

Joint Committee on Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Spoken

001 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Advice on returning Australians

Senator Julian Hill

Question

"CHAIR: Was advice provided that Australians could be home by Christmas as the Prime Minister committed? Let's not say 'promised'; let's say 'committed'.

Ms Logan: I don't believe so.

CHAIR: So it was a prime ministerial initiative?

Ms Logan: There were plans to return Australians—

Senator REYNOLDS: Would you like to ask me!

Ms Logan: The time frame was not one initiated by the department, but the intention on the part of the department was very much to assist Australians to the extent we could.

CHAIR: I think everyone wanted to see Australians come home. I think we can all agree on that.

Ms Logan: Exactly.

CHAIR: We can call that a common place. Your evidence is that the department didn't provide advice specifically?

Ms Logan: Let me take it on notice to check. As I said, I wasn't in the role at the time. I wasn't there, so I would check that.

CHAIR: Did you have a comment on the way through—without breaching NSC, or you'll get a letter from the Attorney-General!

Senator REYNOLDS: I could say I already have had one, but in a different context!

CHAIR: Yes. That's too soon.

Senator REYNOLDS: Yes, too soon. When you take that on notice: the context is going to be very important under which DFAT was operating. There were pretty much daily NSC meetings at that point where the minister and his secretary, Secretary Adamson at the time, were providing input into opportunities, requirements and things like that. Perhaps the broader context and DFAT's engagement in that broader context."

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Answer

From the commencement of the pandemic, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), along with multiple agencies and industry partners, worked hard to assist as many Australians who wished to return as possible. A National Coordination Mechanism (NCM) Managing Returns to Australia Working Group worked with Commonwealth, State and Territory government agencies and with industry in all jurisdictions to support the safe return of Australian citizens, permanent residents and visa holders to Australia. The NCM, led by the Department of Home Affairs, was commissioned by the Government on 5 March 2020 to coordinate the non- health related aspects of the whole-of-nation response to COVID-19. Additionally, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC) led a Bringing Australians Home Taskforce with representatives from PMC, Australian Border Force, Department of Defence, Department of Social Security, Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources, Department of Home Affairs, Treasury, DFAT, Department of Health and Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

DFAT did not prepare a brief for the 18 September 2020 meeting when National Cabinet agreed that all jurisdictions would continue to work towards enabling more Australians to return home by increasing the existing caps on international passenger arrivals. It was following this meeting that former Prime Minister Morrison responded to a journalist's question that he "would hope that those who are looking to come home, that we'd be able to do that within months and I would hope that we can get as many people home, if not all of them, by Christmas".

Following the National Cabinet decision, more than 63,100 Australians returned from overseas, including more than 24,800 Australians registered with DFAT between 18 September and Christmas 2020. In the six weeks prior to Christmas 2020, DFAT made over 50,000 offers of places on flights to Australians registered overseas. Registrations fluctuated as the pandemic affected various locations in different ways, impacting the ability of Australians to return. Questions relating to discussions at NSC meetings should be referred to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

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002 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
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Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Australians overseas at Christmas

Mr Julian Hill MP

Question

"CHAIR: Yes, indeed. I think it's a reasonable question worth being prepared for, but there we go. I appreciate you weren't there at the time, but it's a pretty obvious question that was going to arise in this hearing. How many Australians were stranded overseas at the time that commitment was made?

Ms Logan: On our database, we were aware of around 26,400 who had registered as wishing to return at that at that time.

CHAIR: How many were stranded overseas by Christmas that year?

Ms Logan: I'd need to check the number, but it was still a sizeable number, from recollection. Let me take that number on notice."

Answer

At the time of Prime Minister Scott Morrison's announcement on 18 September 2020, there were 26,200 Australians registered with DFAT seeking assistance to return to Australia (figure confirmed later in the hearing by Ms Logan).

On 30 December 2020, 38,889 Australians were registered with DFAT seeking assistance to return to Australia.

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003 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Resourcing to assist returning Australians

Senator Julian Hill

Question

"CHAIR: Did the government provide additional resourcing to DFAT to facilitate this commitment?

Ms Logan: Yes. We had a large increase in staff to manage the consular consequences of the pandemic. A large influx.

CHAIR: Can you take on notice how many additional staff were provided.

Ms Logan: Certainly."

Answer

The government provided additional resourcing to DFAT to support the return of Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the announcement on 18 September 2020, DFAT stood up a dedicated taskforce to coordinate the facilitated commercial flights program and COVID-19 Special Overseas (Hardship) Program.

Prior to COVID-19, DFAT's Consular and Crisis Management Division's FTE was around 79. To respond to the pandemic, DFAT deployed staff from across the department to meet the crisis response. By April 2020, the number of officers in the division working on the response had more than doubled. Following the 18 September announcement, the division expanded further, with around 250 officers in November 2020, including temporary resources redirected to the response from across DFAT, supplemented by additional APS secondees (more than 30 APS officers were seconded to DFAT (as at December 2020)).

Please note the exact resourcing numbers changed daily with the arrival of new staff and departure of staff on postings/other placements.

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004 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Advice to Prime Minister on returning Australians

Senator Julian Hill

Question

"CHAIR: The then prime minister said on 8 July 2020 that there have been 'many opportunities for people to return. If they're choosing to do so now, they obviously delayed that decision for a period.' Was that statement made on advice from DFAT?

Ms Logan: Not that I'm aware of.

CHAIR: It does seem to contradict the acknowledgement of people's actual circumstances, which we've just touched on.

Senator REYNOLDS: Ms Logan, can I ask you to take that on notice, given you weren't there and you're not aware.

Ms Logan: I was there in October 2020, but—

Senator REYNOLDS: But you're not aware—or are you saying a definitive no?

Ms Logan: I can take it on notice, Senator.

CHAIR: It contradicts the evidence that was just given.

