

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 FOR OUTCOME 2

QUALITY AND QUANTITY



*Australian Honorary Consul in Seattle, Len Reid, presented a Certificate of Citizenship on Australia Day 2004, to Lachlan Nguyen Kiem, the adopted son of Sandra and Eric (pictured).
Photo: Tony Ramsey*



A staff member in the Passport Production Centre at the Royal Australian Mint explained some of the security features of the new M-series passport to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Alexander Downer, at the series' launch in November 2003. Pictured looking on is the centre's manager, Walter Valeri.



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.

TABLE 10. FINANCIAL AND STAFFING RESOURCES SUMMARY FOR OUTCOME 2

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

	Budget* 2003–2004 (\$'000)	Actual 2003–2004 (\$'000)	Variation (actual less budget) (\$'000)	Budget** 2004–2005 (\$'000)
Administered expenses				
Emergency advances to Australian travellers	200	(1)	(200)	200
Passport and consular refunds under s.28 Special Appropriation	0	237	237	0
Total administered expenses	200	237	37	200
Price of departmental outputs				
Output 2.1—Consular and passport services	149 263	146 410	(2 853)	146 838
Appropriation from government for departmental outputs	149 263	146 410	(2 853)	146 838
Revenue from other sources	0	4 124	4 124	0
Total price of departmental outputs	149 263	150 534	1 271	146 838
Total resourcing for Outcome 2 (Price of departmental outputs plus administered expenses)	149 463	150 771	1 308	147 038

* Full-year budget, including additional estimates

** Budget prior to additional estimates

(1) Emergency advances to Australian travellers are not expensed in the Profit and Loss statement; rather they are treated as receivables in the balance sheet

	2003–2004 Budget	2003–2004 (Actual)	2004–2005 (Estimate)
Average staffing level (number)*	671	668	665

* Includes overseas locally engaged staff

OUTPUT 2.1:

Consular and passport services

2.1.1 CONSULAR SERVICES

2.1.2 PASSPORT SERVICES

Overview

The department delivered high-quality consular and passport services to Australians travelling and living overseas and to their families in Australia.

The first anniversary memorial service for the victims of the Bali bombings, and terrorist attacks in Indonesia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Spain and elsewhere, were compelling reminders of the difficult international security environment faced by Australian travellers. High priority was given to providing continuing support to the survivors and families and friends of the victims of the Bali bombings, including through the organisation of the moving memorial service in October 2003 and support for those survivors who appeared at the trial of the perpetrators.



Angky Septiana OAM, former locally engaged staff member of the Australian Consulate-General in Bali, placed flowers in the Remembrance Pond at the 1st Anniversary ceremony of the Bali bombings. Photo: AUSPIC/David Foote.

As part of the Government's commitment to keeping Australians informed about risks overseas, Mr Downer launched a major \$9.7 million public information campaign, *smartraveller*, to promote safe overseas travel. A total of 527 travel advisory updates were issued for 144 destinations, providing Australians with up-to-date advice on security and related conditions at overseas destinations. The department worked to combat child sex tourism overseas through cooperative arrangements with child protection advocacy groups and representations to governments on Australia's strong commitment to protecting children from sexual exploitation.

Throughout 2003–04, consular staff directly helped almost 13 000 Australians with a wide range of challenging consular problems. Every day an average of two Australians died overseas. On average, another two were hospitalised, with many requiring evacuation to Australia for treatment. At least two more were arrested on charges ranging from kissing in public to suspicion of participation in terrorist activities.

The department strengthened its capacity, with other agencies, to respond to mass-casualty or terrorism incidents involving Australians overseas. Our crisis management arrangements were tested through the hostage-taking incident in Manila in July 2003 and the bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in August 2003. We invested considerable effort in advance contingency planning for the Anzac Day services in Turkey and for the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Greece.

Passport applications increased significantly in October 2003 and continued to rise for the remainder of the financial year. This increase in demand saw applications received at an average rate of 12 per cent above projections. While we gave considerable attention to dealing with the influx, the average turnaround time grew from 6.7 to 9.4 days. As the situation showed no signs of abating, we implemented a strategy to deal with the possibility of a prolonged period of increased demand. This included increasing staff numbers in passport offices, an extensive recruitment program and improvements to our production system.

We introduced a new and more secure passport in December 2003 and made substantial changes to passport production arrangements. We introduced centralised production in Australia and overseas to improve the security and efficiency of the passports issuing system. We continued our development of a biometric identifier for the Australian passport and created a new section in the department dedicated exclusively to fraud-related work.

The department enhanced online passport services in November 2003, reflecting our continuing focus on client services. Users can complete and download an application form and get information about the status of an application. Other online services include the ability to report a lost or stolen passport and to pay priority processing fees. These new services have proved very popular with the Australian public.

