

AUSTRALIA ASSISTS MID-TERM REVIEW: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE (SEPTEMBER 2019)

Summary of Management Response

The purpose of this independent Mid-Term Review (MTR) of Australia Assists was to assess the program's appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency.

Australia Assists commenced in October 2017, deploying Australian specialists to work with governments, multilateral agencies and communities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters and conflict. Australia Assists replaced the former Australian Civilian Corps (ACC), which concluded its final deployments in December 2017. Australia Assists forms an integrated deployable civilian capability, building on the strengths of the ACC and RedR Australia (RedR) as a UN Standby Partner.

Review Team

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Key Messages

- The MTR has assessed that over a relatively short period since commencement, DFAT and RedR have successfully integrated ACC and RedR under Australia Assists.
- Australia Assists has provided high-quality deployments and helped governments respond to disasters and conflicts.
- Australia Assists has made significant contributions to key protracted crises, including the Rohingya and Syria crises.
- The Australia Assists model combines surge support with longer-term deployments that will help support system strengthening and resilience in the Pacific.

Overall response to the evaluation

DFAT welcomes the evaluation findings and acknowledges the recommendations. More detailed responses to each recommendation are included in the table below:

| Recommendation | Response | Explanation | Action plan | Timeframe |
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| <p>Recommendation 1:</p> <p><i>Developing regional strategies that allow flexible responses to crises, take into account the significant variations between regions and the need to service the Standby Partnership (SBP), and concurrently focus resources on key outcomes would help DFAT and RedR deliver greater sustainability of outcomes moving forward.</i></p> | <p>Agree in part</p> | <p>Planning for deployments under Australia Assists takes place through an annual planning process during which DFAT articulates its regional, bilateral and thematic priorities and RedR identifies opportunities under these priorities. DFAT priorities are informed by multi-year protracted crisis packages, Aid Investment Plans (regional and bilateral) and DFAT’s Humanitarian Strategy. In the Pacific, this process will also be informed by a forthcoming regional humanitarian design.</p> <p>DFAT sees limited value in regional strategies that sit above this process, but rather proposes augmenting the current annual planning process with documented regional strategic planning discussions. During these discussions, DFAT stakeholders and RedR would discuss longer-term regional and thematic priorities, including particular countries,</p> | <p>DFAT and RedR will include a longer-term regional strategic discussion during the next annual planning process.</p> <p>As per Recommendation 3 below, DFAT will engage RedR through the forthcoming Pacific humanitarian design process to identify how deployments can be strategically integrated into Australia’s broader programming priorities.</p> | <p>Regional discussions to occur during the 2020-21 Annual Planning Process.</p> |

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| | | <p>thematic areas and organisations. These discussions will also include considerations of RedR's need to service its standby partnership arrangements.</p> | | |
| <p>Recommendation 2: <i>RedR should review Australia Assists management structure to better facilitate cross-departmental management oversight to strengthen partnership and performance management and efficiency in reporting and decision-making.</i></p> | <p>Agree [please note this is primarily a recommendation for RedR to address]</p> | <p>DFAT supports changes to RedR's management structure that better facilitate partnerships, cross-departmental management and efficiency.</p> <p>DFAT notes RedR has already implemented a major restructure in support of this outcome.</p> | <p>DFAT will continue regular dialogue with RedR on the program's management restructure and other administrative arrangements at Steering Committee Meetings and further build on the positive working relationships between RedR and DFAT.</p> | <p>DFAT will seek a final program management structure from RedR by 31 January 2020.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 3: <i>To support a stronger focus on results as the program matures, a Pacific regional strategy should be developed that has sufficient flexibility to concurrently address long-term support for disaster preparedness and resilience-building while progressing Australia's objectives vis-à-vis protection, social inclusion and</i></p> | <p>Agree in part [please also refer to Recommendation 1]</p> | <p>DFAT agrees that in order to be effective, Australia Assists deployments should form part of a broader strategy for building preparedness and resilience in the Pacific. DFAT is currently designing a new Pacific humanitarian program. DFAT proposes that this design process consider how Australia Assists can be more strategically used/integrated into broader</p> | <p>DFAT will engage RedR through the Pacific Prepare design process to identify how deployments can be strategically integrated into Australia's broader programming priorities.</p> <p>DFAT and RedR will continue to look for opportunities for Australia Assists employees to</p> | <p>Paper to be developed by June 2020 and incorporated into Australia Assists Annual Plan for FY 2020-21.</p> |