Senator REYNOLDS: I'm just saying that, if Ms Logan is not sure, she can take it on notice.

CHAIR: She said no.

Ms Logan: I'm not aware of advice that the department put up to the—it wouldn't be—

CHAIR: Saying, 'Blame the victims.'

Ms Logan: It wouldn't be advice of the nature that the department would typically give about the reasons why people were still there.

CHAIR: But we've learnt never to be surprised.

Senator REYNOLDS: So, if it is the sort of thing the department wouldn't advise on—because this is a political question—when you take it on notice perhaps just include a bit of clarity about why you wouldn't normally provide that sort of advice.

Ms Logan: Certainly.

CHAIR: Are you aware whether the government consulted with DFAT before the Prime Minister made those remarks?

Ms Logan: Are you referring to the ones in July about the reasons why people—I'm not aware, but, again, I can make that part of our answer on notice.

CHAIR: Do you know if the foreign minister's office consulted with DFAT before the Prime Minister made those remarks?

Ms Logan: I would say, similarly, part of my same answer."

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Answer

DFAT was aware there were a range of circumstances influencing individual's decisions to return to Australia. These may have included flight availability, local lockdowns and border closures, flight costs, ongoing employment and accommodation, familial obligations and health settings. This information may have been discussed in whole of government forums (refer QoN 001) or directly with the Foreign Minister's office. We were unable to locate any written advice to ministers or the Prime Minister that advised that Australians had had "many opportunities for people to return. If they're choosing to do so now, they obviously delayed that decision for a period" prior to the Prime Minister's 8 July 2020 comments.

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Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Consultation on passenger arrival caps

Senator Julian Hill

Question

"CHAIR: Did the government consult with DFAT on the imposition of the passenger arrival caps?

Ms Logan: As Senator Reynolds has said, I suspect it was in NSC. But, again, we can check for you."

Answer

DFAT did not prepare a brief for Ministers on the impact of introducing the international flight cap before it was announced by the then Prime Minister on 10 July 2020.

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006 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's report No. 39 (2022-2023)

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: COVID deaths overseas

Senator Julian Hill

Question

"CHAIR: How many Australians stranded overseas died from COVID-19 in other countries?

Ms Logan: We were aware of a small number of Australians who did die, but it wasn't an exclusive number in the sense that Australians died that were not necessarily reported to the department at the time. So the number is not a comprehensive number, but I think from recollection—

CHAIR: So it's a floor, not a ceiling.

Ms Logan: Sadly, yes.

CHAIR: What was the floor?

Ms Logan: I want to say 11, but that was a number in my mind from an earlier Senate estimates hearing. It may not have been the final number that we were aware of. I can check that.

CHAIR: Were any of those listed as vulnerable in DFAT's categorisation.

Ms Logan: I recall that some were. Yes.

CHAIR: Can you take that on notice, please?

Ms Logan: Yes."

Answer

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is aware of 136 Australians (Australian citizens and permanent residents) who died overseas with COVID-19 before 11 March 2022. Australian borders were re-opened from 21 February 2022. By 11 March 2022, there were no Australians registered with DFAT seeking assistance to return to Australia.

Of the 136, only 14 had registered with DFAT, three of whom were categorised as vulnerable at the time of their death. The remaining 122 had not registered with DFAT during the COVID period but became consular cases due to illness or death.

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**007 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)**

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Partner engagement on crisis preparedness

Senator Julian Hill

Question

"CHAIR: The Auditor-General also suggested there'd be value in strengthening your learnings engagement with partner countries with whom we work and whom we could learn with and from to benchmark your preparedness. What work are you doing to engage with partner countries to develop crisis preparedness policies and processes, and are you benchmarking your capabilities? Can you do such a thing?

Ms Logan: Yes, we can, actually. It's a really good question, and it's quite an interesting area of our work. We have what we call the Five Eyes crisis forum that we engage with regularly. Lynn Bell participates on behalf of the division. It is an incredibly useful way of benchmarking, because it turns out the only people who do what we do in this crisis response space internationally are other countries with similar crisis response mechanisms, and our Five Eyes partners are probably the best benchmarks for us—although we also have broader groupings. We touch base with other European countries, and some of our regional consular officers in Europe engage with other European countries that aren't typically like-minded with us. But it's a useful way of tracking how other countries are responding. By way of example, we had people from Switzerland visit the other day, and we had an extremely useful exchange with them on how they track during the pandemic and what measures they are putting in place. So that's an additional mechanism that we use.

CHAIR: You might want to take this on notice: if there's a supplementary page or two that you want to give us on that, that would be useful.

Ms Logan: Mm."

Answer

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade engages with international partners on crisis management through a range of formal and informal mechanisms.

The Consular Colloquy (made up of consular partners - Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Australia), and its crisis and travel advice sub-groups and crisis planning sub-groups, meet regularly and provides the department with an opportunity to exchange lessons learned and increase our understanding of close partners' approaches to consular assistance and crisis management. Our membership in the Non-combatant

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Evacuation Operation Coordination Group enhances crisis management linkages with non-traditional partners (such as France, Germany and the Netherlands), and supports multi-country coordination of the evacuation of civilians from places in crisis or conflict.

The department maintains arrangements with Canada, the United Kingdom, and France on cooperation during international crises. Additionally, the department works through existing international structures, such as the United Nations Command Korea, on multilateral planning and cooperation specific to individual situations. Beyond consular crises, we also engage with partners in humanitarian crisis contexts.

The department explores common challenges and international crisis management experiences through its schedule of bilateral consular consultations with partners. Officers in our overseas diplomatic network, led by our network of ten Regional Consular Officers (RCOs), enhance our situational awareness across the globe and engage with counterparts in host nations on crisis management to enhance our own readiness and understanding of host nations' crisis planning (including lessons on how we may improve our own crisis response mechanisms). The RCOs regularly visit posts to conduct crisis preparedness exercises, including table-top simulations and functional exercises.

