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Mekong Australia Partnership on Transnational Crime
Mid-Term Review Report

July 2023

About this paper

This paper is a Mid-Term Review of Mekong Australia Partnership on Transnational Crime undertaken by the team between March to July 2023. This report was prepared through consultations in Canberra as well as in the Mekong Region.

According to the Terms of Reference, "this review will inform DFAT's consideration about whether to continue the program in a second phase and whether a redesign is required."

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Acronyms and abbreviations.

ABF	Australian Border Force
ACCCE	Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AGA	Australian Government Agency
AGD	Attorney Generals Department
ARLEMP	Asia Regional Law Enforcement Management Program
ATO	Australian Tax Office
AUSTRAC	Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre
BCAMP	Border Control Agency Management Program
CC	Country Coordinator
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
CSERD	Child Sexual Exploitation Regional Dialogue
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
EoPOs	End of Program Outcomes
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FICG	Financial Intelligence Consultative Group
FIU	Financial Intelligence Unit
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
GI-TOC	Global Initiative for Transnational and Organised Crime
GOA	Government of Australia
IDC	Interdepartmental Committee
IOs	Intermediate Outcomes
KRQ	Key Review Questions
KR	Key Recommendation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAP-TNC	Mekong Australia Partnership on Transnational Crime
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
MIS	Management Information System
ML	Money laundering
MTR	Mid-Term Review
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PAF	Performance Assessment Framework
PSU	Partnership Support Unit
SEZ	Special Economic Zone
UNODC	United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime
WOG	Whole of Government

Part One

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Executive Summary

The Mekong Australia Partnership on Transnational Crime (MAP-TNC) Mid-Term Review (MTR) Team was asked to:

1. Produce an independent stocktake of program progress;
2. Deliver relevant insights to inform the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)'s consideration of whether to proceed to a second phase and sketch a process for decision making;
3. Offer feasible, practical, value-adding ideas to improve program performance; and
4. Be tailored to meet the needs of DFAT as the primary audience, including the Bangkok Post and relevant divisions in Canberra.

This Executive Summary details the findings of this work with a particular focus on improving Australian Government management and operation of MAP-TNC.

Synopsis

Escalating transnational crime is seriously undermining development in the Mekong region, spilling over into Australia and damaging a wide range of Australian interests. s 33(a)(iii)

It is an increasing threat to national sovereignty and security in the region. Australian agencies have s 47E(d)   valued capability to assist and strong relations to build on. Australian national interests warrant renewed and expanded efforts to address Mekong TNC, but the existing MAP-TNC needs to be reconfigured to respond adequately to these challenges. It is currently too focussed on rolling out small activities and is not yet delivering on its strategic intent.

Despite the challenges and relatively weak performance to date against End of Program Objectives, the Review Team heard enough evidence from counterparts and senior AGA regional representatives to suggest that future success is possible. MAP-TNC has potential, but as a senior manager aptly put it, is 'stuck in the weeds'. It needs senior help to lift the program gaze and allow its management to become more strategic. The Review Team sees feasible changes that would lift performance significantly by making better use of expertise dispersed across DFAT, the Program Support Unit, Australian Government Agencies (AGAs) and external partners. A shift to larger, multi-year programs of work, consolidated TNC expertise and a more differentiated approach to AGA support would allow DFAT to provide the strategic leadership AGAs, external partners and counterparts are looking for. On that basis, The Review Team recommends a partial redesign to underpin a second and more strategically impactful Phase II.

Background

The MAP-TNC Partnership is an ambitious and complex attempt to marshal Australian government capability to address transnational crime in the Mekong sub-region. The $30m, eight-year program has sponsored six Australian Government Agencies and two research partners to deliver transnational crime-related activities in five Mekong locations (Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos - and the sub-region).

It is early days in the program as it finds its purpose, niche, value and impact

Barely two years' old, MAP-TNC is the only multi-agency government-to-government program that funds broad transnational crime cooperation in the Mekong and there is clear demand from counterparts and Australian Government Agencies to continue. The program provides an opportunity to capitalise on the strong relationships that Australian government agencies have built with influential counterparts to share expertise, partner on shared priorities and project Australian capability and reputation as a partner of choice.

Unclear objectives

s 47E(d)

. Program objectives are often presented differently depending on the perspective of stakeholders. Sometimes the principal goal of the program is set out as detecting, deterring and disrupting TNC in the region, drawing heavily on the capability of Australia government agencies (AGA's). At other times, stronger government to government relations are an end in themselves,

with some arguing that 'this is not a development program'. These different renderings are not irreconcilable and can be mutually reinforcing, but it matters which has primacy and why.

The Review Team recommends a tighter, clearer program goal that clarifies that stronger relations are the means to unite regional efforts to combat TNC and strengthen counterparts' capacity to disrupt serious TNC threats. It also recommends identifying a small number of specific, high-level outcomes to go beyond the very broad goal of 'addressing transnational crime' - for example, an outcome that no regional country is on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) "grey list", or equivalent. This would provide greater focus and shape currently disparate efforts between agencies, countries and crime types.

Early signs of Australian whole-of-government cooperation are positive

Defined as a government-to-government (G2G) relationship program, built on small-scale, dispersed activity, the program is understandably presented by DFAT Bangkok as a hard-won success. Its facilitation of high-level access to counterparts and its storyline of whole of government regional engagement, add up to a valued, niche diplomatic platform that has the potential to deliver modest development impact. s 47E(d)
The whole of government relationship achievements are real and commendable and explain strong senior DFAT posted officer support for the program and the DFAT management team. Such progress on Australian government coordination of efforts is notoriously hard to achieve and should not be overlooked.

Early signs of program success and impact are limited

However, to deliver impact and value for money, strong relationships between DFAT and AGA partners - and even more critically, with local counterparts - need to be a steppingstone to stronger outcomes in combatting TNC. Judged by this standard, the program cannot be said to be successful at this stage.

Progress against End of Program Outcomes (EoPOs) has been weak, with a consensus that that Pillars One (strategic analysis and frameworks) and Three (regional) are off track. Under Pillar One, useful research by the Global Initiative for Transnational and Organised Crime (GI-TOC) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), communicated via expert briefings, has better informed some stakeholders, but has not been used to shape activities, drive strategy or define regional engagement. In fact, there has been almost no high-level strategic regional engagement of the type envisaged in the program design under Pillar Three. Despite this, close to a third of activities are being described as regional because they are multi-country, disguising the lack of substantive regional initiatives.

The MTR Team sees opportunities to move to more mature, policy-based partnerships with effective regional organisations such as GI-TOC and UNODC, both of which expressed interest in going beyond contractual relationships and represent significant, unique and high value expertise and networks to be leveraged by the program. This would require more substantial, expert-led collaboration in priority setting and policy and program coordination.

The current management focus is on inputs rather than outcomes

Weak performance against strategic goals reflects several factors - the huge demands of inception with too many large and complex tasks frontloaded; the multiple disruptions of COVID-19; s 47E(d)
But more fundamental than any of these is that the program is not resourced or configured to achieve its ambitious outcomes. Transnational crime in the Mekong generates illicit financial flows of over $100bn annually. MAP-TNC has less than $2m annually for programmatic responses. Even more critically, that very small amount of money is not one pool that can be allocated to maximise strategic return, but rather is subdivided several times over.

As a result, MAP-TNC fragments into very small activities to build operational capacity (Pillar 2) - 84 activities at last count. Very modest resources are divided by six AGA partners, five geographies, and three crime types, spread over eight years. This reduces to an average of around $50,000 per activity. The transaction costs and management burden of this are very high, while the relational and training returns have been adequate, but not outstanding. Around 450 officials have been trained; counterpart course feedback has been quite positive, and relations have been modestly extended and deepened.

The question is what does it all add up to? Small activities can be impactful if there's an evidence-based logic about how they join up and achieve big things over time. s 47E(d)

Program management arrangements are not supporting strong program impact

The MAP-TNC G2G modality is particularly complex with the small DFAT management team having to discharge standard responsibilities of program oversight, but also play a proactive role in AGA relationship management and support, as well as spearheading TNC policy dialogue and strategic positioning. The design solution was a small, three-person DFAT team assisted by a contracted PSU. However, the MTR Team judges this bifurcated approach has been costly, inefficient and the source of much frustration. It has also left DFAT with inadequate resources to play the roles expected of it. What works for a standard program does not necessarily work for a program like MAP-TNC where DFAT needs to be a central actor and does not want to delegate key parts of program delivery. This calls for a unitary management structure.

Despite DFAT efforts to create a one-team approach, the Review Team sees two distinct, but overlapping management entities whose roles and responsibilities are not sufficiently clear, leading to uncertainty, gaps and duplication. While DFAT and the PSU have a monthly management meeting and more frequent issues-based communication, the MTR Team sees a need for direct, daily interaction. It proposes a more integrated DFAT/contractor model allowing DFAT to draw more directly on the expertise and resources currently invested in the PSU. Within this structure, it envisages an operational services and reporting team assisting AGAs and managing finances and an augmented analysis and strategy team, directly assisting DFAT to shift its focus from activity management to strategic gain.

s 47E(d)

COVID-19 made it hard to recruit and effectively utilise skilled personnel. s 47E(d)

Value for money

Direct program management costs currently comprise over half the program budget. In the absence of high value outcomes to date, value for money is currently poor. However, that is partly a function of the very small program budget. An extra $2m a year in program funds would slash the cost ratio whilst also potentially lifting performance of all three pillars, especially one and three. Overall, efforts to contain costs and lift outcomes are needed to deliver greater value for money.

GEDSI performance needs attention

The program has struggled to translate strong Ministerial and departmental prioritisation of Gender, Diversity and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) perspectives into meaningful actions with the issue being reduced to the attendance of women at training courses in early reporting. The program's GEDSI flagship, the Cambodian Police Service's Women in Leadership work, is rightly driven by counterpart priorities with excellent support from local Australian Federal Police (AFP) leadership. While not program-initiated, program funding has been pivotal. Elsewhere evidence of creative thinking is hard to find, probably

because activities were selected and designed before GEDSI frameworks and processes were bedded down. There have been several PSU attempts at developing a GEDSI strategy, none of which DFAT has yet agreed to. Despite this, according to the second Annual Report, some tools and case-studies have been developed and applied. An acceptable policy needs to be agreed ASAP, and renewed effort put into practical assistance to implement it.

Overarching conclusions and recommendations

To reach its potential, MAP-TNC governance and management focus must 'get out of the weeds'. The Review Team sees a need for a series of design; management; and governance reforms. s 47E(d)
, the Review Team sees significant latent potential within the current program that if harnessed effectively could drive substantially improved performance. The key changes proposed are:

1. New program governance centred around a bi-annual, half-day, whole-of-government, Mekong TNC senior management meeting in Canberra. The meeting would analyse program progress, determine Australian policy/strategy and fix problems the Bangkok team needs help with.
2. An early shift away from focusing on activities to a greater focus on outcomes, guided by strategies. Agencies would develop multi-year programs of work which become the new unit of management while DFAT diverts management savings towards strategic goals to drive higher performance against pillars one and three.
3. The creation of enhanced strategic capability by combining all available TNC expertise in a dedicated analytical and policy unit, working direct to DFAT, within a fully integrated, one-team structure. The unit would scope the landscape; undertake research; define policy priorities; interact, advise and learn from AGA's; broker productive partnerships and work closely with regional countries and specialist organisations.
4. The development of a program strategy that delivers greater focus and impact by identifying the most powerful TNC interventions by country and sub-region, via sharp, succinct, evidence-based and evolving strategy papers. This could result in a greater emphasis on new and emerging TNC threats such as digital crime, scamming factories and the use of casinos and Special Economic Zones (SEZ) for money laundering, or a focus on financial crime as the lifeblood of TNC.
5. A quarterly program steering committee led by DFAT Bangkok possibly in partnership with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) as the largest, most experienced and most invested partner, to determine adjustments to program emphasis, informed by reconfigured six weekly meetings that are used to surface new insights and ideas and identify emerging challenges, risks and threats.
6. An annual regional meeting with counterparts to discuss TNC trends, issues and opportunities. MAP-TNC would form the backdrop and its priorities and progress would be just one agenda item amongst larger strategic discussions.

It is particularly important for Australia to build on extensive DFAT and agency efforts to engage with Mekong operational counterparts. Broader and higher-level political dialogue will be needed to realise program goals. This has been constrained by the absence of Subsidiary Agreements that are typically difficult for regional programs to conclude as they sit outside bilateral dialogue and coordination processes. s 33(a)(iii), s 47E(d)

Where to next?

The development imperative for Mekong countries to address transnational crime is high and with these levels of commitment and demand from Government counterparts, Australia faces a unique opportunity to develop a high value, high impact, offering that deploys "all elements of statecraft" in the region for development impact, and subsequent benefit to Australian national interests on organised crime.

Ultimately, MAP-TNC has potential. Like all new endeavours, stringent focus on its strategy, leadership and operating model will support its longer-term viability and impact. The Review Team believes the program's impact can be significantly increased by adopting the reforms proposed here, tested and further developed through a partial redesign for a second phase of the program. If there is not the scope for this, more modest reforms should still be undertaken to reduce managerial complexity and cost and should commence as soon as possible.

Key Recommendations

Unless otherwise specified the recommendations are directed to DFAT either generically or Canberra/Bangkok as specified.

Recommit to addressing transnational crime in the Mekong

1. Prioritise transnational crime as a Mekong development issue of growing concern to both regional leaders and Australian government agencies due to its increasingly destabilising effects on people, economies and states and its adverse impacts on Australia.
2. Play a whole of government leadership role in Canberra and the region in coordinating Australian Government Agencies to deliver more strategic and more effective Australian responses to Mekong transnational crime.
3. Promptly address MTR identified opportunities to lift MAP-TNC program performance in the second half of Phase I, while considering scope to adapt the MAP TNC model for a more successful Phase II.

Take early action to lift program performance

4. Create additional, dedicated capacity for strategic management and engagement on TNC by
   s 47E(d)

   4.3. Establishing a program advisor position in DFAT's TNC section to link the program to DFAT and whole of government TNC policy priorities in real time; and
   s 47E(d)

5. Produce a short, strategic outline to provide refreshed strategic guidance and signal a shift in direction to a) clarify the program's objectives; b) identify quick wins for early action; and c) lay the foundations for increasing program impact.
6. Move towards multi-year agency programs of work, rather than managing annual, small activities, beginning by bundling already approved activities to be managed as de-facto programs, with DFAT MAP-TNC staff time reallocated to focus on strategic management.
   s 47E(d)

8. Expand and deepen policy-based relationships with effective regional organisations to lift Pillar One performance, with a view to collaborating and coordinating to progress agreed priority actions to combat regional TNC.

Institute governance reforms to drive strategic focus

9. DFAT manage a twice-yearly interdepartmental committee (IDC) that gives the Bangkok team more access to Canberra SES for guidance, performance assessment and resolution of sticking points.
10. Ensure the program has a strong Canberra 'home' allowing both regional and policy synergies, co-locating it with other Mekong programs in one geographic division, with one masterplan.
11. More obviously align MAP-TNC with regional and country priorities through high-level dialogue and referencing of Mekong agreements and plans and by creating a forum for Australia to interact

with regional leaders on TNC to take the place of the Program Coordination Committee which has not been established.

Initiate a partial redesign for a recommended Phase II of MAP TNC

12. Agree to a Phase II of MAP TNC on the basis that
    12.1. There is substantial demand from Mekong leaders and Australian agencies for increased Australian engagement to address Mekong TNC with few viable alternatives to respond to a rapidly growing development problem that Australia cannot walk away from;
    12.2. The existing program has latent potential for improved outcomes that can be immediately realised; and
    12.3. Relatively modest design modifications can deliver further impact gains through the program developing stronger strategic partnerships and creating a value-adding niche role.
13. Commission a partial program redesign for Phase II, to be completed by the end of quarter one, 2024
    13.1. Building as much as possible on what is already in place, adjusted to deliver more impact at less administrative cost;
    13.2. Drawing on internal transnational crime expertise from DFAT, the PSU and at least one major AGA partner, with outside design expertise facilitating, coordinating and driving the process forward; and
    13.3. Starting with a clear, achievable goal of combatting Mekong TNC and a small, set of specific outcomes Australia wants to work towards, incorporated into new End of Program Outcomes. These might include: Keeping countries off [or accelerating their exits from] the FATF "grey list"; disrupting the flow of methamphetamine into the region and Australia; and/or evolving a new regional architecture that complements and enhances existing machinery.
14. Develop an iterative, evolving MAP-TNC strategy that moves it beyond simply a crime-type focus, to a high-value specialist role, that increases its impact and visibility
    14.1. Options for strategic focus to be explored, prioritised and potentially discarded during the rapid redesign, might include
        - Focussing overwhelmingly on issues that require regional collaboration;
        - Bringing national and international partners together for greater impact;
        - Gearing the program for rapid response to new and emerging TNC threats;
        - Doubling down on financial crime as the lifeblood of TNC;
        - Refining the number of crime types of focus or alternatively, gearing towards addressing root causes and multiplier effects of TNC; and
        - Searching for efficient, effective ways to provide greater regional access to advanced tools and technologies, with appropriate governance.
15. Adopt a tiered relationship model for working with Australian Government Agencies
    15.1. Tier One: Programmatic and strategic partnerships with agencies permanently on the ground.
    15.2. Tier Two: Smaller programs or discreet activities for fly-in fly-out agencies that are willing and able to make a medium-term commitment to relationship building with counterparts.
    15.3. Tier Three: A case by case assessment of the costs and benefits of specialist small agency twinning support.
16. Align resources with MAP-TNC's new strategy by directing funding to agency and other programs to the extent that they advance program goals
    16.1. Devoting 80% of program effort and resources to the program's medium-long-term strategic goals; and
    16.2. Retaining 20% of program funds in a flexible pool for opportunistic deployment to allow rapid response to emerging high-level priorities, with a different set of expectations and performance metrics.

Undertake a streamlined Stop/Go decision making process

17. A DFAT First Assistant Secretary make the MAP-TNC Stop/Go decision, advised by the new DFAT-led IDC of relevant stakeholders
    17.1. With evidence to inform that process coming from this MTR report; the recently concluded Investment Monitoring Report; the Second, Program Annual Report; and
    17.2. Confidential and sensitive considerations that might include a rapid whole of government assessment of the importance of TNC in the Mekong to Australian interests with a decision in quarter three, calendar 2023.

And if DFAT wants to stay engaged, but needs a lower-cost option, then

18. Scale back the ambition, cut the costs and still harvest some of the available gains
    18.1. Converting Pillar One into low maintenance, grant-like support for effective specialist agencies in the region;
    18.2. Dropping Pillar Three altogether, as beyond the capacity of the program; and
    18.3. Switching Pillar Two to program-based support s 47E(d)
          Australian agencies s 47E(d)   and
          the PSU reshaped, solely as a support and reporting unit.

In addition to these key recommendations, the findings of this main report also suggest the following supplementary actions be taken.

- Develop a doctrine of relationship building, identifying the factors most likely to underpin strong relations, including presence, continuity, listening-not-lecturing, partner-focus and delivering value.
- Acknowledge and manage different incentives and drivers within DFAT that can result in overly ambitious programs colliding with hard Post constraints.
- Australian Government Agencies should respond to counterpart demand by adopting case-based learning as a central activity training modality.
- Finalise the GEDSI strategy as soon as possible, bring existing and new tools together in practical retrofitting clinics to improve results for pipeline activities while thinking ahead to how to build GEDSI into new generation agency programs.
- s 47E(d)

- Grant independent evaluations access to Aid Governance Board papers as a matter of course to test the adequacy of DFAT quality assurance checks and balances at the design stage.
- Re-examine DFAT machinery and resourcing arrangements for integrating bilateral and regional activities to ensure a better whole-of-department approach.
- s 33(a)(iii)

- Prepare regional and country strategy papers and the identification of a modest, achievable policy dialogue road map as part of renewed Pillar One and Pillar Three agendas.
- Workshop the new Performance Framework to deepen performance reporting.

Part Two
Main Report

Section One | Introduction

The Mekong Australia Partnership on Transnational Crime (MAP-TNC) Mid-Term Review (MTR) Team was asked to:

1. Produce an independent stocktake of program progress;
2. Deliver relevant insights to inform the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)'s consideration of whether to proceed to a second phase and sketch a process for decision making;
3. Offer feasible, practical, value-adding ideas to improve program performance; and
4. Be tailored to meet the needs of DFAT as the primary audience, including the Bangkok Post and relevant divisions in Canberra.

The Review Terms of Reference (TORs) are at Annex Five and the Review Plan with the Key Review Questions are at Annex Seven.

Section Two | Methodology

The Team has approached this Review as a process, not just a product. The MTR has already been through several different stages, each deepening insights through collaboration and the testing of ideas and alternative approaches.

Through initial discussions and documentation review, the MTR team developed a Review Plan endorsed by DFAT without significant change (Annex Seven). The Review Plan involved extensive analysis of key documents (Annex Eight); stakeholder consultations in Canberra with DFAT and key agencies participating in the program (Annex Nine) and regional consultations in the Mekong (Annex Ten). Regional consultations allowed direct interaction with the MAP-TNC team at the Bangkok Post; engagement collectively and individually with delivery agencies; dialogue with counterparts; and workshops with Bangkok program staff and managers. The Review Team also had the benefit of observing program coordination meetings and an Investment Monitoring Report peer review process. The latter provided considerable confidence that DFAT does have some robust processes to challenge and test assessments.

The Review Plan identified 10 areas of inquiry this Report will respond to: 1) Objectives; 2) Interests and Incentives; 3) Partner focus; 4) GEDSI and development effectiveness; 5) Program design; 6) Geographic remit; 7) Management model; 8) Governance; 9) Performance; 10) Future possibilities. As anticipated, some areas have assumed greater importance since the Plan was prepared and some, less. Some initial hypotheses have been confirmed while others have had to be altered on the basis of evidence. This has made the process fluid and adaptive, ultimately arriving at some conclusions and proposals that were not foreseen by the Review Team. High-level conclusions were presented to DFAT in an Aide Memoire in Bangkok in early May with constructive engagement on future possibilities.

