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JOINT COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

Reference: Immigration entry arrangements for the Olympic Games

MONDAY, 9 AUGUST 1999

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION

Monday, 9 August 1999

Members: Mrs Gallus (*Chair*), Senators Bartlett, Eggleston, McKiernan and Tierney and Mr Baird, Mrs Irwin, Mrs May, Mr Ripoll and Dr Theophanous

Senators and members in attendance: Senator McKiernan and Mrs Gallus, Mrs Irwin, Mrs May and Mr Ripoll

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

The efficient planning and co-ordination of immigration arrangements for the Olympic and Paralympic Games will be a key contributor to the success of the Games. Positive experiences in obtaining visas, entering, staying in and leaving Australia, will assist Australia in gaining opportunities for the development of business, tourism and its place in the world as a multicultural nation. The Committee will inquire into and report on:

- (1) Australia's immigration temporary entry provisions and their capacity to meet the special needs arising from the Games;
- (2) The planned immigration arrangements for the entry and departure of Olympic and Paralympic Family Members at the time of the Games; and
- (3) The planning and co-ordination arrangements for informing visitors of the entry requirements at the time of the Games.

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Committee met at 10.09 a.m.

CHAIR—I now open this public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's inquiry into immigration entry arrangements to the Olympic and Paralympic games. The matter was first referred to the committee in June 1998. The inquiry lapsed when the election was called last year. However, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs re-referred the matter to the committee on 16 December 1998. During this parliament the committee has received approximately 40 submissions and has taken evidence at public hearings on two previous occasions.

The purpose of the inquiry is to review issues to do with planning and coordination of immigration entry arrangements to the Olympic and Paralympic games. The terms of reference note that 'positive experience in obtaining visas, entering, staying in and leaving Australia will assist Australia in gaining opportunities for the development of business, tourism and its place in the world as a multicultural nation'.

At this hearing members will hear further evidence from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, the Australian Customs Service and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I believe the Department of Transport and Regional Services is here as an observer, but if the department would like to join us, that will mean we will officially include you in the inquiry and if you have any comments you can put them in. It will also mean if we have any questions we can put you on the spot.

The committee's questions today relate to a number of issues which are common to all four organisations. In order to use the time available this morning most efficiently the committee intends to hold the hearings in a round-table format, with all organisations participating together.

[10.12 a.m.]

BATMAN, Ms Gail Jennifer, National Manager, Passenger Processing Branch, Australian Customs Service

JONES, Mr Leslie George, National Director, Border, Australian Customs Service

De CURE, Mr Christopher, Assistant Secretary, Images of Australia Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

TOOTH, Mr Geoff, Director, Refugees, Immigration and Transnational Crime Section, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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McADIE, Mr Barry Edward, Director, Olympics Project, Aviation, Security and Olympics Branch, Aviation Division, Department of Transport and Regional Services

CHAIR—Welcome. Although the committee does not require witnesses to give evidence under oath, you should understand that these proceedings are legal proceedings of the parliament of Australia and warrant the same respect as the proceedings of the parliament itself. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of parliament.

Last week the committee received supplementary submissions from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and the Australian Customs Service. Is it the wish of the committee that the submissions be accepted as evidence to the inquiry and authorised for publication? There being no objection, it is so ordered.

Before we ask questions, we always ask if witnesses have opening statements. That could take us up to 12 o'clock, with the cast of thousands we have here, so could I ask whoever is the most senior in each department if they would like to make a few relevant comments. Mr Castello?

Mr Castello—We have no opening comment to make, thank you.

Mr Jones—There is no opening statement from the Customs Service, thank you.

Mr De Cure—And lucky again!

CHAIR—In that case, we will proceed straight to questions. I have a few. One is perhaps a very simple one. When I was leaving the country in April this year with another member to go to an IPU delegation, we arrived—this was at Sydney airport—and to go through immigration, unlike a bank line where you take up the first empty spot, everybody queued up behind different tellers. We picked the one where something was going on, so of course we were stuck there. Eventually, everybody else in front of us got the message and, after complaining—somebody did say, ‘If it is like this now, what’s it going to be like during the Olympics Games?’—they ill-temperedly changed their lines, except for my colleague and I because I had a special interest. I dragged him forward and said, ‘Stay here, I want to see.’ There was some discussion that it was because of different passports and some passport being in a suitcase, et cetera.

It was eventually resolved, but it did mean that everybody who was coming through and getting into that line had got stuck and was very ill-tempered about it because, having waited, they then had to move on to another line and go to the back of that other line. Is this a matter for Immigration or Customs? Who is looking after that?

Mr Castello—This is a Customs matter. Perhaps Mr Jones can respond.

Mr Jones—We have introduced what we call bank or snake queueing in the arrivals areas because of the different streaming of different classes of arriving passengers. But in the outbound area we only have two categories. We have express lane passengers. Those are passengers who have been the subject of advanced passenger clearance or advanced passenger processing arrangements with the respective airlines, and they get a truncated process at the outbound primary line. The rest of the passengers all undergo an identical process. As a consequence, at some airports we have not introduced the snake or bank queueing arrangements. By and large, we find that the outbound primary area clears very quickly.

It is unusual to get the ‘queue from hell’, if I can call it that. It is a rare occurrence in the outbound environment, and we find we are able to clear that area pretty quickly. We do engage people to watch and monitor queueing, as best as we are able, to try to avoid those sorts of situations.

CHAIR—How does somebody know that they are in an advanced queue?

Mr Jones—If you are travelling with an airline that is a member of the advanced passenger clearance or advanced passenger processing arrangement—and at the moment that is limited to Qantas and Ansett. We have a trial arrangement under way with Singapore Airlines. We have Air New Zealand on advanced passenger processing. At the time of check-in—and this can occur not only at the international airport but, for example, in Canberra, if you are leaving to go overseas and catching a domestic flight from Canberra with Qantas or Ansett—the airline is able to interact—

CHAIR—I know the process. I am just asking you how the customers will know when they get there and it says ‘advanced’.

Mr Jones—How the customer knows is that they will get a card that is produced by the airline at the time of check-in. Their biodata and the flight details are on that card, and that card has a magnetic stripe on the reverse which is the process.

CHAIR—How do they know? They get the card, but how do they know?

Mr Jones—They would only know by getting that card from the particular airline.

CHAIR—But how do they know that means that they are an advanced passenger?

Mr Jones—Because it tells them that it is an express card—it has got the word ‘express’ printed on it.

CHAIR—How many do you think actually realise that that is relevant for them when they get to the queue?

Mr Jones—I really do not know. I cannot answer that.

CHAIR—Mr Jones, I suggest to you that not very many know, because when everybody arrived to go through immigration to get out, there was this advanced queue and people were saying, ‘Who is advanced? Are we advanced? I do not know. We better go in that one. I do not think we are advanced. That must be for the aeroplane crew; that must be for those sorts of people.’

Mr Jones—We do have the word ‘express’ on the cards and we do have the word ‘express’ at the airport.

CHAIR—But you are suggesting that people read the cards. Can I put to you that when you board a plane, you get dozens of different cards—this entry, that entry, filling out for customs and everything else—and it would never occur to a large number of passengers, who have just got their ticket, their boarding pass, their passport and everything else, to read through one of these tickets with lots of writing before they go through immigration. When they get there they have no idea that it is an advanced card. I will suggest to you that, when they are leaving, people do not know.

In case I sound a little critical, let me congratulate you on the last time I came back, which was two weeks ago, on the speed with which we came back through immigration. In fact every time a queue got long they grabbed the queue and moved it off to another one. That was excellent. But generally, I am sure there are people who would know they were in the advanced queue but I have got to tell you—because I was obviously very much aware of that and listening to what people were saying—they had no idea that this card meant that they were in an advanced queue.

I suggest, if you think perhaps I am being a little biased, that you run a little survey, your own survey, at the airport and just randomly pick a couple of people and ask them what that card means and see what the response is. I would be very interested to see, because just from my listening and saying to people, ‘What is this card? Is it just a Customs card, something you have got to hand through?’ people did not know. And I have got to tell you

my husband does not know, and he is a professor of medicine. Admittedly, they are not all that bright sometimes, but I said to him, 'What is this card for?' and he said, 'I do not know, I suppose it is—'

Senator McKIERNAN—Be careful!

CHAIR—So it is a great system if people know what it is for. There should be a sign up which says, 'The green card you are carrying means you have an advanced card.'

Mr Jones—I think it is a matter of an education process, not only by border agencies but also by airlines. Airlines participate in these arrangements with the view of getting a priority treatment for their customers and they use it as a marketing advantage. They use it as a means through which they reduce the handling of a passenger. For example, if you go through a process in Canberra and you are leaving internationally out of Sydney, then you do not need to go back to the airline check-in desk in Sydney. In fact, the airlines now have a cross-tarmac transport service from the domestic to the international and, by and large, that brings you into an area where you virtually cannot avoid the express lane facility.

But I do take your point and I think there is an education process necessary. We push the advance passenger clearance and advance passenger processing arrangements because they are able to produce productivity gains and efficiencies to us—

CHAIR—I had no idea. We support it fully—

Mr Jones—as well as a better customer service.

