

ENTRY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE GAMES

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Chair: Joint Standing Committee on Migration

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1. In 1998 the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon. Phillip Ruddock, asked the Joint Standing Committee on Migration to report on immigration entry arrangements for the Olympic and Paralympic Games being held in Sydney in September-October 2000.
2. The inquiry lapsed when the Parliament was prorogued. The Minister re-referred the matter to the new Committee on 16 December 1998.
3. The purpose of the inquiry was to review issues related to the planning and coordination of entry arrangements for visitors, participants and officials for the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

4. The Committee received 46 submissions and accumulated 250 pages of evidence at public hearings. Participants at the hearings included representatives of the tourist and travel industries and:

- the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA);
- the Australian Customs Service (ACS)
- the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS);
- the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT);
- the Australian Federal Police;
- the National Crime Authority; and
- the Department of Transport and Regional Services.

5. While Government Departments were asked about their arrangements, tourism and travel industry submissions tended to focus on ways of simplifying access to Australia for visitors.

6. The Committee was not disposed to consider any waiving of visitor visa requirements, as suggested in some of the tourism and travel industry submissions. The Committee felt that this would put added strain on Australia's border entry arrangements and cause delays in visitor entry processing on arrival.

7. . There was broad agreement by witnesses that Australia's paperless Electronic Travel Authority, or ETA, was a satisfactory way of minimising formalities and speeding visitor entry while protecting Australia's border integrity. The Committee recommended increasing the number of countries for which ETA was available. [rec 11]

8. The Committee recommended investigation of the practice of charging visitors for the ETA. [rec 12]

9. The Committee was advised that the standard of scrutiny currently applied to intending visitors will continue through

the Games period. The Committee was concerned that refusal to grant visas to some would-be visitors from specific countries could be caught in the spotlight of media attention during the Games and generate negative publicity.

Consequently the Committee has recommended forward planning to permit effective responses to visa issues which may gain a higher public profile during the period of the Games. [recs 5, 9]

10. The Olympic and Paralympic Games will place considerable demands on Australia's capacity to plan and coordinate immigration arrangements. Not only are more people expected to visit Australia, but the arrivals are also expected to be concentrated in a short period, with most visitors expected to arrive through Sydney International Airport.

11. The Games will also see increased numbers of people seeking to exploit any consequent weakening of DIMA

vigilance by attempting to enter Australia without documents or with false documentation.

12. This will impose heavy demands on the skills and resources of Australia's border agencies, chiefly the Customs Service which staffs the immigration booths, DIMA, and AQIS.

13. Although these agencies sought to reassure the Committee that they would be able to handle the expected demands of the Games period efficiently, the Committee noted that there were only narrow margins between the border authorities' predicted capacity and the expected demand.

14. Australia's capacity to handle the predicted volumes of visitors is reliant on trained and experienced staff offshore, and at on-shore entry points.

15. Staffing in DIMA, ACS and AQIS is generally being approached by restructuring staffing arrangements, rather than recruiting more people. The Committee was concerned that this approach would not permit the agencies to cope with unexpected events. The Committee therefore recommends that staffing levels receive further consideration. [rec 16]

16. The Committee was also uneasy about the current and proposed staffing at international hub airports, such as Singapore and Bangkok. It felt that the provision of still further staff was needed to ensure that personnel at these key locations would be sufficient to deal with the Games-generated pressures. (rec 20, 21)

17. Efficient processing of visitors will be dependent on information technology, some of which is yet to be tested. The Committee was concerned that implementation dates had slipped significantly, and it was not convinced that the systems would be adequately bedded down and tested prior to

the Games. Consequently, it recommended that the installation of specific Games-oriented systems be given the highest priority and tested in situations as close as possible to those that will occur during the Games. [rec 15]

18. As part of its Games responsibilities, Australia will provide special immigration arrangements for the accredited members of the Olympic and Paralympic Families which include competitors, officials, and other personnel nominated by national Olympic, Paralympic, and other sporting bodies.

19. The arrangements for Family members are set out in an information booklet, which is part of the broader Visitor Information Campaign. The Committee noted that this had been undertaken with limited supplementation of the funding for DIMA, AQIS, ACS and DFAT, and it has therefore recommended some low cost measures to further publicise Australia's immigration requirements. [r 8]

20. The special treatment of the Family members will impose additional pressure on Australia's immigration arrangements. Some of the concessions are procedural, such as quarantine arrangements for animals and equipment imported for the Games, and the waiver of duty-free allowances. Others concessions relate to the manner in which Australia's immigration requirements are applied.

21. The most significant of these is the provision of Special Purpose Visas - the Olympic and Paralympic Travel Authority - to accredited Games Family members. This represents a temporary extension of ETA to nationals of countries which do not usually have that facility. A number of safeguards are in place to maintain Australia's visa requirements for Family members, including approval by DIMA prior to the issuing of such a Travel Authority.

22. A Memorandum of Understanding between DIMA and SOCOG on this process had not been finalised at the time of

the Committee's Report. The Committee therefore has urged prompt finalisation of the MOU, so that the Committee members can reassure themselves that Australia's border integrity is being maintained. (rec 2, 3)

23. An Entry Response Team, drawing on the expertise of Australia's border agencies and SOCOG is being set up to facilitate the entry of Family members. The Committee has recommended that this Team be operational well before the Games. [rec 5]

24. To speed their entry to Australia, it is essential that visitors are aware of the arrangements made to facilitate their passage through our border formalities. The Committee noted that there was an unwarranted assumption that the purpose and benefits of the "Express" lane would be well understood by visitors. It recommended that this mechanism for arrival and departure management be more widely promoted. (rec 14)

25. The holding of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Australia in 2000 offers us many opportunities to promote our country, to demonstrate our business capabilities, and emphasise our unique assets as a tourist destination.
26. The Committee has considered the work of the responsible agencies and has unanimously recommended a number of steps which can be undertaken to contribute to the success of providing a positive experience for visitors, while at the same time maintaining our border integrity.
27. I would like to thank the Committee secretariat for their assistance with the inquiry. I also thank the Committee members, most especially the Deputy Chair, Senator McKiernan, and my colleagues in the House, the Hon Bruce Baird, Mrs Irwin, Mrs May, and Mr Ripoll.
28. I commend this report to the House.