The department engages with the Department of Defence to compare understandings of global and emerging risks and to discuss collaboration opportunities, and the department participates in civilian-military joint exercises that enhance whole-of government crisis response readiness.

Our posts engage closely with likeminded missions, particularly Colloque partner missions, to provide assurance of planning and validate contingency planning assumptions outlined in the Post Crisis Action Plans (CAPs). All posts maintain CAPs for resident accredited countries and most countries of non-resident accreditation. Posts produce Event Specific CAPs for significant global events, such as the recent FIFA World Cup in Qatar, and engage with other government agencies and other stakeholder organisations in the development of the plans.

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008 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Australian Government Crisis Management Framework

Senator Julian Hill

Question

"CHAIR: Did that update include recognition of human rights, as the Human Rights Commission has suggested?

Ms Bell: The primary change, I think, reflected the machinery-of-government changes to create the National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA, and has reflected the new architecture for crisis response. I'll have to take on notice, particularly in the whole-of-government framework, how human rights are referenced. But, in terms of DFAT and our own responses, we have a number of internal documents to the department that are important for us in looking at how we manage our human rights obligations. We have documents on DFAT's child protection policy; preventing sexual exploitation; gender equality; environmental and social safeguards; risks and safeguards tools in our aid works program; and environmental and social safeguard operational procedures. These are important parts of consideration for us as officials, particularly where there might be occasions where there is evacuation of minors from overseas, for example—unaccompanied minors. Certainly human rights, relating both to those Australians who we are assisting overseas and in the context of Australian officials undertaking their work, is something we're very mindful of in our own crisis response work.

CHAIR: Yes. I remember some constituent cases quoted some of those documents at me, and the increasing frustration that they weren't able to return to Australia. Can you take on notice that question about the human rights."

Answer

The November 2022 update to the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF) was to ensure the Commonwealth's crisis management arrangements reflect the changes to roles and responsibilities following the machinery-of-government changes on 1 July 2022 and the establishment of the National Emergency Management Agency on 1 September 2022. The update did not consider broader issues. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, who administer the AGCMF, will commence a comprehensive review of the AGCMF in 2023. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is best placed to answer further questions on the AGCMF.

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009 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
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Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: 009: Commonwealth quarantine facility

Senator Karen Grogan

Question

"Senator GROGAN: What was the rationale behind the idea of having a dedicated quarantine facility run by the Commonwealth?

Ms Logan: That's one for the department of health.

Senator GROGAN: It is? Okay.

Ms Logan: Yes. It wasn't a DFAT-run centre.

Senator GROGAN: But it was a DFAT request, a whole-of-government request—

Ms Logan: It was a whole-of-government request, definitely.

Senator GROGAN: I'm just going off—

Ms Logan: It was worked through the NSC, I seem to recall. I remember seeing some advice going up around how it could operate, and I think it was led by department of health.

Senator GROGAN: But it wasn't necessarily a DFAT recommendation.

Ms Logan: No, not that I recall.

Senator GROGAN: Whose idea was it? Do we know? The only reason I ask is that I wonder what inspired one person to say, 'This is the way to go' or 'This is a useful mechanism.'

Ms Logan: I don't know which department first initiated it. I can try and take that on notice. We can find—

Senator GROGAN: That would be great, if you could. It would be good to understand the rationale of how they got to that point, because, obviously, as the conversation has rolled—the state facility scenario. "

Answer

Questions on the Howard Springs Centre for National Resilience and commonwealth quarantine arrangements should be referred to the Department of Home Affairs and Department of Health.

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010 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Flights landing at Christmas Island

Senator Karen Grogan

Question

"Senator GROGAN: When did the initial facilitated flights from Wuhan land?

Ms Logan: Wuhan was back in—

Senator GROGAN: That was like the first.

Ms BELL: January 2020 was the first Wuhan flight.

Senator GROGAN: And they landed on Christmas Island?

Ms Logan: Initially—yes. Then I think, from memory, that they went to Darwin. They were
probably the first group to go into Howard Springs. I'll have to take it on notice—sorry.

Senator GROGAN: I'm not sure that time line lines up, does it?

Ms Logan: I'll have a look, but I think it's not in this time line. We'll check for you. They did land
on Christmas Island.

Senator GROGAN: If Howard Springs was October 2020, then they would have had to have
gone somewhere else. So they landed on Christmas Island. How long did they stay there?

Ms Logan: I don't know. We'll check for you.

Senator GROGAN: Do you know how many other facilitated flights landed at Christmas Island?

Ms Logan: None that I'm aware of.

Senator GROGAN: Just the initial—

Ms Logan: That's right.

Senator GROGAN: And was there just one flight from Wuhan?

Ms Logan: There was also a Diamond Princess flight from—

Ms Bell: There was a second flight from Wuhan.

Ms Logan: There were two flights from Wuhan. I don't know. We'll take that on notice.

Senator GROGAN: Can you take that on notice, and also how long those evacuees then stayed
on Christmas Island.

Ms Logan: Yes. "

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Answer

DFAT managed two assisted departure flights of Australians from Wuhan during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first flight departed Wuhan on 3 February 2020 and landed at RAAF Base Learmonth, Western Australia, where passengers were transferred to Christmas Island via an Australian Border Force flight. As per guidance provided by the Chief Medical Officer, passengers who arrived on Christmas Island undertook 14 days of quarantine. The second flight departed Wuhan on 9 February and landed in Darwin. These passengers quarantined at Howard Springs.

Further questions relating to quarantine arrangements should be directed to the Department of Health and Department of Home Affairs.

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011 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Christmas Island - potential quarantine facility

Senator Karen Grogan

Question

"Senator GROGAN: Did DFAT ever suggest that Christmas Island be used as a quarantine facility?"

Ms Logan: You asked me that before, and I said, 'Not that I'm aware of.' We'll check what the source was for that.