CHAIR—but I suspect a lot of customers are not taking advantage of it. Mrs Irwin, you have a follow-up comment?

Mrs IRWIN—Mine actually follows on from the chair's question. I am interested in the queue time for the Olympics arrivals into Australia. I was in a similar position—I had just arrived back from overseas with a delegation of members of parliament. Our plane landed at Mascot at 8 a.m. and there was no bay to put the plane in. We had to wait for a bus to come out. We then had to line up through Customs. A number of our fellow passengers missed interconnecting planes and it took us exactly three hours from getting onto that bus to getting through Customs. What do you anticipate for the arrival of our visitors for the Olympics? Do you think they are going to experience what I have just experienced recently at Mascot?

Mr Jones—I certainly hope not and I would think that your circumstance was extraordinarily unusual. In fact, I would probably appreciate getting from you some more detail so that I can have a look at what did happen on the particular occasion.

The Customs Service has a processing standard of 95 per cent of people through entry control points in no more than 30 minutes. We obviously have no power over the fact that an aircraft might be put at a bay that is away from the terminal and that it may take time for busing. In our calculation of that time we generally allow in our computer system calculation 10 minutes from what we call 'chocks time'—which is when they put the piece of timber under the front wheels of the aircraft so that it cannot roll or anything—before we start

measuring. By and large we do achieve the 95 per cent standard but we certainly recognise that there are times in the mornings, particularly on weekends at Sydney, when we do not achieve that standard.

For the Olympic Games, we believe that we will have the capacity to do up to 6,000 passengers an hour through the entry control point. We have, in fact, achieved 6,000 an hour already but I doubt our capacity to sustain that rate of throughput at the present time. In recognition of that, we are bringing forward recruitment of additional Customs officers. They will be trained and available for deployment in advance of the Olympics so that we at all times will be able to have all of the inbound primary modules, or desks that you are processed at, actually staffed for the majority of the time. As a consequence, we are confident that we will achieve that level of throughput.

We are, however, still negotiating with a number of airlines to try to encourage them to join the advance passenger processing arrangements. As I indicated earlier, there are productivity gains and efficiencies available to us from that in that we get access to a person's data at the time of check-in overseas. We are able to establish whether that person, from a targeting sense, represents any known threat or risk to us, and we are also able to profile by drawing—could I call it—an identikit picture of a person who might be under suspicion by or of concern to us.

As a consequence, it changes the process that we undertake on arrival. The majority of passengers are, therefore, identified as of no or low risk and, as a consequence, the process is an immigration process, a face to passport identification and then a clearance. We do not do any risk assessment at the primary line.

Mrs IRWIN—So there would be separate queues for these people?

Mr Jones—Yes, there will be. That is why you will see the express lane, and the express lane is for those people who are travelling on those airlines that are members of the systems that I have spoken of.

Mrs IRWIN—I suppose this announcement will be made over the intercom system with the aircraft to advise the passengers that have an advance passenger processing?

Mr Jones—The flight director, or whatever he or she is known as—the person on the aircraft in charge of the cabin crew—generally goes around and hands out arrivals documentation to passengers. Obviously, he or she is aware of what the company has done at the time of check-in of passengers and should be making people aware of the fact that they are entitled to go down the express lane because they have been given one of these cards at the time of check-in and that that card is their entire arrivals documentation for Australia.

Mrs IRWIN—As I just said earlier, it did take us, I think, three-quarters of an hour to get from the plane to Customs, but then it was actually over two hours by the time we got our luggage. That is just my number one concern, especially as we are looking at tourists coming to this country and having to wait for a long time—

Mr Jones—The Customs Service has no control over the rate at which the luggage comes up. Obviously, we can only assume responsibility for those things that we have control of, and we do have control of the rate at which you will get through the arrivals primary area where the immigration and initial customs processing is undertaken.

There is, under a government agreed master plan for passenger processing, a standard for baggage delivery, and that is the first bag should be out in no more than 30 minutes, I think it is—I am not sure what the last bag out time is. We monitor that twice a year and we report those results to the National Facilitation Committee, which is a committee embracing the airport owners, the airline operators and the relevant government agencies.

Mrs IRWIN—Thank you, Mr Jones. I will get in contact with you with the details of what we experienced.

CHAIR—Mr Jones, can you do that fairly quickly? We would like, if we could, just a brief report on that. That gives us at least one example of what happened.

Mr Jones—By all means.

CHAIR—Can I ask you, Julia, were you aware of what your little blue and green cards were for?

Mrs IRWIN—No, I was not. Actually, I do not think we had one of those.

Ms MAY—One of those looks familiar—the usual card.

Mrs IRWIN—I am talking April of this year: were they out then?

Mr Jones—Travelling with?

Mrs IRWIN—Qantas.

Mr Jones—From?

Mrs IRWIN—We went from China to Hong Kong, Hong Kong to Sydney—Hong Kong to Sydney with Qantas. It was a weekday.

Mr Jones—They may not be operating APC, advance passenger clearance, out of Hong Kong. The difficulty for the airline, and one of the reasons participating airlines are not able to process all passengers this way is that to produce one of these computerised cards at the check-in airport requires that airport to have a system known as CUTE 2—common user terminal equipment, phase 2.

Mrs IRWIN—That is a cute name.

Mr Jones—Without that system the infrastructure cannot actually print this particular card. As a consequence, with the best will in the world the participating airlines could not produce 100 per cent advance passenger clearance for their customers.

CHAIR—If we could just clarify that with you, Mrs Irwin: you did not know when you arrived there? It said ‘rapid’, but you did not know whether you were in a rapid group or not.

Mrs IRWIN—No, I was not aware of this.

CHAIR—Mrs May, you were travelling Qantas?

Ms MAY—Yes.

CHAIR—You were travelling Qantas from Fiji and you had a green card, from your recollection, but you had no idea that that was rapid—

Mr Jones—The arrivals card is blue and it has the word ‘express’ on it.

CHAIR—But you did not know?

Mr Jones—And we have tried to colour code express lanes at airports blue.

CHAIR—Can we just, Mr Jones, get for the record that Mrs May did not know. So we have three members of this committee—the Joint Standing Committee on Migration, which has been on this Olympic inquiry and we are familiar with and have talked about the different systems, yet three of us who are not all that stupid, perhaps, for parliamentarians—arriving at the airport and who did not know that that card was a direct card. Can I ask you, Mr Jones, have you done any survey of passengers, both leaving and coming back to the country, to find out what proportion know what the cards mean?

Mr Jones—In that context we are continually monitoring the swipe rate of those cards on behalf of the airline.

CHAIR—So the answer is no.

Mr Jones—The answer is partially yes. We monitor it continuously. The airlines are obviously looking to us to process in an express manner 100 per cent of the traffic to whom they issue these express cards. We are continually monitoring the swipe rate of those cards to ensure that we do pick up the entirety of the passenger traffic to whom they are issued. The swipe rate does have gaps in it.

CHAIR—Do you think there might be a slight problem though if you are issuing these cards which have written on them ‘express’ if a significant proportion of the passengers do not realise that that is what they are?

Mr Jones—I acknowledge that there is a problem.

CHAIR—Would it not be useful to have a random check and take a sample to find out what percentage do understand it?

Mr Jones—I take your point, but again I would emphasise that it is a partnership with the airlines.

CHAIR—I am getting to the airlines in a minute.

Ms Batman—When our new passenger clearance system, PACE, is fully implemented, we will be able to tell whether a person with an express card actually went to an express lane. That will start to fill the need that you have.

CHAIR—When will you know that?

Ms Batman—We are rolling out PACE at the moment, so over the next two months we will have this through all the airports in Australia and at that point we will be able to tell.

CHAIR—Unfortunately, Ms Batman, by that time this committee will have made its report so that is really not much help to us. I was wondering, Mr Jones, would you be able to undertake quickly what is known in the trade as a quick and dirty survey—I don't mean that, but just a quick little sample for the benefit of this committee to ascertain what percentage of passengers are aware of what their card means?

Mr Jones—We would certainly be willing to attempt that. By all means.

CHAIR—We are not asking for a full-scale survey but just really, 'Excuse me, what does 'rapid' mean? Are you a rapid passenger?'

Mr Jones—The word is 'express'.

CHAIR—You refer to the airlines. Are you aware—and, obviously, this is particularly a Qantas question but other airlines are taking part in the APC—of how many of the airlines actually inform their passengers about the meaning of the card?

Mr Jones—I can only go from my own personal experience here as a traveller.

CHAIR—We are all of us using our personal experience.

Mr Jones—I can say that I was not informed by the airline.

CHAIR—At least you are honest about that, Mr Jones. I certainly was not and I take it that you were not either. It was just another piece of paper as far as we were concerned.

Mr Jones—Interestingly enough, Madam Chair, I have had the experience of actually having an APC card and had the flight director give me the other documentation on the airline. I was somewhat aghast at that because I thought they are not even telling their own customers when the company has gone to the expense and the trouble of completing one of these for me and here is their flight services director giving me the other documentation.