There were few serious limitations to the Review. It was comparatively well-resourced, allowing for highly valuable regional consultations and the time frames were generally adequate, although compressed towards the end of the process, when more collaboration and iteration as well as additional investigation would have been valuable. All stakeholders were generous with time and insights, especially counterparts. Inability to visit Vietnam no doubt limited what might have been learnt there but was compensated for by rich discussions elsewhere in the region.

Section Three | Background

Transnational Crime in the Mekong

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), illicit trafficking flows experienced a significant increase of 30% between 2013 and 2019.[1] Since then, it's likely these flows have surged further. The Mekong region, as described by the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), holds global significance in this illicit trade. The scale of illegal goods crossing Southeast Asia is estimated to exceed $110 billion annually, with methamphetamine alone accounting for over $33 billion.[2] s 33(a)(iii)

Transnational criminal actors are quick to adopt new technologies and exploit financial systems, allowing them to rapidly adapt and take advantage of emerging opportunities. They exploit weaknesses in jurisdictional boundaries, company structures, and legal frameworks to facilitate the movement of people, products, and assets, evading detection and capitalising on the fragmented and under-resourced national approaches to counter TNC.

s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

. Whilst many officials shared concerns over some or all of the three specific crime types of focus for MAP-TNC (child sexual exploitation and abuse, financial crime and drug trafficking), all were concerned about online criminality, crypto-currency misuse, money laundering through casinos, broader financial crime encompassing a range of profit producing transnational crimes, the operation of large-scale scam centers, and the utilisation of inaccessible communications channels.

These concerns are not surprising given similar trends observed in Australia which led to the 2018 National Strategy to fight Transnational, Serious and Organised Crime (TSOC) and the appointment of the first Commonwealth TSOC Crime Coordinator.[3] In particular areas, Mekong partners regard Australia as a practical and valuable partner with whom to share operational and strategic objectives around the disruption and dismantling of TNC and the enhancement of regional cooperation. Australia is considered a practical partner and a repository of critical capability s 33(a)(iii), for Mekong benefit – for example, its skills and approaches to online investigations, victim-centred responses to child sexual exploitation and reputation for high quality anti-money laundering support to meet international FATF standards. For a full account of transnational crime in the Mekong, please refer to GI-TOC "Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, Financial Crimes and Drug Trafficking in the Mekong Subregion: A Situational Analysis" (2023).

So what?

The relationship between flourishing transnational crime and development is often overlooked by development agencies but in recent years, has received increased attention from donors such as the US and the UK.

Transnational organised crime poses a significant threat to economic development and governance, as its far-reaching influence undermines the stability and progress of nations. The enormous profits generated by criminal networks enables them to corrupt border control measures and political institutions, leading to compromised law enforcement agencies, politicians, and judges. This corruption acts as a substantial tax on businesses, diverting resources away from legitimate economic activities. The complex technical and political choices countries facing transnational crime must navigate, are further compounded by the rise of criminal activities. s 33(a)(iii)

s 33(a)(iii)

Australia has direct and indirect interests at stake. Serious and organised crime cost the Australian community up to $60.1 billion in 2020-21.[4] Whilst the impact and costs are felt locally and borne by the Australian community up to 70% of Australia's serious and organised crime are either based offshore or have strong offshore links.[5] Directly, Australia is affected by drug flows and needs the ability to cooperate with countries in the Mekong to prevent, detect and respond to transnational crime. Indirectly, it's also in Australia's national interest to reduce the negative impacts of under-development. Strong economies and effective and resilient states in the region are goals of Australia's international development program.

s 47E(d)

The Mekong countries, already facing numerous challenges such as infrastructure development, socio-economic progress, and climate change, are particularly vulnerable to the threats posed by transnational organised crime. Recently, the heads of government in the Mekong region have expressed growing concerns about transnational organized crime, indicating that it has assumed greater priority in their respective agendas. Of course, this occurs against a backdrop of strategic contestation, with the late Allan Gyngell noting that Southeast Asia is the location for some of the most intense contestation.[6]

As such, cooperation on transnational crime is a shared priority between Australia and Mekong countries – albeit areas of focus differing country by country. Cooperation in this area is of value across the spectrum of national diplomatic, security and developmental interests.

Key Review Questions

The Review Plan (Annex Seven) sets out 10 Key Review Questions the Review Team determined needed to be answered to reach conclusions on MAP-TNC. The table below shows these review questions and the area of inquiry with which they associated.

Area of Inquiry	Key Review Question
Objectives	What is the program trying to achieve? What are the pre-requisites for program success?
Interests and Incentives	How are the interests and incentives of multiple Australian program partners being reconciled to deliver against whole of government (WOG) goals and priorities?
Partner focus	To what degree is the program partner-focused? To what degree does it take a phased, well-informed approach to building local capacity?
GEDSI, Inclusion and development effectiveness	How effectively are development effectiveness principles and priorities, especially GEDSI and inclusion, built into the program?
Program design	What are the strengths and weaknesses of the original program design? To what extent have adaptations strengthened or weakened performance?
Geographic remit	What are the advantages and disadvantages of the sub-regional geographic organization of the program?

Management model	What are the strengths and weaknesses of the management model being used? What alternative management models might offer greater effectiveness and/or efficiency?
Governance	Are the program's strategic and technical governance mechanisms conducive to good decision making? How could they be enhanced?
Performance	What outcomes have been achieved to date against each of the program's three pillars? To what extent does program performance to date represent good value for money?
Future Possibilities	What options should exist to strengthen program performance in the near term? How should the stop/go decision be made and what does the team recommend? If there is a Phase II, what changes would maximise program impact?

Section Four | Synthesis of findings across review questions

This section outlines the main findings across the Key Review Questions while the following section provides greater detail on each of the Key Review Questions.

Tackling TNC in the Mekong is highly relevant to Australia's development, diplomatic and broader national interests:

- TNC is escalating in the region and of growing concern to its heads of government.
- Its negative impacts are increasingly being felt in Australia via drug flows; digital crime and money laundering.
- Increasing criminal activity is compromising institutions and destabilising development, weakening the ability of regional countries to manage their borders and maintain their sovereignty.

There have been mixed messages from the outset about whether the program's principal intent - and therefore the benchmark - of success is relationship-building or impact on TNC:

- A clearer hierarchy of objectives is needed for program focus and to deliver value for money.
- Clarifying that strong relationships between Australian Government Agencies and counterparts - built-up over many years based on consistency, respect and expertise - are the means to achieve enhanced regional impact on transnational crime.

s 33(a)(iii), s 47E(d)

At less than $2m per annum in activity spending, the program is seriously underpowered for the challenges it confronts:

- With spending further spread across four countries and the sub-region, six or more Australian Government Agencies, two external research partners and three distinct crime types.
- This fragmentation limits the extent to which it can be strategic, but creates huge management challenges and costs in trying.

Despite this, TNC in the Mekong is a field where Australia can be a practical and high value partner of choice, offering world class support in some areas:
s 33(a)(iii)

Australian Government Agencies differ greatly in their readiness to work internationally and in the support they need:

- There is no substitute for an on the ground presence that delivers knowledge, networks and trust.
- This requires on-going agency investment, not just DFAT supplementation. There is a strong case for a greater Australian presence in the region by major departments.
- Smaller and less internationally engaged agencies can sometimes become influential in key areas, but a case-by-case, cost-benefit approach is needed, rather than an open invitation.

The small Bangkok MAP-TNC DFAT team has done a good job at bringing Australian government agencies together:

- Agencies are not only recognising the program's coordination and collaboration benefits, but also seeking DFAT leadership of a whole of government effort.
- This strategic opportunity will only be realised with skills, management and governance reform.

As the MAP-TNC hub, with no bilateral assistance program, the Thai mission is particularly appreciative of the relationship gains the program can deliver, but these are just one benefit:

s 47E(d)

While the program has struggled to develop and drive a strategic agenda, it has had several wins:

- Producing valued, regional public-good research.
- Encouraging Australian agency collaboration.
- Backing productive external platforms and events through deft DFAT use of program flexibility.

However, the overall performance of the program to date is not strong:

- A recent Investment Monitoring Report concluded End of Program Outcomes for Pillars One and Three are off track, with only Pillar Two performing satisfactorily.
- Given management costs of over 50% of the total budget - the program is not yet demonstrating value for money.

Pillar 1 involves strategic analysis and policy frameworks:

- Closed-door, expert briefings undertaken by GI-TOC to disseminate research findings were widely and positively referenced during the Review, as was its Mekong Dialogue.
- But MAP-TNC has not had the strategic space, the skills or the platforms to define its analytical needs or make most effective use of what is produced.
- Organisations are keen to move from contractual relationships to policy partnerships, but reorganisation of program expertise will be needed to achieve this.

Pillar 2 is centred on operational capabilities and was designed as the core of the program:

- It provides support for multiple Australian Government Agencies with relevant interests and capabilities to share their expertise with Mekong counterparts.
- But widely spread, 'horse-traded' activity grants have reinforced short-term, small-scale interventions and have not provided support for longer term, broader, approaches.

As a senior official noted, the activity-focused approach has trapped the program 'in the weeds':

- Designing, managing, monitoring and reporting on dozens of small activities with unique Official Development Assistance (ODA) specifications, generates significant transaction costs.

The small DFAT MAP-TNC management team works relentlessly to use activity selection, design and monitoring processes to safeguard public monies and ensure adherence to DFAT policies and procedures:

- With Canberra backing, it should be possible to achieve similar or better results by pushing fiduciary and policy controls upwards into multi-year, multi-activity programs, freeing up time for more strategic work.

Pillar Three which involves Regional Collaboration is perhaps the least developed program element:

- The design anticipated that Pillar Three was where strategic analysis (Pillar One) might be used to define and prosecute an agenda of 'reform, policy advocacy and budget dialogue'.

- Thus far there is very little sign of this sort of high-level dialogue or strategic influencing which would require greater DFAT post buy-in and the creation of new dialogue platforms.

While it is currently the weakest link, focusing strongly on truly regional TNC problems would be one possible way to give MAP-TNC a clearer rationale and a pathway to success:

- Since TNC is a regional problem requiring regional solutions s 33(a)(iii)

A new, sharper strategy is needed for the whole program, particularly its regional elements:

- It should move beyond a narrow crime type focus to approaches that tackle the fluidity and interconnectivity of TNC.
- Options to explore may include focussing on new and urgent threats; brokering and leveraging the resources and expertise of other actors; facilitating access to advanced technology; and honing in on TNC financial flows.
- There should be an active process of defining the program's niche.

s 47E(d)

Reconfiguring the DFAT/PSU interface will be essential to making the most of the resources and opportunities it should provide. A more integrated, DFAT-led, one MAP-TNC team is recommended.

s 47E(d)

- Hands on help is needed and appreciated, but will be most effective if it helps agencies unpack the issues and opportunities, rather than just tweak activities for approval purposes.
- The Cambodia Women in Policing program is a good example of what is possible with strong Australian agency and counterpart champions.
- While more attention and progress on GEDSI is essential, the need to focus on this should not disguise the need for a focus on the systemic question of the effectiveness of the entire program.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) are the most prominent, best represented and most invested Australian government partner tackling TNC in the Mekong.

- The Review Team sees opportunities for a strategic partnership between DFAT and the AFP that addresses limited DFAT support for the program from missions outside Bangkok.
- This might start with joint planning and delivery of quarterly strategic management meetings.
- There is an inherent risk of an agency competing for grants playing a program leadership role, but this can be managed by capping the overall allocation that any partner receives and by shifting the focus from operations to strategy where the AFP has major contributions to make.
- A strategic partnership could go as far as joint strategic management of the program, pooling the respective strengths of each organisation, but that would require high degrees of trust and Canberra-agreement on priorities, policies and procedures and is probably too ambitious for now.

'Going strategic', however managed, would also require more TNC expertise to be at the direct disposal of the TNC team. This might involve:

- Redefining the role of the contracted TNC Adviser, currently devoted largely to operational matters that should be the responsibility of the PSU.
- Pooling all TNC expert advisers in one team under direct DFAT management.
- Having a dedicated MAP-TNC Canberra-based team member sitting with DFAT's TNC team able to connect MAP-TNC to broader TNC broader efforts to counter transnational crime.
- These measures might allow variants of the originally envisaged country engagement plans and workplans to be completed to provide practical, well-informed strategic guidance.

Structural, skills and process augmentation need to be crowned with governance reforms that bring senior stakeholders into big-picture decision making.

- The program needs to be well anchored in Canberra, sitting with other Mekong programs, while also being tightly linked to DFAT's TNC section;
- With an efficient platform for SES engagement and another for annual dialogue with regional counterparts.
- Increasing the engagement of senior policy makers in the program is important to ensure alignment with regional priorities; to allow for input and feedback, especially on priorities; and to position Australia as a flexible, responsive partner with real value to add.

The MTR sees enough need, enough priority and enough potential to warrant a Phase II of MAP-TNC, if costs can be reduced and strategic outcomes increased through governance and management reforms.

Key Review Question One | Objectives

Review question	What is the program trying to achieve? What are the prerequisites for program success?
Main finding	Greater clarity is needed about what the program is trying to achieve to focus efforts and allow measurement of their effectiveness.
Consultation quote	s 33(a)(iii), s 47E(d)
Key evidence points	The program goal was originally 'combatting Mekong TNC' but has changed over time and differs according to the perspective of stakeholders.
	Relationship building is seen by some as an end-in-itself, rather than a means of achieving stronger TNC outcomes.
	The lack of clarity around objectives results in very different benchmarks of success as while relationships are strong, there has been little progress against End of Program Outcomes.
Key recommendations	KR 1: Prioritise transnational crime as a Mekong development issue of growing concern to regional leaders and Australian agencies
	KR 5: Produce refreshed strategic guidance to clarify the program's objectives as part of early action to lift performance
	KR 13.3: For Phase II, establish a clear and achievable program goal of combatting Mekong TNC and End of Program Outcomes that set specific, ambitious but achievable targets
	KR 14: Develop an iterative, evolving strategy that moves beyond a crime-type focus
	Additionally, DFAT develop a doctrine of relationship building, identifying the factors most likely to underpin strong relations, including presence, continuity, listening-not-lecturing, partner-focus and delivering value for counterparts.

Jostling objectives

When MAP-TNC was announced, 'combatting' TNC in the Mekong was the goal.[7] Making use of the capability of Australian Government Agencies was covered in the fifth paragraph of the announcement, separating ends and means. When the program design was released - after lengthy workshopping in Canberra - the goal was reformulated - "To build deeper and stronger cooperation between Australia and Mekong Countries to address transnational crime." [8]

The team assesses that this put relationship building on the same plane as tackling the fundamental problem of TNC. This is given currency by the statement in the design document that "strengthened relations are seen as both the means and the end".[9] s 47E(d)

None of this is to diminish the importance of relationship building in the broad, or specifically in this program. Strong relationships are essential both to determining the right development priorities to work on and doing so effectively. They are also essential to Australia having the access and influence it needs at key moments, on TNC and security issues, but also on a wider array of national interest issues. However, clarity is needed on program purpose.

Unclear ambition

The Review Team sees a need to re-express the program goal to make it unambiguously about combatting TNC, with strong relationships positioned as a supporting, but secondary objective. This hierarchy would force deeper thinking about what TNC outcomes are feasible and what sort of deepened and strengthened relations we need to achieve that.

Clearly all current program activity can be said to 'address TNC'. The objective does not give clear guidance as to what scale of achievement is required. The End of Program Outcomes on the other hand are quite ambitious for a small program, requiring that Australian assistance shapes policy and legislation; results in stronger national capacity that is seen in operational impact; and facilitates strategic collaboration at the regional level on border security and operational issues.[10]

Some argue, retrospectively, that this is all too ambitious and the program should just settle for being about relationships that deliver a small and temporary boost to country capability. The MTR Team agrees that resources and means must match ambition and there was a mismatch in the program at the outset. However, settling for low ambition would make little impact on the problem and would require substantial re-engineering to reduce costs. The Team judges that the better path is to re-engineer for high performance rather than for low performance.

In addition to a new, counter-TNC focused objective, the Review favours the program adopting a small number of clear, specific and achievable End of Program Outcomes to provide focus and benchmarking. Feasible outcomes suggested in consultations included ensuring no Mekong country is on the FATF "grey list"; s 33(a)(iii)
and developing new efficient and effective regional machinery to combat TNC.

A sharper definition of what DFAT wants will require consideration of the pre-requisites for success. This in turn will require a well-informed analysis of TNC in the region; what needs to happen to better address it and where Australia can have maximum impact. In terms of relationships, it will require Australia to understand counterpart needs, preferences, and ways of working.

Need to clarify the role of relationships and what underpins them

The bottom line is that relationships are crucial to the program, but critically depend on delivering value for counterparts. If Australian agencies don't get it right and assistance targets the wrong things, is pitched at the wrong level or uses the wrong methods, not only is an opportunity missed, but in a worst-case situation, relations may even be harmed. All parties have a big stake in ensuring Australia delivers targeted expertise, embedded in enduring, respectful relations. This requires a long-term approach, continuity, trust building, highly valued knowledge and technology, customised for local conditions.

The Team sees value in establishing a doctrine of Australian relationship building as a means of reminding all parties that there is a need for long term investments in relationship building.

Key Review Question Two | Interests and Incentives

Review question	How are the interests and incentives of multiple Australian program partners being reconciled to deliver against whole of government goals and priorities?
Main finding	Incentives matter, but those of the major players are better aligned than expected. Within DFAT, differences need to be recognised and reconciled
	s 47E(d)
Consultation quote	
Key evidence points	
Key recommendations	KR 9: Introduce new program governance involving Canberra SES to facilitate a shift to greater strategic impact
	KR 15: Adopt a tiered approach to AGA partnerships with DFAT assistance geared to leveraging the maximum additional benefit from AGAs
	Additionally, acknowledge and manage different incentives and drivers within DFAT that can result in overly ambitious programs colliding with hard Post constraints.
	Examine how DFAT might use the program as an incubator of specialist agency twinning relationships in key areas

Interests better aligned than expected

DFAT has a long history of working with the AFP and other agencies, sometimes in major interventions to restore order during times of instability and at other times as providers of expertise and advice as part of wider criminal justice programs.[11] A recurring theme in these interventions has been different priorities and benchmarks of success, with operationally focussed organisations understandably prioritising immediate impact, especially on activity that could negatively impact Australia. DFAT's development work on the other hand is more future focused, on building the local capacity for key institutions to themselves better manage problems. In truth, both perspectives and approaches are needed, but can be hard to bring together because of organisational and cultural differences.

The MTR Team expected that MAP-TNC operational agencies would be very heavily focused on the here and now, especially current operations - and that it might be hard to get them to think about the best ways and means of building sustainable local capacity. The Team found relatively little evidence for that proposition. This is not to say that everybody – even in DFAT - has a good handle on the best ways to

achieve long-term capability building - and indeed the program is not geared for that. But it would be wrong to suggest that agencies are resistant and are locked into old style modalities because of a short-sighted focus on immediate operational gains.

s 47E(d)

Not surprisingly, there is not a lot of innovation yet evident, with most activities being pre-existing or pre-planned courses. As a Strategic Observations Review undertaken by the PSU noted in 2022, "Initially a large proportion of activities were proposed and selected based on readiness and many are linked to pre-existing programs."[12] The MTR judges that the biggest constraint to date has been the activity selection and design process itself, not habit or lack of imagination.

Managing less well-aligned incentives

There is an argument for a full court press on TNC in the region that seemingly would call for all agencies with relevant expertise to be involved. However, the cost benefit ratio of trying to get different agencies involved varies. For those that have little history of international work, no structures and staff to advance it and a lack of agency leadership support, it is unlikely that relatively small amounts of DFAT money can be a game-changer.

The equation isn't primarily a function of size. Small, specialised agencies don't have large resources to draw on and often require considerable support at the outset. However, their specialised capability can be extremely valuable and they can be disproportionately influential both on defined policy areas and more broadly in burnishing Australia's reputation as a skilled responsive partner. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission is a case in point having been assisted to build a valued relationship with its Thai counterpart.[13] MAP-TNC may benefit from exploring whether it can be an incubator of specialist agency links in critical areas and how it could best achieve this.

s 47E(d)

The Australian Tax Office (ATO) accounts for 11% of MAP-TNC pipeline, delivering tax crime courses and workshops. On the basis of feedback, it substantially customised and improved its courses and has also collaborated with other agencies. In this case MAP-TNC leveraging has had a strong payoff that will be well worth the effort, if the ATO continues its regional work.

Balanced or strategic?

Consistent with its emphasis on impact, the MTR advocates for an allocation of resources based on the extent to which agencies and other partners can contribute to the achievement of strategic goals. As a result, it does not support the idea of aiming for some sort of 'balance' across agencies, countries or crime types. However, in its model for the future (see Key Review Question 10) the Review proposes a more differentiated approach to agency engagement, with more latitude for experienced agencies; most support for committed agencies that can add value but have limited experience - and a highly selective approach to others.

What would it take to bring AGD and Home Affairs into the broader effort?

One area where the program has not drawn in very valuable expertise is in encouraging the Attorney General's Department (AGD) and Home Affairs to undertake Mekong activities. Both are huge portfolios with many pressures and priorities, but without their expertise Australia's efforts will continue to be seriously underpowered. MAP-TNC is not able to provide enough incentives to change the priorities of major departments. In any case AGD and Home Affairs involvement in MAP-TNC would be trivial compared to what they could do if they were present on the ground, running their own programs. While the Review Team believes that to be warranted, it is ultimately a matter for Secretaries and for Cabinet consideration.

The DFAT incentives dilemma

One area where different interests and incentives are clearly evident is within DFAT. Canberra-based officers whether in Southeast Asian Divisions or the Regulatory & Legal Policy Division have a shared interest in the long-term goal of enlarged regional capability to counteract TNC. s 47E(d)

The incentives here are for simple, self-contained programs that run smoothly and are low risk, even if also low reward.

Squaring DFAT's divergent development incentives is one of its biggest challenges. There will always be pressure to do more things and new things, especially following a change of government. However, neither the financial resources nor the delivery capabilities allow for much expansion of activity, especially in knowledge-rich, policy-based programs. This shows up in overly ambitious and under-resourced programs, such as MAP-TNC. DFAT needs to look at a range of options to avoid an increasing proportion of activities missing their performance targets as a result.[14] Without a substantial addition to capacity and increased appetite from Posts, this might need to involve some radical consolidation of sectors and programs, more use of modalities that are management light and/or a paring back of ambitious objectives.

