



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
DEFENCE AND TRADE

(Foreign Affairs Subcommittee)

Reference: Australia's relations with the Middle East

FRIDAY, 17 NOVEMBER 2000

PERTH

BY AUTHORITY OF THE PARLIAMENT

INTERNET

The Proof and Official Hansard transcripts of Senate committee hearings, some House of Representatives committee hearings and some joint committee hearings are available on the Internet. Some House of Representatives committees and some joint committees make available only Official Hansard transcripts.

The Internet address is: **<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>**

To search the parliamentary database, go to: **<http://search.aph.gov.au>**

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE

Foreign Affairs Subcommittee

Friday, 17 November 2000

Members: Senator Ferguson (*Chair*), Senators Bourne, Calvert, Chapman, Cook, Gibbs, Harradine, Hutchins, Sandy Macdonald, O'Brien, Payne and Schacht and Fran Bailey, Mr Baird, Mr Brereton, Mrs Crosio, Mr Laurie Ferguson, Mr Hawker, Mr Hollis, Mr Jull, Mrs De-Anne Kelly, Mr Lieberman, Dr Martin, Mrs Moylan, Mr Nugent, Mr O'Keefe, M Price, Mr Prosser, Mr Pyne, Mr Snowdon, Dr Southcott and Mr Andrew Thomson

Subcommittee members: Mr Jull (*Chair*), Senator Gibbs (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Bourne, Calvert, Chapman, Ferguson and Schacht and Mr Brereton, Mrs Crosio, Mr Laurie Ferguson, Mr Hawker, Mr Hollis, Mr Lieberman, Dr Martin, Mr Nugent, Mr Price, Mr Pyne, Mr Snowdon, Dr Southcott and Mr Andrew Thomson

Senators and members in attendance: Senators Bourne and Gibbs and Mr Jull and Mr Pyne

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on Australia's relations with Middle East nations and the Gulf states, with particular reference to:

- Opportunities and impediments to expanding Australia's trade relationship with the Middle East and the Gulf states;
- Australia's contribution to the Middle East peace process, and the prospects for resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict;
- The role of the United Nations, and Australia's involvement, in promoting regional stability for the Middle East and the Gulf states, including consideration of the United Nations weapons inspection program and the impact on Iraq of internationally-applied sanctions;
- Australia's defence relationship with the Middle East and the Gulf regions, and the scope for promoting Australia's strategic interests;
- The impact of destabilising influences in the region including the potential production of weapons of mass destruction;
- Progress on the adoption of human rights principles in the region; and
- Social and cultural linkages, given the levels of migration to Australia from the Middle East and some Gulf states and with particular reference to the Australian aid program towards the Middle East and the training programs for students from the region.

WITNESSES

JACOB, Mr VERGHESE, Regional Manager, Indian Ocean Region, Department of Commerce and Trade 519

JOHNSON, Mr Simon Charles, Team Leader, International Trade Relations, Department of Commerce and Trade..... 519

KAMALKHANI, Dr Zahra (Private capacity) 537

MURALI, Mr Bala, Principal Policy Officer, Federal and Constitutional Affairs Division, Western Australian Ministry of the Premier and Cabinet..... 519

Subcommittee met at 9.00 a.m.**JACOB, Mr VERGHESE, Regional Manager, Indian Ocean Region, Department of Commerce and Trade****JOHNSON, Mr Simon Charles, Team Leader, International Trade Relations, Department of Commerce and Trade****MURALI, Mr Bala, Principal Policy Officer, Federal and Constitutional Affairs Division, Western Australian Ministry of the Premier and Cabinet**

CHAIR—On behalf of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, I declare open this public hearing in Perth. The committee is conducting a series of public hearings for its review of Australia's relations with the Middle East. Hearings will resume in Canberra early next year. Today's proceedings will enable the committee to focus on two broad elements of the current review: Australia's trade relations with the Middle East and the situation faced by Muslim refugees from the Middle East. On behalf of the subcommittee I welcome the Ministry of the Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Commerce and Trade.