CHAIR—I just remember that we got two, too. One was in Italian and we got a yellow and a green one. That is right; I think the Italian one was the right one, and the yellow one

was given to us on board. I am not sure but now that you remind me, I remember. We had all these cards and one was in Italian and I could not answer the questions in Italian.

Mr Castello—May I comment briefly on that. What is supposed to happen is that the airlines that participate in this process take great pride, in fact, that they do so. They use it as a marketing advantage and should—and they say that they would—take every opportunity to advise their customers, their clients, that they do have express plane access, and they explain how to do it. It is surprising if they are not doing that because it costs them money to provide the service and they do it because they feel that they are getting an advantage out of it. I suspect also that, when some of us, Les Jones and I, turn up at the airport they probably assume that we know how it all works and they probably do not bother to tell us. I think there may be a factor of that in this process as well. For what they see as the frequent traveller, or the business traveller, who presumably is doing this fairly frequently, they do not necessarily bother to go through the steps.

CHAIR—How would they know that Mr Jones was involved in this if he just turns up at a baggage collection and puts his ticket across?

Mr Castello—Not at the baggage collection.

CHAIR—I mean at the counter.

Mr Castello—They can see that he has an official passport and is travelling business class.

CHAIR—That would apply also to Mrs Irwin, Mrs May and me.

Mr Castello—I suggest it could be a factor.

CHAIR—Is it then worth your while to check with the airport and the attitudes of their counter staff to find out who they are telling and who they are not? Could you then get back to us and inform us; perhaps there could be an instruction that people on official passports do not necessarily know what they are doing.

Mr Castello—We can certainly ask them and pass the information back to you.

CHAIR—And to check that perhaps they are telling other customers who are not on official passports. I will turn over the questioning to the Deputy Chair and come back with some more questions later.

Senator McKIERNAN—To follow up what Ms Batman said about the PACE and the introduction of it, I see from the supplementary submission that there have been some technical delays experienced and that is in Adelaide of all places. Can you comment on that?

Ms Batman—The technical delays have not been in Adelaide. The delays have been in starting the roll-out of the system. It is just that Adelaide is the first airport where we are implementing the system, because it is one of the smallest—we are starting small.

At the last hearing, we said that PACE was due out much earlier—towards the end of last year. Unfortunately, that did not happen. The attempted roll-out of it was not successful. Since then the developers have done a lot more work on the development of the system, and in particular we have put a great deal of time into testing. They set up what they call a model airport environment and ran the system under significant loads—volume testing, load testing, functionality testing—through a couple of weeks to make sure that it was robust.

We did not want to have another experience where we rolled out this system unsuccessfully. I am pleased to say that this time it seems to be working. It has been in Adelaide a week now. It is going very well. All of the testing that we have done to date is very positive. The response times are good. The user acceptance is good. The functionality is there. Our scheduled roll-out is to go next to Perth, Melbourne and Sydney by the end of the month. It will be in Sydney for the Olympic test events. We will then continue on through Brisbane, Darwin and the smaller airports.

Senator McKIERNAN—What were the technical difficulties involved, without getting too technical about it. We are looking at something like an eight-month delay on what was originally planned, and that eight-month delay could be very critical because we are now only 13 or 14 months away from the main event, the Olympics themselves.

Ms Batman—Certainly, we have demonstrated our concerns to the developers in very strong terms. I am not sure that I am competent to talk about the technical issues. It is quite an advanced information technology system. It is not a mainframe application. It is based on what they call a distributed system where there is a server at each airport and a central server so that it has got quite a lot of redundancy built in. If the main connection to Immigration through the TRIPS link is down, it can function at the local airport on all of the information built in to the local server. If the local server is out, it can operate off the Canberra server. We have two or three levels of redundancy.

It is quite a complex system that uses a lot of name matching. We do alerts as well as recording the information. We are looking for particular people whose names we know. Name matching is quite a complex thing to do for computers, particularly right across not just European-type names—Asian and Middle Eastern names use a lot of the same sorts of words over and over again.

Other than that, every time we tested it in the early stages we found something else wrong and we had to go back and fix it. We did get it to a reasonably stable place a couple of months ago when we went in to this intensive system testing in a model airport. We continued to find things. I think the experience is that, with any major computer system, you cannot fully test it before you use it. So, as you use it, more things continue to develop. But so far, with the first stage of implementation, we have been able to deal with things that have come up as they have not been major.

CHAIR—Can you just give us an example of one of the glitches, just so we have an understanding? We do not deal with this every day.

Ms Batman—Some of it is a replication problem. Because it operates on a different server at each airport and one in Canberra, the data has to replicate over and over again. So

we take it from TRIPS, the Immigration computer; it sits on our Canberra server. It replicates to all of the eight subsidiary servers and it does this several times—well, four or five times a day—to keep the data up to date. So there are a lot of communication links and sometimes some of those communication links have turned out not to be quite solid.

You can have infrastructure problems. Sometimes we have had functionality problems where it has not quite met our design rules. We have specified quite detailed design rules and business rules about how the visas are to be checked and what action follows different visas. When we have tested it, if it has not been right, we have made them fix it.

Mr Jones—And we are talking about 30 million data records in the vicinity that we are taking over from the Immigration mainframe computer and putting on each of these servers. So it is a massive data task. Obviously, the data has got to be totally accurate.

CHAIR—So 30 million.

Mr Jones—Thirty million data records.

CHAIR—Of individuals?

Mr Jones—Yes. For example, any time Immigration have issued a visa to someone—and they may have issued several visas to that person over a period of time—that one individual, who might be a foreign national coming to Australia on a valid visitor visa, might have half a dozen previous visa records. We have to take the entirety of that across and transplant it in to this new environment.

Senator McKIERNAN—Of the airport departure clearance for Olympic and Paralympic family members, it still seems, from the comments that I hear, that the matter has not been resolved about non-sponsoring airlines having use of the village for departure—at departure points. Has that been resolved or not?

Mr Jones—I am not aware that it has been resolved, Senator. As a service, we have indicated our preparedness, our willingness, to participate in off airport departure processing. It is not up to us to determine which airline gets access to the village. That is entirely out of our control. We are certainly prepared to participate in whatever process people would wish to apply at the village—provided our interests would be ensuring border integrity on behalf of Immigration and on behalf of the other interests whom we represent in relation to that outbound processing—and to work with the operators of Sydney airport in terms of not clogging up the check-in area and the baggage handling area.

Senator McKIERNAN—Isn't it resolved?

Mr Jones—It is not resolved, to my knowledge.

Senator McKIERNAN—Does anybody else at the table know if there have been any developments in that area? It is a factor when people will be leaving Australia, particularly the day after the closing ceremony.

Mr McAdie—It is close to resolution, but it is a matter for SOCOG and Ansett to resolve. If you would like to contact SOCOG, you might get an answer.

CHAIR—We will do that.

Mr RIPOLL—I have a question about the ticketing system regarding express lanes. Will you be embarking on any sort of education program, perhaps in partnership with the airlines, to inform everybody? I honestly do not believe there is any discrimination with people identifying, ‘That is an official passport; therefore, I won’t inform them.’ I think if they are not informing people on official passports, they are not informing anyone. I do not think they are making conscious decisions about whom to tell or whom not to tell. You commented that some people may be slipping through, but people are not sure. Maybe to back up the survey—regardless of whatever the survey tells us—we should embark on some sort of program to let people know specifically that, ‘This ticket means this at point of receipt or somewhere along the line.’

Mr Jones—I take the point. By all means, we will have discussions with the airlines as a consequence of the deliberations here today. It is in the airlines’ interests. For example, I mentioned earlier that our standard for inbound passengers is 95 per cent through in no more than 30 minutes. For a participating airline on an advanced passenger clearance system, we have a lesser or a greater standard and we are obviously looking to give those customers a benefit because of the contribution they have made through APC/APP. I can assure you that, if we fail as a service to adequately man the express lanes—therefore, those customers do not get what the airlines think they should—the airlines are very quick to let us know.

Ms MAY—The airlines are not letting their passengers know.

CHAIR—That is the trouble.

Mr Jones—That is evident.

CHAIR—Do the airlines themselves monitor? They unload their passengers off the plane. Do they follow what happens to the passengers? All I see is the crew running away from the plane as fast as they can to their own little crew line. They are already out of it while we are starting a queue. Is there anybody from the airlines who actually has a look to see what is happening to their passengers?

Mr Jones—To my knowledge, Madam Chair, no.

CHAIR—Nobody knows what is happening. We have this fabulous new system, nobody is monitoring it, and we are all saying it is great.

Mr Jones—I think the airline-airport managers do monitor whether we have the express lane adequately manned in order to meet the expectations that we have given them. Qantas, for example, has an undertaking from us that every passenger for whom they provide advanced passenger clearance detail will get through the entry control point in no more than 15 minutes. So it is half the time of a normal passenger. I can assure you that, if we do not adequately man that, Qantas will let us know. So, to that extent, someone from Qantas is

monitoring what happens. I do think we would prefer to see the take-up rate, the application rate of these systems, to be higher, and we are in constant dialogue with airlines to do that.