Remembering Bali: First anniversary memorial service

On 12 October 2003, the department organised—in cooperation with Indonesian authorities and other Australian Government agencies—a memorial service in Bali for the first anniversary of the Bali terrorist attacks, which killed 88 Australians and 114 others. It was a dignified tribute to the victims and sent an important message of comfort to their families and to Australians generally.

More than 2000 people attended the memorial service, including the Prime Minister, Indonesia's then Security Minister, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and around 500 family members of the victims and survivors. Organisation of the service at an outdoor venue in Bali was a major logistical challenge, involving more than 40 staff of the department from the consulate-general in Bali, the embassy in Jakarta and from Canberra.

Departmental staff worked closely with colleagues from Centrelink, the Australian Federal Police, the Department of Defence and other agencies in arranging the event and supporting Australian families in Bali. We organised visits for families and survivors to the Sanglah hospital—where many victims were treated—and the site of the bombing. Our state and territory offices made a valuable contribution by helping the families before their departure from Australia.

The Prime Minister and Australian families expressed warm appreciation for the work of officials in organising what was a very appropriate and moving service.

Consular services

Consular services are among the most important—and often the most challenging—tasks performed by the department. They include helping Australians who are hospitalised or imprisoned, helping families when Australians die, are injured or go missing, and coordinating evacuations when necessary from trouble spots.

Accessibility of consular services

The department improved the accessibility of its consular services through the expansion of the consular network. Mr Downer agreed to the establishment of two further consulates headed by honorary consuls in Almaty, Kazakhstan and Lagos, Nigeria. This brings the total number of consulates headed by Honorary Consuls to 49.

We reached agreement with Canada to provide consular services to Australians in Afghanistan, Ghana and Venezuela. Canada now offers consular services to Australians in 21 countries.

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) undertook a follow-up audit to its Audit Report of March 2001 on the administration of consular services. It found that over the past two years, the department had responded to changes in global security by expanding public access to travel information and consular assistance, particularly during crisis situations. The ANAO noted that new systems were in place to centralise monitoring of key consular activities, to improve risk assessment, and to strengthen post contingency plans. The ANAO also found that some aspects of project management, and documentation of key consular processes and decisions, could be strengthened for greater efficiency and effectiveness. The department agreed with the ANAO's two recommendations in these areas.

Travel advice: protecting Australians overseas

Against a backdrop of strong media and community interest in the department's consular information services, we continued to improve the format, presentation and dissemination of travel advisories. Travel advisories provide up-to-date, practical information about most destinations to which Australians travel, helping Australians make informed decisions about travelling safely. A total of 527 travel advice updates were issued during the year, and the number of destinations covered by travel advisories grew from 139 to 144. These included advisories for a number of countries where the security risk is low but where there is a high volume of travel by Australians, such as New Zealand.

The department paid particularly close attention to alerting Australians to possible terrorist and other security-related threats that could affect their safety overseas. Mindful of the need to ensure that advice remains credible in the public mind and is not blunted by a perception that risk is overstated, we took further steps to strengthen the link between travel advice and the country threat assessments produced by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation's new National Threat Assessment Centre.

The Government provided the department with new funding to improve significantly the dissemination of travel advisories. A four-year, \$9.7 million public information campaign, *smartraveller*, was launched by Mr Downer in September 2003 (see box below). As part of the *smartraveller* campaign we redesigned the consular pages on the department's website (*smartraveller.gov.au*), promoting further easy access to our advice. Market surveys showed the Internet to be the most popular method of accessing travel advice. The 164 000 web page-views per week (a 27 per cent increase over the average for the previous year) and over 42 000 email subscribers to travel advice updates (up from 25 000 last year) confirmed that trend. A new automated *smartraveller* telephone service (1300 139 281) was introduced to ensure travel advisories were accessible to Australians without Internet access. It registered an average of 3000 calls a month.

The department continued to work closely and cooperatively with the Australian travel industry. We secured a significant increase in membership of the Charter for Safe Travel and agreement from the Australian Federation of Travel Agents (AFTA) to make

participation in the Charter a condition of AFTA membership. Charter members—currently numbering over 1150—promote awareness and use of the department’s travel advisories and work with the Government to promote safe travel. In May 2004 we established the joint government–industry *smartraveller* Consultative Committee to further strengthen cooperation and advance the aims of the Charter. A large number of travel agents in Sydney and Melbourne, as well as 100 branch managers from the Student Travel Association, received training from departmental officers on travel advice.