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| <p><i>short-term surge capabilities at times of crisis.</i></p> | | <p>programming priorities in order to deliver greater benefits.</p> <p>As part of this process, DFAT will develop a short document outlining its priorities for capacity development and Australia Assists deployments in the Pacific.</p> | <p>support recovery activities following disasters in the Pacific.</p> | |
| <p>Recommendation 4:</p> <p><i>DFAT can create greater visibility of and alignment to Australia Assists' contribution to protracted crises by taking steps to integrate Australia Assists within multi-year response frameworks and associated MEAL arrangements for key protracted crises into the future.</i></p> | <p>Agree</p> | <p>DFAT agrees Australia Assists should be integrated into multi-year protracted crisis strategies. Australia Assists was not fully integrated into Australia's Syria response package as this pre-dated the Australia Assists program. Subsequent packages have integrated Australia Assists, but DFAT could do more to articulate how Australia Assists supports the objectives of protracted crisis packages and better integrate Australia Assists into MEAL arrangements.</p> | <p>DFAT will build on the relationship between RedR and DFAT Posts/geographic desks to better align deployments within the objectives of Australia's aid investments in the region.</p> <p>As future protracted crisis packages are developed, DFAT will ensure Australia Assists deployments are factored into DFAT's wider planning and MEAL for protracted crises and work across the humanitarian-development nexus.</p> | <p>As protracted crisis packages are developed.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 5:</p> | <p>Agree</p> | <p>DFAT agrees there is a need to examine and agree on what</p> | <p>DFAT and RedR will prepare a practice note to define what</p> | <p>Practice note and roster to be</p> |

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| <p><i>As the program matures, the need to arrive at a more nuanced understanding about what localisation means for a technical deployment mechanism such as Australia Assists will become increasingly evident. As a first step DFAT and RedR should work together to define what localisation means for Australia Assists, systematically explore opportunities and barriers to advancing the localisation agenda and develop an action plan to progress localisation efforts.</i></p> | | <p>localisation means for implementation of Australia Assists (including selection/prioritisation of deployments).</p> <p>This process will take into account different approaches and barriers to localisation in different contexts.</p> | <p>localisation means for Australia Assists.</p> | <p>developed by June 2020 and incorporated into Australia Assists Annual Plan FY 2020-21.</p> |
| <p>Recommendation 6:</p> <p><i>There is an ongoing need to recruit specialist disability inclusion expertise into the roster as well as to upskill the capability of the wider roster to mainstream disability inclusion and extend partnerships with Disabled People's Organisations. This will require persistent efforts to address barriers to deployment of people with disability themselves, including addressing challenges associated with reasonable</i></p> | <p>Agree [please note this is primarily a recommendation for RedR to address]</p> | <p>Promoting and practicing inclusive humanitarian action is a core objective of Australia Assists, reflected in the Australia Assists Disability Inclusion Strategy which aims to ensure disability is effectively addressed in humanitarian action. 2019-20 has seen an increased focus on disability inclusion and protection, including the prioritisation of disability inclusion deployments. For example, Australia</p> | <p>DFAT and RedR to identify potential deployments for future disability inclusion positions and seek a wider range of partners to develop this priority.</p> <p>DFAT and RedR to discuss possible revisions, including refreshing the roster to gain more diversity, at a follow-up Q3 strategic meeting (February 2020).</p> | <p>Approach to be agreed in 2019-20 Q3.</p> <p>Future disability inclusion positions to be addressed in Annual Plan FY 2020-21.</p> |