CHAIR—Can I suggest to you that maybe one reason that is not happening—this is going way out on a limb—is that nobody is perceiving there is a difference. For instance, if I come to an airport as a regular traveller and see some people who are going through a rapid—I am in a long queue and they are in a fast one—I will want to know what I have to do to get a rapid. The fact that people are not running around saying, ‘Hey, how do I get into that queue?’ suggests that nobody is noticing a difference.

Mr Jones—I could also suggest that people are not offended by our level of service overall.

Mrs IRWIN—Most of the time.

CHAIR—It could be either.

Mr Jones—We make it very clear that the intention for the future is that there will be a discernible difference between airlines, depending upon their level of cooperation or participation in these sorts of schemes. I do envisage a day when there will be people streaming through express lanes and other people standing there waiting and complaining. When they complain, the answer will be that their airline did not participate in any of these programs.

CHAIR—Surely that is what needs to be happening now. We have a goal here now; it is not just for future travel. We have a goal which is coming up on us extremely fast. There is only one year to get this under way. Perhaps we should be looking to the future now.

Mr Jones—I would not envisage a difficulty with the Olympic family members, because of the fact that—

CHAIR—They will have a queue saying ‘Olympic family members.’

Mr Jones—We will be seeking to do what we can on the basis of the risk assessment and visa processes, which have been applied by Immigration. We will be trying to access as much advance information as we can. Customs and Immigration are currently negotiating with a range of different airlines. We have developed a draft service standard on a range of issues with Immigration, and we are out there negotiating with airlines as we speak, trying to encourage them into these arrangements. In fact, Mr Castello and Ms Batman are going to Singapore this week to try to sign up Singapore Airlines into these arrangements.

CHAIR—Arriving in Melbourne airport, we actually got from the plane out of the airport with our luggage in 15 minutes.

Mr Jones—I am delighted to hear that, Madam Chair.

CHAIR—Admittedly, it was 4 o’clock in the morning and we were the only plane, but all of us got through very quickly. I referred earlier, in a private conversation, to the beagles

doing their great job, which was very impressive. The rest of the committee missed out on that, but the only people waiting for their baggage who had the dog sniff and stand beside them were my husband and I, with everybody saying, 'Look at them—drug smugglers!' We were really impressed with the work of the dogs. The dogs are obviously sniffing foodstuffs, but are those the same dogs that sniff for drugs?

Mr Jones—No, they are entirely different dogs. The beagles are owned and operated by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service and are trained under a food reward system to sniff out food.

CHAIR—I know! It got the reward when it got us.

Mr Jones—We breed our own Australian Customs Service dogs and we train labradors. We train them in two different modes: one is known as an 'active dog' and the other is known as a 'passive dog'. We use the passive dog in the passenger environment. When it smells narcotics, it sits down next to the passenger.

CHAIR—The same as the beagle.

Mr Jones—We use an active dog in the cargo, in the mail and also underneath the airports in the baggage make-up areas. If we used those dogs amongst passengers, we might have a number of lawsuits against us.

CHAIR—The passive dogs are extraordinarily impressive. They are non-intrusive and everybody loves them except, I suspect, people who are trying to get something through. As I said, we had the food dog—the beagle—but we did not have the labrador. Is this because you are short of labradors?

Mr Jones—No, we are not short of them. We breed our own dogs. We undertook that breeding program because of a shortage of dogs when we were sourcing dogs from pounds or wherever we were able. We embarked on a breeding program because of that difficulty, and we are now regarded as world leaders in breeding these types of dogs. We even have the participation of the kennels of Her Majesty the Queen in assisting us with our breeding program, and we have now supplied breeding dogs to the United States customs service.

CHAIR—Congratulations.

Mr Jones—We have not got a shortage of dogs. It is a matter of working out what is the optimum number of dogs and handlers that you should have, in both a passive and an active mode. It is also a matter of risk assessment, as to when you will deploy those dogs. We do not use those dogs on all flights because not all flights necessarily represent a drug threat or risk to us.

CHAIR—How do you know?

Mr Jones—Because of our experience.

CHAIR—If I were a drug smuggler, I would say, ‘Customs are pretty tough on these flights but their experience generally is that we do not have people coming through. Let us target the one that they do not target.’

Mr Jones—I think that you will find that we are pretty successful in identifying those areas when we need to have a presence of a drug effort.

CHAIR—Our plane came in from Bangkok and I would say to you that Bangkok is a gathering place from many other places around the world.

Mr Jones—It certainly is.

CHAIR—So you would have people from every possible country, including countries that have drugs. Why would you not have targeted a plane from Bangkok?

Mr Jones—We normally would regard Bangkok as a drug source. There is no question about that. But that does not mean to say we deploy passive dogs on all flights. I do not know whether there would be active dogs working below the baggage reclaim area which there would often be. You would not be aware that they were there.

CHAIR—No, but obviously people also have hand luggage.

Mr Jones—We have a number or a range of defences in relation to drugs, only one of which is dogs.

CHAIR—I take that point. It is always dangerous to speak from personal experience, but at the moment that is all I have got to go from. Nobody was actually checked going through customs. We got to immigration. They looked at the form we had filled out which we all thought was just a customs declaration form. We did not realise it had anything to do with our rapid transit. We had marked two sections which asked what we had. We said what we had and they said it did not matter. We went through there and then we were picked up. We went to the red line with customs. So did a lot of other people and they were simply waved through. Your only point of checking was in fact the dog which had picked us up on the food but, as you were saying, there was nobody for drugs.

I realise the difficulty; you have a limited number of dogs. But I am just wondering what sort of coverage you will be able to do during the Olympics with those labrador dogs for the drugs?

Mr Jones—I cannot answer you specifically.

CHAIR—Could you give me an estimation of what percentage of arriving flights you would think would be checked?

Mr Jones—I could not off the top of my head.

CHAIR—Would you be able to get that information for us?

Mr Jones—I could say to you that all flights are risk assessed. There is not a flight that comes to Australia where there is not some form of risk assessment undertaken and a decision made as to what effort of deployment would be applied. There is a range of different deployments. We engage people—we call them Sierra officers. They are uniformed officers that walk around in the baggage reclaim area. They are trained in behavioural analysis and they will approach and question passengers. They will intentionally put them under pressure, without trying to induce a ministerial complaint for the treatment of the passenger, to try to establish their bona fides and, as a consequence of that, determine whether or not they represent a threat or risk. That is probably the source of the highest level of drug interception that we have in the passenger area. We have X-ray technology and we invest very heavily in what is known as backscatter X-ray technology.

CHAIR—Can your X-ray technology pick up drugs?

Mr Jones—It certainly can. We use backscatter X-ray because it is capable of finding goods in a complex cluttered environment and finding narcotics in that sense. We also use what is known as ion scan technology which is a particle analyser that can actually trace absolutely minute particles of narcotics and that will give us an indication as to whether or not we need to go on with some further examination.

CHAIR—If I am bringing in drugs in the lining of the jacket or coat that I am wearing, where would you pick me up?

Mr Jones—If we did not have a drug detector dog, then we would be talking to you around the baggage reclaim area.

CHAIR—But you are not going to talk to every passenger in the reclaim area?

Mr Jones—As I said before, our people are trained in behaviour analysis. We also produce profiles of different ethnic groups so as to educate our people on how a person of different ethnic background might be expected to behave or react in a controlled environment like a passenger hall. What might be to you and me innocent behaviour or reaction, might be a signal to one of these people that you warrant further attention.

CHAIR—Mr Jones, with all respect, if I were running drugs and getting my drug couriers, the first thing I would do is put them through training on the proper way to behave in an airport and what not to do.

Mr Jones—I am not suggesting that there are not people who get through, Madam Chair. I am not suggesting that at all. But I am saying that we believe that we have a fairly high level of success with that particular technique.

CHAIR—I do not want to labour this point, but I am just really trying to get a clear idea. Would you agree with me that sniffer dogs around airports are one of your best assets for picking up drugs?

Mr Jones—My answer is yes. I have been quoted publicly before as saying that there would not in my lifetime be a better piece of drug detector technology than a dog.

CHAIR—Yet at the moment you are unable to tell me what percentage of flights or what percentage of passengers will be checked by the sniffer dogs when they come into Australia?

Mr Jones—That is right; I do not have that information on the top of my head.

CHAIR—There is no way you can get that information?

Mr Jones—I can get that information.

CHAIR—If you could.

Mr Jones—I can give you an indication of the number of dogs, both passive and active, that we deploy at different airports, by all means.

CHAIR—And what percentage of Olympic traffic would be expected to be checked by those dogs?

Senator McKIERNAN—Madam Chair, I am just wondering how much of this we would want on the public record.

Mr Jones—Not a lot I would hope, Senator.

Senator McKIERNAN—Perhaps you might provide the information to us on a confidential basis so that it does not hit the headlines, which others would see.