It’s a must see destination

On 7 September 2003, Mr Downer launched the Government’s travel advice public information campaign—*smartraveller.gov.au: it’s a must see destination*—at Adelaide International Airport. Over the next few years, the \$9.7 million campaign will highlight a simple but important message for all Australian travellers: consult travel advice as part of routine preparation for overseas travel. The campaign aims to broaden the public’s understanding of the Government’s travel advisory service.

The campaign is built on targeted national television and print advertising, and a new-look for consular information on the website *smartraveller.gov.au*. The website is a critical tool for disseminating travel advice to travellers and the campaign has already resulted in a marked increase in the number of people accessing travel advice via the website.

Early research indicates a significant increase in awareness of the Government’s travel advice as a result of the campaign. There has also been a significant increase in the number of travellers who consider it a high priority to check the advice before travel. A very high percentage of travellers now acknowledge that it is their responsibility to be informed before they travel. Research also indicates that the campaign is not dissuading people from travelling but is informing them of the risks before they go.

The campaign also includes:

- a *smartraveller* automated phone service that provides travel advice 24 hours a day
- consular touchscreen kiosks installed in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Darwin and Adelaide international airports and in the Canberra and Sydney passport offices.

In addition to the *smartraveller* campaign, we undertook a range of other public information activities to raise awareness of travel advice and consular services. We participated in eleven holiday and travel expos in capital cities. Feedback from

attendees at the expos about our consular service (an average of 15 000 people attended), including our online *smartraveller* information, was overwhelmingly positive.

Our 14 consular information publications continued to generate considerable public interest, with nearly 1.3 million paper brochures distributed throughout the year. We continue to promote online access to the brochures, including through our redesigned website. In line with *smartraveller* branding we updated the content and style of most of our publications—such as *Hints for Australian travellers*—and published two new brochures. In particular, in anticipation of strong public appetite for information about travelling to the Olympic Games in Athens in August 2004, we prepared and distributed over 5500 copies of a new *Travelling to the Athens Olympics* brochure.



Efforts to combat child sex crime overseas

The department further boosted its efforts to combat the sexual exploitation of children overseas, including through improved inter-agency consultation with the Australian Federal Police, the Attorney-General's Department and AusAID. We undertook a program to brief foreign governments on Australia's child sex tourism legislation and underlined the Government's strong commitment to working with international partners to punish the perpetrators of such crimes. The response to our representations was positive. A number of countries sought further advice on Australian government child protection strategies, ongoing information exchange, and model legislation.

The department used its consular public information program to deliver strong messages against child sex tourism and to raise awareness of the serious criminal penalties for these crimes. We launched a revised bulletin on the *smartraveller* website warning travellers against involvement in child sex crimes overseas and

included references to the extra-territorial application of Australian law relating to child sex crimes in all travel advisories. We implemented new guidelines to help staff properly manage and report cases of child sexual exploitation.

Our work against child sex crimes also included closer cooperation with a key child protection advocacy group, Child Wise—a leading international non-government organisation fighting child sex tourism. We endorsed a public information campaign entitled *Don't let child abuse travel* that was launched by Child Wise in December 2003. We promoted the campaign through our overseas missions and state and territory offices.

Responsiveness to consular crises

The difficult international security environment presents a continuing challenge in ensuring our crisis management arrangements are effective, particularly in the event of any mass-casualty incident involving Australians overseas. During the reporting period we twice activated our systems, including the standing interdepartmental emergency task force mechanism—during the hostage taking in Manila (July 2003), which involved Australia's Ambassador, and the Marriott Hotel bombing in Jakarta (August 2003).

In the case of the Marriott bombing, our officials from the embassy in Jakarta were at the scene within 15 minutes of the bombing. They worked quickly to establish the safety and whereabouts of Australian guests that evening. The embassy established within one hour of the explosion the identities of the two Australians who had been affected. The department's Canberra-based crisis centre and emergency call unit, which took 350 calls, were operating within two hours of the explosion.

Contingency planning has been refined and improved over the past year. Building on the whole-of-government response to the Bali bombings, the department has worked closely with other agencies to strengthen rapid-response capabilities across agencies in the event of a mass-casualty incident overseas. We have also made improvements to the management and critical evaluation of overseas posts' contingency plans.

In recognition of the need for continuous preparedness in the event of a crisis overseas, the department introduced further technical improvements to the emergency call unit, which will improve handling and monitoring of telephone calls. We have also trained an additional 145 of our staff for work in the crisis centre and the emergency call unit.

In cooperation with other relevant government agencies, the department developed detailed contingency plans for the Anzac Day commemoration ceremony in Turkey. Work continued with the Greek Government and the Australian Olympic and Paralympic Committees to ensure that an appropriate level of security would be provided by the Greek Government to protect Australian athletes, officials and travellers to Athens for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Detailed contingency plans were also developed to enable the Government to respond to an emergency over the Games period.

