non-case-related inquiries in Australia and at overseas posts, are reported under quantity indicators.

4 These figures include notarial acts performed at overseas posts, in Canberra and in state and territory offices.

## OUTPUT 2.1 QUALITY AND QUANTITY INFORMATION

### 2.1.1 Consular services

#### Quality indicators

- Satisfaction of the public and travel industry with consular services
- 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 posts
- 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 unexpected events or crises handled by the department, number of associated departmental Emergency Task Force and Inter-Departmental Emergency Task Force meetings held, and the duration of Crisis Centre operations

### Satisfaction of the public and the travel industry

The department is committed under the Consular Services Charter to providing effective, prompt and courteous consular services in an equitable way to all Australians and to protecting their privacy in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988*. Consular client feedback on our consular and information services remains very positive. In Canberra, we received 145 unsolicited letters and emails commenting positively on services provided in respect of particular consular cases and on our information service.

We received a further 892 letters and emails of general enquiry, which represents a 39 per cent increase over 2001–02. This increase can be attributed primarily to an increased focus on travel advice and consular services more generally, particularly in the wake of the Bali bombings, terrorist threats, the conflict in Iraq and the outbreak of the SARS virus. This trend is also evident in the number of public enquiries received at our overseas posts and in Canberra, which rose from 133 665 in 2001–02 to 430 349 in 2002–03.

Only a small number of letters and emails—less than four per cent of the total received—expressed dissatisfaction with the level of service we provided. In all instances of negative feedback we followed up directly with clients, investigated their concerns and provided a response explaining the circumstances, including in cases where we were unable to provide the services they expected.

The department continued to work to promote greater awareness of the extent of consular assistance services, including through the establishment of a section on our website outlining what consuls can and cannot do.

The travel industry provided close feedback through correspondence and at a range of forums. While the industry has been seriously affected by the uncertain international environment of the past year, in the main it understands and supports our work to ensure Australians' travel abroad is well-informed. This is reflected by the industry's support for and participation in the voluntary Government–Industry Charter for Safe Travel, launched by Mr Downer in June 2003.

In 2002–03, we surveyed travel industry views through an Internet-based survey. Results indicated that:

- travel agents assessed that 90 per cent of their clients had a greater awareness of the Government's travel advice compared with 12 months ago
- 88 per cent of travel agents were using travel advisories more frequently than 12 months ago
- 75 per cent judged that travel advice was easy to access
- more than 80 per cent indicated they expected to be accessing the Government's travel advice more frequently in the future.

We were responsive to industry feedback, developing a Frequently Asked Questions page on our website that outlines the Government's methodology in the formulation of travel advice, and the development of a training module to help travel agents use travel advice.

### **Consular crises and crisis management**

The department manages responses to crises through its Emergency Task Force and Inter-departmental Emergency Task Force. In 2002–03 the Inter-departmental Emergency Task Force met 129 times, compared to 17 during the previous reporting period. We convened 19 meetings on the Bali terrorist attacks, 92 meetings on Iraq, four on the Philippines, four on the Middle East and ten on East Timor.

The Crisis Centre was activated for 13 days to manage the Government's response to the Bali bombings and for 26 days for the conflict in Iraq. We also responded to a number of major consular events including:

- a meningococcal outbreak in an Australian tour group in Italy (July 2002)
- a hostage situation in Colombia (July 2002)
- two terrorist attacks in Pakistan (August 2002)
- attempted abductions in the Philippines (September 2002)
- civil disturbances on the Ivory Coast (September 2002)
- a terrorist bombing in Afghanistan (September 2002)
- a hostage situation in Russia (October 2002)

- a commercial plane crash in the Philippines (November 2002)
- terrorist bombings in Mombasa, Kenya (November 2002)
- a terrorist threat against Australian interests in Manila (November 2002)
- civil disturbances in East Timor (December 2002)
- an attempted coup in Venezuela (December 2002)
- terrorist bombings in Makasar, Indonesia (December 2002)
- a deterioration in the security situation in Zimbabwe (January 2003)
- an earthquake in Solomon Islands (January 2003)
- an earthquake in Mexico (January 2003)
- threats against international schools in Bali (March 2003)
- terrorist threats in Surabaya, Indonesia (March 2003)
- the outbreak of the SARS virus (April 2003)
- a terrorist bombing at Jakarta airport (April 2003)
- a deterioration in the security situation in Solomon Islands (May 2003)
- a military state of emergency declared in Aceh, Indonesia (May 2003)
- a terrorist attack in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (May 2003)
- a terrorist bombing in Casablanca, Morocco (May 2003)
- a mountaineering rescue in Tibet (May 2003)
- an evacuation of foreign nationals from Liberia (June 2003).