CHAIR—Yes, and I suspect something the committee has to discuss if we see weaknesses in our own system is how much we want that in a public report and how much has to go in a confidential section of the report. Let me tell all departments that we are very sensitive to this. If you do not want to make public any of the information you give us, you have to only tell the committee and we will make sure that that certainly does not go into the public realm, because we are not interested in anything sensational here. We are interested in giving the minister a fairly good analysis of what the problems are at this stage so we can get rid of any potential problems before they happen. It is going to be a hell of a lot better for all of us now than in a year's time at the coalface. That is really what we are trying to look at.

Mrs IRWIN—I would like to get back and talk about computers, if I may.

CHAIR—Please.

Mrs IRWIN—I am going to talk about an incident that happened at a domestic terminal in Melbourne. I was not directly involved this time. But what really concerns me is that we are going to have a lot of visitors, as we are all aware, coming to Australia prior to the Olympics to do various tours in various states. In Melbourne recently—I think it was either on 20 or 21 July—there was a fire in the computers and people were waiting three or four hours to get a flight to Sydney. I was having a meeting in Sydney and I was waiting for people to arrive from Darwin, Melbourne and also Perth, and some of them just did not

arrive. They arrived five or six hours later. That is something that really does concern me. If there were a fire in the computers, what would it be like to get these people interstate or even departing the country?

Mr Jones—We obviously have undertaken a risk assessment of our systems, we have undertaken business resumption plans and we have developed contingency plans. Those contingency plans would span, if you like, the range of disasters that we might encounter to the point where the process that people might actually go through in a worst case scenario would be minimal. We have an absolute obligation to do that. We are not going to be able to sit here and say, ‘People are never going to be inconvenienced or delayed as a consequence of one of these scenarios.’ Obviously, they will be. I guess we have a good test run coming up with the Y2K example and ensuring that we are able to keep operating and minimise delays or impacts.

CHAIR—Who will I address my questions to from Immigration?

Mr Castello—To myself, thank you Madam Chair.

CHAIR—Can you tell us the system, in a place like Bangkok, in regard to people coming to Australia on visas and things like that? That is a place where people come in. It is a bottleneck, if you like, in a way. What do we have in place on the ground in Bangkok?

Mr Castello—Do you mean at the airport?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Castello—First of all, I should add that—

CHAIR—I could widen that to Bangkok and Singapore. I am looking at those sorts of places like airports where people come through.

Mr Castello—Everyone who is going to travel to Australia needs a visa or an authority to travel to Australia. It is the role of the airline to confirm at the time that they check them in that people have authority to travel to Australia. That will happen regardless of where they board the plane, where the flight originates.

What we have done to supplement what the airlines should be doing in terms of checking that people have authority to travel to Australia, checking that people have the right documentation, is to station some Airline Liaison Officers in our gateway airports. In general, the boarding of a flight out of Bangkok would be attended by one of our officers, who is seconded to Qantas, to keep an eye on things. He will deal with any queries from an airline if they suspect that someone may not have authority to travel, may have a document that looks suspicious, or perhaps might have no documentation. As a consequence of that we advise the airline, on occasions, not to allow someone to travel to Australia.

CHAIR—Let me get this clear. You have your airline counter with, as they do, queuing. Fifty-odd people are all waiting to get there. So, in the first instance it is up to the

airline person at the airline counter to check there is a proper visa. Do they have any role in checking the photograph or looking at the passport?

Mr Castello—Yes, they do.

CHAIR—So they have a role of checking that. They have to do the booking, check the photograph, and check the appropriate visa. We can understand, with 50,000 economy passengers all queueing up and everything else, that they are going to be under a certain amount of pressure. But you have somebody there. If they say, 'I am uncomfortable about this. The picture of this person has black hair and the person standing in front of me is blond,' they will call the immigration person?

Mr Castello—That's correct.

CHAIR—So the immigration person takes that person. He has to do that quickly. What happens if subsequently there is somebody else in that line who has got a problem? What do they do with that person?

Mr Castello—They are referred also.

CHAIR—So that one chap who is already dealing with the first case then has to deal with any others?

Mr Castello—Correct.

CHAIR—Is there anybody else there to assist?

Mr Castello—No, not really. They work on their own. Usually the issue is resolved very quickly. It is really a matter of making inquiries to see whether somebody is eligible to travel to Australia and looking at the document to see whether it has been tampered with or not. If there is more than one person on that flight being boarded who requires that attention then they get that attention.

CHAIR—Is it only the Australian immigration officer who does that? There is nobody else who they can ask for assistance?

Mr Castello—No. As I say, the airlines themselves provide training to their staff.

CHAIR—Yes, but nobody else—

Mr Castello—Could I add that that is the current situation. As we move to the Olympics, and in expectation of the greater volumes and the greater importance attached to making sure that that scrutiny occurs, we would be looking to placing additional airport liaison officers, on a risk assessment basis, at those airports where we believe there is a need to have more than one person.

CHAIR—Does it come as a surprise to you that I was informed at Bangkok airport on two occasions—because I checked the second time—that the Australian Customs agents do

not work alone, they work in conjunction with contractors who are looking after both New Zealand and Canada? All three work together. Therefore, if there is more call on looking at an Australian problem then they will ask the contractor to assist them and he might be looking at some Australian problems. Similarly, the Australian officer might be looking at some New Zealand problems or a Canadian problem. Were you aware of that?

Mr Castello—Yes.

CHAIR—Well, you did not tell me. You said there was only—

Mr Castello—There was only one Australian.

CHAIR—I asked, ‘Was there anybody to help them?’ and you said, ‘No.’ So, in fact, there is somebody to help them. It is the people from the other countries.

Mr Castello—We work very closely with similar airport liaison officers from other countries. It is not impossible, but it would be unlikely, that you would have more than one airport liaison officer attending any one flight, and that is because the liaison officers only look after the flights going to their countries.

But in order to share the work around, given the timing of flight departures, the Australian will monitor flights, say, leaving for Canada, just as the Canadian will at times do our flight. The New Zealanders have contracted a local company to provide that service for them. That is the equivalent to having a New Zealand officer also at the airport. They do cooperate. They try to coordinate their activities so that they cover the majority of the flights.

CHAIR—Let me get this clear. You say you have an airport liaison person from Immigration. Because flights go all through the day and night, do you have more than one person so you can cover the 24 hours, or do you only have one person and then you rely on the Canadians and New Zealanders to—

Mr Castello—We have had one. We are now putting two people there.

CHAIR—Up to now we have had only one. So, as a country we are not covering the 24 hours, we are relying on both New Zealand and Canada to assist. I do not know if you did not understand my first question but I thought it was fairly clear. My question was, ‘Did we have any assistance there?’ We obviously do. So there is only one person there at any time at present. I understand we are moving on to the Olympics situation in a minute, so there is only one person there. Now that person is not only looking after Australia but he is looking after Canada and New Zealand at the same time.

Mr Castello—Only when they are not doing the flights to Australia.

CHAIR—True, but when our Australian guy is home in bed then the New Zealand guy is looking after the Australian people and the New Zealand people, and I do not know whether the Canadian person is in bed or not. Is that true?

Mr Castello—The main purpose for having the airport liaison officer at Bangkok airport and other locations is to make sure that the check-in staff of the airlines are fully trained to understand what Australia's document entry requirements are in terms of passports, visas, et cetera. So training is the principal role of that particular person—to make sure that the check-in staff get it right.

Secondly, the officer is there to deal with any queries that are referred from the check-in staff. The one officer, if we have one officer there, cannot cover all of the flights. That officer, on the other hand, is always on call. Even though the person may not be at the airport, queries will be referred to that officer, or to the entry operations centre here in Canberra which operates 24 hours a day.

CHAIR—Hold on. You said even though he is not on duty at the airport he is available for inquiries. I do not know if you have ever travelled around the Bangkok area, but it is very busy. He must do this on the phone. There is no way he could get to the airport—

Mr Castello—Correct.

CHAIR—But he cannot see the documentation. So you are asking questions on the phone of your officer?

Mr Castello—Correct.

CHAIR—How many people would try to get through one airport—we are talking about Bangkok but it could be Singapore—as a means of getting into Australia by rorting the system in some way?

Mr Castello—I have not brought those statistics with me but we refused, at the border, at the Australian airports, a little over 2,000 people last financial year. They were people who got to the airport and were refused entry for having false documentation or for being assessed as not being bona fide entrants.

CHAIR—Which airports are these?

Mr Castello—All Australian airports.

CHAIR—So that is at the border when they arrive in Australia?

Mr Castello—Correct. In terms of the interdiction overseas, not just at Bangkok but all other interdiction, I think in the last year we refused a little over 400. I can get those figures and let you have them.

CHAIR—This is an unfair question; you might not know the answer. Would you suggest that it was fairly similar for Canada and New Zealand?

Mr Castello—Probably higher, not for New Zealand, but for Canada higher and much lower for New Zealand in terms of volume.

CHAIR—Yes, obviously. Would it surprise you that, at Bangkok airport, in a week—or was it a day—they stopped, between Australia, New Zealand and Canada, 200 people trying to get through? Would that have been a week or a day? I cannot remember my figures.

Mr Castello—That would be a week. No, I would not be surprised.

Evidence was then taken in camera, but later resumed in public—

CHAIR—I just wondered if you were aware of some of the scams that people are using to get into Australia.

