



**DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURAL
AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

**JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT
REVIEW OF AUSTRALIA'S QUARANTINE FUNCTION:**

**SUBMISSION FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND
MULTICULTURAL AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**



Introduction

1. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit's Review of Australia's Quarantine Function.
2. DIMIA is responsible for administering the *Migration Act 1958*, the object which is to regulate, in the national interest, the travel, entry and stay in Australia of non-citizens. To advance its object, the Act provides for visas permitting non-citizens to enter or remain in Australia and requires persons whether citizens or non-citizens, entering Australia to identify themselves.
3. The Australian Customs Service (ACS) undertakes immigration clearance processing on behalf of DIMIA at both airports and seaports. ACS officers performing these functions are authorised by the Minister to act as clearance officers as defined in section 165 and section 43(1) of the Migration Act.
4. This submission concerns DIMIA's relationship with AQIS in relation to border control arrangements. The submission focuses on our relationship at the national level and at air and seaports.
5. DIMIA has an established cooperative and productive working relationship with the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) and other border agencies concerning border processing at Australian airports and seaports and in relation to processing unauthorised boat arrivals.
6. The Secretary of DIMIA meets regularly with his counterpart in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry-Australia (AFFA) and the Chief Executive Officer of the ACS to coordinate border policy and management issues.
7. At the national level, officers from DIMIA and AQIS meet on a regular basis through their membership of various committees, eg, the National Facilitation Advisory Committee chaired by the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS) and the National Passenger Processing Committee chaired by Customs. DIMIA is also represented on the Commonwealth Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) steering committee.
8. At air and seaports DIMIA and AQIS officers meet on a regular basis to ensure a coordinated approach to border management.

Relationship at Air and Sea Ports

9. Following the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in the United Kingdom and parts of Europe in 2001 the Commonwealth FMD Steering committee was established. DIMIA has a representative on the FMD Steering Committee to provide advice and assistance on relevant issues such as visa requirements for overseas veterinarians should they be required to enter Australia at short notice in the event of a FMD outbreak.

10. AQIS was provided with additional funding in 2001 to increase the quarantine intervention rate to detect potential FMD threats entering Australia. As a result, AQIS recruited additional staff for baggage searches, particularly at airports. The increase in AQIS inspections of baggage and the ongoing cooperative relationship between the two agencies, has led to an increased number of passengers being referred to DIMIA Airport Inspectors for matters of interest in the immigration context.
11. Since the FMD initiatives by AQIS at airports, DIMIA officers have established closer working relationships with their AQIS counterparts and cooperation occurs at all levels. DIMIA officers have participated in staff training sessions to heighten AQIS officer's awareness of document fraud and matters of immigration concern and AQIS has delivered awareness training to DIMIA officers. Benefits accrue to both DIMIA and AQIS if staff have an understanding of the concerns of both organisations and react and refer any findings.
12. The department is working productively with AQIS and ACS to ensure that the focus on quarantine intervention does not impinge on the immigration clearance process or lead to increased processing times where passengers experience longer delays in clearance.

Unauthorised Arrivals and Seaports

13. DIMIA works closely with AQIS and the other border agencies to maintain Australia's disease free status. This is particularly so with the Seaports Program in relation to border crossers in the Torres Strait. There is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DIMIA and AQIS to ensure that there is 24-hour coverage on each of the 14 inhabited islands throughout the Torres Strait. In relation to unauthorised boat arrivals on the north west coast of Australia, both the persons and the vessels are subjected to a rigorous quarantine inspection regime because of the high risk of pests and diseases. The vessels that arrive without authorisation are cleaned to Quarantine specification as a matter of course. Some are subject of an Order into Quarantine and are cleaned up prior to disposal.
14. DIMIA works jointly with Coastwatch, the Australian Defence Force and the intelligence community to detect suspected illegal entry vessels and prevent illegal landings on Australian territory. There is a MOU on the response to illegal landings which includes all the border agencies and the federal, state and territory police as signatories.

Incoming Passenger Card (IPC)

15. The IPC is a document that passengers must complete before presenting for immigration clearance. Passengers are required to make declarations on the card in relation to immigration and quarantine issues. DIMIA is the custodian of the IPC.
16. DIMIA and AQIS have engaged in a consultative process over several years regarding the content and design of the IPC. In 2001, DIMIA in consultation with

AQIS incorporated two further questions on the IPC relating to passenger intention to import certain articles or previous travel prior to visiting Australia.

General Comment

17. It is DIMIA's view that there is a very positive cooperative relationship between DIMIA and AQIS. This relationship ensures that practical issues or concerns to one or both agencies are addressed promptly. It also means that, to the extent possible and appropriate, the resources of both agencies are able to be used efficiently to serve the goals of both agencies.