



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and
Citizenship

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Security in Government Conference

“Enhancing security through effective immigration measures”

Ladies and gentlemen,

Introduction

The development of civilization itself has been based on the ability of people to temporarily and permanently cross borders.

There are now more people moving across the face of the planet than at any other time in history.

International travel is simply part of the way many people live – travel for tourism, for work, for study and sadly sometimes due to war or persecution.

And some to commit crimes or acts of violence.

There will be over 24 million movements of both foreign nationals and Australians across our own borders alone, this year.

And every one of those movements requires some kind of interaction with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

For example, at the Brisbane international airport we process about 11 000 passengers a day.

And the majority of them will have arrived during the early-morning rush and will have passed through immigration before I finish my speech today.

Flight SQ255 from Singapore to Brisbane, which arrived at 9.25am had 308 passengers.

They included 70 Australians, 60 Singaporeans, 30 UK citizens, 20 South Africans, 15 Italians, 10 Thais, 10 Indians and several other nationalities.

The Sydney international airport staff process about three times the number that come through Brisbane.

Not only does my department have officers in 95 locations around the world, but we have them operating throughout Australia, from the Torres Strait, where we have Movement Monitoring Officers as our first line of intelligence-gathering and border protection, through to Tasmania, which is the first point of entry for almost half of the cruise ships coming to Australia.

In addition to flying or driving to remote ports, some officers travel by launch or helicopter to reach vessels or resource installations that are located off Australia's coast.

They may deal with immigration issues surrounding medical evacuations, deserters, stowaways, sinking at sea and distressed vessels as well as the normal duties they carry out on a daily basis.

In fact, we process something like one person every second across our borders.

Most of the millions of movements across our borders are vital to our economic and social prosperity.

The challenge for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship is to facilitate the entry and departure of legitimate travellers whilst ensuring we detect fraud, and identify people who are not entitled to come here, locate them top them travelling here.

If they are here already, we must consider the need for their departure.

This presents a complex scenario. Speed and accuracy are paramount – to ensure legitimate travellers are not inconvenienced by security measures, but those who are security threats, are identified.

The constant challenge for the department is to find the right balance.

Adding to this complexity is the fact that the travel market is becoming more diverse with more travellers arriving from an increasing number of countries around the world.

For instance, 228 592 student visas were granted for 2006-07 – a nearly 20 per cent increase on the previous year.

Health risks and transnational crime continue to be addressed, but our focus has also turned to those who would threaten Australia's national security – from within as well as outside Australia.

From this perspective, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship plays a key role in national security, which is often not immediately apparent.

Today I will speak to you about how the department contributes to national security – from within Australia, within our region and through direct border security as well as how we are constantly working to achieve that balance I described earlier.

International engagement

Firstly, let me begin with the strategic context.

Now, more than ever, no country can secure its vital migration and border security interests on its own.

At the same time, Australia is committed to meeting its international obligations under the Refugee Convention and other relevant instruments.

Australia takes more than 13 000 refugee and humanitarian entrants each year, the third largest intake in the world after the US and Canada.

In fact, we have a long and proud history of helping refugees.

Since World War II we have accepted around 690 000 refugees and people in urgent need of settlement.

We are committed to those international obligations, which stand firmly alongside strong border security and promoting the importance of the rights and obligations of living within Australia's rich cultural and religious diversity.

The changing scale of international people movements, the growing demands for international competitiveness enhanced by well-managed migration, and the heightened concerns around terrorist and international criminal elements, are symptoms of the complex international environment that lies ahead.

Therefore, there has never been a more important time for us to be involved in creating a more enabling environment, to facilitate people movement in support of our national objectives.

Working very closely with a number of other Australian government agencies, we are thinking afresh about the *opportunities* as well as the risks of people movement in an increasingly globalised world.

One of the ways we are doing this is by exploring shared agendas with other countries on people movement.

We're doing this through international engagement on a global scale with "like-minded" countries such as the US, Canada, New Zealand, Japan and European countries.

