

Submission to the Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements.

I lived and worked in Thailand from September 1999 to September 2020.

The attached documents give a reasonably complete and concise history of my dealings with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and their response to my plight caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

My three questions that I want this committee to find answers for plus the "remedial" future policies and practices are:

1. Why was I never informed about the Department's 'Traveller Emergency Loan Programme.'?

"Building on our existing Traveller Emergency Loans program, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is making available a Hardship Program with further emergency assistance for the most vulnerable Australian citizens overseas. The loans are intended to cover temporary accommodation and daily living expenses until they can return. Loans may also be available to help vulnerable Australians purchase tickets for commercial flights."- Ministerial Statement 2 September 2020.

2. Why was I encouraged to apply for and complete said application (even after I was back in Perth!!) for the 'Hardship Program' when the Department knew full well that I was flying back to Perth on 11 September 2020?

3. Why the Department displayed a total lack of empathy and awareness of my predicament?
In particular:

1. The month of September in Thailand is the height of the monsoon.
2. Reliable communication and commuting is nigh impossible at times.
3. Ready access to all the requisite documentation posed a lot of problems and the scanning thereof.
4. The effects of this stress and frustration upon my physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.

Please note that I am totally aware that I was not alone in such suffering and despair. Many, many other Australians suffered dreadfully and as for me, are still suffering.

Some Final Observations.

1. Should not the number one priority for The Australian Federal Government to have been to repatriate all of its citizens as soon as possible?

2. Should not all the eligibility and identification requirements for financial assistance be of a secondary nature that could far more easily completed in Australia after repatriation?

3. Why was there seemingly two basic categories of COVID-19 victims?

That is:

Category 1- Those suffering from medical, economic and social problems caused by

the pandemic and were resident in Australia, were categorised as “Worthy” or “Deserving” victims be they businesses or individuals, and thus received massive Commonwealth support.

Category 2- Those suffering from medical, economic and social problems caused by the pandemic and were NOT resident in Australia, were categorised as “Unworthy” or “Undeserving” and thus basically received nothing.

4. A Cruel Twist of Fate.

Now to hit a final note to all of this.

This is most probably the cruellest aspect of my COVID-19 ordeal.

That is, the timing of Thai International Airways’ rescheduling and subsequent cancellation of their international flights.

The “norm” is that usually changes, upgrades, innovations, etc, regardless of which sector of a society or economy, is that these are introduced on the FIRST day of a month.

But oh no, not in Thailand, they just try so, so hard to be different!

(NB: they have developed their own rules for the game of chess and even Scrabble!!)

Consequently, Thai International Airways introduced theirs on the LAST day of the month!!

In my case, the 30th of April 2020.

In essence, this 24 hours has unleashed such suffering.

Please note that I was originally to fly out on 30 April 2020, being the day that my Contract of Employment terminated which in turn meant that my Thai Work Permit terminated and as a consequence my Thai Non-Immigrant Visa terminated.

This 24 hours is still resonating dreadfully to this very day and will continue for the foreseeable future.

Such a cruel twist of fate for not only just me, but for my two dependants as well.