Key Review Question Three | Partner Focus

Review question	To what degree is the program partner-focused? To what degree does it take a phased, well-informed approach to capacity building?
Main finding	The program is not strongly and clearly partner-focused, but agencies are. That has worked to date, but some powerful feedback is not being heard.
Consultation quote	s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)
Key evidence points	The DFAT team is highly focused on AGA partners s 47E(d) the activity focus have held back high-level policy engagement.
	s 47E(d) The absence of high-level counterpart input and feedback needs early resolution.
	The program is not configured for serious capacity building, but with longer horizons could get beyond short term training.
Key recommendations	KR 11: MAP-TNC needs to be more obviously aligned with regional and country priorities through high-level dialogue and referencing of Mekong agreements and plans. Australia needs to create a forum to interact with regional leaders on TNC to take the place of the Program Coordination Committee which has not been established.
	KR 14: Australia should search for a specialist niche role to deliver high value to country partners
	Additionally, agencies should respond to counterpart demand by adopting case-based learning as a central activity training modality.

Who is the partner?

In some senses, MAP-TNC is very partner-focused, with DFAT devoting the lion's share of program time and effort to managing partner relations and activities. However, when MAP-TNC management and participants talk about partners they nearly always mean DFAT's Australian Government Agency partners, rather than regional counterparts. This is a function of s 47E(d) operating at arms-length from program counterparts outside Thailand and having to manage relations with intermediary agencies rather than country officials. The Agencies themselves hold the counterpart relationships and they are nearly always good custodians of them, but there remains the risk of the program as-a-whole being insufficiently focused on counterparts.

It is telling that two years in, following problems establishing the envisaged Program Coordinating Committee due to a lack of Subsidiary Agreements, there is a not a platform allowing senior counterparts to reflect on the program's progress and to contribute to its overall directions. Very few people identified this as a problem and quite a few were sceptical that anything else was needed, because agency to agency relationships are good. But Australia's aspiration is to step up both for policy impact and for broader relationship purposes and to do that it has to be engaging more broadly and at more senior levels. Its counterparts need confidence that they're being heard and that Team Australia wants and respects local ownership.

It is acknowledged that setting up Subsidiary Agreements for regional programs is much harder than for bilateral programs that are negotiated, agreed and coordinated with counterpart aid coordination units. This needs to be reflected in planning time frames. That said, while regional Subsidiary Agreements start at the back of the queue, that means special efforts are needed to get them agreed. Two years into the program this is taking too long and holding back higher-level policy engagement.

The lack of Subsidiary Agreements has impacted negatively in other ways too. Country coordinators only have informal accreditation and much less room to move than they might. The plan was that they would "facilitate detailed dialogue with Mekong country stakeholders" culminating in "Annual Plans that foster Mekong Country Ownership", described as "critical to program objectives."[15] The MTR judges that more weight needs to be given to counterpart involvement and to resolving issues that currently restrict it. Canberra heft might be needed to encourage Posts to pursue the Subsidiary Agreements with more vigour.

Agency to agency relations

The good news is that the Review Team assesses agency-level partnership satisfaction to be quite high overall and that is indicative of well-managed relations. Indeed, the Team saw this directly in several different ways. Firstly, the Team was surprised at the senior access it got in the region and the quantity and quality of feedback it received[16]. This indicated a significant investment in preparation that would not be undertaken for a low-value program. While there were ideas for improvements and requests Australia would not be able to meet, most of the feedback was positive[17]. The frank, but cordial tone struck by most interlocutors suggested strong working relations that were further evidenced by the good-natured familiarity of Australian officials with their counterparts.

s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

High-level counterpart consultations

As the program goes upstream, new mechanisms will be needed to ensure that the tighter focus and clearer strategy proposed accord with regional thinking and priorities. Even if Australia was very confident it had its finger on the pulse, it would not be enough for AGA's and DFAT to argue that they know what's best. Perhaps the number one lesson in development is the need to start from and stay focused on the priorities of local authorities and communities. This must be continually tested and reconfirmed, with high-level political leaders endorsing what has hopefully already been negotiated at operational levels.

Therefore, a replacement should be found for the Program Coordination Committee that has not been established due to the Subsidiary Agreement problem. The MTR Team proposes an annual high-level meeting engaging political leadership in strategic dialogue about TNC challenges, threats and opportunities, with a view to establishing priorities and coordinating actions. One role would be to test and ensure the program is aligned and on track, but the bigger task would be to engage substantively and influentially with regional leadership on TNC.

Some of those consulted within DFAT and AGAs argued against regional consultations raising a range of issues from over burdening busy people, to replicating ASEAN arrangements or simply over-complicating matters. The MTR Team agrees that careful design is needed, but not that high-level

Mekong consultations are unnecessary or undesirable. s 33(a)(iii)

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The high-level meeting envisaged might be held in the wake of an annual TNC symposium drawing attention to a specific issue. This might be a continuation, or a reshaped version, of GI-TOC's Mekong dialogue – described by one regional actor as "one of the most valuable events on the calendar". The aim would be to gather a very diverse group of stakeholders to look closely at one big issue per annum and in the process deepen understanding, generate solutions and stimulate media and political interest and engagement. This would also extend Australia's networks and open-up new avenues for responses.

What niche for Australia?

This Review is not in a position to recommend definitively what that niche should be, but there are several possibilities that should be tested. Across the region counterparts indicated that TNC was being turbo charged by technology and new forms of criminal activity that were outpacing their responses. This includes the use of encrypted communications; crypto-currency money laundering and industrial scale scam centres. s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)
. s 33(a)(iii)

Another possibility is to focus on issues that require regional collaboration - for example cross border management and protocols, procedural harmonisation; real-time information exchange and regional cooperation architecture. s 33(a)(iii)

t. In fact, for a small player like Australia brokering, coordinating, and leveraging others would make a lot of sense, however this would require Australia making itself amongst the best-informed, most creative and propositional partners on TNC in the region. It is not clear Australia has the tools or the appetite for that. These are the sorts of things that need to be determined through strategic inquiry.

A more straight-forward way of adding greater value might be to focus further on financial crime as the lifeblood of TNC. This would complement Australia's National Strategy to Fight TSOC, which includes stopping the flow of illicit finances as a central pillar to disrupt and deter organised crime networks motivated by profit. Under MAP-TNC, several Australian agencies already do a lot of work in this area including AFP, AUSTRAC and ATO who have started to combine their expertise to deliver joint activities. It comprises the single biggest share of MAP-TNC activities by crime type taking 48% of the whole.[18] Focusing on strategies to make money laundering more difficult, more dangerous and more likely to be detected makes life harder for all transnational criminal enterprises.

Searching for, locating and pursuing a specialist niche is the program's pathway to impact, but it needs stronger means of doing that. (This is explored further in the responses to Key Review Questions 7: Management model and 8: Governance).

Capacity building

In terms of the capacity building modalities and approaches used by the program, these are inherently limited by short time frames and small activities. It was accepted at the outset that the program would start with the small training programs agencies already ran and try to expand and improve them.[19] The design is phased in that sense, but it is hard to see how things transition and to what.

The existing activity-based regime which the first Annual Report concedes provides the 'program framework'[20] will need to be altered to open-up new capacity building possibilities. Even if this occurs, the program is not going to be able to become an exemplar of good capacity building practice. It may however be able to employ a wider range of modalities such as limited twinning arrangements, secondments and possibly mentoring for senior staff, all of which were raised during consultations.

It might also move more consistently to adopt a case-based learning approach, possibly even using live cases. The Team repeatedly heard that case-based practical work was the way to go. Adopting this modality would better meet counterpart requests and requirements and by engaging participants strongly it is likely to be more effective. The Team recognises that use of live cases would involve some blurring of the lines between operational assistance and development assistance. It judges that if the result is stronger learning and greater engagement this should increase development benefits and make them more sustainable.

Even large, long duration capacity building programs have a mixed history[21] because there are so many elements that need to line up including political determination, agency leadership, ability to manage change, countervailing incentives, budgetary reforms etc. What is known is that training-based approaches - even when they are good - are of limited efficacy by themselves in creating sustainable capacity enlargement.[22] That means Australia needs to be realistic about the operational capacity improvement that can be expected under the program and accept that Pillar Two is essentially about the near term. What Australia wants to do about the medium-longer term is an open question. A more strategic approach to Pillars One and Three may help open-up possibilities and allow some longer-term progress.

Key Review Question Four | GEDSI, Inclusion & development effectiveness

Review question	How effectively are development effectiveness principles and priorities, especially GEDSI and inclusion being built into the program?
Main finding	The program is at first-base on GEDSI as a result of the pipeline being composed of largely 'off the rack' activities. PSU assistance and advice is now focusing on implementation. The GEDSI strategy needs to be simple, practical and results based – and finalised now.
Consultation quote	s 47E(d)
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	"Greater diversity results in greater capability." Senior AFP Officer.
Key evidence points	The emphasis to date has been on women in the TNC workforce trying to achieve more parity in training. This is important, but insufficient.
	A GEDSI strategy is needed to explain how gender issues are critical to program and agency goals, but neither of the two attempts have been signed off.
	Program partners want simple guidance, practical assistance and realistic expectations. Some good work has been done already, especially the Cambodian Women in Policing project.
Key recommendations	KRs 1-17 aim to deliver enhanced development effectiveness
	Additionally, reach agreement on the GEDSI strategy as soon as possible, bring existing and new tools together in practical retrofitting clinics to improve results for pipeline activities while thinking ahead to how to build GEDSI into new generation agency programs.

What's the problem?

To the frustration of MAP-TNC's management, Gender Equality, Disability and Inclusion (GEDSI) represents a weak point for the program. Disability and other aspects of inclusion seem to have fared worse than gender, with a recent Independent Monitoring Report concluding there has been next to no active consideration in design processes.[23] Poor results here appear less because of any active resistance than the fact that activities were locked in early, before GEDSI advice and tools were available. It's not impossible to retrofit activities, but it's hard.

Two attempts have been made to develop a GEDSI strategy but have not resulted in an agreed product.[24] The risk here is of 'the best becoming the enemy of the good', with delayed guidance enlarging the GEDSI performance gap. DFAT must start from the position that most agencies will have limited understanding of development effectiveness lessons learned, including fundamental GEDSI principles and policy positions. The ask of agencies must be reasonably modest with a limited number of key requirements, clearly set out and assessed.

It is important that the task is not made too complicated or too theoretical. Gender equality principles - are infused through the program design,[25] albeit at a high level. Additionally high-level GEDSI goals have been reiterated frequently in management meetings and performance assessments.[26] However, at a

practical level, the Review did not see any succinct statement about exactly why and how GEDSI matters in the TNC space and how considering it, or failing to do so, can affect outcomes positively or negatively.

What is needed now are simple ways of adjusting already designed Phase I activities to improve GEDSI outcomes – practical, interim guidance. The MTR understands some of this has already been provided in the form of 'GEDSI one pagers' on crime types, but more reference material and in particular more workshops may be needed.[27] It might be useful for the PSU and DFAT to jointly lead a number of sessions at six-week management meetings to look at what has been done in other programs and what might be impactful in the Mekong.

What GEDSI results is the program trying to achieve?

There was an early tendency – reflected in reporting - to equate GEDSI with women's participation in training courses. That is one aspect, but only one. The bigger need is to be able to see some of the gender dimensions of TNC and how they throw up new challenges and opportunities. The problem will be easier to address if there is a shift to agency program funding since it will allow both for specific interventions and mainstreaming.

Gender analysis should start with a clear articulation of how TNC problems and law enforcement responses are experienced very differently by different genders. Power imbalances, especially those that make less well-educated women migrants, indigenous and minority groups particularly vulnerable to being exploited, as drug mules, scammers and sex workers also work to disproportionally punish them. Understanding the processes by which different genders are recruited and used in TNC activities creates better intelligence and more effective means of interdiction. This in turn requires greater interaction with NGOs and civil society. A simple but powerful example of gender impact was provided by a civil society organisation that talked about its work with young village women giving them the confidence to speak up, push back and become sources of information and of resistance to traffickers.

While the program as-a-whole is currently doing relatively poorly on GEDSI, AFP Cambodia has sponsored Women in Policing activities and has a strong record of outreach to civil society groups. The reason given was straightforward, "Greater diversity results in greater capability. There are more ideas and more opportunities". Other officials indicated that the program has encouraged and resourced a greater gender emphasis in their work.

A Special Fund?

The MTR was not persuaded that the best response to GEDSI weakness would be a separate fund, not least because MAP-TNC is already fragmented into too many separate pieces. A stand-alone fund would no doubt sponsor a few more specific activities, but that is not really the main game. DFAT, the PSU and agencies need to find the formula to influence thinking, planning and design. Greater practical engagement between all the parties would be a good place to start even if the tools and guidance are imperfect.

Key Review Question Five | Program Design

Review question	What were the strengths and weaknesses of the original program design? To what extent have adaptations strengthened or weakened performance?
Main finding	The design had to square the circle, with inconsistent decisions built in from the outset.
	s 47E(d)
Consultation quote	
Key evidence points	
	The design was an exercise in making the best of things, but was overly ambitious, got the contractor model wrong and could not escape the 'small activity trap' at the program's core.
	Elaborate quality assurance processes were designed to try to break the program out of its confines, but were not in place before most program resources were committed.
Key recommendations	KR 13: Commission a partial redesign by the end of quarter one 2024, building as much as possible on what is already in place
	KR 18: If DFAT wants to stay engaged, but needs a low-cost option, then scale back the ambition, cut the costs and still harvest some of the available gains
	s 47E(d)
	Independent evaluations should have access to Aid Governance Board papers to test the adequacy of DFAT quality assurance checks and balances at the design stage.
	DFAT needs to revise its norms to be more consistent with its own experiences, recognising that entirely new programs require long inception periods.

Design by press release

MAP-TNC was announced in August 2019 in the aftermath of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting. s 47E(d)   This locked in its intent, including tackling multiple crime types; coverage of five countries; its modalities and its $30m eight-year funding, too early. The design became a process of trying to make the best of things. Consultations in the region were rapid and interagency discussions in Canberra - described by some as "endless rounds of talking" - did not necessarily represent the optimal design process.

The MAP-TNC design appears to have been a series of heroic attempts to try and make a program developmentally effective, despite the odds stacked against it. Firstly, $30m over eight years - less than

$4m a year and half that on activities - was never going to make a meaningful, sustainable impact on a regional problem denominated at over a hundred billion dollars per annum. Secondly the announcement pre-judged the solution by honing-in on specific issues and determining that the expansion of existing Australian agency activity was the answer.

With the central parameters set at the outset, the big risk for MAP-TNC was always going to be fragmenting into lots of small activities managed by multiple partners in multiple locations. s 47E(d)

The MTR did not have access to Aid Governance Board documents on MAP-TNC and so cannot assess the rigor with which it was appraised. It would be valuable if all independent reviews and evaluations could check the initial stages of design and quality assurance to look for avenues for improvement.

Specific design strengths and weaknesses

MAP-TNC's design does try to grapple with the problems it confronted. It tries to link operations and strategy with a separate pillar for strategic analysis and another for regional collaboration to promote harmonisation and information sharing, but the interconnectivity of the pillars has been weak in practice. The design aspired to tackle needed TNC reforms through DFAT-led policy dialogue, but DFAT's role as a delivery partner, while critical, is not explicitly recognised and resourced, s 33(a)(iii)

Herein lies a major difficulty. Program costs are already high and adequately resourcing posts would make costs prohibitive. The only way this would add up is if the overall program was much larger and costs were a smaller percentage of the whole.

On the positive side, the design team was realistic enough to know that a phased approach should be taken to what it could deliver.[29] It sought to build on existing cooperation, but rightly concluded that "training alone will not realise an improvement in addressing TNC in Mekong countries".[30] It recognised that DFAT would need considerable help in the form of a contracted Program Support Unit to deliver the program, especially in assisting agencies operate internationally and in meeting aid design, quality and reporting requirements.[31]

There were several other elements of the design that would have helped achieve better outcomes but have not been put in place. s 47E(d)

The design is simultaneously ambitious and ambivalent about what it is trying to achieve. That may have been a deliberate attempt to square the circle. The program is seriously under-resourced to achieve its outcomes, overly focused on law enforcement and is spread far too thin. The Review Team concludes it was not open to the designers to proceed methodically from analysis of TNC in the region and how best to address it.

The program design did try to bring some coherence and strategy to activity selection and design, including country plans, competitive processes, and selection criteria informed by strategic analysis, baseline data and purpose-built monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and GEDSI frameworks. Unfortunately, almost none of this was in place before most Phase I resources were committed. That was due to a range of factors including COVID-19 and PSU delays, but the design was much too ambitious about what could be achieved in the inception phase, most likely to meet unrealistic government expectations.

DFAT frequently underestimates what it takes to start a new program and this was a new program in a new regional hub. Inception of this complex program should have taken twice as long and activity selection, even tentative, ought not to have proceeded for 2023 and 2024, before fundamental strategic guidance and quality assurance systems were in place.

Key Review Question Six | Geographic remit

Review question	What are the advantages and disadvantages of the sub-regional geographic organisation of the program?
Main finding	Mekong TNC is a genuinely regional problem, but the inter-governmental architecture to address it is weak and Australia has not developed a regional strategy or approach.
Consultation quote	s 47E(d)
Key evidence points	Mekong TNC is being driven by fast growing interconnectivity and lagging development of regional machinery and public goods. 'Infrastructure is not enough'.
	The Program's Regional Pillar is conceptually undeveloped and almost no work has been done to push forward a strategic agenda to strengthen regional architecture and cooperation.
	MAP-TNC is not integrated with bilateral programs and country counterpart plans. It needs to be incorporated into Mekong strategic planning and management.
Key recommendations	KR 10: MAP-TNC's Canberra focal point should be co-located with other Mekong programs, in one geographic division, working to one masterplan
	KR 11: More obviously align MAP-TNC with regional and country priorities through high-level dialogue and referencing of Mekong agreements and plans and by creating a forum for Australia to interact with regional leaders on TNC
	Additionally, DFAT should re-examine its machinery and resourcing arrangements for integrating bilateral and regional activities to create a level playing field and allow for greater complementarity.
	s 33(a)(iii)

Mekong TNC is a regional problem requiring regional solutions

By definition, transnational crime is not bilateral. In spanning borders and taking advantage of separated jurisdictions, with different vulnerabilities, TNC not only lends itself to transnational cooperation, but effective responses require it. That said, both capability building and policy dialogue must have strong, local roots and relationship building is typically best done by representatives on the ground, seeing each other frequently and able to build trust and confidence through personal and professional linkages. Therefore, effective TNC cooperation needs a mix of bilateral and regional cooperation with assessments about the right balance, at different moments.

The Mekong sub-region is much more joined up than a generation ago - not least due to the efforts of international partners including Australia and the Asian Development Bank.[35] Interconnectivity facilitated by major infrastructure has seen trade and people movement rise and TNC multiply. TNC has distinct

regional patterns that argue for a regional focus. s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

. Existing channels of communication and protocols for exchange of information are slow and cumbersome. Partial solutions can be seen in the short term through better networking of officials, but institutional cooperation needs thorough renovation - new legislation, new protocols, harmonised procedures, etc. This sort of work was envisaged in Pillar Three, but has not been taken forward to date.

Regional programs have a major programming advantage in allowing flexibility across borders meaning that a slow-down in one country can be offset by expanding elsewhere. This also provides more scope to seize opportunities wherever they arise, compared with when funds are locked-in, country by country. Regional approaches can also be efficient, as the same problem can be tackled in multiple locations at the same time, allowing a hubbing of expertise and avoidance of isolated country activities. While these benefits are real, they must be offset with known disadvantages. One is the risk of overplaying the hub and homogenising support when responses really require country customisation.

Some Mekong-specifics cautions

While the Mekong is a distinct sub-region in which TNC is thriving,[36] it is not one, homogenous or even fully cohesive region. It spans countries at very different levels of development and TNC capability with very different histories and cultures. s 33(a)(iii)

. During consultations, counterparts -
s 33(a)(iii)   - showed a welcome appetite for working with their peers, but wanted that cooperation to be neutral and equally respectful of all countries. Australia can be that neutral party, bringing people and institutions together, but this should happen in different places at different times and not all be centred on Bangkok.

The regional/bilateral divide

It has proved quite difficult over the long-term to integrate Australia's regional and bilateral programs. They tend to be designed, managed and monitored separately and have their own key players, fora and rhythms. It is a common refrain in bilateral posts that regional activities and visits occur with little notice and that posts are expected to service them without resources, even when they do not accord with post priorities. Regional programs on the other hand complain of a lack of support from bilateral posts, despite the fact they often address Ministerial priorities. Despite living in an era of sophisticated management and communications tools it still seems to be surprisingly hard to bring Australia's regional and bilateral efforts together.

The Team encountered this directly both by observing very limited post engagement with the program during its regional consultations and receiving strong, direct senior feedback that if posts were to take a more prominent role they would need staff resources, influence over programming and a clear Canberra signal that TNC was to be prioritised. This ups the ante for Canberra in determining what it wants, what takes precedence and what takes a back seat. It also raises issues of management and how strategies and programs are brought together. DFAT should take another look at how it integrates bilateral and regional programs as it works out how best to take forward the new development policy that is about to be announced.

DFAT regional organisation and strategy

For historic reasons, MAP-TNC sits in the Southeast Asian Development Policy and Programs Branch whereas other Mekong development activities are managed from the Vietnam and Mekong Branch in a separate division. This makes the integration of policies, programs and priorities harder than it should be.

Additionally, while a new cluster of predominantly regional activities was created under the Mekong Australia Partnership banner to increase regional activity and engagement in 2020[37] it is not clear that the separate elements amount to a powerful, cohesive strategy that unifies, organises and prioritises ongoing activity, bilateral and regional, new MAP activity and MAP-TNC. This makes all of the inherent regional problems more difficult still. The good news is that there would appear to be good opportunities for improved results by bringing the Canberra oversight and management of all Mekong programs together in one division, working to one masterplan.