The department is also particularly active in its engagement in the Asia-Pacific region. Our cooperation with Asia-Pacific countries is integral to the management of Australia's borders and strong border management across the region.

We are involved in discussions with our regional partners at forums such as the annual ASEAN Directors-General of Immigration.

We are also involved with the Pacific Immigration Directors Conference, which acts as a focal point for the harmonisation of approaches to issues such as legislation and border management.

The benefits of this interaction are two-way because it also assists our regional partners to prevent illegal movements into and through their own countries.

This is particularly important as the irregular movement of people increases.

Weak border controls provide opportunities for terrorists, people smugglers, people traffickers and other criminals to operate.

Bilateral activities

There is no "one size fits all" solution. However, the department uses targeted bilateral activities to help improve the border security and gradually raise the profile and priority of border security matters with counterpart agencies in the region.

Activities such as sharing intelligence information and joint enforcement operations are building trust and cooperation with governments and reinforcing the mutual benefits of this shared relationship.

Other types of activities include:

- analytical border management assessments
- alert systems design and implementation
- identity verification
- creation of legal and regulatory frameworks
- joint training ventures, and
- technical assistance and training (such as forensic document examination, immigration intelligence and English language skills).

Through these activities, counterpart countries increase their understanding and skills in migration management.

We have also been involved in a number of larger technical assistance activities for border management systems.

For example, we are working with the Indonesian government on a \$10 million border management system that will strengthen Indonesia's capacity to protect its borders by allowing Indonesian officials to check those arriving and leaving at key border points.

We are also working with the Philippines Bureau of Immigration on the expansion of their system to provide connectivity between their border management systems and alert databases.

National Action Plan

Ladies and gentlemen, I would now like to turn to the ways in which the department – within its areas of responsibility – is addressing national security, on Australian soil.

As you may be aware, part of the department's role is to provide settlement services to newly-arrived migrants and refugee and humanitarian entrants.

Supporting our new arrivals is a priority for my department, both in the short term and long term.

People migrate to succeed, not to fail.

But often the search for a new life in a new country can be very challenging and very occasionally can result in alienation and disaffection which creates the potential for a security risk.

We are seeing a trend of growing demands among some younger members of our society for answers about their identity and religion.

As a result, the national counter-terrorism response can be divided into two types of approaches.

One approach includes law enforcement, new legislation and heightened intelligence capabilities.

The second approach includes the development of social policy responses to address the features which can breed terrorism.

The National Action Plan to Build on Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security (NAP) was developed by the Ministerial Council on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, at the request of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in September 2005.

Its intention was to provide a coordinated approach by federal, state and territory governments to build social cohesion and community harmony, as an important part of the broader strategy to combat terrorism and empower those who may feel disaffected or marginalised.

The NAP includes:

- education projects

- employment initiatives
- integration programs
- community projects
- national security initiatives, and
- research.

Through the NAP, the department is playing a key role in supporting practical solutions to counter isolation and marginalisation and is engaging the Australian community in better understanding about issues arising from Australia's cultural and religious diversity.

Border Security

I would now like to turn to perhaps the most significant security element of our work and that is border security.

Australia's border security system differs from other countries in some important aspects.

Firstly, Australia has a universal visa system – all visitors and permanent migrants to Australia must apply for a visa or a visa equivalent, with conditions appropriate to their stay.

Our visa application system is a risk-based system. The traveller's risk profile, reason for travel and individual characteristics are all taken into account, and will determine what kind of visa application process is undertaken.

As part of the visa application process, all applicants are checked against the Migration Alert List (MAL), a watch list contributed to by security and law enforcement agencies as well as other Commonwealth agencies.

After visa grant, a traveller passes through a number of other checking layers culminating in their final check at the Australian border.

I will describe these more fully, later.

Most other countries have "visa waiver" arrangements, which allow certain nationalities to travel without previously applying for a visa. This can result in minimal advance warning of the travel of an individual who may be of concern.