Assisting Australians overseas

The department helped over 12 900 Australians overseas, compared with 19 000 in 2002–03. This decrease is mainly due to the large number of cases in 2002–03 associated with the Bali bombings, particularly hospitalisation cases, medical evacuations and whereabouts inquiries. Despite the renewed growth in the number of Australians travelling overseas, there was a welcome decline in most categories of consular cases over the past year, including medical cases, deaths, general welfare cases and Australians requiring financial assistance. This suggests a greater degree of care and preparation by Australians travelling overseas, consistent with key messages in the *smartraveller* campaign. There were, however, increases in the number of Australians arrested and imprisoned overseas. See table 11 for details.

Many of the cases we managed were complex and difficult, reflecting the kinds of divergent cultural practices, legal loopholes and local security risks about which we seek to warn Australians through our travel advisories. They include, for example, the rescue of a woman at risk from traditional witchdoctor practices in Africa, repatriation of a woman at grave risk of an ‘honour’ killing, and the repatriation of a number of young girls offered as child brides. We also helped a young man return to Australia from an overseas holiday in his ancestral homeland, where he had found an arranged marriage and a commitment to military service waiting for him.

In continuing our constructive work with consular partner governments, the department hosted the Five-Nation Consular Colloque in Sydney in March 2004, which drew together the heads of the consular services from Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand. The colloque was an opportunity to discuss emerging challenges in the consular field, including passport security, children’s issues, comparison of travel advice preparation and examination of opportunities for coordination of crisis response arrangements overseas. All governments thanked the department for the assistance rendered by Australia to their nationals caught up in the Bali bombings.

Mr Downer signed a Consular Agreement with Vietnam with the Vietnamese Foreign Minister in July 2003. The agreement will help Australian consular officials deliver consular services with greater certainty to Australians in Vietnam, including dual nationals.

The department also delivers a wide range of services to Australians either resident or visiting overseas for other government agencies. In consultation with the Australian Electoral Commission, we have set in place new arrangements for providing voting services overseas for federal elections, including through early provision of ballot papers electronically to our overseas missions. We experienced an 18 per cent increase in the number of notarial acts undertaken by the department in Australia and overseas.

TABLE 11. CONSULAR SERVICES PROVIDED TO AUSTRALIAN TRAVELLERS

	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Australian travellers ¹	3 417 140*	3 670 260*	3 459 970*	3 379 500 ¹	4 021 230
Australians given general welfare and guidance ²	16 085	16 975	19 914	10 129	9 478
Hospitalised Australians given general welfare and guidance	656	766	722	864	666
Australians evacuated to another location for medical purposes	103	138	116	203	81
Next of kin guided or assisted with disposal of remains in relation to overseas deaths	604	547	639	681	547
Australians having difficulty arranging their own return to Australia given guidance and assistance	60	71	81	109	66
Inquiries made about Australians overseas who could not be contacted by their next of kin ³	1 850	1 712	1 838	5767	711
Australians arrested overseas	453	568	649	649	728
Australians in prison overseas (as at 30 June)	155	208	180	184	215
Australians in financial difficulty who were lent public funds to cover immediate needs (travellers' emergency loans)	775	738	739	610	454
Total number of cases involving Australians in difficulty	20 741	21 723	24 158	19 196	12 946
Notarial acts ⁴	64 889*	67 319*	74 932*	73 514	87 545
Total number of Australians provided with consular assistance	85 630	89 042	99 090	92 710	100 491

1 These figures draw on ABS data and include permanent departures, long term departures and short term departures of Australian residents.

2 The method of data collection for general welfare and guidance has been defined more precisely and includes the following sub-categories: assaults (126), theft (3925), welfare of children (325) and other serious welfare matters (3925). Estimates of non-case consular welfare matters, which were recorded here until 2001-02, are now recorded separately under quantity information—overseas post non-case enquiries.

3 These statistics refer specifically to inquiries about actual cases at posts. Total inquiries, including non-case-related inquiries, in Australia and at overseas posts, are recorded under quantity information.

* These figures have been revised following revisions to ABS data.