During the year we handled more than 130 higher-profile consular cases requiring the drafting of media talking points, and upgraded our travel advisories where concerns were held for the welfare of Australians overseas. We carefully scrutinised and provided up-to-date travel advice in response to a number of emergency situations during the year, including Bali (October 2002), terrorist threats against Australian interests in East Timor (September 2002), the Philippines (November 2002) and Indonesia (March 2003), the conflict in Iraq (March 2003) and the SARS virus (April–June 2003).

### **Suitability and effectiveness of contingency plans at overseas posts**

In 2002–03, contingency plans for a number of posts were tested by international developments. The bombings in Bali, the conflict in Iraq and planning for Anzac Day arrangements in Turkey generated considerable activity centred on the relevant posts' contingency plans.

Client satisfaction with plans was consistently high:

- The effectiveness of the Australian Government's response to the tragedy in Bali reflected the high quality of the contingency plan maintained by the post
- As tensions in the Middle East heightened in early 2003, we established a consultative committee involving other government agencies with a stake in contingency planning for the ten Middle East posts. These agencies complimented the posts' contingency plans and the consultative arrangements
- An Anzac Day-specific contingency plan we developed for ceremonies in Gallipoli was welcomed by the departments of Defence and Veterans Affairs, and security and intelligence agencies. It was praised as a useful template to develop for future similar events.

Drawing on the lessons learnt during the past year, we began in June 2003 a review of the contingency planning template provided to our posts, in consultation with the Department of Defence.

### **Response time to consular issues**

The department's consular operations are structured to allow immediate response to consular cases and international crises. Australians within Australia have free-call access to assistance around the clock. Outside business hours of their nearest consular post, Australians overseas have free-call or reverse-charge access to assistance through our 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre in Canberra or to local consular duty officers.

Within a few hours of the terrorist bombings in Bali, our crisis mechanisms were fully operational and assisting Australians with enquiries about family members or friends who may have been caught up in the tragedy. The magnitude of the Bali tragedy meant that the department has strengthened these facilities to allow better management of mass casualty cases in the future.

## Quantity information

Indicator	2002-03	2001-02
Number of Australians assisted overseas:		
Consular cases <sup>1</sup>	19 196	24 158
Public inquiries <sup>2</sup>	430 349	133 665
Notarial acts performed <sup>3</sup>	73 514	74 932
Travel advice notices issued <sup>4</sup>	593	705
Number of unexpected events or crises handled by the department	39	12
Number of associated departmental Emergency Task Force and Inter-departmental Emergency Task Force meetings held <sup>5</sup>	129	17
Duration of Crisis Centre operations <sup>6</sup>	39 days	9 days

- 1 These statistics refer to inquiries about actual cases at posts and do not include general inquiries on non-case-related consular matters (eg travel advice). These are now reported under public inquiries.
- 2 Public inquiries include inquiries on non-case related matters made at overseas posts and through the 1300 and 1800 call numbers in Australia.
- 3 These figures include notarial acts performed at overseas posts, in Canberra and in state and territory offices.
- 4 Travel advisories for all countries were reissued in 2001-02 following the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001. The department has maintained a system of regular updates to the advisories.
- 5 There were a number of departmental Emergency Task Force and Inter-departmental Emergency Task Force meetings held. They were for Bali 19, Philippines 4, Middle East 4, East Timor 10 and Iraq 92.
- 6 The increase in the duration of Crisis Centre operations was principally due to the Bali bombings.

## 2.1.2 Passport services

### Quality indicators

- Satisfaction of the public and travel industry with passport services
- Turnaround 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

### Satisfaction of the public and the travel industry

Results from the second customer satisfaction survey for the department confirmed that service was maintained at a high level; very few ratings indicated a decline since the first survey was conducted in April 2001 and some showed clear improvement. Customers rated the overall process of applying for a passport as follows: 89 per cent good/very good; nine per cent acceptable; two per cent poor.

Each passport production staff member (that is, non-management staff at passport offices) produced on average 5832 passports in 2002–03 compared to 6335 in 2001–02, reflecting reduced demand for passports.