Senator GROGAN: Yes, if you could.

Senator REYNOLDS: It might be helpful, Senator Grogan, to also ask who else was housed at Christmas Island at the same time, because my understanding is there were others who were already located there.

Senator GROGAN: When did Christmas Island cease? So it was never really a quarantine facility per se?

Ms Logan: No, not for our purposes in this exercise.

Senator GROGAN: Okay. If you could give us a bit of a sense of what was going on at that facility, that would be really helpful. "

Answer

DFAT does not have authority to provide advice on quarantine facilities or options. Please refer these questions to the Department of Health and Aged Care.

Questions related to the management of Christmas Island detention facilities should be referred to the Department of Home Affairs.

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012 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Proposals to transport Australians home

Senator Karen Grogan

Question

"Senator GROGAN: Were any other any other ideas floated at that time?

Ms Logan: To transport Australians home? I'm not aware, but let me take that on notice as well."

Answer

DFAT worked within the whole of government framework to support Australians to return during the pandemic.

The decision to facilitate commercial flights from certain countries was based on providing the most flexible means of targeting those existing cohorts with the greatest immediate need. The department considered a range of factors, including:

- where commercial flights became unavailable before Australians could return from overseas
- the numbers and locations of Australians
- the level of demand from those wishing to leave
- the vulnerability of consular clients
- local factors, such as internal travel restrictions and access to essential services.

In addition to the COVID-19 Special Overseas (Hardship) Program and the Facilitated Commercial Flight program, DFAT utilised all options and took a pragmatic, multi-pronged approach to assist the return of Australians. This included the use of private charters (organised by individuals or companies), non-scheduled commercial flights, flights organised by foreign governments and pre-existing commercial flights.

Assistance included:

- liaising with airlines to advise of the need for additional commercial flights
- working with host governments to obtain required aircraft and domestic movement approvals

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- negotiating to secure seats for Australians on flights organised by a foreign government or non-government entities
- underwriting or covering viability gaps for particular flights, to ensure they went ahead on a commercial basis
- promoting relevant flights on social media to Australians in country
- assisting disembarked cruise ship passengers
- facilitating ground transfers for those distant from the city of departure or where domestic travel restrictions made travel to airports impossible.

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Report No. 39 (2021-22)

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Australians registered to return from India

Senator Karen Grogan

Question

"Senator GROGAN: Your perspective would have been a different perspective. How many Australian citizens and permanent residents were in India at the time of that decision? I suppose if you don't know when the decision was made you probably don't know that either.

Ms Logan: Yes, we'd have to take that on notice.

Mr Hehir: It was 27 April 2021.

Senator GROGAN: Thank you.

Ms Logan: What we could give you at that time is the number of Australians, permanent residents and family members registered to return from India. That information we have. We wouldn't have the whole numbers, because many people chose not to register."

Answer

At the time of the decision to pause passenger flights from India to Australia (27 April 2021), 9,035 Australian citizens, permanent residents and family members were registered with DFAT seeking assistance to return to Australia.

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Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Hardship loans

Senator Karen Grogan

Question

"Senator GROGAN: Did they start rolling out in 2020?

Ms Logan: Yes, they did. Again, I can take the exact date on notice if you'd like. But yes—I think."

Answer

The COVID-19 Special Overseas (Hardship) Program commenced on 2 September 2020.

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Report No. 39 (2021-22)

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Documentation of decision making

Senator Julian Hill

Question

"The Auditor-General's report notes it is important for decision making to be properly documented 'to maintain transparency and accountability and enable lessons to be learned' (ANAO report, para 2.49, p. 36). However, the report found that records of key decisions and approvals during the pandemic were not maintained by DFAT (ANAO report, para 2.51, p. 36).
a. How has DFAT addressed the issues identified by the Auditor-General relating to the recording and retention of key decision and advice to government?"

Answer

DFAT adheres to the appropriate management of records to ensure completeness, authenticity and long-term accessibility of information in line with its Record Management Policy and the Archives Act 1983. The department recognises the imperative to maintain appropriate records, particularly of decisions, during international crisis response for transparency and accountability.

Since the release of Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021-22 Performance Audit, the department has provided enhanced guidance to staff on record keeping during a crisis via the intranet Crisis Gateway. This guidance includes direction to use the department's electronic records management system, maintain a chronology of events, and prioritise the capture of documents which evidence approvals and decisions taken.

The department's International Crisis Response Framework, being drafted in response to recommendation one of Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021-22 Performance Audit *Overseas Crisis Management and Response: The Effectiveness of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Management of the Return of Overseas Australians in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*, will include direction on record keeping responsibilities.

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Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Data strategy

Senator Julian Hill

Question

"Two of the Auditor-General's recommendations relate to DFAT's collection, use and management of data (ANAO report, Recommendations 3 and 7, pp. 58 and 76). In your submission you refer to work underway to develop a new data strategy, which you say 'will ensure the department is well placed to quickly report on crises and provide relevant, reliable data and analysis' (DFAT submission, p. 5).

- a. What are the challenges involved in collecting and using data in crisis situations?
- b. What is included in the new data strategy, and what measures is DFAT taking to improve its data capability more broadly?"

Answer

a. Challenges involved in collecting and using data in crisis situations

During the early stages of a crisis, data is not always available, can be incomplete, and it can take some time for a clear picture supported by data to emerge.

As a crisis is unfolding, the pace of events can make it challenging to collect and quality assure data.

To provide dashboards and other visual data reporting products, DFAT must access and analyse multiple sources of information from several stand-alone systems. Collecting and consolidating this time critical data for timely reporting can be challenging.

Data held across different Australian Government agencies can also be difficult to access quickly.

b. Data strategy components and DFAT measures to improve data capability

DFAT's Consular and Crisis Management Division (CCD) is developing a Divisional Data Strategy to strengthen the capacity to rapidly and effectively source, analyse and use data for crisis management and consular functions.