Regional coordination and dialogue

Mekong regional TNC architecture is underdeveloped with relatively little to plug into.[38] ASEAN meetings including Ministerial and Senior Officials meetings on drugs and on transnational crime are important and should be bolstered, but there remains scope for greater Mekong-specific, high-level dialogue and coordination, not least to manage common borders. While there are ASEAN wide issues, problems and processes, this should not obscure the fact that the Mekong sub-region is distinct s 33(a)(iii) Work under Pillar Three could usefully scope what is optimal.

MAP-TNC currently has the attention of operational counterparts at senior levels, but not necessarily those whose support is needed for big reforms such as finance and foreign affairs departments s 33(a)(iii) Given the growing concerns about TNC expressed by the leaders of the four participating countries, there would appear to be opportunities to develop different dialogue tracks, culminating perhaps in a senior leaders' summit.

The review team is cognisant of how busy senior political leaders are and agrees that regional dialogue has to be driven by local leaders, not outside parties. It also needs to complement and not diminish or distort existing platforms and relationships. But being able to imagine and suggest feasible high-value possibilities and help bring them into being, is the sort of work MAP-TNC might aspire to deliver. It is disappointing that neither the program, nor any other party has yet been able to produce a comprehensive and reliable map of regional meetings and processes, actors and interest groups and external partner activities. This would seem to be an important prerequisite for navigating the territory and finding strategic opportunity.

s 33(a)(iii)

Key Review Question Seven | Management model

Review question	What are the strengths and weaknesses of the management model?
Main finding	Activity management has become the raison d'etre of the program, trapping it 'in the weeds' but also bringing agencies to the table to collaborate.
Consultation quote	s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)
Key evidence points	The program has become the pipeline. This has delivered structure and collaboration, but also rigidity and a narrow focus on activities, averaging $50,000.
	The high costs of managing 84 small activities across 5 locations, 6 AGAs & 2 external partners are consuming all DFAT's resources.
	s 47E(d)
	.
Key recommendations	KR 4: Create additional dedicated capacity for strategic management and engagement on TNC by combining departmental and contracted resources to create an analytical and policy unit working direct to DFAT Bangkok
	KR 6: Move towards more efficient and effective multi-year agency programs of work with DFAT MAP-TNC staff time reallocated to focus on strategic management
	KR 15: Adopt a tiered relationship model for working with Australian Government Agencies
	KR 16: Align resources with MAP-TNCs new strategy by directing resources to agencies and other partners to the extent they advance program goals
	s 47E(d)

The complex dynamics of G2G

MAP-TNC - and most G2G programs - involve complicated relationships. DFAT holds the money, but agencies have the technical skills and counterpart relationships. Normally, DFAT has commissioning power, controls the money and has strong legal instruments to enforce what it wants from contractors and grantees. Here authority, both formal and informal, is divided between the principal parties and has to be configured and managed differently. In this case, no-one can get what they want without collaboration and this has allowed the program's central mechanism of grants to bring the parties together to facilitate specific and agreed agency activities. That's a major and worthy achievement and

importantly provides a foundation for thinking and working together outside of the activity confines of the program.

For whole of government to work well, senior officials have to be bilingual and bifocal. They need to speak their own organisational language, but understand that of others, and they need to focus on both the here and now and where will we be in 5-10 years' time. To the Team's surprise, MAP-TNC seems to be fostering that, even if it has not yet translated this into serious impact. This needs to be institutionalised to survive changes of personnel. That will require deals struck, documented and reinforced in Canberra to help avoid unproductive turf battles in the field in future.

DFAT is managing money and risk

DFAT brings its regional and global diplomatic expertise into the mix and its development experience and knowledge. ODA spending is held to very high standards of accountability that can sometimes frustrate other agencies. The trick is to get the balance right in terms of requirements. As noted on the GEDSI issue, AGAs are not going to become mini development agencies and the small activities being supported are unlikely to have many long-term sustainable outcomes. Therefore, what is expected must reflect this. The best way to do this is through applying a small number of clear principles that target the greatest risks. The largest of these is likely to be aid spending that is seen as unnecessary, extravagant, or poor value for money. Risk management requires specific protocols around hospitality, equipment and infrastructure.

The current team is dogged about this and does a great job at safeguarding public monies, but this causes it to over-rely on the controls it can affect via activity design and approval. The whole program is geared around allocating, approving and rolling out small activities. As one person put it, it has become s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

The MAP-TNC Second Annual Report reinforces the centrality of activity management stating that "the pipeline process has remained the overarching governance framework for DFAT and AGA's to engage with".[40] While this has provided a structure for decision making it has also locked in a mechanistic allocation of resources and a small activity focus. As observed in the 2022 'Strategic Observations Report', "Funding arrangements to date appear to have been prioritised and selected, based on what activities are available rather than a strategic approach ... the main prioritisation criteria for activities to be included in a funding pipeline has in practice been budget availability".[41]

Major management burden

There are six or more eligible AGAs, four countries and the region, and three specified crime types. That necessitates small grants of up to $100,000 in theory - but half that in practice[42] - to hit most of the bases and keep the major players happy. The resulting 84 small activities involve a huge management burden for all concerned - with backwards and forwards negotiations sometimes taking many weeks over relatively small matters.

The opportunity cost of this is high, with six weekly management meetings being dominated by pipeline description and activity double checking, rather than harnessing the expertise around the table to share intelligence, recalibrate strategy, look at what's working and search for new pathways to maximise results. A senior figure asked, "why is this so hard". The Team thinks it is because activities are the wrong unit of account for a regional program with multiple partners, especially if there is strategic intent.

A new unit of account

Risk and money must be managed differently if MAP-TNC is to succeed. This requires the partnership element to come to the fore with agencies accepting more responsibility for meeting fundamental requirements and undertaking transparent, quality reporting, while DFAT lets go of activity- based

controls, shifting instead to more flexible, outcome-focused multi-year agency programs, at least with bigger partners.

While of course there would still be specific activities to be delivered they could be larger and longer duration, opening-up new possibilities. More to the point, the conversations and collaboration would shift to what the agency program is trying to achieve; how it will get there; and what support will be most helpful. DFAT would end up managing fewer than half a dozen agency programs, rather than 80 small activities. The management savings should be devoted to combining scarce strategic expertise in DFAT, the PSU and agencies to deliver against the higher-level objective of helping agencies in the region become more effective in tackling transnational crime.

Creating capacity for strategic leadership

Limited TNC-specific capability available to the program is fragmented and sits largely outside the MAP-TNC team. It is in the PSU, it is in DFAT's small TNC section in Canberra - and most significantly it is in the AGA and external partners. Furthermore, what expertise is directly available to DFAT is largely being used for activity management purposes.

If governments and bilateral and multilateral partners are to be influenced and leveraged, DFAT itself needs more TNC heft to define and prosecute a credible strategic agenda. Creating a dedicated, small strategic team would help the program interface with these regional partners. As already observed, the analytical products produced under Pillar One have been useful.[43] Australia needs to continue to work with effective international partners, but cannot manage them like contractors. The Review team detected a desire amongst those partners for a different sort of relationship that would be less transactional and more knowledge and strategy based. Of course, relationships must work for both sides, so the natural starting point is to define what the respective needs are. Once decisions about the future of MAP-TNC have been made that would be a good time to refresh the relationship with regional bodies.

Ideally the program would be able to draw on wider departmental expertise as the program evolves and faces a series of choices about where and how to focus. However, DFAT does not currently have a law and justice sectoral team that might be able to provide expert assessments and advice, one step removed from the program. The TNC section is the closest proxy for this, but its responsibilities are largely multilateral. Giving that team a dedicated MAP-TNC advisor position could help both Bangkok and Canberra better link up and support each other's agendas. This is particularly important as MAP-TNC is now Australia's only dedicated programme that supports multiagency government to government activity to counter TNC activity in the Indo-Pacific.

In summary, to provide more capacity for strategic interventions, the Review team suggests:
- TNC adviser inputs be shifted from activities to strategy.
- All available TNC expertise - DFAT Bangkok and Canberra; PSU; and contracted-in - be combined and put directly at the disposal of the MAP-TNC team in a dedicated unit to drive improved performance, especially against Pillars One and Three.
- A new dedicated MAP-TNC position be created in the DFAT TNC section in Canberra.

The Program Support Unit

A central element of the MAP-TNC management model is reliance on a contracted Program Support Unit, whose budget is $12m over the full eight years of the program.[44] s 47E(d)
          The inception phase was much too short, with the PSU as well as the Embassy team asked to do too much, too quickly. The baseline study in particular, as a comprehensive assessment of TNC issues, trends, architecture and interventions would have been beyond almost any party in the first six months. s 47E(d)

Key Review Question Eight | Governance

Review question	Are the program's strategic and technical governance mechanisms conducive to good decision making? How could they be enhanced?
Main finding	There is no existing MAP-TNC leadership structure to set strategy and guide overarching directions on countries and crime types. Activities emerge from activity competition, not strategic planning.
Consultation quote	*"MAP-TNC brings us and partners together. DFAT keeps agencies strategically aligned, has made us think more about the context and operating environment."* Senior AFP officer.
Key evidence points	Currently there is no broad based, senior program governance to provide strategic guidance and help get the program out of the weeds.
	Governance needs to better reflect MAP-TNC as a partnership between agencies with complementary strengths and many shared interests.
	Country counterparts are not currently engaged in strategic prioritisation & performance assessment. This should only be one aspect of bigger-picture-strategic engagement.
Key recommendations	KR 2: DFAT play a whole of government leadership role in Canberra and the region in coordinating Australian Government Agencies to deliver more strategic and more effective Australian responses to Mekong transnational crime
	KR 9: Develop and implement new governance for MAP-TNC including an SES-led, bi-annual Canberra IDC
	KR 10: Ensure the program has a strong Canberra 'home' allowing both regional and policy synergies, by locating its oversight with other Mekong programs in one geographic division, working to one masterplan
	s 47E(d)
	KR 17: A DFAT First Assistant Secretary make the MAP-TNC Stop/Go decision, advised by the new DFAT led IDC of relevant stakeholders

Current arrangements

MAP-TNC is managed and overseen by the Australian Mission in Bangkok. This is a simple arrangement with a clear and short chain of command.[45] The Review Team spoke with senior officers, including SES and found them engaged and responsive, but also extremely busy. With little time and no formal mechanism to engage regularly, involvement is typically triggered by approvals, or by problems. The Bangkok team has been specifically commended by senior staff for containing potential issues and for the program running as smoothly as it does. The MTR agrees that this is very valuable for the Post, but comes with the risk of some big problems persisting, especially given the Post's dominant bilateral responsibilities.

The MTR assesses that there were several points when alarm bells ought to have rung quite loudly. This includes diagnosing some fundamental problems with the design; recognising and resolving the unrealistic demands of the inception phase; spotting the central problem of the program being trapped in small scale activity management s 47E(d)   .

Most of these issues need Canberra SES engagement, as they go to policy, strategy, partnership agreements, contractual issues and risk management processes. Canberra already shadows the program, attending management meetings and being involved in formal processes such as this MTR, but in a largely secondary and passive role. The MTR concludes that Canberra needs to be more involved in program oversight, direction setting and performance assessment.

Six monthly Canberra IDC

The MTR does not want to make a complicated program more so, but wants to give the team greater strategic guidance and access to problem resolution support. This will allow it to move a little more confidently into strategic space that it does not yet occupy. The most efficient way to achieve that might be for SES from the Office of Southeast Asia and from the Regulatory & Legal Policy Division to co-chair a six-monthly IDC of interested parties to consider regional TNC developments and what responses are called for from Australia. The IDC would also review program performance and determine the need for any changes of approach or management responses.

Other potential reforms

On the technical side, the program has access to a modest amount of expertise, but it is thinly spread across multiple locations and hard to bring together. It has already been proposed that PSU and DFAT advisors comprise one sub-unit, working more directly to MAP-TNC management.

Engaging and involving counterparts

Finally, with other matters resolved, DFAT needs to turn its attention to involving counterparts in the governance of the program. As noted previously (See Key Review Question Three) the original plan for this in the design has not been able to be implemented due to COVID-19 having greatly delayed the negotiation of Subsidiary Agreements with regional countries. This provides an opportunity to reassess the balance of representation at such a meeting and to look at how to use it for wider engagement on TNC. (See Key Review Question Three).

Key Review Question Nine | Performance

Review question	What outcomes have been achieved to date against each of the program's three pillars? To what extent does program performance to date represent good value for money?
Main finding	Only End of Program Outcome Two is on track, albeit judged against delivery metrics and relationships, rather than capacity strengthening outcomes. Performance reporting is improving from a low base. Value for money is poor, but there are successes to point to and assets to build on
Consultation quote	s 33(a)(iii), s 47E(d) .
Key evidence points	Underperformance against all EoPOs, except relationship gains, but targeted wins s 33(a)(iii) and potential for significant further improvement.
	Some sound, initial analytical collaboration with GI-TOC and UNODC but all sides want to make more of it and DFAT needs to re-gear for policy engagement and regional work.
	Performance reporting has been weak on both the demand and supply side. The new PSU framework is strong and should be pushed forward.
Key recommendations	The entire package of Key Recommendations is designed to improve overall effectiveness and increase value for money, especially KRs 4-7 and 13-16.
	Additionally, a renewed Pillar One agenda should involve preparation of regional and country strategy papers and the identification of a modest, achievable policy dialogue road map; and
	Management should affirm the strengths of the new Performance Framework and workshop its approaches to deepen performance reporting.

Performance results: Whole of Program

In a nutshell, the program is too ambitious and its small activity focus has weighed it down and held it back. MAP-TNC has produced some useful research, including UNODC work on illicit financial flows and GI-TOC expert briefings, but it has not been able to make major use of this research and has not satisfied Canberra's appetite for reporting on regional TNC. High-level policy dialogue has not been driven forward and genuinely regional engagement has barely begun.

However, against the odds and even in the wake of COVID, it has been able to get Australian agencies around the table and increasingly working together, albeit on a small scale. The Team has also selectively funded some complementary programs and events, extending its reach, linking to other fora and achieving some useful wins. This includes funding regional participation in the Financial Intelligence Consultative Group (FICG) and Asia Regional Law Enforcement Meetings (ARLEM). The program also funded attendance at an UNODC high-level forum on Money Laundering that alerted a regional government to new risks and threats and led to follow on requests for assistance.

For overall program performance to be satisfactory or better, program-specific analytical work would need to help shape operational work and/or the policies and programs of other actors. Operational activities would need to continue to evolve to become more joined up, with longer-term horizons. The strategic analysis would also need to define and advance a regional role that is as yet unclear. It important to note that it is still relatively 'early days' and the program had a tough start. The MTR Team believes that with substantial management and governance changes success is possible.

Performance results: Outcome results

EOPO 1: Policy framework and strategic analysis

There are visible inputs and outputs under EOPO 1, but substantial outcomes are less clear. DFAT engaged UNODC and GI-TOC to undertake research to define the Mekong TNC landscape better. While high-level progress has been made on that score, and expert briefings widely welcomed, the research pointed to a lot more that needs to be done, with persisting uncertainty about what direction to go in. GI-TOC's Situation Analysis[46] was a competent if high-level stop-gap product to compensate for the lack of baseline analysis, but from all this work it is not clear that an Australian policy framework has yet emerged, or is in prospect. A renewed Pillar One agenda might also see the preparation of regional and country strategy papers and the identification of a modest, achievable policy dialogue road map.

EOPO 2: Operational capacities

Course evaluation feedback in the MAP-TNC second Annual Report shows that more than 85% of participants reported activities met their expectations; were relevant; and provided useful knowledge they would apply in their work.[47] That is good as far as its goes, but it does not provide information about whether operational capacity has actually been improved or other less obvious flow-on results.

While the program can only modestly improve operational capacity in the short to medium term through the skills development of individuals and the promotion of productive ways of working, sometimes that can contribute to significant outcomes. s 33(a)(iii), s 33(b)

This shows that picking the right targets, at the right time can have a disproportionate impact, even if the training mechanism is not incredibly powerful. It also means there need to be reliable processes to capture that sort of result, which has not been the case to date.

Similarly, counterparts repeatedly said to the MTR team that they valued how the program connected them to their peers. Sometimes this was their regional peers, but most often this was to peers in their own country. It turns out that is a very important and value-adding role of the program. However, currently important results like this are getting lost. The new Performance Framework – which is a high-quality PSU product - should allow them to be captured, but its intent and methods needs to be propagated and reinforced through PSU/agency workshops.

EOPO 3: Regional collaboration

As noted elsewhere, the program has made no visible progress against defining a regional agenda. Currently AGA activities involving more than one country are being booked as regional activities. While there is real value in bringing counterparts together and creating informal networks to complement and compensate for weak formal structures, this not really the strategic collaboration the design seemed to have in mind. At best it should be included as a sub-category so that managers can see what is or is not happening at a higher level.

Performance reporting

"*We're not doing a good job of telling our story. We need guidance on what story we need to be telling and how to frame it*" - Senior AGA representative.

Performance reporting was a significant weak spot during the early stages of the program. It was always going to be hard, with a plethora of small, short activities to tell a positive performance story, but the original focus on number of attendees at courses did not do a good job of highlighting program achievements and kept the focus at too low a level. Agencies themselves need to complement activity-based reporting with short qualitative reporting setting out what happened because of the activities.

The first Annual Report[48], responding to DFAT specifications, was configured largely as a report against PSU deliverables. Program performance information was scattered and buried, rather than consolidated and elevated. The program needs a dashboard of key information and results that all parties can see and that is used to steer the program. Perhaps the PSU's new portal will provide this function. Currently it is not clear what the key management metrics are, beyond the pipeline and budget management, but these are crude delivery indicators. The Second Annual Report was being finalised as this Review was concluding but appears to be a significant improvement, making more use of case studies and qualitative feedback.

A new Performance Framework[49] was released in October 2022 that the MTR judges to be a good product, due to its emphasis on what is practical and proportional. It encourages a mix of methods to tell a credible story about what has been achieved based on what evidence there is. Practical workshops with agencies might maximise the uptake of its approaches.

Value for money

s 47E(d)

A plausible argument is that this is the price that must be paid to bring the expertise of agencies together with good development practice; make it accord with foreign policy practice and priorities and deliver greater outcomes over the medium term. The cost would look much more reasonable if the program was twice as big, as ideally it would be and reportedly, it was to be. But DFAT is left with the need to demonstrate that the cost is worth it because there's clear evidence of value-adding in the outcomes achieved. Unfortunately, that is not evident. Indeed, the argument is negated by the fact that most of program resources available in Phase I were allocated without the information or systems and processes the design intended to deliver better results. All of that adds up to a serious value for money problem.

This requires urgent work to reduce costs where possible and improve outcomes. The MTR sees opportunities to do both. s 47E(d)

Secondly the Review sees scope to differentiate between management, administration and program support on the one hand and high-level expertise that is mapping a detailed policy agenda; brokering partnerships, designing dialogue processes etc. The latter should be defined as program products rather than costs. To underline this and ring fence those resources, the Review has proposed a separate strategic analysis team under DFAT management. That team would become the engine the program currently lacks to define and advance a more strategic agenda. Through those processes MAP-TNC may be able to achieve value for money in the future.

Key Review Question Ten | Future Possibilities

Review question	What options exist to strengthen program performance in the near term? How should the stop/go decision be made and what does the Team recommend? If there is a Phase II, what changes would maximise program impact?
Main finding	This isn't a simple stop/go decision, there are different options depending on what Australia wants to achieve and is willing to pay for.
Consultation quote	*"I think this can come good, but we need to make some changes."* AGA partner.
Key evidence points	The MTR Team recommends taking a defined pathway to higher performance (see Key Recommendations) but DFAT & partners need to commit to the additional effort involved.
	The Stop/Go decision should be made in Quarter three, 2023 by a DFAT FAS with input from all relevant stakeholders, on the basis of Australian interests (especially development interests) and a hard-headed look at how they can be advanced.
	The MTR Team recommends a Phase II if DFAT can reorganise to deliver stronger results.
Key recommendations	KRs 4-11 address the near term through an SES-led strategic reset and a shift to multi-year, multi-activity programs
	KRs 12-16 propose a partial redesign to prepare for MAP-TNC Phase II, incorporating and extending immediate changes, especially through greater SES oversight and the creation of a single management team with dedicated strategic analytical capability
	KR 17: A DFAT FAS make the MAP-TNC Stop/Go decision advised by the new DFAT led IDC of relevant stakeholders
	KR 18: If DAFT wants to stay engaged but needs a low-cost option, then it should scale back the ambition, cut the costs and still harvest some of the available gains

Stop/Go - what are the options?

MAP-TNC has been hard work and is expensive to run. Early results have not been strong. There is a case to abandon the model, learn the lessons and wrap it up. That's not what the MTR recommends, but drawing a line under Phase I and not proceeding to Phase II is a live option that will need to be considered as part of the Stop/Go process.

Why does the MTR Team think it's worth persevering? Fundamentally because Australian national interests require it and because development in the region is being seriously eroded by escalating TNC. The Team sees opportunities, if Australia is nimble and creative to make common cause with heads of government in the region who are increasingly concerned about criminal infiltration. The team also thinks that it should be possible to reduce management costs while also stepping up strategically, changing the whole program calculus.

Ideally, Phase II would be considerably better funded but the Team recognises hard budget constraints. The cheapest option is to set the bar low, fund agencies directly with the simplest set of requirements, provide logistical support, but dispense with most of the higher-level PSU functions.

If Australia wanted to add to this minimalist approach without significant management cost, it could also provide core funding to specialist agencies in the region, occasionally getting a seat at the table, although not necessarily with much to contribute to policy dialogue. Pillars One and Two of the current model would continue in a simpler and more streamlined way, with the ambition matching the resourcing. Pillar Three would have to be abandoned as beyond the capability of the program.

If this halfway house is too unambitious, which the MTR concludes, new machinery will be needed to drive a more impactful approach. Fortunately, as has been set out in responses to other Key Review Questions, it seems possible to re-engineer and modestly supplement, existing machinery to build a stronger program engine.