4 Includes notarial acts performed by overseas posts, Canberra and state and territory offices in Australia.

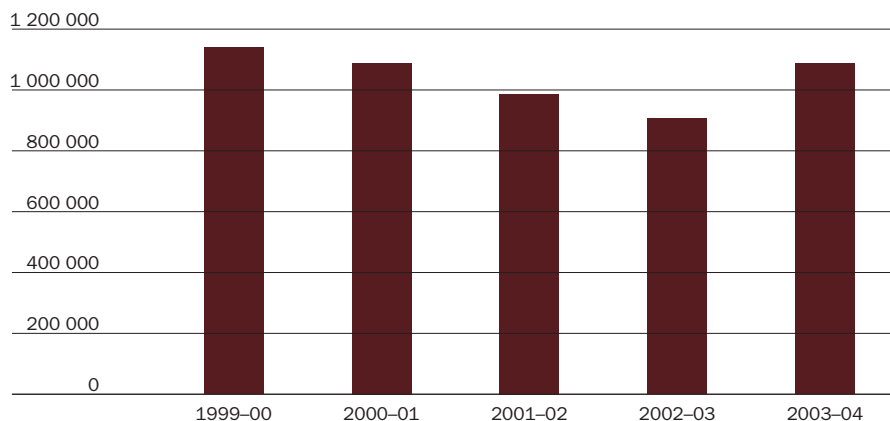
Passport services

The department provides Australian citizens with passport services under the *Passports Act 1938* through its passport offices in nine cities around Australia and our diplomatic and consular missions overseas. Australia Post conducts interviews throughout Australia on behalf of the department. We have made available information about the passport issuing process and requirements via the Australian Passport Information Service (APIS) and the passports website. The department took a number of initiatives during the year to improve passport services.

In a major organisational reform, passport production was centralised with the introduction of the new M-series passport in December 2003. This initiative was taken to improve the security and efficiency of the issuing process. Since then, 80 per cent of the production in Australia has been undertaken at a new facility at the Royal Australian Mint in Canberra. Applications from posts in Asia and the Pacific have also been processed at this facility. Similar production centres were established in Washington and London to handle applications lodged overseas. We engaged a safehand commercial courier service to return passports from these production centres to posts. We introduced an emergency passport overseas to meet the needs of Australians who could not wait the ten days customary processing period to receive a new passport.

Demand for Australian travel documents grew significantly during the year with 1 086 366 documents issued compared to 906 049 for the previous year. The stronger Australian dollar and resulting decrease in the cost of overseas travel appeared to be a contributing factor. Analysis suggests that the increased rate of applications also represents a catch-up in demand following the substantial drop experienced after the events of 11 September 2001, the Bali bombings and the outbreak of the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) virus. Average staff levels in passport offices were increased by 50 to 230 to cope with the heavy demand.

FIGURE 14. TRAVEL DOCUMENTS APPROVED



Australia Post continued to provide ease of access for Australians attending a passport interview, with 84.7 per cent of all applications in Australia lodged by this method. Training was a key element of our partnership with Australia Post, resulting in a reduction in the national interview error rate from 4 per cent in 2002–03 to 3.5 per cent in 2003–04.

Passport services were further improved in November 2003 with the introduction of a range of interactive online services designed to provide the public with continuous access to passport services. This completed Phase 2 of the four-phased 'passports online' strategy, for which the Government has allocated \$3.1 million. Australians are now able to complete application forms online, pay priority processing fees, report a passport lost or stolen, track the progress of an application and view personal passport details online. Response to the new services has been very positive with 82 504 application forms downloaded, 57 550 clients viewing the status of their application in the production process, 186 032 passport ready emails being sent to clients and 202 clients having paid the priority processing fee online. A content management system will be introduced in 2004–05, as part of the next phase, to manage the regular update of passport online information. An online passport renewal service will also be introduced.

Introduction of the M-series passport

The department introduced a new and more secure Australian passport—the M-series—in December 2003 as a replacement for the L-series, which had been in use since 1995.

The M-series passport blends the latest in secure printing techniques with technical sophistication. It includes state-of-the-art security features which have been designed to ensure that any attempt to tamper with the document will be clearly evident. While some of these features are visible to the naked eye, others require the use of special detection devices.

Careful design has achieved balance between durability and the need for sensitive security improvements. This combination has been designed to indicate quickly and clearly that the document is a genuine Australian passport.

One obvious change is the relocation of the data page from the inside cover to the first free-standing page in the document. This change was made to make this important part of the booklet more tamper-resistant. The most striking feature of the new data page is the images of small and large kangaroos embedded in the laminate. Viewed under normal lighting, these kangaroos appear to hop when the page is moved up and down.

The security printing techniques employed in the M-series passport include intaglio printing, microprinting and complexity of design. Many of the visa pages contain microtext in the background incorporating the words to *Waltzing Matilda*. There are also special watermarks featuring kangaroos and the Federation Star.

The department manages a contract with Centrelink for the provision of the Australian Passport Information Service (APIS). This service provides advice and assistance to the public on all passport matters seven days a week. Arrangements are in place to expand the APIS network to handle passport calls from Australians resident in New Zealand.

Efforts to combat passport fraud remained a high priority during the year. We worked closely with other agencies on a whole-of-government approach to develop a common proof-of-identity procedure and to enhance identity validation arrangements between agencies. A major review of the department's Passport Fraud and Review Unit was also undertaken to ensure we had the capacity and specialised skills to meet the challenges posed by an increase in identity-related fraud. This review led to the creation of a new Passport Fraud Section within the department.