This is clearly a risk in the current international security environment, and may also lead to extended waiting times at airport arrival halls.

Australia's visa system provides a screening mechanism preventing the entry of people who are identified as posing a security, criminal or health risk.

We manage the movement of non-citizens across our borders by, in effect, pushing the border clearance process back to where travellers originate from.

This means that checking and screening starts well before a person reaches our physical border.

Multi-layered system

As I mentioned, Australia's border management system is based on a number of "layers".

These are:

- the universal visa system (with immigration alert checking)
- the airline liaison officers
- the Advance Passenger Processing system (APP), which operates at check-in overseas, and
- the processing at Australian airports and seaports on arrival.

Leading-edge technology is being used to deliver these secure immigration processing systems.

Anyone wanting to travel to, enter or remain in Australia must pass through each of these layers.

It's worth mentioning here that each year, the department locates a significant number of overstayers and people breaching their visa conditions, including those working illegally. We oversight the departure of about 12-13,000 of these people each year.

Despite a significant increase in the number of travellers to Australia, the number of overstayers has been trending down.

This is because we have a risk-based compliance program, and under this, priority is now being given to the location and removal of unlawful non-citizens who pose the greatest risk to the Australian community.

This includes a shift in focus towards a balance of prevention, deterrence and enforcement activities.

The focus has shifted from primarily dealing with individual visa breaches to focussing more strategically on employers, labour suppliers and organisers.

An example of some excellent work done by our borders and compliance staff earlier this year occurred in July when border staff at Adelaide Airport questioned two overstayers as they departed the country.

The information was provided to the compliance team who, drawing on additional information, conducted 11 successful operations. This resulted in the detection of 87 people in Australia unlawfully or in breach of visa conditions.

With further help from the state intelligence officer and external agencies, compliance officers worked to apprehend the local organiser of the visa and employment racket.

The Layers

At the time of visa application, there is a check against the Movement Alert List (MAL) prior to visa issue.

The MAL is a database of people and travel documents of concern. It includes criminals, who may pose a security risk and people barred from entering Australia for immigration breaches and health matters. It also includes lost, stolen and fraudulent travel documents.

The database consists of 600 000 people of concern, and 2.5 million documents of concern, and since September 11 2001, the number of people of concern has grown by about 600 per cent.

All visa records are checked more than once against the warning lists.

The check at visa application time ensures travellers are checked prior to travel to Australia and they are checked again by Australian Customs Service officers when they arrive in Australia.

I'd like to tell you at this point about a new system which has just moved to Phase 2 of rollout.

It's our Security Referral Service (SRS) which has increased the agility of our border security systems in general.

It allows processing to happen electronically between the department and ASIO and is a huge step forward that has been overwhelmingly welcomed by staff.

It is world leading technology and places Australian border security as being among the very best in the world.

When it is fully rolled out, SRS will:

- reduce manual data entry and improve data accuracy
- provide an opportunity to speed up the process of national security checks in some cases
- reduce the need for slower, less accurate information transmission and
- introduce guaranteed delivery acknowledgement and a unique identifier for each check.

Australia also has a network of immigration officers operating as Airline Liaison Officers (ALOs) at around 14 key locations overseas.

ALOs assist airline officers in screening Australia-bound travellers at the last points of embarkation to check for inadequate documentation.

In some locations, Australia's ALOs work cooperatively with the ALOs of other countries, thus contributing to international action against people smuggling, human trafficking and unlawful activities.

In 2006-07, our ALOs were involved in 180 interdictions of passengers with irregular documentation who were attempting to travel to Australia. This is a 26 per cent increase over the previous year. These interventions save the Australian Government over \$8.5 million each year.

Australia's Advance Passenger Processing or "APP" system is the next layer in Australia's approach to border management.

When a traveller, including airline crew, checks in to travel to Australia, the airline is required to confirm (via the APP system) whether the traveller has current valid authority to travel to and enter Australia.

Approximately 99.7 per cent of all air travellers to Australia are processed through APP.