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| <i>accommodations, safe workspaces and insurance and the need for adequate resourcing.</i> | | Assists has a deployee working with the Pacific Disability Forum. | | |
| <p>Recommendation 7:</p> <p><i>DFAT should pragmatically consider the extent to which pursuit of Australia Assists brand recognition effectively reinforces its wider need to promote Australia as a valuable technical partner. This should include consideration of the relative priority placed on pursuit of this identity in favour of other program management priorities.</i></p> | Agree in part | <p>DFAT agrees there is a need to better distinguish between Australia Assists as a brand (which encompasses all of DFAT’s deployable humanitarian capabilities) and Australia Assists the program (which is implemented by RedR).</p> <p>DFAT notes brand recognition takes time, and changing branding arrangements at this point of the program risks further complicating partners’ understanding of Australia Assists.</p> <p>DFAT is open to further discussion with RedR and other stakeholders to optimise how the Australia Assists brand is used.</p> | <p>Accept that brand recognition is a long term process, but continue to monitor through deployees and Posts how well Australia Assists branding is understood by humanitarian partners and host governments.</p> <p>DFAT will engage in further discussion with RedR and other stakeholders to find ways to optimise the use of the Australia Assists brand.</p> | Approach to be agreed in 2019-20 Q4. |
| <p>Recommendation 8:</p> <p><i>The MEAL framework should be revised to include:</i></p> | Agree [please note this is primarily a recommendation | DFAT agrees there would be value in revising and further discussing the | DFAT and RedR will discuss and agree on a revised MEAL framework for Australia Assists. | Approach to be agreed in 2019-20 Q4. |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>a narrative explanation of the purpose of the MEAL system, Australia Assists' approach to MEAL and the descriptors of key terms and what successful outcomes would look like</i> • <i>targets and outcome indicators for training</i> • <i>a consideration of whether or not EOPO 4 (Quality of Humanitarian Action) should be articulated as a goal or remain as a standalone outcome.</i> <p><i>Concurrently, DFAT and RedR should re-engage with the Knowledge and Learning Strategy to establish and guide learning priorities and how these will be used.</i></p> | <p>for RedR to address]</p> | <p>Australia Assists MEAL framework with RedR.</p> <p>DFAT is open to RedR re-engaging the Knowledge and Learning Strategy as part of their training and knowledge transfer.</p> | | |
| <p>Recommendation 9:</p> <p><i>To ensure attractiveness of the roster within a crowded market; RedR, in consultation with DFAT, should consider restructuring the deployee remuneration package to deliver equity in remuneration.</i></p> | <p>Agree in part [please note this is primarily a recommendation for RedR to address]</p> | <p>DFAT supports diversification and renewal of the RedR roster and acknowledges the need for Australia Assists to remain competitive in a range of labour markets. However, DFAT notes an increase in base remuneration and training is likely to</p> | <p>DFAT and RedR will further discuss the composition of the Australia Assists budget. Any revisions to the overall budget would form part of a contract amendment.</p> | <p>Approach to be discussed in 2019-20 Q4.</p> |

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| <p><i>This could include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>an increase in the base remuneration package</i> • <i>consideration of how best to overcome the costs of training to promote greater diversification and renewal of the roster including, for example, increased funding for training or refunding of the cost of training upon completion of the first successful deployment</i> • <i>a tiered structure that allows additional cost supplementation for high value deployments into multilateral agencies (eg the deployment in Iraq) so that they align with the host agency.</i> <p><i>This process could be undertaken within a wider context of considering the utility of the roster as Australia Assists matures, including the implications for localisation and for DFAT resourcing.</i></p> | | <p>impact the MTR's assessment of the program's value for money. These decisions will require careful consideration and may require a rebalancing of operational and other costs.</p> | | |