Passport security

Passport security was improved by a number of new measures, particularly with the introduction of the new, and more secure, M-series passport in December 2003. Other initiatives included the introduction of new passport forms designed to strengthen the proof-of-identity requirements. A new change of name policy ensures



*Three-year old Sally Jackson (centre) and her two-year old brother, Alan, received the first M-series passports issued in Manila from Australia's Ambassador to the Philippines, Ruth Pearce.
Photo: Rey Mondez.*

that passports are only issued in the applicant's birth name or a name formally registered with the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Procedures to improve the quality control of the finished passport and to identify errors before the document is issued to the customer were introduced in December 2003 with the new centralised production arrangements. We continued efforts to minimise the number of passports lost in the mail. We made good progress in negotiating a new secure delivery arrangement with Australia Post. A costed proposal is now under examination in the department.

Negotiations began to provide Interpol, New Zealand and the United States with data on Australian lost and stolen passports. This initiative will help control the illegal use of these documents.

The Government provided the department with new funding of \$3 million in 2003–04 for more research and development on the use of facial biometric technology in travel documents. We improved matching rates for identity verification and fraud control and produced a prototype biometrically enabled Australian passport.

Passport Client Service Charter

During 2003–04, the department reviewed the Passports Client Service Charter. As a result of this review we drafted a revised interim Charter in June 2004.

The Charter commits the department to a turnaround time of ten working days. A significant increase in passport demand from November 2003 saw a slippage of passport turnaround times from 6.7 days in 2002–03 to 9.4 working days in 2003–04.

The department has implemented measures to ensure that the turnaround time is lowered during 2004–05. A major revision of the Passports Client Service Charter will also be undertaken.

Passport legislation

The department prepared legislation introduced into Parliament in June 2004 to replace the *Passports Act 1938* and to provide a modern legal structure to maintain access by Australian citizens to passports of the highest integrity while ensuring passports law complements national security, border protection, Australian law-enforcement measures and international law-enforcement cooperation.

The Australian Passports Bill 2004:

- increases penalties for passport fraud
- provides measures to minimise problems caused by lost and stolen passports
- establishes an improved mechanism for refusal or cancellation of a passport on law-enforcement and security grounds.

The Australian Passports (Application Fees) Bill 2004 seeks to create a simpler structure to deal with changes in the costs and validity of Australian travel documents.

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 inquiries 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, through its network of overseas posts, helps Australians in trouble overseas. The department's Consular Services Charter signifies our commitment to delivering effective, prompt and courteous service in an equitable way to all Australians as well as our obligation to protecting their privacy in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988*. Client feedback on our consular and information services is, for the most part, positive. As part of our continuous improvement program, and consistent with a recommendation by the Australian National Audit Office, we are developing our complaints handling mechanism, which will be introduced in the second half of 2004.

We received 363 952 public inquiries in 2003–04, a fall of 15 per cent from 2002–03. There was increased interest from people seeking information before they travel—one of the main aims of the *smartraveller* public information campaign.

In Canberra, we received 50 letters and emails commenting positively on services provided for particular consular cases and on our information service. We received a further 400 letters and emails containing general inquiries. This represents a fall of 55 per cent from 2002–03, which was dominated by correspondence on the Bali bombings and the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) virus.

We received 68 items of correspondence expressing either dissatisfaction or misunderstandings about elements of our service. The majority of this correspondence related to our travel advice. This reflected, in part, the greater public awareness of travel advice generated by the *smartraveller* public information campaign. Some clients expressed dissatisfaction about navigating the website. In all instances, we responded to complaints after investigating the concerns and, where warranted, have taken corrective action. Following a comprehensive review, we redesigned our *smartraveller* webpages to take account of a number of issues raised by clients.

The department's relations with the travel industry were strengthened during the year. We worked closely with the industry through the voluntary government–industry Charter for Safe Travel, which now extends to over 1150 industry participants. We established a '*smartraveller* Consultative Committee' to: review implementation of the goals of the Charter for Safe Travel; channel industry and traveller feedback on the *smartraveller* campaign; and discuss the presentation and dissemination of travel advice.

We received positive feedback on our training for travel agents in Sydney and Melbourne and Branch managers from the Student Travel Association (STA). Peak travel bodies commended the department for our program of consultations on issues related to travel advice and the safety of Australian travellers, including attendance at eleven travel industry expositions. The Australian Federation of Travel Agents strongly endorsed both the content and reach of our public information activities in support of the *smartraveller* campaign. The Eastern Mediterranean Tourism Association described the department's dialogue with the travel industry as 'groundbreaking'.