Mr Castello—The variety is infinite. That is largely because as soon as we try to crack down on any particular type of scam, people will turn their attention to different types. Similarly, if you crack down on one airport, they will come through another airport. If you try to put the pressure on one route, they will go another way.

The usual ways of attempting to get into Australia without proper documentation is either to get a travel document or a passport which has been photo-substituted, so that you have your own passport. This is usually after a visa has been issued quite legitimately to the true bearer of the passport. You try then to use that document to travel to Australia.

CHAIR—So what happens? Does somebody else get the passport and the visa?

Mr Castello—Yes, the true owner.

CHAIR—So Mrs Irwin gets the passport and visa, she hands them on to me, and then I front up at the Qantas counter?

Mr Castello—No, Mrs Irwin gets the visa. The passport is often stolen, or it might be sold. In Bangkok there are something like a hundred passports a day reported lost in one way or another. You then take that passport to an operator who is very easily found in Bangkok who will photo substitute the passport—that is, put a photo of you into Mrs Irwin's passport.

CHAIR—Won't our machines pick that up instantaneously?

Mr Castello—No.

CHAIR—What was the system we saw that picked up any tampering with the photograph? It was made by 3M, wasn't it?

Mrs IRWIN—Yes.

Mr Castello—If the passport is examined under the right lights, yes, it will be picked up. But in terms of presenting it to the check-in clerk to board a plane to go to Australia, it would not be detected unless it was a rough job. If it was badly done then it would stand out. It would be detected only if somebody noticed there was something unusual about the

document, about the passport, or if it was examined under ultraviolet light—which may or may not happen.

What we would do at check-in, however—and it depends here whether or not the check-in process is linked to the advance passenger information system—would be to feed the information obtained from that document into the Immigration computer systems. That information would then be available at the point of arrival so that the data contained in that document could be checked against our systems.

If there has been any tampering at all with any of the biodata—the date of birth or the name—that would immediately become evident. If the only tampering has been that the photo has been substituted, but the data integrity is the same, then we are reliant, as a last resort, on the Customs officer at the primary line making that face to passport check and noticing whether in fact the passport has been tampered with.

There are advanced passport readers that will automatically subject the document to that sort of analysis to see whether it has been tampered with, but that is not available. But we do have fairly sophisticated screening machines at all our airports that submit passports to that sort of scrutiny.

CHAIR—But that requires them being picked up?

Mr Castello—Yes, somebody has to think there may be something wrong with the passport. That is one method. The other very common one is simply the boarding pass switch in transit. For instance, somebody at Bangkok who has been booked through to Australia quite legitimately will give their boarding pass to somebody else who will then board the plane with it. That is why we try to encourage airlines to conduct gate checks—that is, even though you might have just been out in the transit lounge, when you go to reboard the plane, they should check your boarding pass.

CHAIR—It would not help to look at the passport, because that person would then be travelling on their own passport.

Mr Castello—No, they usually are not. If they are, then they will get through. But often people will not have the documents then. If they do have the documents then, as they often do, they will destroy them on the last leg of the journey, say, between Bangkok and Sydney.

CHAIR—Flush it down the toilet.

Mr Castello—That is correct.

CHAIR—Certainly that was one they mentioned: they go in legitimately on their own ticket, somebody else is going through on another flight to Chang Mai or elsewhere, a swap is done and they then have their own documentation. After I was told that, I thought that there should be an export stamp in the documentation to say that they had left the country. They would not have that if they had not been using theirs.

Mr Castello—No, but a lot of these people are in Bangkok in transit only.

CHAIR—Oh, I see.

Mr Castello—They have flown in from somewhere else.

CHAIR—So they have the export stamp from their own country?

Mr Castello—Yes. The control is not needed just at Bangkok; it needs to be wherever people board the flight.

CHAIR—I am told this is the major scam they go for and that it is apparently increasing.

Mr Castello—Whilst the boarding pass swap is very common, it is accompanied by the fact that the person will arrive at the border in Australia without a passport and will be detected. These people do not—

CHAIR—Because his passport has not been cleared and he has no visa?

Mr Castello—He has no visa and he has usually thrown the passport away. He will arrive and say, ‘I am a refugee.’

CHAIR—How many people per week get in here without their papers, people who have obviously done this sort of swap?

Mr Castello—Last year there were about 600 people who turned up at our border, were refused entry and claimed asylum or refugee status in Australia. I am not sure how many of those actually arrived without a document as against those who arrived with a document that was not theirs. My recollection is that about 60 per cent of those who seek protection at the border have arrived with fraudulent documents or with no documents.

CHAIR—Do we have an estimate of the expected increase of this during the Olympics? I do not mean of people getting through but of people actually trying to use this method? They will obviously be aware that lots of people will be coming in and that this could create a better opportunity. I would suggest to you right now that people are saving up for exactly that. They are saying, ‘Okay, we will not go this year. Let us wait until the Olympics when there will be so much traffic that it will be easier.’

Mr Castello—The numbers have been increasing at about 30 per cent per annum over the last four or five years. There is no sign that it is abating.

CHAIR—So an extra 30 per cent would be normal, plus there will be the extras you are going to get because of the Olympics. Do you have any way of estimating how many?

Mr Castello—No, there is no way. Some of the experience from elsewhere also suggests that there is a counterbalancing angle: people do expect there will be greater security and greater scrutiny at the time of the Olympics and that might in fact be a force which mitigates what might otherwise be an increase.

CHAIR—So at the moment the first thing you are doing—and you are obviously doing a few more things—is putting one extra person on at the major airports, say, in Bangkok and Singapore?

Mr Castello—That is at the moment.

CHAIR—You have one person on now but you are putting one extra person on for the Olympics?

Mr Castello—No, we are putting an additional person on now. We have not decided how many additional people we will have for the Olympics. We will monitor the situation closely as we move towards the Olympics and put additional people on if we believe that is necessary.

CHAIR—So there would be a guarantee that, for every 24 hours, there would be at least one Australian Immigration officer present?

Mr Castello—There will be at least two people there full time, and I would think probably more.

CHAIR—There will be at least two people there full time, but unless you put them on 12-hour shifts they are not going to cover the 24 hours.

Mr Castello—No.

CHAIR—So at the moment we have no guarantee that we will have full 24-hour coverage at those two airports?

Mr Castello—I would be very surprised if we did not have enough people to provide full 24-hour coverage at the time of the Olympics—and leading up to them.

CHAIR—But at the moment we do not, and you cannot say that for sure?

Mr Castello—Not at the moment, no.

CHAIR—You have one extra person there. What else do you have in train?

Mr Castello—We are working very closely with the airlines in terms of their take-up of advance passenger information. This is an important tool for us in monitoring who is coming to Australia and in preventing people coming to Australia if, in fact, they should not be travelling. That is one. That involves entering into arrangements with the airlines so that we have a greater sharing of intelligence—what is going on, what people are trying to do, what routes smugglers are using at any particular time, what groups of people might be travelling around who might be trying to head to Australia. It is that cooperative arrangement with the airlines that we are trying to improve so that both Immigration and Customs and the other agencies—police and so on—can have a greater cooperative involvement in protecting the borders. That is one important factor.

The other factor is one of working very closely with other immigration services and law enforcement agencies around the world. We share information and work together in terms of airport interdictions, analyses of people smuggling and fraud. There are different types of document fraud emerging. We work very closely with the Canadians, the Americans, the British, the Dutch, the Germans and others. So we all cooperate and keep on top of the abuse that occurs.

CHAIR—Is it feasible to have the machines in the primary line when you come into an airport—these machines identify very quickly any tampering with the passport—or is it just not feasible? The officers look at the face, but when they shove the passport into the machine it pings immediately if there is anything wrong.

Mr Castello—Customs, of course, operates the border. There are machines of that type around.

CHAIR—Would it be feasible to have it at every box at the private line?

Mr Jones—Certainly not before the Olympics.

CHAIR—That is the next question. Would it work? Is that a feasible thing—the ability of the machine to do that? Obviously there are costs and all sorts of other questions, but would it be an advantage to have that?

Mr Castello—The answer is technically yes; however, in practice, it is probably difficult. Whilst there are machines that purport to do that—in fact, they can do that to a very large extent—they require very fine calibration depending on the different types of passports that have been used and what has been done to the passport. So whilst you could have a machine that you swipe the passport in and, all being well, it will tell you that it has been tampered with, it will not do it in 100 per cent of the cases, unless you have a trained person who can calibrate the machine properly to handle that passport. The answer is probably yes, but we have a little way to go before we have those sorts of machines readily available on the market that will do 100 per cent of the task.

CHAIR—I take it the machine will miss some but, excluding the cost, it will improve the hit rate.

Mr Castello—It would.

Senator McKIERNAN—Are officers from other countries who act on behalf of Australia—which I think you said happens from time to time—accredited as immigration officers?

Mr Castello—No, they are not. Could I just add that what we have been operating in a number of airports are informal arrangements where ALOs—airport liaison officers—share some of the work amongst themselves. For the Australian officer, as for the others, their sole role is to advise the airline as to whether, in their opinion, someone has authority to travel to Australia and whether their documents are genuine or not. They do not refuse a person's

onward carriage to Australia. They advise the airline. The airline is still free to carry that person.

