



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**



**Submission No.5**

14 August 2008

Ms Belinda Neal MP  
Chair, Standing Committee on Communications  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Neal

**INQUIRY INTO INTERNATIONAL MOBILE ROAMING**

I refer to your letter of 17 June 2008 to the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) inviting the department to make a submission to the inquiry into international mobile roaming (IMR) being conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications. The Secretary has asked me to reply on his behalf. This letter, which reflects the inquiry's terms of reference, comprises the department's contribution to the inquiry.

**Background**

The department is responsible for advancing the interests of Australia and Australians internationally. To this end, the department's key goals are to enhance the security of Australia and Australians at home and overseas; to contribute to Australia's prosperity by promoting growth in Australia's economy, employment and standard of living; and to help Australian travellers and Australians abroad.

Information and communications technology is central to DFAT's operations and crucial in enabling it to provide the services expected of it by government. This includes the use of international mobile roaming services to conduct departmental business. The department uses four telephony services in Australia that utilise IMR:

- standard departmental mobile phones via OPTUS (500 units);
- departmental loan phones via OPTUS (40 units);
- BlackBerrys through OPTUS (155 units); and
- mobile phones for Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries and their staff via Telstra (24 units; staff prefer Telstra's coverage in Australia, especially rural areas).

### **DFAT IMR cost profile**

Costs incurred by DFAT for the use of its standard mobile phones have two basic profiles: those that incur no IMR charges in a particular month and those utilised on overseas travel by staff and have IMR bills from \$100 to \$1500 per month. The average monthly cost of IMR charges is approximately \$220 of which around \$35 is for incoming calls. The total IMR cost for standard phones in FY 2007-08 was \$214,800.

The department maintains a mobile phone pool that can be used by staff who require a mobile phone for short-term use, mainly related to international travel. About 10 pool phones incur IMR charges each month and around 90 per cent of costs incurred for these phones represent IMR charges. IMR charges for pool phones totalled \$26,500 in FY 2007-08.

Ministerial staff phones have heavy use and around 23 per cent (\$17,300) of the charges for ministerial mobile phones in the last financial year were due to IMR charges. By comparison, IMR charges associated with the department's use of BlackBerry devices in the same period totalled \$31,000 with up to 20 devices incurring IMR charges in any given month.

The total IMR cost for the four types of services noted above was \$289,000 in FY 2007-08.

### **Cost reduction strategies**

To reduce global roaming charges the department adopts the following strategies:

- Mobile phones and BlackBerrys used by staff in diplomatic missions are connected to local service providers to take advantage of cheaper local call rates.
- Staff travelling overseas are encouraged to make use of fixed phones in our diplomatic missions where possible instead of using their Australian mobile phone to make calls.
- The use of BlackBerrys to send emails can reduce the need for long phone calls and is being monitored to assess its capacity to reduce IMR charges.
- To assist Australian consular clients avoid roaming charges, most missions have a call-through facility. This enables Australian citizens who call the mission after hours for consular support to be transferred to the consular call centre in Canberra via the DFAT internal phone network.

### **Additional information requirements**

More information to assist mobile phone users make a selection from mobile carrier options would be beneficial. For example, on arrival in another country there is no easy way to ascertain whether any of the carrier options presented have a commercial relationship with the department's primary carriers, OPTUS and Telstra. This can result in calls incurring a higher tariff rate than if they were made via one of DFAT's partner networks. Apart from carrying a full list of linked carriers, it is difficult for users to identify the preferred partners in each country. This is one possible area of cost savings that could perhaps be examined more fully by the Committee as part of its inquiry.

The contact point in the department for any queries relating to this submission is Mark Slater (ICT Services Branch) who can be contacted on telephone 6261 1399.

Yours sincerely



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