We commissioned market research on the impact of the *smartraveller* campaign. Results indicated that:

- 88 per cent of respondents were satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the information provided on the *smartraveller.gov.au* web site
- a significant majority of travellers (60–80 per cent) intended to access travel advice during the year. (This was borne out by an increase in web site views to 270 000 per week in 2003–2004)
- 40–55 per cent of respondents said *smartraveller.gov.au* was the best source of up-to-date information on their overseas destination
- 92 per cent of respondents said the *smartraveller* advertisements contained useful information
- 90 per cent of travel agents reported that they encouraged customers to access travel advice.

Consular crises and crisis management

The department manages responses to crises through its Emergency Task Force, an Inter-departmental Emergency Task Force (IDETF) and the department's Crisis Centre. In 2003–04 the IDETF met on six occasions—in response to the hostage taking in Manila in July 2003 and the Marriott hotel bombing in Jakarta in August 2003.

The Crisis Centre was activated on two occasions for a total of five days during 2003–2004 to manage the Government's response to the hostage taking incident in Manila and the Marriott bombing in Jakarta. The IDETF mechanism was tested in August 2003 for a hostage-taking training exercise to ensure staff were prepared in the event of another crisis.

We responded to a number of major consular events including:

- terrorist bombings in Mumbai, India—August 2003
- a bus crash in Scotland—September 2003
- detentions in Aceh—September 2003
- civil unrest in Bolivia—October 2003
- terrorist threats in Indonesia—October 2003
- a ferry accident New York—October 2003
- continuing Maoist activity in Nepal—October 2003
- floods in Sumatra—November 2003
- continuing terrorist attacks in Iraq
- terrorist bombings in Istanbul—November 2003
- a hostage situation in Nigeria—November 2003
- an outbreak of avian influenza in Asia—January 2004
- a plane crash Uzbekistan—January 2004
- civil unrest in Southern Thailand—January 2004
- cyclone Ivy in New Caledonia—March 2004
- terrorist attacks in Madrid—March 2004
- terrorist bombings in Ankara—April 2004
- terrorist bombings in Riyadh—April 2004

- an anarchist attack in Athens—May 2004
- a terrorist threat against foreign interests in Sulawesi, Indonesia—May 2004
- the security situation in Pakistan—May 2004
- terrorist attacks involving Australians in Saudi Arabia—May 2004
- an assault on the Australian Honorary Consul in Colombia—May 2004
- a plane crash in Indonesia—June 2004
- a hostage situation in Jamaica—June 2004.

During the year, we handled more than 145 high-profile consular cases and upgraded our travel advice where concerns were held for the welfare of Australians overseas. The department exceeded the 'best practice' benchmark for issuing travel advisories set by the Australian National Audit Office (quarterly review of each advice). We carefully scrutinised and updated our travel advisories in response to changing security environments. A number of travel advisories were updated on several occasions to advise Australians of changing security environments, including Indonesia (14 issues), Saudi Arabia (10 issues), Philippines (eight issues) and Iraq (8 issues).

Suitability and effectiveness of contingency plans at overseas posts

During the year, we conducted an audit of all contingency plans to ensure they were up-to-date. We introduced a more formal mechanism for critical evaluation of post contingency plans, which provides clearer and more consistent feedback to posts on the quality of their plans. We continued our efforts to improve contingency planning—developing a number of event-specific plans for occasions where Australians were expected to gather in numbers. In the lead up to the Olympic Games in Athens we established a consultative committee involving other government and non-government agencies with a stake in contingency planning arrangements, including the Australian Olympic and Paralympic Committees.

Client satisfaction with plans was consistently high:

- the contingency plan we developed for the first anniversary memorial service for the victims of the Bali bombings plan was commended by Centrelink, the Australian Federal Police, the Department of Defence and other agencies involved in planning the event
- we developed a specific contingency plan for Anzac Day commemorations in Turkey, which was commended by the departments of Defence and Veterans Affairs and security and intelligence agencies.

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 24 hours a day for seven days a week. Outside the opening hours of their nearest consular post, Australians overseas have free-call or reverse-charge access to assistance from our 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre in Canberra or to local consular duty officers. We have enhanced our emergency call unit facilities through new telephone technology allowing us to monitor queues more precisely and divert calls appropriately to help ensure our clients receive assistance in a timely manner.

The ability of the department to respond promptly to incidents in which Australians were injured or killed overseas was demonstrated on a number of occasions during the year. In September 2003, the high commission in London responded promptly following the crash of a bus in Scotland in which a number of Australians were injured, some seriously. London despatched three consular officers within the day, one each to the hospitals where the injured Australians were transferred and one to the site of the crash where welcome support was provided to survivors.