So regardless of what officer it is that is providing that advice—whether the officer is Canadian, New Zealand or Australian—they will say to the airline, ‘This document has been tampered with,’ or ‘This is not this person’s photograph,’ or ‘This person does not have a visa to travel.’ The airline would then normally decide on the basis of that advice whether or not to carry the person. Normally, if the advice is that there is no visa or the document has been tampered with, they would not carry the person—keeping in mind that if they did, the person would be refused entry to Australia. The airlines would have to return that person, meet the costs and be fined in addition.

Senator McKIERNAN—In a hypothetical instance where an Australian liaison officer at an overseas airport came across a passenger whose documentation was in some doubt, the officer would be able to contact Immigration in Canberra to run some checks. In the event of that officer being, say, a Canadian who is acting for us, would that Canadian officer—or an officer of another nation—be able to do the same thing?

Mr Castello—No, they do not. If anything like that arose they would then contact the Australian officer who would make those inquiries.

Senator McKIERNAN—Are there any overseas airports where Australia has contracted private operators to assist them in that liaison type role?

Mr Castello—No, there are none.

CHAIR—I think we had better let you off the hook for a while.

Senator McKIERNAN—Let us follow through this monarchist bloodline. This is intriguing me, particularly as we have a member of the committee who was apprehended by a dog—being a member of the republican movement.

Mr Jones—A beagle—not one of ours.

CHAIR—It was worrying about what was being carried into the country.

Senator McKIERNAN—I am concerned with the referendum coming on. It could be a very close vote and if the republicans could be sniffed out at the airports on re-entry—

Mr Jones—Senator, we can arrange anything.

CHAIR—Thank you. I am glad that is entered in the *Hansard*. Mr De Cure, as you would be aware, each week we knock back a lot of visitor applications to Australia on the basis of, firstly, nationality, secondly, marriage status—and this is all tied together—thirdly, employment and fourthly, I think, family connections, on a statistical basis. You would be aware that for a number of countries this is very high. Have you any concern that this would cause us any embarrassment during the Olympic Games when people apply from these so-called high risk countries for a visa to visit the Olympic Games and are denied such?

Mr De Cure—In general, there is always a difficult balance between ensuring the integrity, I suppose, of Australia's borders and creating some international situation. Essentially, responsibility for managing that, of course, is an immigration issue, but we have an advisory role there, I suppose, in providing advice on circumstances in countries, or the status of documentation and so forth. In the context of the Olympics, obviously a lot of the pre-planning is being done to try and minimise the risk of those sorts of situations.

CHAIR—Could you tell us what the pre-planning is?

Mr De Cure—There is a lot of co-ordination among agencies, for instance, and close liaison with SOCOG about a whole range of issues, particularly for members of the Olympic family, for instance, and their access arrangements. Obviously the key area is trying to identify what situations might arise and what sorts of people might want to come here. We are talking about two categories there, I suppose. Recognition of documentation and states, I guess, is one issue. The second one is people who might be at risk of overstay. The latter is essentially an issue for Immigration.

CHAIR—By saying that it is an issue for Immigration, what is going to happen when, say, we have two countries that have a high rejection rate—mainland China and Lebanon—and there are quite a few people who want to come to the Olympics? Under the present rules they apply and you say, 'Sorry, you are not going to be given a visitor visa.' They run to the press in their own country and suddenly we have got headlines in both those countries and maybe a couple of others: 'Australia refuses citizen's right to see Olympics.' That might have been put in train by DIMA, but I tell you what: you are the ones that are holding the baby. How you are going to treat it?

Mr De Cure—I think we often face those sorts of situations internationally. As I said, it is simply a matter of—

CHAIR—So you see no problem in a high rate of refusal of any particular nationality in public relations and diplomatic relations with a country? If it comes up that Lebanon says that 27 per cent of their people who want to go to the Olympics have been refused by Australia and none of these people has a criminal record or anything else, you don't see any danger for our diplomatic relations with that country, or a potential public relations disaster for Australia?

Mr De Cure—It could certainly complicate our job, but the government has an immigration policy.

CHAIR—Have you had meetings to discuss how you are going to deal with this?

Mr De Cure—It is an issue that we face all the time.

CHAIR—But you have not put in train any special arrangements vis-a-vis the Olympics?

Mr De Cure—Not that I am aware of.

CHAIR—Do you not think that this is a qualitatively and quantitatively different situation? Normally people want to travel for individual reasons. They want to visit family members; they want to see the country. They all have individual reasons and they are not all travelling en masse at one time. Suddenly you have a large number of people all travelling for one purpose, which is a once in four years event, the Olympic Games, which theoretically everybody in the world wants to see. Suddenly, en masse, those people are refused. Can you not see that this is perhaps quantitatively and qualitatively different from the normal run of what happens during normal years?

Mr De Cure—As I said earlier, clearly it is an issue that we would need to deal with in the way we project ourselves internationally.

CHAIR—But at the moment you have not made any plans for that. You are saying that, when it happens, you will deal with it.

Mr De Cure—It is an issue that we deal with not on a daily basis but on a regular basis.

CHAIR—It is regarded as simply business as usual and we will deal with it when it happens. Obviously, that is so, because you have not made any forward planning. You deal with this day-to-day, therefore, you are going to deal with it as it happens.

Mr De Cure—It is an ongoing issue.

CHAIR—So in the Olympic Games, despite the fact that this is quantitatively and qualitatively different, it is going to be dealt with in an ongoing way?

Mr De Cure—Clearly we are in discussions with the Department of Immigration in relation to those sorts of issues. We have views and they are fed into the process. Ultimately, the integrity of the border is the number one priority for the government. That is something that we accept.

Senator McKIERNAN—On another side of it, I noticed in the statistics provided to the committee that, despite the detailed scrutiny of applications for visas from a select group of countries, we still have very high non-compliance rates from those countries. Some countries were mentioned earlier in the committee's proceedings—China, Lebanon, Turkey and Vietnam. There is a 25 per cent non-compliance rate from those from China successful in being granted a visa. My approach is probably from the other side to you. If we relaxed our checks at application stage, would we run the risk of increasing that non-compliance rate by persons from those nationalities that would seem to have a proven record of non-compliance with Australia's immigration laws?

Mr De Cure—That is an issue I can certainly refer to my Immigration colleagues.

Senator McKIERNAN—I think it would be.

Mr Rizvi—In terms of processing applications for visitor visas, which are not related to Olympic family members, we have not been given any indication by the government that we should be changing our approach to high risk countries. We will be continuing to consider

each application on its individual merits and it will be decided on the basis of whether the applicant intends a genuine visit or not.

CHAIR—How do you decide at the moment whether an applicant intends to return after a visit?

Mr Rizvi—There are a range of factors that must be considered. They include: whether the individual concerned has a strong incentive to return and the person's employment status. Another factor may be whether the person has sufficient funds to travel and remain in Australia for the period that they have indicated that they intend to stay. Another factor would be the purpose of the visit and whether that, taken in its entirety, makes some sense.

CHAIR—That is the key, isn't it? At the moment, we are processing people as they want to see a family relative, Sydney, the opera house or whatever. Now we have something which we know is a legitimate reason—not that I am suggesting that seeing Sydney is not a legitimate reason—which is the Olympic Games. Is that, by its very nature, going to alter that particular parameter of when we make a decision?

Mr Rizvi—If the person is intending to come to Australia to see the Olympics and, for example, has purchased a ticket to do so, that is a relevant consideration. It will not, of its own, determine the issue one way or the other.

CHAIR—Could a person with a ticket to the Olympic Games and no criminal record and no bad character record still be refused entry to Australia?

Mr Rizvi—Yes.

CHAIR—I am just clarifying that point.

Mrs IRWIN—The department is not going to change the rules for visitors visas. I would particularly like to talk about Lebanon. I know that there have been a lot of visas rejected on age and whether people work or not. I am going to give an example. I represent a very large Lebanese population in my electorate. They are gorgeous people who find that they would like to invite people over for the Olympics. The family overseas are not in the financial position to pay the airfares or to buy the Olympic tickets but the family in Australia are in that financial position. It is a lot cheaper to bring two members over from Lebanon to the Olympics than take five or six family members over there on a holiday. They have come to see me. They will be rejected because of their age and because they are not in a work situation.

Mr Rizvi—Mrs Irwin, the age issue relates only to the risk factor profile. There is a profile of persons from a particular country and age is one of the considerations.

Mrs IRWIN—Because they are not married as well, they are not leaving a partner over there.

Mr Rizvi—That has, from our past experience, indicated a higher than normal probability of overstaying. That is a factor that is taken into account. However, age by itself

is not a determining factor in whether the person gets a visa or not. It is a matter of taking into account all of the relevant considerations and making a decision on the basis of those. Each individual applicant of that kind would have to be considered separately and a decision made.

When I said the government has not indicated to us any change in policy in that area, I should highlight that there is a review currently being undertaken, which the minister announced earlier this year, concerning illegal workers and related issues. That may result in recommendations which refine the approach that we might be taking in this area.