The great majority of passport applicants lodge their applications at an Australia Post outlet and the client survey found that the majority of applicants received attention in under ten minutes. Under the Australia Post outreach training program, departmental training officers conducted training seminars for post office staff at several metropolitan and rural centres during the year and provided one-on-one training at 82 postal outlets.

### Turnaround time for passport issue

The average passport turnaround time for applications lodged in Australia was 6.4 days, well under the ten day turnaround time in the Client Service Charter. This was a similar level of service to the previous year.

The number of passports issued in 2002–03 was 906 049, down eight per cent on the previous year (986 316), the decrease reflecting the downturn in international travel due to security concerns and the spread of the SARS virus. Of this figure:

- 65 792 passports were issued overseas compared to 68 077 in the previous year
- 112 525 applicants paid the \$60 priority processing fee to have their application processed within 48 hours. Of these, 525 were refunded on compassionate grounds and 24 because the 48-hour standard was not met.

- 32 479 passports were reported lost or stolen, of which 6805 were lost or stolen overseas
- 535 cases of passport fraud were detected in 2002–03 compared to 586 the previous year.

The Australian Passport Information Service (APIS) received 1 123 133 calls during the year of which 28 per cent were answered by the integrated voice response system and the remainder by a passport adviser. The majority of calls related to travel document renewals. APIS mailed out over 234 000 renewal applications and responded to 48 267 emails. The service levels achieved by APIS were well within contractual performance benchmarks, with caller waiting times averaging 47 seconds and call duration averaging 125 seconds.

### Quantity information

Indicator	2002–03	2001–02
Number of passport enquiries handled by the Australian Passport Information Service <sup>1</sup>	1 123 133	1 206 736
Number of travel documents issued, including urgent issues <sup>2</sup>	906 049	986 316

1 The decrease in the number of inquiries handled reflects the downturn in international travel due to security concerns and the spread of the SARS virus.

2 Travel documents include passports, documents of identity, certificates of identity and convention travel documents. The decrease in the number of documents issued again reflects the downturn in international travel.

## ADMINISTERED ITEM FOR OUTCOME 2

### *Travellers' Emergency Loans*

#### Quality indicator

- Travellers' emergency loans granted to Australian travellers in accordance with the guidelines laid down in the Consular Instructions

#### Quantity indicator

- Number of Australian travellers assisted by emergency loans
- Success of debt recovery activities

During 2002–03, 610 travellers' emergency loans, including repatriations, were granted in accordance with the guidelines laid down in the consular handbook. This compares to 739 loans granted in 2001–02. Decisions to issue emergency loans are made on a case-by-case basis, and only when it has been established that the concerns for an individual's welfare warrant such assistance and that the individual has no alternative means to access funds, including through family members in Australia. Loans were also made through the Prisoner Loans Scheme to 35 Australians imprisoned overseas.

The department issued \$200 547 in travellers' emergency loans. We issue emergency loans on the basis of a traveller's need and not on their ability to repay, which can affect the success of debt recovery efforts. Higher repatriation costs can also influence debt recovery rates. We use all means available to encourage repayment of loans, including making a person's eligibility for a new passport subject to repayment of the loan. A total of \$104 051 was repaid in 2002–03.

#### Quantity information

Indicator	2002–03	2001–02
Number of Australian travellers assisted by emergency loans	610	739
Success of debt recovery activities	\$104 051	\$114 507





*Deputy Director of the department's Tasmanian State Office, Martin Randle, promoted exports at AGFEST, Tasmania's largest agricultural show, in May 2003.*



*Australian Ambassador to Thailand, Miles Kupa, hosted a reception for the premiere of the film, Lantana, to mark the start of the 2nd Australian Film Festival in Thailand in May 2003. The festival was organised in cooperation with EGV Entertainment Plc and FM 107 Right Radio. From left, Mr Jackie Russell, Program Director of FM 107 Right Radio, Ms Zuly Chudori, Ambassador Miles Kupa, Mr Wichai Poolwaraluk, Executive President of EGV Entertainment Plc and Mr Sophat Sithisomwong, Chief Marketing Officer of EGV Entertainment Plc.*



*Australian Consul-General to Los Angeles the Hon. John Olsen, addressed the Anzac Day commemorative service held in Los Angeles in April 2003.*