In less than four seconds, the passenger data is checked against Australia's passport, visa and alert lists and a message is returned to the airline staff telling them whether the person is "OK to board" or "not OK to board."

This system can prevent a traveller from boarding an aircraft, flag them for screening or arrival or process legitimate travellers faster because they've already been "pre-processed".

Entry processing at the border

When travellers arrive at the border, they may still be refused entry because of information revealed on arrival.

For example, since February 2004, a Fraudulent Travel Document Detection System has been used in Australia's international airports to assist in detecting fraudulent travel documents.

If the document fails the test in the machine-readable material, it is referred to immigration officials for further investigation.

In 2006-07, just 1388 people were refused immigration clearance at Australian airports. This represents just 0.01 per cent of total passenger air arrivals and is a decrease on the previous year's figures in spite of increased air travel volumes.

This is due to the fact that the checking begins long before travellers actually arrive in Australia.

Identity management

As you would be aware, biometrics is being increasingly used as a high-tech identity management tool.

Our objective is to use biometric technology as part of a broader identity management strategy to strengthen identification processes for non-citizens entering Australia.

This could include scanning the credentials or proof-of-identity documents provided with an application as well as biometric information – particularly facial images and finger scans.

Once established, the identity can be matched consistently during subsequent interactions with our department and other government agencies.

To assist in this process, the Migration Act has been amended to provide a comprehensive regime for the collection, storage, use and sharing of biometric and person identifiers.

Some recent developments include:

- rollout of facial and fingerprint scanning capability to immigration detention centres and
- the use of the Gold Standard Enrolment Process, which is a method of registering clients, for example, for the Citizenship Test, to ensure their claimed identity is correct.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Customs and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner received funding over four years, starting in 2005 to deliver an integrated biometric solution at our borders.

The key aspects are:

- the use of Smartgate booths at the borders, which use facial recognition technology to compare information stored on a biometric passport to a live image of the traveller taken at the gate.
- e-passports granted to Australian citizens containing biometric chips to be recognised by the SmartGate booths.
- acquiring biometrics from higher-risk non-citizens at the point of first contact with immigration, for later potential matching with other data.

New initiatives

We are always working to improve our border security arrangements while ensuring that “Australia stays open for business”.

For instance, the Maritime Crew visa was introduced in July this year to improve security for maritime arrivals. To put this in context, there are around 300 000 foreign sea crew arrivals in Australia each year.

Our officers world-wide also have access to IMtel, our intelligence support system, which holds over 37 000 reports and is growing in size by over 1000 intelligence reports a month.

It has already been used to identify fraud and immigration malpractice in Australia and overseas.

At the same time, we are developing systems that will produce more accurate analysis of risks associated with potential people of concern bound for Australia.

These new systems will draw on data and intelligence we routinely collect from visa applicants and new sources of information and intelligence.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, as mentioned previously, our approach to security is a multi-layered one that addresses the issue at a number of levels.

These include engaging with regional partners to encourage and develop the understanding of the mutual and regional benefits of well-developed people movement systems.

At the same time, we are working towards ensuring that those who settle in Australia, are encouraged to quickly become contributing members of Australian society, to enjoy the rights and benefits of life in Australia and to avoid the alienation and marginalisation that leads to extremism.

And on the issue of border security, Australia has one of the most efficient visa processing systems in the world – so efficient in fact that some travellers barely notice the visa application and issuance processes.

Our Electronic Travel Authority system is a high-speed, highly reliable tool available to nationals of 33 countries, which means it takes only minutes to issue a visa

Those minutes between application and visa issue are used to conduct rapid checks against our movement alerts lists, and will, in future, also have to check for new often changing risk factors.

All of this while ensuring that client service standards are maintained and constantly improved – supporting that crucial balance between travel facilitation and security that I have mentioned previously.

Our work is never complete, due to the 24-hour a day, seven days a week nature of our operations.

However, I believe the multi-layered, whole-of-government approach we have taken towards border security is a key factor in making Australia's borders, among of the most secure in the world.

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