Mrs IRWIN—Further on that, as we know, the Olympics are in the year 2000. If a family member in Australia invites another member of the family from overseas to visit them, they have to put their application in. If it is rejected by the overseas post, that family has a right of review here in Australia, which can take up to four or five months. I think some of the people in my electorate have their reviews in now. When should these people start going to get their visitors visas to Australia?

Mr Rizvi—We would suggest as early as possible.

Mrs IRWIN—So, with a bit of luck, they should put in their applications in, say, February of next year. If that does get rejected in March, they should have an answer prior to the Olympics starting?

Mr Rizvi—I could not speculate on individual cases, Mrs Irwin. It would depend on the individual circumstances.

CHAIR—Mr Rizvi, if you are refused a tourist visa and you appeal, how long does the appeal take?

Mr Rizvi—That person would have to have a sponsor in Australia in order to acquire that review right. The review would be undertaken by the Migration Review Tribunal. I do not have the statistics with me on how long its processing times are. We could get those statistics for you.

CHAIR—Obviously the question I am coming up with is: do they have time to be reviewed before the Olympics have come and gone?

Mr Rizvi—I could not answer that.

CHAIR—Could you get back to us on what you expect the review time to take? We want to know how long beforehand somebody has to apply for their visa, so if they get refused they can apply to the tribunal and also perhaps have time to apply to the minister on top of that.

Senator McKIERNAN—There are a number of categories where there is no review.

Mrs IRWIN—It has to be a close relative—mother, father, brother, sister.

Mr Rizvi—We can get you the statistics on turnaround times in the Migration Review Tribunal for visitor visa applications.

Senator McKIERNAN—I would be interested to see those because the MRT started on 1 June. It did not operate with a full complement of tribunal members in the initial stages. I have noticed a ministerial press release just very recently appointing some new people to the tribunal. I understood that probably through the whole of June, and certainly for the better part of July, that they were dealing with urgent reviews—spouse categories or permanent residence, people in detention and so forth. I would be interested to see how many reviews of visitors visas were undertaken by the tribunal in that time.

Mr Rizvi—Perhaps the data on the Migration Review Tribunal may not be the best indicator. Perhaps we could also provide you with information on processing time for the IRT prior to its closure.

Senator McKIERNAN—I am not so sure that is going to be all that helpful to the committee.

Mr Rizvi—That would be the data that we have got available.

Senator McKIERNAN—That is why I intervened at the time that I intervened.

CHAIR—Perhaps you could us some projections.

Mr Rizvi—That would be a matter for the Migration Review Tribunal, being an independent body.

CHAIR—Perhaps we could write to the Migration Review Tribunal and ask them for some predictions. Senator McKiernan, do you think that would help?

Senator McKIERNAN—I am not so sure how useful it is going to be to us in the preparation of our report to the parliament because we have a time factor.

CHAIR—Anyway, let us have a phone call and just see what we can do fairly quickly in regard to the point.

Mrs IRWIN—Madam Chair, I made a phone call myself about three weeks ago and it is five to six months.

CHAIR—Right. Is that for a tourist visa with a family connection?

Mrs IRWIN—That is for any sort of review.

CHAIR—Some are gaining urgent categories. It would be interesting to feed that in too, particularly what happens if somebody comes to the Olympics who has a right of review and what they estimate the review time would be.

Senator McKIERNAN—In relation to the subject matter we are talking about, Olympic family members coming from those high-risk factor countries, are there any additional screening processes going to be put in place for those countries on the issuance of the special Olympic—

Mr Rizvi—I might respond to that initially and then I will pass it over to Mr Castello who has more details on that specific issue. There was a report in this morning's media which linked the risk factor criterion to Olympic family members. That linkage was incorrect. There is no relationship between the special purpose visa category for Olympic family members and the risk factor criterion. The risk factor criterion would not apply to persons entering under special purpose visas. The exact processes for special purpose visas is something that—

Senator McKIERNAN—Can you identify the media report you are referring to?

Mr Rizvi—It was the *Herald Sun* this morning.

CHAIR—We will get a copy immediately.

Mr Castello—For those who are Olympic family members, their entry into Australia is conditional on their nomination by their national Olympic committee and their accreditation by SOCOG. We get involved in that process before there is a final decision on whether the person is accredited as an Olympic family member or not. If there are any issues related to any individual as to their entry to Australia because of public interest, foreign affairs, any other sorts of issues that might be involved—

CHAIR—Can you be more specific?

Mr Castello—As occurs at present, some people seek entry to Australia where their visit might be highly controversial because of membership of groups, because of the country itself, or because of communities in Australia that might be antagonistic to a person entering the country. When those issues arise, as they will arise for Olympic family members, and they arise now, then together with security agencies such as ASIO and with Foreign Affairs and Trade, we make a decision. Often that can go to ministers. A decision will be taken as to whether the person is to be admitted or not. The same process would occur during the time of the Olympics.

CHAIR—What would it take—and can we have Foreign Affairs work with you here—to reject an Olympic or a Paralympic family member?

Mr Castello—We have no track record.

CHAIR—You may have no track record but you are going to go into that having a pretty good idea of what you are going to question and what you are not going to question. Tell me what you think. Give me what you think would be some typical things where you would say, 'This is what we would reject.'

Mr Castello—I do not believe that I can give you any examples. As I say, we do not have a track record on that. I think our hope and expectation will be that whilst there will be some people whose entry to Australia may be seen as controversial, that at the end of the day there will not be a need for anyone to be refused entry.

CHAIR—So we are hoping not to refuse anybody in the Olympic family, for obvious diplomatic reasons. I can see us saying no to some champion discus thrower who is expected to win the event. I can imagine the publicity that is going to get worldwide.

Mr Castello—That's correct.

CHAIR—Okay. Concerning drugs—and I am not asking you to rule on this—would you have difficulty in letting in an Olympic family member who had a drug conviction?

Mr Castello—We would have a difficulty and so an assessment would need to be made.

CHAIR—This is obviously a logical thing, that on each individual case you would sit down and find how possibly you can let this guy in because if you don't you are going to have a lot of trouble.

Mr Castello—Correct. There are no strict guidelines associated with that. Each case has to be considered on its merits.

CHAIR—That is very sensible. I cannot see any other possible way that you would handle that. What is perhaps a little more concerning are the accompanying team members who are considered Olympic family members. For instance, they are part of the team but not actually the athletes. I understand from various sources that with certain countries, and I think China was mentioned here but there are obviously countries, that this is a standard way of getting people into the country who want to stay here illegally, or want to claim refugee status. They are not really members of that team but for some reason manage to get included under that team.

Mr Castello—They are either Olympic family members or they are not. If they are then they go through the accreditation process that I have mentioned. If they are not then they have to meet the normal entry requirements, which includes bona fide assessments.

CHAIR—I am just talking about Olympic family members. I guess I am again referring to people who I now seem to know extraordinarily well in Bangkok. This is a common thing, that every time there is an athletic event, from certain countries people will be included on the team, not as an athlete, but as accompanying team members so they qualify as Olympic family members. They have substituted for somebody else who could have legitimately come, or somehow have just been added because somebody saw fit to add them and somehow it is done in that country. Because this is known to happen, you would expect then that from the Olympic family you would get some extra people staying over illegally or applying for refugee status. Is that correct?

Mr Castello—I think that that is a certain outcome, yes.

CHAIR—Do we know how many applied out of Atlanta?

Mr Castello—I might ask Terry who is the expert on that to elaborate, but the short answer is probably not many, but they would not know.

CHAIR—We do expect it to happen.

Mr Walker—The INS produced a report after the Atlanta Games and that report said that there were no applications for refugee status lodged in Atlanta during the games. As my colleague Mr Castello said, the Americans probably would not know if an application was lodged six months later in Seattle or Kansas City or wherever. So I guess the answer is that they do not really know, but their report says that there were no applications lodged in Atlanta at the time of the games.

Mr Castello—Another way of putting it is that it did not emerge as an issue for them.

CHAIR—Well, from that point of view, that obviously looks good. What about people who overstayed, who just did not front at the end of their visa period? Did we have a listing on that as well?

Mr Walker—The Americans really did not comment about that. My understanding is that their exit controls are not as ours are and that—

CHAIR—So they did not know if they left or not?

Mr Walker—My understanding is they have quite a few illegal immigrants, and I do not think they know.

Mr Castello—The US has over five million illegals at any one time, so a few—

CHAIR—A few out of the Olympic family was not going to make that much difference. They might be better qualified than many others. It being 12 o'clock, and as there are no further questions, I thank you for your attendance today. If there is anything we have asked you to get back to us on fairly quickly, we would really appreciate that because the minister is waiting for the report. If we have any follow-up questions while we are writing the report we will get back to you. Thank you again, and thank you *Hansard*.

Resolved (on motion by **Senator McKiernan**):

That this committee authorises publication of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day, with the exception of paragraphs relating to a particular discussion undertaken by the chair of the committee and identification by the committee.

Committee adjourned at 12.02 p.m.