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The strategy will enhance the security of client data; improve data utilisation via better tools and automation; establish a Divisional Data Register to facilitate crisis reporting and analytics; and ensure proper and accountable use of data.

The strategy will identify appropriate data training, both basic and advanced, depending on role requirements. It will also assist in formalising data sharing arrangements with other agencies, consistent with Australian Government data sharing principles.

Joint Committee on Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

**017 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)**

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Outstanding hardship loans

Senator Julian Hill

Question

"The Auditor-General's report states that as of 31 December 2021, \$7.42 million in hardship loans made to assist vulnerable Australians overseas during the pandemic were overdue (ANAO report, para 3.99, p. 71).

- a. Can you provide an update on the amount of outstanding hardship loans? Has there been any changes to DFAT's process for recovering these overdue amounts?
- b. Based on the outcomes of this program, has DFAT made any changes to how it would approach to assistance programs in future crises?"

Answer

a. Can you provide an update on the amount of outstanding hardship loans?

As of 31 December 2022, a total of \$5.475 million remains owing in hardship loans, with \$3.271 million having been repaid. As at 31 December 2022, there were 1,775 Hardship loan recipients with 3,023 loans with outstanding loan balances. Of these, 918 hardship recipients were repaying by instalments through approved repayment plans, with \$1.766 million recovered.

Has there been any changes to DFAT's process for recovering these overdue amounts?

The Department continues to take a compassionate approach to the recovery of loans, including through repayment by instalment options and temporary payment deferrals on a case-by-case basis. Repayment plans are tailored to suit individual circumstances through proactive engagement and consultation with the loan recipient. Arrangements in place with clients are reviewed periodically, to take into account any change in circumstances.

b. Based on the outcomes of this program, has DFAT made any changes to how it would approach to assistance programs in future crises?

The Department has established a Traveller Emergency Loan (TELs) Unit, which manages outstanding hardship loans. The establishment of this unit will ensure DFAT maintains the corporate knowledge and expertise surrounding the management and implementation of the financial assistance hardship program. The TELs Unit has developed standard operating procedures and a range of templates and documents that are used to manage the current loan recovery process, including changes made based on lessons learned from the COVID-19 hardship program.

Joint Committee on Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

018 Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Consular complaints

Senator Julian Hill

Question

"While the Auditor-General found that DFAT was largely effective in engaging with overseas Australians during the pandemic, they also recommended that DFAT improve how it manages consular complaints across the Department (ANAO report, Recommendation 8, p. 79). In your submission to the inquiry, you state you are implementing a revised system for handling consular feedback and complaints (DFAT submission, p. 8).

- a. To what extent will this system allow DFAT to analyse and report on complaints received across the entire consular service network in order to identify common complaints and inform improvements to services?
- b. What specific changes have been made to how DFAT manages consular complaints during crisis events, as opposed to during times of normal operation?"

Answer

a. The revised consular complaints management system will centralise the tracking and reporting of complaints across the consular network, enabling DFAT to collect data on the number and nature of complaints. DFAT will be able to analyse this information for monitoring and reporting purposes and to inform continuous improvement of our consular service delivery.

b. Consular complaints across the network will be managed by a centralised complaints coordinator. Resources committed to the complaints coordination function can be readily scaled-up in the event of an influx in complaints corresponding with a crisis, supported by enhanced procedural guidance.

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Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's Report
No. 39 (2021-22) 2022-2023

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

019 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's Report No. 39 (2021-22)

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Crisis management workforce strategy

Senator Julian Hill

Question

"The Auditor-General found that DFAT effectiveness in responding to the COVID-19 crisis was 'reduced by weaknesses in its existing crisis workforce policies and processes' (ANAO report, p. 55). Your submission to the inquiry states that work is underway on a new crisis management workforce strategy (DFAT submission, pp. 5–6).

- a. How will the new strategy seek to address the findings of the Auditor-General, and how will it draw on lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic more broadly?
- b. In developing the strategy, to what extent has DFAT considered frameworks and systems used by emergency response agencies to manage their workforce?"

Answer

- a. The development of the new workforce strategy will be subject to extensive internal and external stakeholder engagement and incorporate lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises, such as ensuring effective remote work arrangements, deepening consular and crisis management capability, and ensuring effective management of staff welfare during crises. To date, DFAT has:
 - Expanded its surge crisis workforce by almost 60 positions, including additional senior executive officers to enhance leadership and decision-making capability, Canberra based Crisis Cadre officers, and ready to deploy Crisis Response Team personnel.
 - Expanded its crisis management facilities by establishing a third crisis centre to provide additional capacity during concurrent crises and redundancy in the event that the primary premises become compromised.
 - Procured software used by emergency response agencies to streamline and improve staff rostering.
- b. Development of the crisis management workforce strategy will involve extensive engagement, both within DFAT and more broadly across other emergency response and crisis management agencies. We are already engaging with the Victorian State Government and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), with further consultation likely as the project progresses.

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Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

020 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

Hearing Date: 21 December 2022

Topic: Crisis arrangements with Home Affairs

Senator Julian Hill

Question

What arrangements are in place with the Department of Home Affairs to assist in crisis situations where responsibilities overlap, for example, on visa issues?

Answer

Whole-of-Government coordination is a key factor in effective international crisis response. The Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) and Inter-Departmental Emergency Taskforce (IDETF) processes are the mechanisms for coordinating the Australian Government's response to international incidents and crises, respectively. DFAT chairs both processes.

The Department of Home Affairs participates in IDCs and IDETFs. Where the international incident or crisis response requires the expertise and input of the Department of Home Affairs, the IDC or IDETF may agree to the deployment of Home Affairs personnel to support the whole-of-government response. For example, when the evacuation of Australian citizens and/or foreign nationals is under consideration, the Department of Home Affairs provides advice on the citizenship and visa status of affected individuals.

