

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Secretary Jan Adams AO PSM

Additional Budget Estimates

27 February 2025

Opening Statement

Senators – thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement.

Since the last Estimates hearings, my department has been focused on advancing Australia’s interests against a backdrop of a challenging international environment.

This week marks the third anniversary of Russia’s illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine.

We have made clear that Australia stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Ukraine and we continue to support the Ukrainian people, committing more than \$1.5 billion in assistance.

Turning to the Middle East, the ceasefire and hostage deal agreed in January are steps towards peace and stability - for Israelis awaiting desperately the safe return of loved ones, and Palestinians in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

Australia continues to pursue our longstanding policy of working with the international community towards a two-state solution - a Palestinian state and the State of Israel, living side by side in peace and security, within internationally recognised borders.

In these increasingly challenging times, I am proud to lead a global network that engages confidently and effectively with the world - to advocate our values and deliver on our national interests.

The last time DFAT appeared before this committee was the day after the US Presidential Election.

We have moved quickly to prosecute Australia's interests with the new Administration.

In addition to the high-level political engagements outlined by the Foreign Minister, our Ambassador to the United States has spoken with President Trump and the Embassy has developed extensive relationships across the new Administration.

As the Foreign Minister has said, Australia can engage with confidence as we continue to bolster our ties with the United States, Australia's principal and longstanding strategic partner.

Australia's early, high-level contact and the early meeting of Quad partners is a demonstration of ongoing US commitment to this region.

We will continue to work with all of our global partners – in proactive, collaborative and innovative ways – with a clear understanding of our national interests to make Australia, and our region, peaceful, stable and prosperous.

This includes a commitment to the predictable rules-based international system – which remains squarely in Australia’s national interest.

We are working closely with Defence and our ally New Zealand to observe the PLA Navy Task Group operating near Australia, and we continue to register our concerns about dangerous and destabilising conduct in the South China Sea and the need to adhere to international law.

I’d like to highlight the efforts of officials in DFAT’s Office of the Pacific, who in recent months have delivered significant initiatives that build prosperity, security and resilience in our most immediate region, the Pacific.

I'm particularly thinking of those involved in the Government's successful treaty with Nauru, which will sustain banking services there, and separately the opportunity for Papua New Guinea to join the NRL by 2028.

This, of course, is about so much more than sport, and is another chapter in our shared history, as we celebrate PNG's 50th anniversary of independence later this year.

These are important initiatives that will help cement understanding and common purpose with other members of our Pacific family.

As we focus our efforts to shape the kind of region we want to share, DFAT continues to drive deeper engagement with Southeast Asia, which is vital to Australia's security and prosperity, and core to our national interests.

We are strengthening education, industry and community connections through the ASEAN-Australia Centre launched by the Foreign Minister in November, and continue to make significant progress in implementing the recommendations in *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040*.

And just yesterday, the Government launched the *New Roadmap for Australia's Economic Engagement with India*, helping us harness the enormous trade and investment potential of the world's fastest growing major economy.

I'd also like to acknowledge the professional and compassionate efforts of our consular officials over the last few months, as we continue to grapple with crises driven by events overseas.

The recent Consular State of Play report highlighted a significant spike in crisis cases, involving over 6,000 Australians in 2023-24.

Indeed, between May 2022 and January 2025, DFAT's Crisis Centre has been activated ten times, and we have managed 21,573 consular cases.

DFAT has coordinated six assisted departure operations since 2022, helping Australians and their families leave: Ukraine, Sudan, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, New Caledonia, Lebanon and, most recently, Vanuatu – where we delivering humanitarian support and helped over 680 Australians and family members return home.

Australia continues to support Vanuatu's recovery, and the Minister for International Development and the Pacific is visiting Port Vila today.

Finally, Senators, I am particularly proud DFAT ranked equal first in the *2023-24 Survey of Trust in Australian public services*.

DFAT's services – provided through the Australian Passport Office and the Consular and Crisis Management Division – were rated among the most trusted, backed by 81 per cent of respondents. Similarly, a high level of respondents – 78 per cent – expressed satisfaction with DFAT's services.

Respondents were most satisfied with the respectful interactions they had with DFAT staff and the accuracy of the information the department provided.

These results reflect our strong commitment to helping Australians – both at home and abroad.

Thank you, Chair and members.