In many locations where the department is not represented, we engage the assistance of consular partner governments—particularly Canada, with which we have a formal consular sharing agreement—and other government agencies that may be better placed to respond quickly. Our ability to respond promptly to situations in countries where we have no representation was demonstrated by our response to the murder of an Australian in Afghanistan, which presented particular challenges for our post in Islamabad. Working with US authorities in Afghanistan, our post tasked Australian defence officials to ensure the safe return of his remains to Australia. We registered through our embassy in Washington our interest in the progress of the investigation into his murder.

Quantity information for output 2.1: consular services

Indicator	2003–04	2002–03
Number of Australians assisted overseas:		
Consular cases ¹	12 946	19 196
Public inquiries ²	363 952	430 349
Notarial acts performed ³	87 545	73 514
Travel advice notices issued	527	593
Number of unexpected events or crises handled by the department	26	39
Number of associated departmental Emergency Task Force and Inter-departmental Emergency Task Force meetings held	6	129
Duration of Crisis Centre operations	5 days	39 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.

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 inquiries handled by the Australian Passport Information Service
- Number of travel documents issued, including urgent issues

Satisfaction of the public and the travel industry

Feedback from clients on the quality of passport services indicated that 91.7 per cent of all customers surveyed were satisfied with the service they received and indicates that a high level of service was maintained despite the considerable challenges posed by the rollout of the new passport and a substantial increase in demand.

A successful information campaign was undertaken both in Australia and overseas to explain changes in the passport production arrangements to the travelling public. This campaign included writing to travel agents in Australia, running video clips in all passport offices, addressing key groups overseas and advising those Australians registered with Australian missions.

The priority processing service that allows customers to pay an additional fee to ensure their passport is issued within a 48-hour timeframe again proved popular and demand for this service rose by 35 per cent to 173 893.

Turnaround time for passport issue

Passport application rates in 2003–04 rose by 16.6 per cent over the previous year. This increase in issue rates—together with a major re-engineering of the passport-issuing process—placed considerable pressures on passport offices. As a result, the turnaround time in 2003–04 increased from an average of 6.7 days to 9.4 days. While this remained within the ten-day turnaround time outlined in the Client Service Charter, the majority of complaints received concerned delays in receiving passports.

The number of travel documents issued in 2003–04 was 1 086 366—up 16.6 percent over the previous year (906 049).

- 173 893 customers took the option of paying the priority processing fee to have their travel document issued within 48 hours compared to 112 525 last year. Of these, 651 were refunded on compassionate grounds and 197 because the 48-hour standard was not met.
- Emergency passports were introduced overseas in December 2003 with 3981 documents issued during the remainder of the year.
- 33 954 passports were reported lost or stolen compared to 32 479 last year.
- 319 cases of passport fraud were detected compared to 535 last year. The decline in numbers relates to the fact that 199 additional cases were investigated in 2002–03 as a result of a ‘back wash’ operation conducted with the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

The Australian Passport Information Service (APIS) provides advice and assistance to the public on all passport matters seven days a week. The centre handled 1 496 907 calls in 2003–04, an increase of 33 per cent from the previous year. All APIS contract performance indicators were met for the year. Arrangements are in place to expand the APIS network to handle passport calls from Australians resident in New Zealand.

Quantity information for output 2.1: passport services

Indicator	2003–04	2002–03
Number of passport inquiries handled by the Australian Passport Information Service ¹	1 496 907	1 123 133
Number of travel documents issued, including urgent issues ²	1 086 366	906 049

1. The increase in the number of inquiries handled reflects a catch-up in demand following the substantial drop experienced after the tragic events of 11 September 2001, the Bali bombings and the outbreak of SARS.

2. Travel documents include passports, documents of identity, certificates of identity and convention travel documents.

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 2003–04, 454 travellers' emergency loans were granted in accordance with the guidelines laid down in the consular handbook. This figure includes loans made to 23 Australians requiring repatriation to Australia, including medical evacuations, and loans to 28 Australians imprisoned overseas through the Prisoner Loans Scheme. This compares to 610 loans granted in 2002–03 and 739 loans 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.

The department issued \$233 150 in travellers' emergency loans (\$33 940 of this total are loans issued with funds from loans issued and repaid in the 2003–04 financial year). We issued fewer loans than in previous years. The higher total value of the loans issued was due to the number and expense of repatriations, including medical evacuations, which totalled \$129 010.

A total of \$76 333 was repaid in 2003–04 compared to \$104 051 in 2002–03. 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 also influence debt recovery rates, which is evident this year. 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.

Quantity information

Indicator	2003–04	2002–03
Number of Australian travellers assisted by emergency loans	454	610
Success of debt recovery activities	\$76 333	\$104 051