Depending on the nature of the crisis, Home Affairs officers may be embedded in the Crisis Centre and/or accompany a Crisis Response Team deployed overseas to provide expertise in support of the Australian Government response. Home Affairs also has a well-established capability to quickly process and decide visa and citizenship applications in one of its global processing offices as priorities require.

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Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

021 – Inquiry into DFAT's crisis management arrangements as considered in Auditor-General's
Report No. 39 (2021-22)

Hearing Date: 21 December 2022

Topic: Pandemic response - engagement with other agencies

Senator Julian Hill

Question

What other lessons were learned from DFAT's pandemic response in relation to engaging with other agencies?

Answer

As the Australian Government responds to crises – often concurrent – in an increasingly complex strategic environment, early and close engagement between agencies is essential.

During the COVID-19 pandemic response, the department's effectiveness at informing central government decision making processes relied on deep relationships with key agencies, including the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Department of Health, the Department of Home Affairs, Australian Border Force, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, and Emergency Management Australia. We continue to prioritise our relationships across government.

The impact of border closures and limiting international arrivals of Australians in line with quarantine capacity resulted in the largest consular and crisis response in the department's history. DFAT's response was underpinned by strong connections with the Department of Health, Australia Border Force, the Department of Home Affairs, and others.

A further lesson learned by the department during the pandemic was the requirement for Australian Government, with State and Territory Governments, to collectively improve our ability to work together to respond to crises across jurisdictions (for example, entry and testing requirements during a health crisis).

The Australian Public Service's ability to quickly surge capacity and reallocate staffing resources, including through inter-agency staff placement with the department receiving staff from several agencies, and seconding staff to Services Australia, the Department of Health, Australian Border Force and elsewhere was central to government's ability to respond to changing circumstances. The secondment of Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade staff to relevant agencies during a crisis, such as the Department of Health's National Incident Room, supports the integration of international considerations in whole of government response efforts.

Joint Committee on Public Accounts and Audit

Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements
2022-2023

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

IQoN 022 – Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Howard Springs

Senator Julian Hill

Question

1. What is the timeline of the use of the Howard Springs facility?
2. What was the predominate purpose of the facility?
3. What date did Howard Springs become a COVID-19 quarantine facility?
4. What is the number of people that were at the Howard Springs during the time it was a COVID-19 quarantine facility?
5. During the JCPAA hearing on 16/12/2022, Ms Logan referred to a spreadsheet containing information about the various points people entered the facility, can that spreadsheet be made available to the committee?
6. Who ran the facility during this period?
7. Were there any changes in responsibility (management) over the period the facility was used for COVID-19 quarantine?
8. Where did the idea of using Howards Springs as a COVID-19 quarantine facility start? Which department recommended this idea?
9. What advice was given by DFAT about the appropriateness of Howard Springs as a quarantine facility?
10. What role, if any, did the NT government play in establishing the quarantine facility, or to the ongoing operation?
11. Was the cap on the number of residents returning to Australia primarily due to the lack of quarantine facility spaces?
12. Did DFAT recommend establishing a dedicated quarantine facility? If so, who did DFAT recommend this to? What, if any, recommendations were made?

Answer

1. The first passengers returning to Australia on a flight facilitated by the Australian Government (from Wuhan) to quarantine at the Howard Springs facility arrived in Australia on 9 February 2020. The last passengers returning on a flight facilitated by the Australian Government to quarantine at Howard Springs departed Singapore on 24 February 2022. Questions related to the use of the Howard Springs facility for the purposes of COVID-19 quarantine, including the timeline of the use of the facility, should be referred to the Department of Health and Aged Care and the Northern Territory Government.

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**Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements
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2. Questions related to the use of the Howard Springs facility should be referred to the Department of Health and Aged Care and the Northern Territory Government.

3. Questions related to the use of the Howard Springs facility as a COVID-19 quarantine facility should be referred to the Department of Health and Aged Care and the Northern Territory Government.

4. Questions related to the number of people that were at the Howard Springs facility during its time as a COVID-19 quarantine facility should be referred to the Department of Health and Aged Care and the Northern Territory Government.

5. No. The spreadsheet was a Gantt chart drafted and maintained at the working-level by staff to conceptualise a proposed schedule of flights that took into account quarantine periods for arriving passengers, passenger caps on incoming flights and flight dates so as not to exceed the capacity available at Howard Springs. It did not record the points when people entered the facility.

Questions on the entry and departure of individuals from the facility should be referred to the Department of Health and Aged Care and the Northern Territory Government as Howard Springs quarantine facility hosted a range of individuals required to quarantine, not only international travellers.

The attached table (at Attachment A) provides the flight arrival dates and flight numbers for facilitated flights into Darwin, the passengers on which quarantined at Howard Springs.

6. DFAT was not responsible for the oversight or management of the Howard Springs quarantine facility. Questions related to the management of the facility should be referred to the Department of Health and Aged Care and the Northern Territory Government.

7. DFAT was not responsible for the oversight or management of the Howard Springs quarantine facility. Questions related to the management of the facility should be referred to the Department of Health and Aged Care and the Northern Territory Government.

8. DFAT did not propose the use of Howard Springs as a COVID-19 quarantine facility. Questions related to the establishment of quarantine arrangements at Howard Springs should be referred to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Health and Aged Care.

9. DFAT did not provide advice to government about the appropriateness of Howard Springs as a quarantine facility, a matter which would have been the responsibility of health authorities. Questions related to advice about the appropriateness of the Howard Springs facility should be directed to the Department of Health and Aged Care.

10. Questions related to the establishment and management of the facility should be referred to the Department of Health and Aged Care and the Northern Territory Government.

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11. No. There were many variables that impacted the return of Australians to Australia in 2020 and 2021, including Commonwealth, State and Territory COVID-19 response measures as well as quarantine capacity. Questions related to passenger caps should be referred to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

12. No. DFAT did not recommend the establishment of a dedicated quarantine facility. DFAT's role was to facilitate the return of Australians within the quarantine arrangements that existed at the time. Questions related to the establishment of a dedicated quarantine facility should be referred to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Finance.