Under any scenario shift to agency programs and tiered partnerships as soon as possible

Whether there is a Phase II or not; whether it is less ambitious or more strategic; the MTR recommends moving as soon as possible to multi-year, multi-activity agency programs both to enlarge agency strategic scope and to slash transaction costs. It also recommends a move to differentiated relationships between DFAT and AGAs.

Tier One would involve strategic partnerships with highly capable agencies that have a regional presence - currently AFP, AUSTRAC and Australian Border Force. There would be a high degree of trust and collaboration on overall program strategy; DFAT support would be geared to leveraging agency capability at the program level, rather than the activity level. DFAT and Tier One agencies would negotiate multi-year programs that would specify agreed outcomes and in principle agreement to work programs that would be firmed up annually.

Tier Two would involve agencies judged to have strong interests and valuable expertise to share but needing more hands-on help to undertake regional activities. Agencies would be expected to make an ongoing commitment to work in the region. ATO is a case in point from Phase I, having started at a low base, but also having made a determined and successful effort to build its own capacity and customise its engagement. These agencies would receive the same sort of practical assistance now being provided and might likely remain activity based or have small programs.

Tier Three would be a holding category for possible candidates for program support on a case-by-case basis. It would not try to coax those that are ambivalent about international engagement with the lure of program funds. It judges that this is unlikely to deliver good outcomes over the longer term. It would instead actively look for twinning possibilities for small, specialist agencies where there is likely mutual benefit in addressing high priority issues.

The MTR, Optimal Model for Phase II

Bringing together the analysis in this Review, the Team proposes a new model that might meet the aspirations of the original program. It would work in the following ways:

1. Canberra frames a new and clear goal for the program with ambitious, but achievable End of Program Outcomes. It specifies high level results that Australia and regional partners want to achieve that provide clearer benchmarks of success. It clarifies the role of relationships in positively influencing both operational and policy decision making, with the aim of achieving stronger results both today and in five years' time.
2. Canberra also articulates an Australian approach to relationship building which is long-term, consistent, respectful and supportive, based on delivering well-targeted, high-value assistance.

It recognises, welcomes and wants to harvest the broader benefits this approach can yield in terms of trust, access and influence, but also that a transactional approach, built on a weak base will not deliver what Australia needs.

3. New governance machinery brings relevant agencies together at the SES level in Canberra under DFAT leadership, twice a year to provide strategic oversight and guidance to the program and to provide a sounding board and forum for problem resolution. Program performance is assessed by the IDC and changes to strategy determined as necessary.

4. A strategic policy team is assembled under direct MAP-TNC management to help explore, steer and discover the most productive interventions to tackle Mekong TNC. It is drawn from the existing PSU, directly contracted assistance and a new advisor position based in DFAT's TNC section in Canberra. Residual PSU functions are organised in a separately managed operational services and support team. PSU roles and responsibilities include all aspects of program support and accounting, with no split functions.

5. The strategic policy team leads development of an iterative program strategy that gives effect to the original desire for adaptive management. In doing so it considers various possibilities to provide program focus, moving away from specific crime types. To ensure Child Sexual Exploitation receives more attention rather than less, this distinct program element transitions to the ASEAN-ACT Team.

6. The policy team reconfigures Pillar One, interacting closely and in partnership with regional bodies to build needed knowledge for stronger regional responses to Mekong TNC. It maps the architecture, actors and activities occurring, looking for ways to enhance impact.

7. Pillar Two is reshaped around multi-year, multi-activity programs, built primarily as a partnership between DFAT and agencies on the ground. Programs are agreed, but remain fluid to allow for responses to changing needs and priorities.

8. Pillar Three - regional collaboration - is defined and advanced by the work of the policy team. The team develops a potential model of effective regional collaboration, including multi-level architecture; legal and procedural agreements; external partnering; track 2 dialogue etc. It then tries to identify where, when and how Australia can play the most effective role in evolving regional collaboration.

9. If possible, the program's activity budget increases while DFAT and PSU budgets are held constant to reduce the ratio of management costs. Management funding is used differently, as per the previous description of a hybrid model with a policy team working directly to DFAT and a services team working separately with agencies.

A quarter of total program funds across the pillars is retained in a flexible fund for opportunistic deployment to allow rapid response to emerging high-level priorities, with a different set of expectations and performance metrics. The remaining three quarters advance long term sustainable outcomes.

Partial redesign

The above is a sketch of a model that the MTR team thinks is affordable, feasible to construct and likely to be less expensive, less burdensome and more effective than the current model. That said, it is only a sketch and so more work must be done to test and better define its propositions. The team proposes that this is achieved through a partial redesign, to be completed by the end of quarter one, calendar 2024. Full-scale redesigns are lengthy, demanding and uncertain processes. Sometimes they are used as a reason not to take early action and can result in wasted time and opportunity. A partial redesign can make good use of existing inside knowledge and experience, especially when paired with outside oversight.

The MTR recommends that this redesign process be driven by a contracted in expert working closely with DFAT, the PSU and at least one AGA partner. The expert group would be overseen by an SES-led, taskforce drawn from the Post, Canberra and possibly including two Senior counterpart officials.

The Review Team believes that the directions the program must head in are clear and that the sooner the journey is started the better. It recommends that governance changes are instituted as soon as possible to drive the process forward.

Making the Stop/Go decision

As MAP-TNC is an interdepartmental partnership with significant Canberra interest and implications, the decision about whether to proceed to a second phase should be made by Senior DFAT personnel in Canberra. The MTR judges that a First Assistant Secretary should make the decision, with one option being that it is made jointly by FAS, Southeast Asia Strategy and Development and FAS, Regulatory and Legal Policy Division.

Departmental stakeholders will need to be consulted and might be brought into the decision making directly so that they can own the outcome and do whatever is necessary implement it successfully. This would entail setting up an IDC that might also provide the governance body proposed previously at least for the remainder of Phase I and any changes required to transition to new arrangements.

Decision makers will need to consider the evidence base for continuing the program. This report may be helpful in this regard, alongside the Investment Monitoring Report and the second MAP-TNC Annual Report. A separate, rapid assessment of confidential considerations and Australian interests may need to be undertaken to feed into the process. The sooner the decision is made the better to provide a degree of certainty to all stakeholders and to allow whatever transition that needs to be made to happen smoothly. The MTR recommends that a decision be made by the end of the first quarter of calendar 2024.

Section Five | Conclusions

Transnational crime has become a key development issue in the Mekong, driven by rapidly increasing methamphetamine production and consumption, improved connectivity and trade and encrypted communications. Shape-shifting criminal enterprises and other malign actors are taking advantage of weak links and undeveloped regional architecture s 33(a)(iii)

As part of its near neighbourhood, Australia wants the Mekong sub-region to be peaceful, stable, fast growing and confidently able to manage its affairs. It also wants to protect itself directly from transnational crime harming its citizens and its institutions. That explains the presence on the ground of agencies such as the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Border Force and AUSTRAC. Increasing and widening the ongoing presence of effective Australian Agencies can help regional countries strengthen their operational responses but is beyond the scope of MAP-TNC. What the program can do is to expand agency support, join it up better and look to increase its impact, while working with other bilateral and multilateral partners to build more coherent and powerful regional responses to TNC.

A key part of increasing the program's impact is to be able to use the networks and knowledge gained through its work to plan and deliver more effective responses. This includes operational responses that are live and immediate, but also responses that are longer term and designed to enlarge the capability of regional countries to combat TNC threats. As a development program, MAP-TNC must be most concerned with the latter, but also open to the possibility that working on the former can be used to that end.

The program has proven effective to date in assisting agencies to expand their activities modestly, reaching 450 officials directly. Those officials have reported that they have found the support relevant and useful. However, the program only succeeds as a whole if this becomes the base for defining and implementing more effective long-term policies, strategies and interventions, inside those law enforcement agencies assisted, but much more widely as well. The program has not made much progress yet on this wider agenda and needs to turn its attention from rolling out agency activities to developing and implementing a bigger game plan.

In theory, the means to do this exist in pillars focussed on strategic analysis and regional policy making but, the program has been so busy with small activities it has not been able to do much more than commission some additional research from expert bodies. It needs the capacity to utilise this information, draw down that of Australian agencies and interact creatively with other partners to develop new architecture, polices and interventions that will have a bigger regional impact.

The Review Team thinks that is possible if there is greater Canberra SES engagement in setting strategic directions and more TNC expertise directly available to the program, brought together and dedicated to finding more effective responses. Therefore, it has recommended some immediate changes, to steer in these directions and a partial redesign process for a second and more successful Phase I of MAP-TNC.

Annex One
Key Design Features

Goals and outcomes

The goal of MAP-TNC is 'to build deeper and stronger cooperation between Australia and Mekong countries to address transnational crime'. On a quick reading, deeper and stronger cooperation has equal billing with addressing transnational crime, rather than being the means by which it is achieved.

Furthermore, while 'addressing transnational crime' has the virtue of allowing a multitude of possibilities, its lack of specificity reduces it focusing power and is difficult to benchmark. That said, End of Program Outcomes (EOPOs) provide greater definition.

EOPO 1: Policy Frameworks and strategic analysis

> Collaboration that 'informs national and regional TNC and border security polices and legislation'.

EOPO 2: Operational capacities

> 'Intelligence-led TNC and border security operations, leveraging Australian expertise' and the development of 'stronger national operational capabilities to prevent, detect and address TNC'.

EOPO 3: Regional Collaboration

> Countries working together bilaterally and regionally to share information, intelligence and insights and to co-operating operationally and strategically.

In retrospect, while this framework is sound and logical, the design might have defined in more detail the sorts of activities it envisaged and what success would look like at different stages.

Machinery and Modalities

A small DFAT Bangkok team provides program leadership, assisted by a Program Support Unit (PSU). Australian Government Agencies (AGA) lead the delivery of technical assistance, especially in the dominant, second EOPO Area - Operational Capacities. DFAT Canberra has regional and thematic interests in the program as do other government departments. There are currently limited opportunities for these parties to engage strategically with the program.

The main jobs of the PSU are summarised in the design as assisting with AGA activity design, monitoring and evaluation, program and activity reporting and gender equality expertise, but throughout the design many more tasks are raised as possibilities. Given limited DFAT TNC capability in Canberra and the region it's not surprising the PSU was tasked to perform a very wide range of functions from writing activity reports for AGA partners through to high-level strategic analysis, s 47E(d)

The design involves a fusion of capabilities - DFAT brings international relations, regional and development expertise into the mix; Australian Government Agencies bring technical expertise and sometimes significant regional knowledge and multilateral; and civil society partners offering additional perspectives and reach. The key platform to operationalise this is an activity selection process where agencies put forward proposals for funding.

While competition should allow the best activities to receive funding and PSU and DFAT support can enhance activity design quality, the process can only work with what agencies generate. The risk is that it becomes a small activity grants program, sponsoring lots of standardised short duration activities, good for show and tell perhaps, but not necessarily amounting to much. This risk was recognised in the design.

Its mitigation relies on increasing agency maturity and investment over time, strategic leadership from DFAT, stronger agencies and partners; and an evolution of collaboration. Charting whether this is happening or not is difficult.

In addition to supporting the work of AGAs, the program has the capacity to commission research, especially under EOPO 1. The ability this creates for DFAT to build links with expert bodies while obtaining useful products is a strong feature as is the specific emphasis on "reform, policy advocacy and budget dialogue". The design rightly argues that this will become more feasible later in the program. It is however unclear where this policy incubation and promulgation will be driven from, where the dialogue will happen and how the chances of success will be increased.

Management

MAP-TNC is a complex program with a lot of partners, counterparts, locations and activities. It's not surprising it's a huge generator of work - events, logistics, finance, activity design, quality assurance reporting etc. Management is also complicated, spread over DFAT, the PSU, AGAs, other implementing partners and counterparts. Apart from the transaction costs of this multilayered management, the big risk is not being able to see the wood for the trees. The Bangkok team need to be able to carve out time for strategic management and will need help redesigning processes to allow this to happen. The load can be reduced and shared differently if key risks are elevated and owned by agencies.

Throughout the design there is repeated emphasis on adaptive management. The program did not determine at the outset exactly what would be done, meaning that decisions need to be taken as the program unfolds. This should allow for reprioritisation, flexibility to respond to opportunities and risks and course corrections where things are off track. Truly adaptive management is exploratory, constantly searching for success in different ways and recalibrating strategy on the basis of evidence and experience. It is not clear that MAP-TNC as currently organised has or could have that capability. It lacks a strategic engine and budget flexibility. The Review team applauds the aspiration and is interested in how it might be realised if there is a Phase II.

Governance

Unfortunately, the principal program governance vehicle - A Program Coordinating Committee involving both Australian and regional representatives - has not been constituted s 47E(d)

The absence of a PCC creates both risk and opportunity. The risk is that there's a gap in strategic oversight, but the gap highlights that there's no fall back and complementary mechanism that allows high level stakeholders, especially in Canberra, to chart progress, ask hard questions and set strategic directions. Additionally, it allows reconsideration of whether the exact composition and focus of the PCC was optimal.

A PCC with a large number of Australian stakeholders at the table and one representative per participating country might not be the right balance. It might be better to conceive of a broader high-level forum to refine strategic priorities, highlight threats and showcase success, with MAP-TNC progress reporting and discussion just one item.

Annex Two

MAP-TNC in practice

Key Features.

The Mekong Australia Partnership on Transnational Crime (MAP-TNC) is an ambitious and complex attempt to marshal Australian government capability to address transnational crime in the Mekong sub-region. The $30m, eight-year program currently funds two research partnerships and sponsors six Australian Government Agencies to deliver activities in five Mekong locations (Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos - and the sub region).

The Program goal is to build deeper and stronger cooperation between Australia and Mekong countries to address transnational crime.[50] It has three End of Program Objectives[51] reflecting the three 'pillars' of activity under the Program as set out below:

1. Policy Framework and strategic analysis. Australian collaboration on demand driven research and strategic analysis informs national and regional TNC and border security policies and legislation.
2. Operational capabilities. Mekong countries implement intelligence led TNC and border security operations at national and regional levels, aligned with existing Australian TNC contributions
3. Regional collaboration. Mekong countries collaborate to strategically address TNC and border security issues at bilateral and regional levels.

The Program was announced in 2019 in the wake of the Australian Foreign Affairs White Paper that foreshadowed increased engagement with Southeast Asia, in particular, to promote stability, rule of law and enhanced state effectiveness.[52] It was a precursor to the much larger, 2020 Mekong Australia Partnership[53] and is funded and managed differently.

The initial Ministerial announcement stated that the program's aim was to 'combat transnational crime and strengthen security ... through an 8-year investment that will promote cross border cooperation'.[54] The Review Team was advised that there was strong interest in Canberra at the time in making greater and more effective use of Australia's law enforcement capability including by giving greater visibility to regional TNC threats and joining up and making Australia efforts more effective.

Program design occurred in 2020 and the program mobilised in the second quarter of 2021 with COVID at a high point. Changes to Australian machinery of government in 2022[55] that saw some responsibilities for international counter-TNC, including the Australian Federal Police, return from Home Affairs to the Attorney General's Department, impacted the capability of those departments to participate fully in the program, at least initially.

Implicit Strategy.

MAP-TNC does not have a formal program strategy although the design envisaged this emerging from its analytical work. However, its central features embody a strong law and enforcement orientation, reinforced by the agencies delivering activities, including Australian Federal Police (AFP), Australian Border Force (ABF) and Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC).

Law enforcement is an essential aspect of reducing TNC and may well be the most important approach if TNC is escalating rapidly **s 33(a)(iii)**   . However, some critics have argued Australia tends to over-rely on law enforcement in both domestic and international responses and under-rely on reducing the incidence of TNC by reducing its drivers.[56] In its situational analysis for MAP-TNC GI-TOC stated that "Drug policies in the region have had minimal demonstrable effects towards achieving the ASEAN goal of a drug free region, despite often deeply repressive 'war on drugs' policies, part of which includes the death penalty which is in place in Laos, Thailand and Vietnam."

UNODC in conversations with the MTR Team stressed the need to complement law enforcement work with wider judicial system strengthening while GI-TOC pointed to a lack of focus on corruption and state

actor culpability. The corruption issue is particularly challenging given its estimated scale and involvement of powerful figures. For example, UNODC reports several studies estimating a corruption loss of 20-25% of public contracts, amounting to over $400bn per annum in Southeast Asia.[57] Unlike some other countries, Australia does not take an overt approach on corruption believing it to be counterproductive. However, that ups the ante in terms of its alternative strategies which are difficult to discern.

The MAP-TNC design did state that a criminological approach is unlikely to lead to the outcomes the region and Australia want and identified the need for wider approaches and engagement[58] but as, yet the program has not been able to create the space and means to follow through substantively outside of AGA engagement with some civil society groups.

As a small, AGA-based program, the MTR does not see scope to radically reinvent it with a much wider mandate. A much larger and differently organised program would be required for that. That said, it does judge that explicitly engaging with a wider range of actors will facilitate and strengthen policy dialogue, build stronger coalitions for reforms and generate wider and more effective responses.

What does MAP-TNC look like in practice?

This section provides a quick snapshot of the ways MAP-TNC is organised and what it delivers, and how. A more detailed articulation of the design of the Program is at Annex One and a summary of strengths and weaknesses is presented against Key Evaluation Question 5 (*What were the strengths and weaknesses of the original program design? To what extent have adaptations strengthened or weakened performance?*).

s 33(a)(iii), s 47E(d)

s 33(a)(iii)

s 33(a)(iii)

s 33(a)(iii)

Regional

A high proportion of activities is "regionally focused" (defined as activities involving the participation of government officials and representatives from at least three regional countries). Despite this, MAP-TNC's first Investment Monitoring Report concluded that End of Program Outcome (EOPO) 3 focused on regional collaboration is "not on track" as many of these activities fund Mekong counterparts to participate in established regional leadership programmes such as the Asia Region Law Enforcement Management Program (ARLEMP) and the Border Control Agency Management Program (BCAMP); or attend meetings of regional bodies such as the Financial Intelligence Consultative Group (FICG). However, in the case of ARLEMP, AFP emphasised the value of having a continual funding source that allows ARLEMP to pivot to wherever the threat is, rather than needing to "scramble together money" on a year-to-year basis. AFP value having MAP-TNC as continual and flexible funding source to enable them to harness the ARLEMP network in a more strategic way. There were also initial indications of sub-regional dialogue, such as the UNODC run High Level Meeting on impact of TSOC and money laundering (ML) on gambling sector and Special Economic Zones (SEZs).

Agencies.

AFP with Posted officers in all Mekong countries (except for Laos) leads the lion's share of work, delivering more than half of the current pipeline of activities. Despite only having one Posted officer in Southeast Asia in Kuala Lumpur, AUSTRAC is delivering a quarter of activities under MAP-TNC, and it was clear that AUSTRAC enjoyed strong relationships with their counterpart Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) in the Mekong. s 33(a)(iii), s 47E(d)
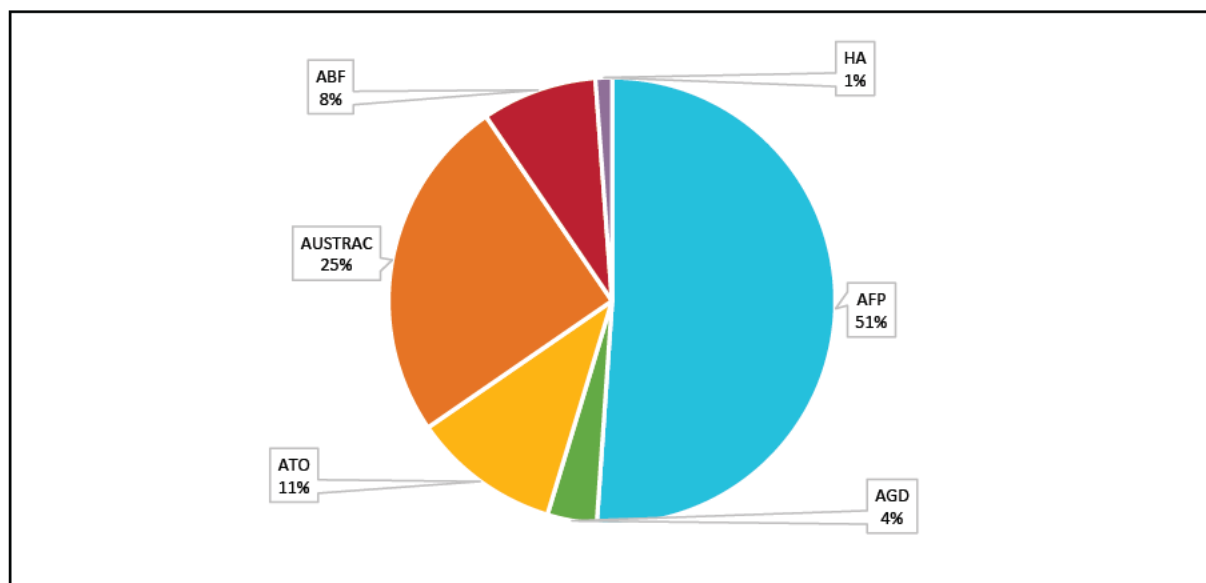

Figure 2: Activities by Delivering Australian Government Agency – 22-24 Pipeline

Crime Types.