Attachment A: Facilitated flight numbers and arrival dates into Darwin

Date of Arrival	Flight number
23/10/2020	QF110
27/10/2020	QF112
8/11/2020	QF110
11/11/2020	QF112
12/11/2020	QF110
24/11/2020	QF112
28/11/2020	QF112
30/11/2020	QF110
13/12/2020	QF116
15/12/2020	QF106
17/12/2020	QF176
30/12/2020	QF110
1/01/2021	QF106
3/01/2021	QF116
8/01/2021	QF106
16/01/2021	QF110
19/01/2021	QF106
20/01/2021	QF106
31/01/2021	QF110
2/02/2021	QF110
4/02/2021	QF112
6/02/2021	QF106
17/02/2021	QF110
19/02/2021	QF110
21/02/2021	QF116
23/02/2021	QF110
8/03/2021	QF110
10/03/2021	QF110
12/03/2021	QF116
14/03/2021	QF112
25/03/2021	QF112
27/03/2021	QF108
29/03/2021	QF102
31/03/2021	QF116
11/04/2021	QF114
13/04/2021	QF110
15/04/2021	QF106
17/04/2021	QF112
3/05/2021	QF110
4/05/2021	QF110
7/05/2021	QF116
15/05/2021	QF112
17/05/2021	QF110
23/05/2021	QF112
24/05/2021	QF114
25/05/2021	QF110
31/05/2021	QF112
10/06/2021	QF112

Date of Arrival	Flight number
16/06/2021	QF112
21/06/2021	QF110
23/06/2021	QF112
24/06/2021	QF116
30/06/2021	QF112
6/07/2021	QF112
11/07/2021	QF112
13/07/2021	QF116
16/07/2021	QF112
18/07/2021	QF112
21/07/2021	QF112
22/07/2021	QF110
24/07/2021	QF110
26/07/2021	QF112
30/07/2021	QF114
1/08/2021	QF112
2/08/2021	QF110
4/08/2021	QF110
10/08/2021	QF112
11/08/2021	QF112
12/08/2021	QF110
13/08/2021	QF116
18/08/2021	QF108
19/08/2021	QF118
20/08/2021	QF110
21/08/2021	QF112
22/08/2021	QF110
27/08/2021	QF112
28/08/2021	QF112
29/08/2021	QF114
30/08/2021	QF110
6/09/2021	QF112
7/09/2021	QF116
9/09/2021	QF110
14/09/2021	QF112
15/09/2021	QF114
16/09/2021	QF116
17/09/2021	QF112
19/09/2021	QF108
22/09/2021	QF110
23/09/2021	QF112
24/09/2021	QF102
25/09/2021	QF104
27/09/2021	QF114
30/09/2021	QF112
2/10/2021	QF114
3/10/2021	QF110
4/10/2021	QF112

Date of Arrival	Flight number
6/10/2021	QF14
10/10/2021	QF112
11/10/2021	QF116
12/10/2021	QF114
13/10/2021	QF110
14/10/2021	QF112
20/10/2021	QF104
21/10/2021	QF104
22/10/2021	QF112
23/10/2021	QF110
24/10/2021	QF116
30/10/2021	QF104
31/10/2021	QF110
2/11/2021	SQ249
7/11/2021	QF338
8/11/2021	SQ249
9/11/2021	SQ249
10/11/2021	QF338
17/11/2021	QF336
18/11/2021	QF340
19/11/2021	QF340
20/11/2021	SQ249
25/11/2021	QF118
26/11/2021	QF336
27/11/2021	SQ249
28/11/2021	QF340
5/12/2021	SQ249
7/12/2021	SQ249
8/12/2021	QF332
12/12/2021	HFM811
13/12/2021	SQ249
14/12/2021	QF340
15/12/2021	SQ249
16/12/2021	SQ249
15/01/2022	SQ249
24/01/2022	SQ249
3/02/2022	SQ249
24/02/2022	SQ249

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Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements
2022-2023

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

IQoN 023 – Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Facilitated flights

Senator Julian Hill

Question

1. What was the number of facilitated flights between India and Australia once the flight ban was lifted
2. Was a criterion established to select passengers for these flights?
3. What was the monthly breakdown of facilitated flights? What were the number of flights per month? How many people were facilitated on these flights? What were the departing cities for facilitated flights?
4. Who approved the facilitated flights? Was it the Secretary? Foreign Minister or someone else?
5. How many unaccompanied minors were on these flights? Where/how did they undertake their quarantine?
6. What was the cost of facilitated flights?
7. What was the cost of a facilitated flight? Was this cost set by the airline or the government?
8. How much were passengers on these flights charged for a seat?
9. How many passengers received hardship support for repatriation flights?

Answer

1. From the expiration of the temporary pause on 15 May 2021 until the conclusion of the Facilitated Commercial Flights program, there were 34 flights between India and Australia.
2. DFAT prioritised vulnerable clients when making flight offers for facilitated commercial flights from India, consistent with the policy used for flights from other departure points. DFAT also considered the client's right of entry to Australia, the date the client registered their intent to return to Australia and their ability to travel on the dates of the facilitated flights.
3. Following the closure of Australia's borders on 16 March 2020, the Government facilitated the return of 33,531 people to Australia. This included assisting 26,100 Australian citizens, permanent residents and their immediate family members on 177 contracted non-scheduled commercial flights. The monthly breakdown of these flights is below:

Month/Year	No. Facilitated Flights	Departure points	Australians returned
Mar-20	2	Cusco, Santiago de Chile	284
Apr-20	15	Bogota, Buenos Aires, Cusco, Johannesburg, La Paz, Lima, Montevideo, Phnom Penh, Quito, Santiago de Chile, Sao Paulo	1453
May-20	8	Chennai, Mumbai, New Delhi, Vientiane	1387
Jun-20	2	Chennai	376
Oct-20	2	New Delhi, London	344
Nov-20	7	New Delhi, London, Johannesburg	1121
Dec-20	8	Paris, Frankfurt, Chennai, New Delhi, London, Los Angeles	1162
Jan-21	11	Frankfurt, New Delhi, Chennai, London, Los Angeles	1349
Feb-21	8	Frankfurt, Chennai, New Delhi, London	1546
Mar-21	8	Vancouver BC, Frankfurt, New Delhi, London, Los Angeles	1377
Apr-21	4	New Delhi, Chennai, Johannesburg, London	719
May-21	12	Frankfurt, New Delhi, Istanbul, London	1668
Jun-21	8	Frankfurt, New Delhi, London	1257
Jul-21	10	Frankfurt, New Delhi, Istanbul, London	1830
Aug-21	16	Frankfurt, New Delhi, Denpasar, Johannesburg, Istanbul, London	2822
Sep-21	15	Vancouver, Frankfurt, New Delhi, Denpasar, Islamabad, Johannesburg, Istanbul, London	2564
Oct-21	16	Buenos Aires, Frankfurt, New Delhi, Islamabad, Istanbul, London	2458
Nov-21	13	Frankfurt, New Delhi, Islamabad, Singapore, Johannesburg, Istanbul	1632
Dec-21	8	Islamabad, Singapore, Johannesburg	619
Jan-22	2	Singapore	104
Feb-22	2	Singapore	28

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In addition, DFAT negotiated access for 7,431 vulnerable Australians to return on scheduled commercial flights. Departure locations of the flights in this category included:

Amman (Jordan)	Istanbul (Turkiye)	Mumbai (India)
Beirut (Lebanon)	Kabul (Afghanistan)	Nairobi (Kenya)
Bogota (Colombia)	Kathmandu (Nepal)	New Delhi (India)
Bucaramanga (Colombia)	Kolkata (India)	Riyadh (Saudi Arabia)
Chennai (India)	Kuwait (Kuwait)	Santiago de Chile (Chile)
Dhaka (Bangladesh)	Lahore (Pakistan)	Singapore (Singapore)
Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam)	Lima (Peru)	Yangon (Myanmar)
Honiara (Solomon Islands)	London (United Kingdom)	
	Manila (Philippines)	

Prior to the border closure, the Government assisted 532 people to return on flights from Wuhan in February 2020.

4. The Foreign Minister approved the Facilitated Commercial Flight program and schedule.
5. No unaccompanied minors were on facilitated flights.

Where minors travelled to Australia on facilitated flights without their parent/guardian, they travelled and undertook quarantine in the city of arrival alongside a responsible adult as nominated by their parent/guardian.

6. The Government spent \$62,661,556 on facilitated flights.
7. Costs associated with the facilitated flights was subject to contract arrangements with the commercial airline providing the service. The cost of a facilitated flight was set by the airline and final costs varied depending on the departure location, the airline and the number of passengers on a flight.
8. Passenger facilitated flight seat costs were sold on a commercial rate basis, factoring in departure location. The exact cost varied due to daily currency conversions. Prices ranged across locations, with options for financial assistance available to help cover the costs of flights.
9. The department provided hardship support to 4,795 clients for repatriation flights.

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Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements
2022-2023

QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

IQoN 024 – Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements

Hearing Date: 23 January 2023

Topic: India

Senator Julian Hill

Question

1. What date did the Government stop commercial flights departing from India?
2. Was DFAT consulted on this decision, if so, on what date were they consulted?
3. What was DFAT's advice on this issue?
4. What date was the Indian Government notified of this decision? How were they notified?
Was this notification consistent with standard practice?
5. What date was Australia's High Commissioner notified about this decision? How were they notified? Was this notification consistent with standard practice?
6. What date was this flight ban lifted? Were DFAT consulted on this? What date was the Indian Government notified the flight ban would be lifted?
7. How many Australians were stranded in India during the Covid-19 pandemic and how many were repatriated in this timeline?

Answer

1. On 27 April 2021, the Government announced that Australia, commencing 3 May 2021, would implement a temporary two-week pause on direct passenger flights between India and Australia.
2. Yes. 23 April 2021.
3. The advice provided by DFAT is classified and not for public release.
4. The Government of India was notified of the decision to pause flights from India on 27 April 2021 via the High Commission of India in Canberra.
5. Australia's High Commissioner to India was notified on 27 April 2021 by email.
6. The temporary pause on flights from India to Australia was lifted on 15 May 2021. We have no record that DFAT was consulted on the decision, beyond the consultation that occurred during the drafting of the Biosecurity (Human Biosecurity Emergency) (Human Coronavirus with Pandemic Potential) (Emergency Requirements – High Risk Country Travel Pause)

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Determination 2021 – the basis for the travel pause – which included discussion of an end date. DFAT is not able to confirm whether the Government of India was informed prior to the public announcement.

7. As at 1 November 2021, 37,771 Australians and their family members had registered with DFAT in India since March 2020. Of this total, 27,581 had returned to Australia, including 11,767 who returned on government facilitated flights from India. The DFAT COVID-19 Registration Portal was closed to new registrations on 22 November 2021.

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Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements
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QUESTION ON NOTICE / Written

QoN 025 – Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements

Hearing Date: 16 December 2022

Topic: Breakdown of Hardship Program funding expended

Senator Julian Hill

Question

What is the total amount of funding that had been paid out under the hardship program, and a breakdown of this figure by loans and grants?

Answer

At the close of the COVID-19 Special Overseas (Hardship) Program on 31 March 2022, the department had issued \$44.54m in loans and grants, broken down as follows:

- a) grants: \$35.19m
- b) loans: \$9.35m