Across all four countries, there was a significant focus on financial crime – which spanned across building the analytical capacities of FIUs, workshops on tax crime, investigation of money laundering and policy dialogues on the disruption of money laundering activities through casinos. There was a scattering of activities on child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) and illicit drugs (representing only 12% and 6% of activities respectively). A large proportion of activities were classified more broadly as "TNC" and focused on strengthening law enforcement capability through trainings on cyber enabled investigation methods, digital forensics and customs investigation.
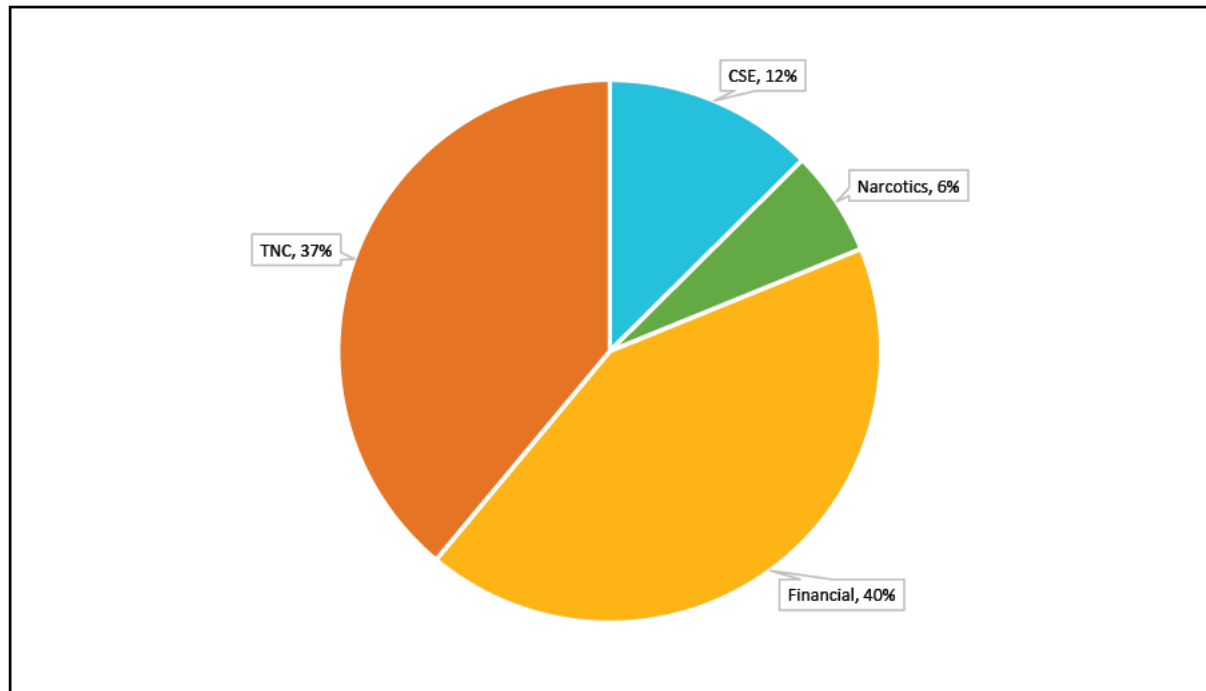

Figure 3: Activities by Crime Type – 22-24 Pipeline

The agency driven distribution of activities against crime types raises the question of whether the three, crime-type focus of MAP-TNC is redundant. Agencies appear to be focussing on financial flows as the life blood of TNC along with issues that concern multiple types of crime. It is not surprising to the Review Team that drug specific activities only make up 6% of the whole, due to the resources dedicated to narcotics through other programs and the MAP-TNC focus on finance providing a powerful response. There is little doubt that technology facilitated Child Sexual Exploitation is growing and warrants significant attention. While MAP-TNC work to upgrade digital forensics will continue to be useful, the team wonders whether making CSE a distinct component of Association of Southeast Asian Nations-Australia Counter Trafficking (ASEAN-ACT) (which deals with related trafficking issues) would give this work greater impetus.

DFAT Post buy-in.

Beyond Bangkok Post, MAP-TNC (and transnational crime more broadly) was not a strong focus for Mekong Posts. This was even though many Posts identified transnational crime as an issue that was growing in significance in the region and identified as a priority by the highest levels of government in the countries they were working. Nevertheless, transnational crime as a topic struggled to gain traction when competing with priority against other issues such as economic recovery. The lack of Post's focus may explain why, with the exception of Bangkok Post, there is limited policy alignment between MAP-TNC priorities with policy priorities in country and limited appreciation of the relationship gains that the program can deliver.

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Annex Three
Sample of Australian programs with transnational and organised crime objectives

Sample of Australian programs with transnational and organised crime objectives

This table represents key programs and engagements supported by Australia. As such, it represents the majority of Australia's work in combatting transnational and organised crime overseas. It does not, however, represent every program or engagement.

Program title	Country	Summary	Key Agencies and Delivery Modalities	Current Program Period	Focus
ASEAN-ACT	Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand	Supporting ASEAN states to implement and report under the ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons	DFAT, DT Global. Delivered by Managing Contractor. Includes private sector engagement and CSO grants.	2018-2028	Human Trafficking
AUSTRAC Indonesia Program	Indonesia	Focuses on collaborative activities that harden the Indonesian financial systems to financial crime	AUSTRAC. Delivered through training and capacity development with key in-country law and justice agencies.	2009-2022	Law and justice
AUSTRAC Pacific Islands Partnership Program	Pacific Regional	Provides anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CTF) capacity building activities for counterparts across the Pacific region.	AUSTRAC. Delivered through training and capacity development with key in-country law and justice agencies.	2020-2025	Law and justice
AUSTRAC Philippines Program	Philippines	Supports the Philippines to enhance their AML/CTF framework to meet international standards.	AUSTRAC. Delivered through training and capacity development with key in-country law and justice agencies.	2022-2024	Law and justice
Pacific Law and Justice Development Program	Pacific Regional	Supports Pacific law and justice agencies to develop and implement laws that respond to law and justice priorities for the region.	DFAT, AGD. Delivered through training and capacity development with key in-country law and justice agencies.	N/A	Law, justice, governance
PNG-Australia Policing Partnership	Papua New Guinea	Police-to-police partnership. Focusing on the areas of	DFAT, AFP. Includes partnership with Royal Papua New	2022-2026	Policing

		operations, training, corporate reform and enabling services.	Guinea Constabulary. Long-term Advisers recruited and deployed by Managing Contractor.		
RSIPF-AFP Partnership Program	Solomon Islands	Police-to-police partnership. Assisting with the rearmament of RSIPF.	DFAT, AFP. Includes partnership with Solomon Islands Ministry of Police, National Security and Correctional Services	2021-2025	Policing
Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands RAMSI	Solomon Islands	Police, military, civilian assistance mission. Included all Pacific Island Forum members.	Run by a Special Coordinator through DFAT. Included AFP, ADF, Australian Public Service personnel.	2003-2017	Policing
Timor-Leste Police Development Program	Timor-Leste	Bilateral capacity building	DFAT, AFP, and Tetra Tech. Delivered by Managing Contractor. Includes partnership with National Police Force (PNTL).	2021-2025	Policing
Law and Justice – Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice	Indonesia	Rule of law and security in Indonesia.	DFAT, DT Global. Delivered by Managing Contractor.	2017-2025	Law and Justice
Transparency International Indo-Pacific Partnerships Program	Regional	Strengthens public demand for accountability, accountable governance frameworks, and a strong, independent and active TI civil society voice on anti-corruption	DFAT, MFAT. Delivered through joint-core funding to CSOs.	2020-2023	Governance
Justice Services Stability for Development	Papua New Guinea	Justice reform at the national level, as well as services. Also focuses on local justice mechanisms	DFAT, DT Gobal. Delivered by Managing Contractor. Includes budgetary support to national and sub-national justice agencies.	2016-2023	Law and Justice
Strengthening Philippine Justices Responses to Violent Extremism Program	Philippines	Provides targeted assistance to Philippine law and justice agencies to strengthen their rule of law, uphold peace and order, and good government.	DFAT	2015-23	Law, justice, governance

Solomon Islands Partnership for Justice	Solomon Islands	Works with key justice agencies. Increasing access to a strong rule of law system.	DFAT, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Delivered by Managing Contractor.	2017-2022	Law and Justice
PNG Anti-Money Laundering Assistance	PNG	Provision of AUSTRAC and AGD anti-money laundering assistance to PNG agencies.	Self-managed budgets administered by AUSTRAC and AGD Anti-Money Laundering Assistance Team (AMLAT), funded directly from DFAT.	2009 - 2021	Financial sector / law and justice.
Vanuatu Australia Policing and Justice Program	Vanuatu	Provides institutional strengthening support to Vanuatu's Ministry of Justice, Police Force, Office of Public Prosecutions, State Law Office, Vanuatu Law Reform Commission, and its court system.	DFAT, AFP, DT Global Delivered by Managing Contractor and AFP. Includes budgetary support to police and justice agencies, and NGO grants.	N/A	Law, justice, and policing
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime	Regional	DFAT, Home Affairs, Border Force, and Australian Federal Police each have partnerships with the UNODC to fund and support the delivery of various regional and bilateral programs combatting transnational crime.	DFAT, Home Affairs, ABF, AFP Delivered through direct funding or agency-agency partnerships.	N/A	Law and justice

Annex Four

Lessons learned from comparable programs

Effective support for addressing transnational crime.

An internal document was produced for DFAT in October 2022 looking at how a range of Southeast Asian and Pacific Programs have made use of Australian government agency expertise. This annex does not repeat that analysis, but draws on it, the MAP-TNC process and other reviews and evaluations. The MTR notes that DFAT and its predecessor AusAID, have used several different approaches to manage G2G engagement over the last twenty years ranging from opt-in Government partnership schemes, through deploying AGA expertise in highly targeted and DFAT-determined ways as part of country strategies and programs, s 47E(d)   . A more thorough evaluation of these management methods might be a useful tool to help design future G2G work.

Providing transnational crime support through a government-to-government modality has unique challenges but also opens valuable opportunities. The Mid Term Review Team has distilled several critical lessons that a future iteration of MAP-TNC should consider when looking to reset the program, drawing on its own analysis and that of others.

1. Government-to-government development cooperation is not a generic modality that can be used in any context, but rather a highly specific modality that is a very attractive option for peer-to-peer engagement to build governmental capacity and relations over the long term. That said, even within these confines, Australia's G2G capacity – its specialist knowledge, its program management capability and its development expertise - is relatively limited and therefore it should be targeted where it is most valuable by country, sector and development problem. That means focusing it in regions and countries that are top priorities for Australia, primarily in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. The question of where and how Australia adds most value cannot be determined by Australia alone. It must factor-in feedback from country authorities and affected communities. G2G assistance should be demand driven, planned and prioritised in partnership with local decision-makers.

2. The big benefits of G2G derive from the trust and confidence that counterparts have in working with organisations that face similar problems and peers who typically have similar professional backgrounds. In short, the collaborators understand each other and speak similar professional languages. Questions of loyalty, confidentiality and hidden agendas are typically of less concern. However, partners must still be careful to respect both the sovereignty of the nation they are working in and the confidentiality of material they encounter through privileged access.

   While suspicions are typically fewer and opportunities greater than assisting governments directly through programs using mainly commercial providers, it still takes years for relationships to fully develop. Australia's engagement on people trafficking in the ASEAN region began 20 years ago as a very tentative, activity-based modality and only after prolonged engagement was able to mature into the ASEAN-ACT program that is celebrated today. Continuity and reliability are essential, but so too is responsiveness and the ability to 'make things happen'. A pragmatic, practical approach is a key Australian advantage noted in the MTR Review, but also in other reviews and evaluations.

3. G2G can sometimes be seen as a low-cost panacea. On the surface it may appear that all this needed is to take proven Australian expertise and make it available overseas, but this ignores decades of development experience which underlines the difficulties and dangers of applying what works in one context in an entirely different environment. Some Australian interventions have not heeded this lesson and have cost more and achieved less than desired as a result.

   A regular failing is to adopt technical solutions and training that ignores local conditions, incentives and political economy (see below). In addition, agencies may have a limited understanding of Australia's foreign policy priorities and strategic objectives. They may act

independently of each other and sometimes at odds with international policy. Because of this DFAT's role is crucial, especially in regard to less experienced AGAs. DFAT needs to guide, coordinate, inject development lessons and ensure accountability – all while simultaneously respecting the capacity of AGA's and not micromanaging what they do on the ground. This is highly demanding and requires DFAT to be resourced appropriately, which currently is not the case.

4. The question of who holds counter-part relationships is critical and complicated. The P4I G2G Review concluded that to ensure a whole of government perspective; fully take account of the spectrum of foreign policy considerations; and to deliver continuity, that DFAT needs to be the manager of relationships. The problem is that where agency-to-agency relationships are strong this adds another party in the mix and is sometimes resented. It means DFAT has to manage AGA and counter-parts relations very carefully, leaving them enough room to move and enough recognition to feel their efforts are recognised and rewarded. This is not something that should be delegated to junior staff.

    In addition, the MTR Review came to a slightly different conclusion in regard to specialist agencies with a long history of overseas engagement. In such cases, while DFAT still needs to have visibility of relationships to add value, to join up and to elevate issues where necessary it does not need to guide and support to the same extent as less experienced agencies and must be particularly careful not to micromanage. On the upside, DFAT can gain more by integrating the strategic perspectives of such organisations into ongoing management.

5. Obtaining clarity of purpose, roles and responsibilities is a known challenge for Australian-run Government-to-Government projects
    a. Work done by the Asia Pacific Development, Diplomacy, Defence, Dialogue on 'Strategic Coherence' and 'All Tools of Statecraft' has pointed to the importance of aligning strategies, systems and resources with clear, realistic goals.
    b. The MAP-TNC MTR identified competing objectives as a central problem, but it was also noted in the P4I review of G2G that it is important to "clearly define leadership and decision-making roles for G2G workstream, ensuring that this role sits within the DFAT team. DFAT Canberra is advised to manage the Australian agency relationships, and DFAT Bangkok (via the Program Executive) to manage SEA agency relationships with strategic support from relevant DFAT Posts."
    c. A simple governance and relationship structure is suggested in the P4I evaluation to help to mitigate risks including "misalignment of objectives, interests and concerns held by Australian and counterpart agencies as a result of unclear lines of accountability, relationship management and communication"

6. Government-to-Government support presents unique delivery challenges for Government agencies. The usual form of development assistance involves DFAT commissioning a development project, that is delivered by external agents according to a contractual agreement of one form or another that clearly identifies DFAT as the client and its agents as suppliers. For Government-to-Government programs, DFAT both commissions and manages other Government agencies that are themselves independent actors. This makes the relationships and accountabilities more complex. Some ongoing challenges include:
    a. AGA's understanding and accepting DFAT frameworks, policies and procedures for overseas programs, especially ODA-funded programs
    b. Finding public servants in AGAs with development skills to operate successfully overseas, especially within the ODA paradigm. It is particularly hard to find those familiar with aid delivery (MEL and GEDSI) experience.
    c. The P4I Evaluation noted that those with specialist experience are often brought on too late. Rather, "to ensure GEDSI/DRRCC is mainstreamed throughout the partnership

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GEDSI/DRRCC needs to be part of the conceptualizations of the partnership activities." (P4I Review)

d. Allocating priority to international engagement over domestic policy activities is challenging. Not all Government agencies have budget available for international engagement meaning that where DFAT programming does not support staff costs (only activity costs), it may be hard for this to be a priority for a domestic facing agency.

7. Training alone as a means of achieving capacity development or strategic disruption of transnational crime is limited in its impact.

   a. Technical assistance, through training, is limited in its ability to affect change. Denney and Valters (2015) found that in their research, there was no "robust causal relationships between capacity building activities and outcomes." They note that given the large amount invested in capacity building, this is a significant gap.

   b. Furthermore, many donors include technical assistance as part of other projects and programs, however this supply-driven form of technical assistance can duplicate reform processes and may go beyond the absorptive capacity of these institutions.

   c. In order to ensure that technical assistance is successful it must be:

      i. Demand-driven

      ii. Evidence based - Ensure that technical assistance is based on either national development plans or on national development strategies.

      iii. Aligned to "National leadership for reform and organisational development" as this leads the prospect of successful TA to be much higher.

      iv. Combined with other forms of support such as live-case cooperation

8. Law enforcement responses to TNC are a critical component, but not the only way to mitigate transnational crime. Emphasising law enforcement approaches to transnational crime privileges operational disruption over preventing transnational crime harm. Should a future iteration of MAP-TNC want to address transnational crime using methods beyond generating investigations such as law reform, ethics and compliance programs, mobilizing civil society groups and industry, it could look to some of the examples of international practice outlined in Figure 1 below. This points to the importance of not only gathering evidence, but also using it to shape responses. Applied and translational research are likely to be key components of multi-faceted, successful responses.

The ASEAN-ACT program embodies 20 years of learning and while law enforcement agencies remain critical partners, it has both brpodened its engagement and reach and effectively lined up uniformed and civic society organisations to deliver much more effective. Whole of society responses.

9. TNC support programs face a choice between approaching transnational crime based on the crime type or tackling systemic drivers of barriers to combating transnational crime. Effective examples of transnational crime support such as Australia's ARTIP (trafficking in persons) or anti-money laundering related support exist. The benefit of such programs is a key focus on crime types and therefore focus on particular stakeholders, relationships and effective operating models. However, increasingly, organised crime groups are using multiple crime types to generate profit and there may be value in refocusing programs at a systemic level to identify key vulnerabilities and/or look to dismantle overarching motivations for transnational crime such as

the profit imperative or the organised crime group itself (as opposed to responding only to the crimes they commit). Research is increasingly suggesting that tackling the underlying drivers of organised crime may herald better results. See Figure 2 below.

Australia faces a choice on whether they should focus on three cross-cutting systemic vulnerabilities - "protracted corruption; deep income inequality and rapid technological advances and digitisation" (GI-TOC, 2023) as points of priority to address larger issues facing TNC in the Mekong. Addressing these three vulnerabilities as they affect transnational crime is an area for opportunity for Australia. Australia should "enhance discussions around these vulnerabilities through hosting a 'call to action' event with regional partners to identify specific gaps or taskforces that could be established to focus efforts". (GI-TOC 2023).

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Annex Five

Terms of Reference

Mid-Term Review of Mekong Australia Partnership on Transnational Crime- Terms Of Reference

Purpose

These Terms-of-Reference (ToR) outline the purpose, scope of work and requirements for conducting an Independent Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the Mekong Australia Partnership on Transnational Crime program (MAP-TNC), delivered and managed by the Australian government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). MAP-TNC is an eight-year program, valued at AUD30 million, with the first phase running from March 2021 until June 2024 (4 years, AUD xxx). The MTR will analyse program effectiveness, efficiency and gender reaching conclusions on performance and providing clear actionable recommendations for program improvement. The review will inform DFAT's consideration of whether to continue the program into a second phase and whether a redesign is required. This includes mapping out a broad process and timeline on how this decision will be recommended and finalised.

A.   Background and context

1.   Transnational crime (TNC) is a lucrative business, generating tens of billions of dollars a year for organised crime groups through illicit activities in the region. Transnational crime in the Mekong countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam) in influenced by a range of factors, including shifting power dynamics, large-scale development, improved regional connectivity, highly porous borders, and uneven pace of economic development.

2.   Transnational crimes, such as trafficking in illicit drugs, human trafficking, child sexual exploitation, and financial crimes fuel corruption, money laundering, poor governance and lack of transparency. TNC decreases government revenue, adds to business costs and, in some cases, can fund terrorism and fuel conflict. Increased poverty from the ongoing economic downturn caused by compounding geopolitical crisis, including COVID-19, conflict in Ukraine and global supply chain pressures, presents fertile ground for illicit, criminal and terrorist networks.

3.   MAP-TNC seeks to engage the Mekong Countries[1] to address TNC, specifically financial crime, child sexual exploitation, and illegal drug trafficking. These crimes undermine political processes, weaken security, harm communities, inhibit economic development and impede good governance.

4.   MAP-TNC complements existing Australian, longstanding engagements in the Mekong and ASEAN regions, promoting a stable, prosperous, and resilient region. MAP-TNC supports bilateral and multilateral partners through a whole-of-government approach in recognition of the threat transnational crime poses to the stability of both Australia and Mekong countries.

5.   MAP-TNC is consistent with Australian government international policy, including *Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response* and the *National Strategy to Fight Transnational, Serious and Organised Crime*, and is complementary to existing regional programming, such as the ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking.

6.   The goal of MAP-TNC is to build deeper and stronger cooperation between Australia and Mekong Countries to address transnational crime. The Program's high-level End of Program Outcomes (EOPOs) are:

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[1] Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. Engagement with Myanmar is on hold since the February 2021 coup, in line with Australian government policy and consistent with other development partners.

a. Policy framework and strategic analysis: Australian collaboration on demand-driven research and strategic analysis informs national and regional TNC and border security policies and legislation

b. Operational capacities: Mekong countries implement intelligence led TNC and border security operations at national and regional levels, aligned with existing Australian TNC contributions

c. Regional collaboration: Mekong countries collaborate to strategically address TNC and border security issues at bilateral and regional levels.

7. MAP-TNC is delivered as a partnership between DFAT and Australian Public Service (APS) partner agencies,[2] who bring operational and technical expertise in implementing capacity building activities with relevant agency counterparts. Activities aim to build on existing relationships, create new relationships for APS partners that do not have established footprints or deep networks in the region, and develop stronger institutional links with APS Agencies and Mekong Country counterpart agencies.

8. MAP-TNC includes a Managing Contractor component (Palladium) that provides support services to the partnership, including international development technical support to deliver activity designs, activity and program level M&E, results reporting on program impact and progress, including the provision of gender equality expertise. This component has been established as a Partnership Support Unit (PSU). The PSU also provides logistical and administrative support to implementation of APS partner activities, including meeting secretariat support, events management and logistics.

9. MAP-TNC also engages with research partners for the production of high-quality research and analysis to inform policy discussion. DFAT currently manages two grant agreements, with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC – signed in June 2021 and currently negotiating a no-cost extension from end date 30 December 2022 to extended date of 30 June 2023) and the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC – two agreements, both to end on 30 June 2023).

B. Audience / users of this review

10. DFAT, including the Development Section, Bangkok post, relevant Divisions in DFAT Canberra, and Mekong posts[3] will be the primary users of the MTR findings and recommendations. Key findings will also be shared with MAP-TNC Australian Public Sector (APS)[4] partners and Palladium. Consideration when to share with research partners UNODC and GI-TOC will be considered when the MTR report is finalised. To ensure transparency, DFAT will publish the MTR Report and Management Response on the DFAT website.

C. Scope

11. All aspects of the program are in scope including managing contractor, DFAT, research partner and whole of government partner performance.

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[2] To date, MAP-TNC has partnered with Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC), Australian Taxation Office (ATO), Australian Border Force (ABF), Australian Federal Police (AFP), Department of Home Affairs (DoHA) and the Attorney-General's Department (AGD).
3 Hanoi, Phnom Penh, Vientiane and information sharing with Yangon
4 AFP (including ACCCE), ABF, ATO, AUSTRAC, Home Affairs, AGD

12. As a regional program with 4 focus countries, the MTR will consider the regional program as managed from Bangkok, and up to 2 countries (Thailand and Cambodia) for the country-level perspective.

13. Indicative Key Evaluation Questions **(KEQs)** proposed: (*Note: still refining*)

Effectiveness:
Overarching drivers to this criteria include:
- Is the modality of the program demonstrating efficient use of resources to deliver the program?
- To what extent are the systems and process to operatise and manage program in place and being used effectively?
- To what extenat are the process to implement deliverables demonstrating value for money (VFM)?

Sub-questions to explore:
a. At this point in implementation, is the program achieving intermediate outcomes as expected and positioned to achieve end of program outcomes?
b. Has the design theory of change proven realistic and are underlying assumptions holding?
c. Is MERL fit for purpose and providing analysis leading to informed judgements on performance?
d. To what extent has MAP-TNC remained relevant, agile, and responsive to the changing contexts and emerging priorities?
e. How appropriate is MAP TNC's adaptive management modality and what conditions must be in place for it to be effective? To what extent are lessons learned identified and applied?

f. To what extent has MAP-TNC supported and promoted a coordinated Australian effort to strategically address TNC and border security issues in individual Mekong countries and in sub-Mekong region?

Efficiency
Overarching drivers to this criteria include:
- Is the modality design theory translating into expected program deliver efficiencies (eg: APS partners as the technical implementers; MC providing development support; research partner management; DFT leading overall program management)?
- To what extent is the program structure providing clear and smooth operations and support to DFAT to effectively manage the program, report results and feed information into broader foreign policy priorities?
- At this point in a starting up a new program and new modality, what has worked, what needs to stop and what need to be amended to improve efficiency?

Sub-questions to explore:
g. Is the mix of modalities, research and whole of government partnerships, and supporting contractor, delivering?
h. Are the governance and operational oversight arrangements leading to appropriate strategic direction and risk management?
i. Are risks being appropriately identified and managed?
j. Is MAP-TNC supporting a whole-of-government approach to tackling TNC, or supplementing APS partner funding gaps?
k. To what extent is MAP-TNC being efficiently managed and implemented to manage risk, use time and resources appropriately and optimally, and achieve intended outcomes?

GEDSI
Overarching drivers to this criteria include:

- Is gender equality, disability and social inclusion being adequately integrated and addressed in activity development that supports DFAT's policy reporting requirements?
- Are the right building blocks to target and capture gender results in place and being applied (eg: strategy)?
- Given the complexity and challenges GEDSI dimensions within transnational crime markets, victims, detection, prevention, prosecution systems, can Australia target our comparative advantage in the Mekong better?

Sub-questions to explore:

l. Is gender both well integrated across the program and are their significant gender stand-alone initiatives?

m. To what extent has MAP-TNC integrated gender equality, disability, and social inclusion considerations and social safeguards in planning, activity implementation and reporting?

D. Review team composition

22. DFAT will contract an independent MTR team to undertake the review. The MTR team will work in consultation with the MAP-TNC Program Management team in the Bangkok Development Section.

23. Given the MTR's findings could shape the future of the program, DFAT is seeking a team of 3-4 members, including a team leader, a subject matter expert and a DFAT officer. Either the team leader or the subject matter expert must have considerable experience in gender equality and social inclusion, including disability:

   a. Team leader – experience in leading evaluations, whole of government / political programming experience, strong leadership and interpersonal skills, excellent writing skills, previous experience in Australian Aid programming and evaluation.

   b. A subject matter expert – technical experience/expertise in transnational crime, law and justice, governance.

   c. A DFAT officer – understanding of ODA programming, familiarity with DFAT programming standards and quality assurance processes, MTR logistical support and participation in the MTR as a learning opportunity.

E. Methodology

24. The review team will propose a specific methodology to be agreed with DFAT through a review plan, but a mixed methods approach is anticipated comprised of key informant interviews (in-person/online) with DFAT, Australian whole-of-government partners, the managing contractor, research partners and relevant counterparts engaged with MAP-TNC. This will be augmented by key program document analysis and a summary academic and gray literature analysis of similar programs funded by other organisations.

25. The indicative budget for this review will be up to AUD 130,000.

F. Ethical Considerations

   22. The MTR is required to follow DFAT's Ethical Research and Evaluation Guidance Note.[5]

G. Reporting and Deliverables

23. Expected Deliverables of this MTR include:

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[5] Research overview | Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (dfat.gov.au)

a) Review Plan – will be developed in line with DFAT Monitoring and Evaluation Standard 5, and detailing the approach, scope and methodology of the review, based on the TORs, discussions with DFAT and the review of key documents. It will include the methodology for answering the key evaluation questions; the process for information collection and analysis, including tools such as questionnaires and/or detailed separate set of questions to be asked during the consultations; identification of any challenges anticipated in achieving the review objectives; allocation of tasks; key timelines; and other activities to be undertaken (as necessary).

- The Plan should include specific details as to how any remote components of the review will be managed effectively. DFAT can share some lessons from previous DFAT's evaluations conducted remotely.
- The Review Plan should include detail on how the MTR process will be accessible to and inclusive of diverse participants, including whether and how reasonable accommodation will be provided to enable the participation of people with disabilities facing particular barriers (e.g., provision of sign language interpretation) as applicable.

Aide Memoire of no more than five pages on key initial findings and feedback for DFAT and other stakeholders. This will be accompanied by a validation meeting and brief presentation at the end of the review and consultation period, to allow for questions and comments to be absorbed by the review team ahead of the final report

b) Draft Report to be submitted electronically to DFAT for comment. Structure of the report and submission date to be finalised when the Review Plan is agreed.

c) Final Report of the Mid-Term Review to be submitted electronically to DFAT within two weeks of receiving DFAT comments on the Draft.

24. The Review Plan and the MTR Reports should be prepared and completed in line with DFAT's M&E Standards[6] and must meet DFAT's accessibility obligations[7].

G.   Review process and timeline

Review	Estimated time	Actual (TBC)	Indicative Timeframe
Mid-term Desk review commence • Brief with DFAT BKK – First week Feb 2023 • Document review and analysis – By end of 2nd week Feb 2023 • Development of the evaluation and review plan – By end of 2nd week Feb 2023 to be cleared by DFAT BKK by end of 3rd week Feb 2023 • Preparation for in-country mission – by end of 4th week Feb 2023	1 day < 7 days < 4 days < 2 days		End Feb 2023
Mid-term evaluation and review plan implemented • In Australia phase implemented – by 1st week Mar 2023 • In-country phase implemented – start by 2nd week Mar 2023	< 7 days < 14 days		End Mar 2023

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[6] https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/dfat-monitoring-and-evaluation-standards
[7] https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/corporate/transparency

o This could include multiple Mekong country locations – 3rd week Mar 2023 o Aid memoire of in-country mission – by the end of 3rd week Mar 2023			
Analysis and Reporting			
• Analysis and development of report	< 7 days		April 2023
• DFAT review of first draft of report (DFAT officer only)	< 7 days		April 2023
• Consultation of final draft	< 2 days		April 2023
• Applying consultation feedback	< 7 days		April 2023
• Final draft submitted to DFAT	< 3 days		End Apr 2023 with flexibility as needed to end of May 2023

H. List of Key Documents

25. Below is the list of documents that are provided to the MTR Team to inform the development of the Review Plan, and where relevant and as identified by MTR team, appropriate data or information will also be provided by MAP-TNC.

26. Documents provided by MAP-TNC team:

MAP-TNC Key Documents

- Investment Design
- MAP-TNC MEL Plan, included MEL Framework
- MAP-TNC Situation Analysis
- MAP-TNC Gender Strategy
- MAP-TNC Communication Strategy
- MAP-TNC Inception Work Plan and Report (2021)
- MAP-TNC Contract (Schedule 1)
- MAP-TNC Program Annual Work Plans (2021 and 2022)
- MAP-TNC Program Annual Reports and Six-Monthly reports (2021-2022)
- DFAT Partner Performance Assessments (PPA) for Palladium (2021-2022)
- Note: DFAT Aid Quality Checks/Investment Monitoring Report (2021-2022) – exempted
- Optional – Program Activity Reports

DFAT Policies/Strategies

- Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/aid/partnerships-recovery-australias-covid-19-development-response
- COVID-19 Development Response Plan: ASEAN and Southeast Asia Regional https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/asean-and-southeast-asia-regional-covid-19-development-response-plan
- Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-strategy
- Development for All 2015-2020: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program (extended to 2021)

https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/development-for-all-2015-2020
- M&E Standards https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/dfat-monitoring-and-evaluation-standards
- Guidance on Value for Money Principles
- DFAT's Ethical Research and Evaluation Guidance. The review should be conducted in line with this guidance. https://www.dfat.gov.au/aid/topics/development-issues/research
- DFAT Contract with Cardno – excluding commercial-in-confidence content
- https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/amplifying-our-impact-australias-international-strategy-to-combat-human-trafficking-and-slavery
- https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/criminal-justice/files/trafficking-national-action-plan-combat-human-trafficking-slavery-2015-19.pdf
- Modern Slavery and human trafficking
- TNC arching policy document
- MAP Strategy

MAP-TNC selected key products

Videos
- GI-TOC Expert brief synopsis: https://page.globalinitiative.net/mekong-expert-brief-series/index.html

Study/research
- UNODC study research and scoping memo
- UNODC Agreement and proposal
- GI-TOC Agreement and proposal

Policy briefs
- Mekong Development Dialogue Agenda

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Annex Six
MTR Team Biographies

MTR Team

Richard Moore, Team Leader

Richard Moore is a Manila-based, strategic analyst specialising in Southeast Asian development. He was a co-founder of the Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy, Defence Dialogue and is a Strategic Adviser to the Development Intelligence Lab in Canberra.

Richard has undertaken evaluations and strategic analysis for the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs, the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations. Previously, he was a Deputy Director General at AusAID, managing a program pipeline worth AUD$3.5 billion and a staff of 450, across 14 overseas posts in Asia. He was DFAT's First Assistant Secretary for Aid Program Performance and Management, 2013-14.

Richard was an Asian Development Bank Board member, 2004-2007, representing the largest and most diverse ADB constituency, including Australia; 6 Pacific Island States; Hong Kong, China; Cambodia; Georgia; and Azerbaijan. He also worked as an adviser to the Myanmar Ministry of National Planning in 2012-13, leading the drafting of the Nay Pyi Taw Accord on Development Effectiveness and was a Myanmar election monitor in 2015.

Richard was Vice Chair of the Board of the Asia-Pacific Leaders' Malaria Alliance, 2018-2020 and has also been a member of the governing Boards of major NGOs, private sector organisations and multilateral bodies.

Bridi Rice, Transnational Law and Justice Specialist

Bridi Rice is CEO of the Development Intelligence Lab and Expert Associate at the Australian National Security College. She is an international development specialist and the 2021 awardee of the Fulbright Scholarship for Not-for-Profit Leadership.

Bridi holds a Master of Politics (Research) from LaTrobe University, Bachelor of Laws (Hons) from Monash University and a Bachelor of Arts (Double Major: Cultural Anthropology and Literature) from Monash University.

Bridi has worked in international development and foreign policy since 2008, including as Director at the Australian Council for International Development, Senior Manager at Ernst & Young, Co-founding Convenor of the Asia Pacific Development Diplomacy and Defence Dialogue and as a senior public servant for over 8 years at the Attorney-General's Department.

Bridi is convinced that great development cooperation in the Indo-Pacific comes from unusual collaborations, inspired leadership, good natured debate and cracking analysis. This is the foundation for her new enterprise: Development Intelligence Lab and the collaborations it hosts with regional leaders, researchers, governments and practitioners.

Bridi is also a Senior Associate with the Project on Fragility and Mobility and the Project on Prosperity and Development at Washington-based Centre for Strategic International Studies (CSIS), a member of the Asia Pacific Development, Diplomacy and Defence Dialogue advisory board and a non-resident visitor at ANU's Regnet.

s22(1)(a)(ii)   , DFAT Team

s22(1)(a)(ii)   (Transnational Crime Section) and s22(1)(a)   (Southeast Asia Development Policy and Performance Section) served as the DFAT officers on the Mid-Term Review Team.

Annex Seven

Mid Term Review Plan

Review Plan: Mekong Australia Partnership on Transnational Crime

Submitted 31 March 2023
Prepared by Richard Moore & Bridi Rice

1. Introduction

This document presents the Review Plan for the Mid-Term Review of the Mekong Australia Partnership on Transnational Crime. As set out in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Review:

"The review will inform DFAT's consideration of whether to continue the program into a second phase and whether a redesign is required."

As also established in the ToR, the Review Plan will analyse program effectiveness, efficiency and gender, reaching conclusions on performance and providing clear, actionable recommendations for program improvement.

2. Background

The relationship between transnational organised crime and development

Transnational crime (TNC) is corrosive of the institutions that underpin development. As the ToRs note, '[transnational crimes] undermine political processes, weaken security, harm communities, inhibit economic development and impede good governance.' The more extensive and pervasive TNC becomes, the more societies are destabilised.

The ToRs note that transnational crimes, such as trafficking in illicit drugs, human trafficking, child sexual exploitation, and financial crimes, fuel corruption, money laundering, and poor governance. TNC decreases government revenue, adds to business costs and, in some cases, can fund terrorism and fuel conflict. Increased poverty from the ongoing economic downturn caused by compounding geopolitical crisis, including COVID-19, conflict in Ukraine and global supply chain pressures, presents fertile ground for illicit, criminal, and terrorist networks.

Australia has strong interests in the stability of the Mekong sub-region as a distinct part of the broader ASEAN region. As a long-term partner, Australia wants to see the sub-region become increasingly prosperous, cooperative and open, while becoming more able to manage threats and challenges. Australia also wants to prevent criminal activity spilling over into Australia and damaging its own communities, economy and institutions. Consequently, MAP-TNC seeks to engage the Mekong Countries[8] to address TNC, specifically financial crime, child sexual exploitation, and illegal drug trafficking.

MAP-TNC Operations
MAP is a $30m, potentially 8-year program that has the goal of building deeper and stronger cooperation between Australia and Mekong Countries to address transnational crime. The Review will test the extent of progress against the Program's high-level End of Program Outcomes (EOPOs), set out below:

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[8] Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. Engagement with Myanmar is on hold since the February 2021 coup, in line with Australian government policy and consistent with other development partners.

1. <u>Policy framework and strategic analysis</u>: Australian collaboration on demand-driven research and strategic analysis informs national and regional TNC and border security policies and legislation
2. <u>Operational capacities</u>: Mekong countries implement intelligence led TNC and border security operations at national and regional levels, aligned with existing Australian TNC contributions
3. <u>Regional collaboration</u>: Mekong countries collaborate to strategically address TNC and border security issues at bilateral and regional levels.

The Review will also assess the achievement of the program's intermediate outcomes. MAP-TNC is delivered as a partnership between DFAT and Australian Public Service (APS) partner agencies,[9] who bring operational and technical expertise in implementing capacity building activities with relevant agency counterparts. Activities aim to build on existing relationships, create new relationships for APS partners that do not have established footprints or deep networks in the region, and develop stronger institutional links with APS Agencies and Mekong Country counterpart agencies.

MAP-TNC includes a Managing Contractor (Palladium) that provides support services to the partnership, including international development technical support to deliver activity designs, activity and program level monitoring and evaluation, results reporting on program impact and progress, including the provision of gender equality expertise. This component has been established as a Partnership Support Unit (PSU). The PSU also provides logistical and administrative support to implementation of APS partner activities, including meeting secretariat support, events management, and logistics.

3. Our understanding of the Terms of Reference

Purpose

We see the Review as having several, inter-related purposes. First and foremost, it is an independent stocktake of progress that should assist DFAT, APS partners and the PSU to make management changes to maximise performance in the second half of the first phase of the program. The Review will analyse program effectiveness, efficiency and gender integration, reaching conclusions on performance and providing clear actionable recommendations. The Review also serves a useful accountability function both to the Australian parliament and public, especially in terms of assessing value for money and adherence to Australian policy and procedures, but also to counterpart governments and agencies.

An additional important purpose of the review is to inform DFAT's consideration of whether to continue to a second phase - and whether a redesign is required. The review has been tasked with proposing a broad process and timeline on how this stop/go decision will be recommended and finalised. We envisage that once DFAT has determined what it intends to do, it will need to undertake additional consultations with counterparts and implementing partners prior to seeking Ministerial agreement to a proposed course of action. The Review is

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[9] To date, MAP-TNC has partnered with Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC), Australian Taxation Office (ATO), Australian Border Force (ABF), Australian Federal Police (AFP), Department of Home Affairs (DoHA) and the Attorney-General's Department (AGD).

cognisant that ultimately it is up to DFAT to determine the process by which this decision should be made, the weightings to be given to various considerations and the ultimate recommendation, but the Review Team will inform and advise those processes.

Audience

The primary audience of this review, its findings and recommendations will be DFAT, including the Bangkok post, relevant Divisions in DFAT Canberra, and Mekong posts. The secondary audience for this review includes Australian Government delivery agencies, as partners whose actions determine program success. The Review Team also envisages the Report being shared with counterparts, particularly its Executive Summary and recommendations. This is consistent with respectful, partner-focused programming and may offer opportunities for additional policy dialogue. To ensure transparency and wider accountability, it is noted DFAT intends to publish the MTR Report and Management Response on the DFAT website.

Scope

The Review Team concurs with DFAT's proposal that all aspects of the program should be included in the review. This includes the performance of DFAT; the managing contractor; research partners; and whole of government partner performance. While judgements will be made, the review will not apply a scorecard to each of the actors, but rather focus on what has gone well, as well as opportunities for improvement. This all-inclusive approach includes considering how program-shaping decisions were made at the outset, including through the brief given to the design team. In terms of geographic scope, the Review will be equally comprehensive, looking at the roles and performance of Canberra, as well as the Bangkok hub, and posts in each of the 4 participant countries.

4. Methodology

The Review Team proposes a mixed methods approach comprised of key informant interviews (in-person/online) with DFAT, Australian government partners, the managing contractor, research partners and relevant counterparts. The Review's approaches to Canberra consultations and regional consultations are in Annex A. Consultations will be augmented by key program document analysis and a summary academic and gray literature analysis of similar programs funded by DFAT and other organisations.

Document review

The Review Team will undertake a detailed review of key documents provided to:

- develop an appreciation of the background to and rationale for MAP-TNC;
- understand the key decisions made in the program's design and implementation and the reasons for those decisions;
- understand the way in which the program is evolving, including in response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- ensure that the insights from reporting to date are properly considered;
- access and assess performance information to determine the extent and adequacy of program progress
- glean insights and other considerations from the wider literature and international experience in comparable programs.

A comprehensive list of documents consulted will be provided as part of the final report. An initial list is at Annex B.

Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders

In answering the Key Review Questions and providing recommendations, the Review Team will draw heavily upon a series of interviews with key stakeholders (see Annex C). Some additional key informants have also been identified to provide additional information on the context and history of the program.

The key stakeholders will be identified through a process of purposive sampling undertaken in consultation with DFAT. A key consideration in the sampling process will be to ensure adequate and appropriate representation from a range of relevant agencies so as to permit a triangulation of different perspectives. To ensure that the interview process is as inclusive as possible, the following measures will be implemented:

- In the selection of interviewees, due attention will be paid to inclusion of diverse perspectives.
- Stakeholders from a range of seniority levels will be selected to ensure a range of perspectives. For in-country stakeholders, where possible interviews will be scheduled in order of seniority so that more junior staff participate knowing that their supervisors have already engaged in the process.
- Cultural protocols in approaching staff will be adhered to through the identification of appropriate contact points and initial approaches will be made by DFAT Post.
- The review team will be guided by a Listen I Ask I Think I Evaluate approach. Each interview will primarily be a listening and understanding exercise, albeit conducted through active inquiry. Our experience suggests that additional time should be allocated for counterpart stakeholder interviews as for Australian stakeholder

interviews, and this is built into the timelines. This ensures the appropriate levels of trust can be built so as to surface meaningful contributions from local stakeholders.

- A one-page 'explainer' has been developed setting out the background to MAP-TNC, the purpose of the review, the role of interviews in the review (with assurances of confidentiality) and a brief introduction to the review team for all participants.

Interviews will be semi-structured around a small number of open-ended questions so that:

- the interviews are not overly structured;
- interviewees have the maximum possible space to express their perspectives;
- interviewees are able to reflect in detail upon aspects of greatest relevance to their own interaction with the program; and
- the review team is able to follow up on elements of an interviewee's reflections that are particularly pertinent to the review.

Interviews The Review Team aims to have discussions that are big picture, strategic and forward looking, focused on problem solving and performance maximisation.

5.   Key Review Questions

The Review Team regards the key review questions as critical to providing performance information, but also insights into what factors are lifting and inhibiting performance. Key review questions must be determined at the outset to guide inquiry based on DFAT's experience with the program and the Team's initial assessments of what is likely to be most important. While this ought to result in questions that go to the heart of matters, inevitably issues will emerge and recede in importance, and this too must be reflected as the Review goes forward – it must be partially iterative. Hence, while the team envisages its current identification of issues and questions as providing an outline of the content and structure of the Report, it also expects some movement before the process is complete. To the extent this occurs, the Team will provide a commentary in the Review report on any reweighting of issues and questions and the reasons behind such changes.

The Review Team has drawn on multiple sources to arrive at a set of Key Review Questions. It took the initial questions proposed by DFAT as a starting point and has managed to incorporate most into its final set. It also considered what the design document thought would be most relevant to consider at the stop/go point and suggestions from the 'Strategic Observations' paper completed in April 22. Review Team thinking was also informed by the initial document review and by conversations with APS agencies in Canberra in March 2023. On this basis, the Team proceeded to identify 10 areas of inquiry:

1. Objectives
2. Interests and incentives
3. Relationships
4. GEDSI, inclusion and development effectiveness
5. Program design
6. Geographic remit
7. Management model
8. Governance
9. Overall performance
10. Future possibilities

The Team decided to organise its questions around this structure, giving rise to the following Key Review Questions, with prioritised questions bolded. Annex D presents the areas of investigation, issues and questions in table form. It also lists a series of subsidiary question for each key question.

1. What is the program is trying to achieve? What are the pre-requisites for program success?
2. How are the interests and incentives of multiple Australian program partners being reconciled to deliver against WOG goals and priorities?
3. To what degree is the program partner-focused? To what degree does it take a phased, well-informed approach to building local capacity?
4. How effectively are development effectiveness principles and priorities, especially GEDSI and inclusion, built into the program?
5. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the original program design? To what extent have adaptations strengthened or weakened performance?
6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the sub-regional geographic organisation of the program?
7. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the management model being used? What alternative management models might offer greater effectiveness and/or efficiency?
8. Are the program's strategic and technical governance mechanisms conducive to good decision making? How could they be enhanced?
9. What outcomes have been achieved to date against each of the program's three pillars? To what extent does program performance to date represent good value for money?
10. What options exist to strengthen program performance in the near term? How should the stop/go decision be made and what does the team recommend? If there is a phase 2, what changes would maximise program impact?

6.   Ethical and cultural considerations

The MTR will follow DFAT's Ethical Research and Evaluation Guidance Note[10].
The review team will practice ethical conduct in accordance with the Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations established by the Australasian Evaluation Society and the Principles and Guidelines for Ethical Research and Evaluation in Development developed by the Australian Council for International Development and the Research for Development Impact Network. In particular, the team will ensure the following:

- Respect for Mekong culture, gender and diversity. Those charged with arranging and conducting the interviews will be responsible for ensuring that procedures are culturally competent and are conducted in a manner that encourages the free expression of views by key informants, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, age, seniority, or disability.

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[10] Research overview | Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (dfat.gov.au)

- Protecting the legitimate concerns of both clients and stakeholders. The review team will be cognisant of balancing the concerns of the review commissioner (DFAT) with the possibly conflicting perspectives of a wide variety of stakeholders.
- Obtaining informed consent from participants. The purpose of the review and intended use of information obtained from interviews will be explained to each stakeholder. The review team will advise each stakeholder that their participation in the interview and any responses provided are entirely voluntary. Permission will also be obtained for the taking of notes during interviews.
- Confidentiality. The review team will inform all participants that information they provide as part of the evaluation will be aggregated and individuals will not be identified in the review report without their express consent. All documentation and review materials will be held as confidential, stored securely and only accessible by the review team and OPM QTAG Management.

7. Limitations and constraints

This mid-term review is relatively well resourced and ought to have the time to conduct thorough inquiries, reflect on them, reach conclusions and construct feasible recommendations. That said, several potential difficulties are foreseen:

1. It may prove difficult to uncover the program's 'marching orders' that shaped it at the outset. It is important for the Team to understand the basis for initial decision making, how well informed it was and the extent to which it influenced outcomes, positively or negatively.

2. On the basis of the Annual Report for Year 1 of the program - and in the absence currently of the Annual Report for Year 2 - the Team anticipates performance data may be thin, of variable quality and not fully reliable for reaching conclusions in which there is a high of confidence. The team will do what it can to surface and use multiple forms of performance data and to triangulate that which has been formally presented.

3. Those consulted may be reluctant to provide frank advice and feedback for a range of reasons. APS partners may not see it as in their interests to do so. Counterparts may be culturally reluctant to be critical of those providing assistance and may believe it could lead to less help in future. The Team will endeavour to have private discussions with key interlocutors and will stress the confidentiality of those discussions at the outset of meetings.

8. Risk assessment

The review team has undertaken a risk assessment for the review drawing upon the following risk matrix:

Likelihood						
Certain / Imminent	5	10	15	20	25	
Very Likely	4	8	12	16	20	
Likely	3	6	9	12	15	
Possible	2	4	6	8	10	
Unlikely	1	2	3	4	5	
	Neglible	Minor	Moderate	Severe	Critical	Impact

Criticality	
1	Nil
2-3	Negligible
4-6	Low
8-10	Medium
12-16	High
20-25	Critical

Risk (description)	Probability	Impact	Criticality	Mitigation
1. Comprehensive assessment of impact and effectiveness is not possible because of limited program logic and data.	Very likely	Moderate	High	Open communication between the review team and DFAT on developments in this regard, with attempts to find a consensus way forward if the risk eventuates.
2. Mekong stakeholders feel insufficiently consulted and/or engaged on the establishment of the review and are not invested in it.	Possible	Severe	Medium	DFAT and delivery stakeholders to communicate with Mekong stakeholders to explain the purpose and process of the review before contact with the review team. Review team to send ahead a one-page 'explainer' outlining the review to participants.
3. The limited lifespan, scale of activity and COVID-19 disruptions to date may mean that informants do not have significant insights or breadth of data to inform firm conclusions.	Very likely	Minor	Medium	Review team to focus on key themes of a strategic nature, relying heavily on document review to ascertain data gaps and form conclusions as necessary.
4. Competing priorities will mean that key stakeholders do not have sufficient time to engage adequately with the review.	Likely	Moderate	Medium	Maximise flexibility in terms of scheduling and modalities for interviews and undertake an ongoing process of purposive sampling to ensure that all agencies' perspectives are considered.
5. The review exposes tensions or significant differences of opinion between agencies in Australia and/or the Mekong.	Possible	Moderate	Low	Ensure openness and transparency throughout the process and ensure that the perspectives of all stakeholders are presented as objectively as possible in the final report and supplementary report.
6. Insufficient time and material is available to explore concrete options for the future of the program thoroughly.	Likely	Minor	Low	In accordance with the Terms of Reference, restrict the review its scope and key questions.

Risk (description)	Probability	Impact	Criticality	Mitigation
7. It proves very difficult to reconcile competing interests – agency priorities versus WOG priorities; short term versus long; DFAT development policies versus agency operational imperatives	Likely	Moderate	Medium	
8. Canberra is too busy with other priorities, to play a pivotal role in providing strategic oversight, guidance and direction				
9. Posts struggle to keep focussed on strategic intent				

9. Review timeline

The review team has identified the following key milestones for the implementation of this review plan:

Task / Milestone	Responsible	Timeframe / Deadline
1. Document review and analysis	review team	Ongoing
2. Provide draft review plan to DFAT for consideration	review team	End of March 2023
3. Provide comments on draft review plan to review team	DFAT	1st week of April 2023
4. Share final review plan with DFAT	review team	2nd week of April 2023
5. Conduct Canberra consultations	review team	20-24 March 2023
6. Conduct in-country mission, culminating in Aide Memoire	review team	24 April 2023-5 May 2023
7. Analysis and development of report	review team	May 2023
8. Provide draft review report	review team	May 2023
9. Provide comments on draft review report to review team	DFAT Officer	May 2023
10. Final draft submitted to DFAT	review team	No later than 30 June 2023

10. Review team

The review team will be comprised of the following individuals:
- Team Leader: **Richard Moore, Strategic Adviser, Development Intelligence Lab.**
- Subject Matter Expert: **Bridi Rice, CEO, Development Intelligence Lab.**
- DFAT Officer: s22(1)(a)(ii)   **Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.**

The Lab will draw on additional research assistance as necessary.

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Annex Eight

List of Documents Reviewed

MAP-TNC Key Documents

- Investment Design
- MAP-TNC MEL Plan, included MEL Framework
- MAP-TNC Situation Analysis
- MAP-TNC Gender Strategy
- MAP-TNC Communication Strategy
- MAP-TNC Inception Work Plan and Report (2021)
- MAP-TNC Contract (Schedule 1)
- MAP-TNC Program Annual Work Plans (2021 and 2022)
- Governance structure (2021, 2022)
- Ways of Working Workshop (2021)
- MAP-TNC Program Annual Reports and Six-Monthly reports (2021-2022)
- MAP-TNC Pipeline Workshop process and papers (Jan-Feb 2022)
- MAP-TNC: 2021-2024 Activity Pipeline Approval Minute
- MAP-TNC Partnership Delivery Approach Manual
- Activity Proposal Template
- DFAT Partner Performance Assessments (PPA) for Palladium (2021-2022)
- Final APS Partner Activity Reporting (end of activity reports)
- Note: DFAT Aid Quality Checks/Investment Monitoring Report (2021-2022) – exempted
- Optional – Program Activity Reports

DFAT Policies/Strategies

- Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's COVID-19 Development Response
  https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/aid/partnerships-recovery-australias-covid-19-development-response
- COVID-19 Development Response Plan: ASEAN and Southeast Asia Regional
  https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/asean-and-southeast-asia-regional-covid-19-development-response-plan
- Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-strategy
- Development for All 2015-2020: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program (extended to 2021) https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/development-for-all-2015-2020
- M&E Standards https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/dfat-monitoring-and-evaluation-standards
- Guidance on Value for Money Principles
- DFAT's Ethical Research and Evaluation Guidance. The review should be conducted in line with this guidance. https://www.dfat.gov.au/aid/topics/development-issues/research
- DFAT Contract with Cardno – excluding commercial-in-confidence content
- https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/amplifying-our-impact-australias-international-strategy-to-combat-human-trafficking-and-slavery
- https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/criminal-justice/files/trafficking-national-action-plan-combat-human-trafficking-slavery-2015-19.pdf
- Modern Slavery and human trafficking
- TNC arching policy document
- MAP Strategy

MAP-TNC selected key products

Videos

- GI-TOC Expert brief synopsis https://page.globalinitiative.net/mekong-expert-brief-series/index.html

Study/research

- UNODC study research and scoping memo
- UNODC Agreement and proposal
- GI-TOC Agreement and proposal

Policy briefs

- Mekong Development Dialogue Agenda

Annex Nine

Canberra Consultation List

List of Interviewees in Canberra Consultations

Agency	Name	Position
ABF	s 22(1)(a)(ii)	ABF Counsellor (Mekong)
		ABF First Secretary
AFP		Team Leader, Strategy Design and Evaluation (International Strategy)
		A/g Team Leader, International Gender Team
		Coordinator Crime and Foreign Bribery Command
AGD		Director, International Crime Treaties and Policy
		Director, Child Protection International Partnerships
		Program Officer, Child Protection International Partnerships
		Director, International Anti-Corruption Section
		A/g Director, FATF Engagement Section
		Director, Firearms and Illicit Drugs Section, Transnational Crime Branch
		Assistant Director, Firearms and Illicit Drugs Section, Transnational Crime Branch
ATO		Director, Serious Financial Crime Taskforce & Joint Chiefs of Global Tax Enforcement Alliance
		Director, Transnational Crime Program – International
AUSTRAC		Director, International Programs
		Programme Manager, Southeast Asia
		Senior Liaison Officer
DFAT	Ray Marcelo	Assistant Secretary, Southeast Asia, Strategy, Economic & Communications Branch
	Jenny Da Rin	Assistant Secretary, Southeast Asia Development Policy & Program Branch
	s 22(1)(a)(ii)	Director, Southeast Asia Development Program and Performance Section
		Director, Program Support Unit (PSU)
		A/g Director, Mekong Strategy Section

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	Andrew Walter	First Assistant Secretary, Regulatory & Legal Policy Division
	s 22(1)(a)(ii)	A/g Assistant Secretary, Australian Sanctions and Transnational Crime Branch
		A/g Director, Transnational Crime Section
		Assistant Director, Human Trafficking & Modern Slavery Section
		Director, Regional and Bilateral Economic Cooperation Section
		Assistant Director, Regional and Bilateral Economic Cooperation Section
eSafety Commission		Manager, International Engagement Capacity Building
		Director, Office of Drug Control
Health		Assistant Director, Research and International Policy Section
		A/g Director Multilaterals Section
Home Affairs		Assistant Director, Mekong Section
		Director, Critical Infrastructure Program & Education Cyber and Infrastructure Centre
Treasury		A/g Director, Foreign Investment Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Unit
Palladium	s 47F(1)	

Positions are those held at date of consultation

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Annex Ten
Regional Consultations

List of Interviewees in Regional Consultations

Thailand 24 – 26 April 2023

Organisation	Name	Position
Australian Embassy	Julia Feeney s22(1)(a)(ii)	Deputy Head of Mission
		Counsellor (Development)
		First Secretary (MAP-TNC)
		Senior Program Manager (MAP-TNC)
		Operations Officer (MAP-TNC)
		Senior Officer, AFP
		Federal Agent, AFP
		Counsellor, Department of Home Affairs
		Second Secretary, Department of Home Affairs
		Counsellor, ABF
		First Secretary, DFAT Political and Economic
Royal Thai Police (RTP)	s 33(a)(iii), s 47F(1)	Deputy Commissioner, Tourist Police Bureau Thailand Internet Crime Against Children (TICAC)
		Commander, Cyber Crime Investigation Bureau TICAC
		Inspector, Foreign Affairs Division
		Superintendent TICAC
		TICAC
		Inspector, Economic Crime Suppression Division
		Sub-Inspector, Economic Crime Suppression Division
ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking (ASEAN-ACT)		Team Leader
		Deputy Team Leader
		Policy Dialogue and Partnerships Director
Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC)		Representative - Asia and the Pacific
		Programme Manager
Department of Special Investigation (DSI)		Director

	s 33(a)(iii), s 47F(1)	Special Case Officer, Countering Child Sexual Exploitation Centre
		Special Case Officer, Tax Crime Investigation Bureau
		Special Case Officer, Tax Crime Investigation Bureau
		Special Case Officer, Tax Crime Investigation Bureau
		Special Case Officer, Financial, Banking and Money Laundering Crime Bureau
		Special Case Officer, Financial, Banking and Money Laundering Crime Bureau
Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO)		Deputy Director, Cooperation and Standard Development Division
		Chief of International Case Section
		Director of International Affairs
		Investigator, Professional Level
		Plan and Policy Analyst
Revenue Department		Deputy Director
		Director, Bureau of Central Audit Operations
		Tax Audit Officer
		Tax Audit Officer
		Tax Audit Officer
		Tax Audit Officer
		Tax Audit Officer
Office of the Attorney General		Director-General, Traccking in Persons Litigation
		Prosecutor
A21		Regional Diretcor
PSU	s 47F(1), s 47E(d)	Contractor Rep
		Program Director
		Deputy Program Director
		Program Officer
		Program Officer
		MERL

Lao PDR 27 – 28 April 2023

Organisation	Name	Position
Australian Embassy	s22(1)(a)(ii)	Deputy Head of Mission
		First Secretary (Water & Regional)
		Second Secretary (Economic, Trade and Infrastructure)
		Second Secretary (Water & Regional – MAP)
		Program Manager (Water, Energy, Climate – MAP)
		Senior Policy Officer
		Program Manager (Economic Resilience – MAP)
Department of Anti-Human Trafficking	s 33(a)(iii), s 47F(1)	DDG of Anti-Human Trafficking Police Department
		Deputy Chief of Secretariate Division of Anti-Human Trafficking Department.
Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLIO)		Deputy Director General of AMILO
		Chief of Legal and International Cooperation,
ASEAN Act		Country Manager
Village Focus International		Program Coordinator
United Nation Office for Drugs and Crime		AML/CFT Adviser and Mentor– Mekong Region
		Programme Officer
International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs		Director, International Enforcement Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy Vientiane, Lao PDR

Cambodia 2 – 3 May 2023

Organisation	Name	Position
Australian Embassy	s 22(1)(a)(ii)	Senior Officer, Australian Federal Police

	s 33(a)(iii), s 47F(1)	Investigative Assistant/Liaison Officer, AFP
Department of Anti-Cybercrime Cambodian National Police (CNP)		Deputy Commissioner General for Anti-Cybercrime
		Assistant to the Deputy Commissioner General
		Assistant to the Deputy Commissioner General
		Assistant to the Deputy Commissioner General
Gender Working Group of Cambodian National Police (CNP)		Deputy Commissioner General and Head of CNP Gender Working Group
		Deputy Director of Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department
		Deputy Director of Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department
		Assistant to the Deputy Commissioner General
Central Department of Security Cambodian National Police (CNP)		Deputy Commissioner General for Central Department of Security
		Deputy director of Central security department
		Director of Anti cybercrime department
		Transnational crime Team Leader
Cambodia Financial Intelligence Unit (CAFIU)		Head of CAFIU
		Director of Analysis Department
		Deputy Chief of Division
		Chief of Section
General Department of Prosecution and Criminal Affairs Ministry of Justice (MOJ)		Delegates of the royal government and director general of prosecutions and criminal affairs
		Deputy director general of prosecutions and criminal affairs
		Director of prosecutions affairs department
		Director of criminal affairs department
		Deputy Prosecutor - Phnom Penh Court of First Instance
A21 Cambodia		Country Managing Director

| PSU | s 47F(1) | | Country Coordinator |

Vietnam 5 May 2023

Organisation	Name	Position
Australian Embassy	s22(1)(a)(ii)	Detective Superintendent, International Command, AFP
		First Secretary, Political Section, DFAT Post
		Senior Political Officer, Political Section, DFAT Post
		Second Secretary, Economic Section, DFAT Post

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[1] UNODC, Transnational Organised Crime Threat Assessment, Transnational Organized Crime in Southeast Asia: Evolution, Growth and Impact, 2019. https://www.unodc.org/roseap/uploads/archive/documents/Publications/2019/SEA_TOCTA_2019_web.pdf

[2] DFAT, Mekong Australia Program on Transnational Crime, Investment Design, 30 June 2020. P12

[3] Cat Barker, Australian Parliamentary Library, Transnational, Serious and Organised Crime, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/BriefingBook46p/OrganisedCrime

[4] Smith, Russell and Hickman, Amelia, Australian Insittute of Criminology, Estimating the costs of serious and organised crime in Australia, 2020-2021, 2022, https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr38

[5] Australian Criminal Intelligence Comission, Organised Crime in Australia 2017, August 2017, https://www.acic.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases-and-statements/new-report-identifies-six-key-enablers-organised-crime-australia

[6] Gyngell, Alan, Australian Foreign Affairs 15, Our Unstable Neighbourhood, The contest for Southeast Asia, July 2022.

[7] https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/combatting-transnational-crime-southeast-asia

[8] MAP-TNC Design, Op Cit, P8

[9] MAP-TNC Investment Design, Op Cit, P 17.

[10] MAP-TNC Design, Op Cit, P23

[11] For a summary of recent Australian assistance in the law and justice area, see Annex 3

[12] Program Support Unit, MAP-TNC Strategic Observations, Review and Suggested Guidance, April 2002. P. 8

[13] This assistance was organised under the pilot program, Malaysia-Thailand Reform Partnerships, implemented by the Asia Foundation

[14] In its budget analysis, the Development Policy Centre, drew attention to the deteriorating performance of Australian development projects and programs. Slide 14. https://devpolicy.org/Events/2023/2023-aid-budget-presentation-slides_10May2023.pdf

[15] MAP TNC Investment design, P27

[16] A full list of those consulted in the region is at Annex 10

[17] One request that recurred two or three times was for residential courses. This would allow people to leave their desks and inboxes, get away from the office for a while without family responsibilities and make the most of the chance to learn and build networks. Unfortunately, it is also much more expensive. On two occasions it was suggested that resort locations might be chosen for such courses. In such situations a clear line needs to be drawn to avoid any misperceptions. The use of Australian taxpayer funds, especially ODA, should never appear extravagant. If it is ever decided to fund residential courses the business case needs to be very strong and resort locations should be avoided. This principle should be applied to other expenditure that could be misconstrued.

[18] Program Support Unit, 2023, Op Cit, P 28

[19] MAP TNC Investment Design, P 9

[20] Program Support Unit, Annual Report 1, p2.

[21] Adams, Jim, Development Policy Centre, Capacity Building important but unsuccessful, July 2015

[22] OECD DAC, Supporting Partners to Develop their Capacity, 12 Lessons from DAC Peer Reviews, 2012. https://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/12lessonscapdev.pdf

[23] DFAT, Annual Investment Monitoring Report, INN084 Mekong-Australia Partnership on Transnational Crime, May 2023

[24] While there is not an agreed GEDSI strategy the program is still governed by DFAT's 2016 Gender equality and Womens' empowerment strategy that emphasises enhancing women's voice and agency and economic empowerment; and ending violence against women and girls.

[25] MAP TNC Investment Design, P 35-41

[26] Program Support Unit, 2023, Op Cit, 5.2.2 Gender Emerging Results

[27] Program Support UNit 2023, Op Cit P16

s 47E(d)

[29] MAP TNC Investment Design, P9

[30] Ibid, P 14

[31] Ibid, P. 8

s 47E(d)

[35] Australia has a long history in the Mekong that includes building the first bridge across the Mekong River, linking Laos and Thailand. It also built the My Thuan bridge in Vietnam and financed a substantial part of the Can Tho bridge with ADB and South Korea. Having worked on physical infrastructure Australia then moved to support improved border crossings through better facilities, improved protocols and staff training.

[36] UNODC has assessed that illicit financial flows rose 30% between 2013-19. The Mekong is now thge largest meta-amphetamine market in the world.

[37] https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/southeast-asia/investing-our-southeast-asian-partnerships/mekong-australia-partnership

[38] https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2014/January/significant-investments-needed-to-address-weaknesses-at-border-checkpoints-in-the-mekong-sub-region.html

s 33(a)(iii)

[40] PSU, 2023, Op Cit. P.6

[41] PSU, Strategic Observations Report, 2022. P. 8

[42] This figure is computed by dividing the total of program expenditure for 2022 to 2024 inclusive ($4250,384) by 84 activities to arrive at an average of $50,600

[43] UNDOC advised DFAT that there is an urgent need for a deeper and updated understanding of [illicit financial flows] while GITOC's situation analysis pointed to poor and unreliable data as a recurring problem across the three crime types Australia has prioritised

[44] MAP-TNC investment Design, 2019, P. 10

[45] MAP TNC is managed by a First Secretary (Development) who reports to a Development Counsellor. The Program delegate is the Deputy Head of Mission. The Head of Mission is engaged as required to advance relationship and reputational interests.

[46] Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime, Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, Financial Crines and Drug Trafficking in the Mekong Subregion, A Situation Analysis, January 2023.

[47] Program Support Unit. MAP TNC Draft Annual Report 2, March 2022-March 2023. P 10

[48] PSU, Year 1 Annual Report, March 2021-March 2022

[49] MAP TNC PSU, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework, October 2022

[50] MAP-TNC INvestment Design, 2020, Op Cit, P8

[51] MAP-TNC Investment Design, 2020, P8

[52] DFAT, 2017 Foreign Policy White paper, P.44

[53] DFAT Mekong Australia Partnership

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