The subcommittee prefers that all evidence be given in public, but should you at any stage wish to give any evidence in private, you may ask to do so and the subcommittee will give consideration to your request. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence on oath, I should advise you that these hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and therefore have the same standing as proceedings of the parliament itself. I would invite you to make a short opening statement, if you wish, and then we can proceed to questions.

Mr Murali—Thank you, Mr Chairman. I would like to give an overview of Western Australia's submission to the inquiry into Australia's relations with the Middle East. There have been a couple of updates on some of the points that we have raised in the submission, especially in terms of WA's activities in the Middle East with TAFE International WA. I would also like to take the committee through a brief overview of the other sectors we have covered in the submission, namely, the agriculture sector, the fisheries sector, as well as the resources energy sector.

WA has been engaged in the VET market, the vocational education and training market, in the Middle East through commercial as well as social and cultural linkages. WA is aware that the Middle East is one of the fastest growing commodity markets; hence we have made a number of attempts recently to promote WA expertise and its VET system within the education arena in the Middle East. The sorts of initiatives we have taken include: a high level West Australian delegation comprising the West Australian minister for employment and training and high level representatives of the West Australian Department of Training and Employment, the TAFE colleges networks and Western Australian universities.

All three universities, Curtin University, Murdoch University, as well as Edith Cowan, visited Abu Dhabi earlier this year. The delegation had a brief to showcase the ability of the WA VET sector to provide education and training programs that meet the specific requirements of the Petroleum Institute that is being developed in Abu Dhabi. This delegation was keen to assist WA education and training institutions achieve a preferred education provider status with a

potentially world-class petroleum institute, and we believe that this would generate strong export income for the state. The delegation also raised the possibility for the West Australian Department of Training and Employment to be involved in the potential provision of employment related services.

TAFE International WA, or TIWA, is involved in a number of potential business relationships with the Middle East region. Recently, for example, TIWA has been approached by a major petroleum client in Qatar to assist in designing a foundation or entry level program for students wishing to enter engineering related studies. The intention is that the program will be designed so that these students will be able to enter directly into TAFE WA diploma programs in the engineering studies area. Other opportunities have also been identified by TIWA in the Middle East region. These relate to the occupational health and safety area, the meat trades and also short, customised training for the oil and gas industry sectors. TIWA will also continue to expand its role in the region, particularly in the oil and gas sector, which is a major focus area, and other niche areas such as hospitality, English language and business and management courses.

One of the other areas where TIWA is keen to pursue further relations with the Middle East is to recruit students from the region, and TIWA will continue to include the Middle Eastern and Gulf region in its marketing plans for 2001-02. However, most countries in the region are nongazetted, that is, high risk according to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. The likelihood of students gaining students visas, therefore, from that region is poor. TIWA is quite keen to engage with the appropriate Commonwealth departments to ensure that visa requirements are relaxed and look more promising so they can direct large resources in terms of marketing and recruiting students from the Middle East. In the current scenario of relative uncertainty it is a bit difficult to divert large resources when student visas are not very easily forthcoming in that area. That basically sums up what we have given in our submission in relation to TAFE and the VET sector.

As we have highlighted in our submission, the Middle East, including the Gulf region and the North African countries, has been a traditional market for WA's agricultural exports for many years, particularly livestock, meat, wheat, barley and pulses. A number of the Middle East countries are growing markets for horticultural and dairy products, processed foods and ready meals. In 1998-99, 25 per cent of the state's total agricultural exports went to the Middle East. Again in 1998-99, the Middle East consumed 97 per cent of Western Australia's live sheep exports and 30 per cent of its wheat. I am sure my colleagues from Commerce and Trade will expand on some of those figures further.

We attribute explosion of population in the region, urbanisation, limited local production, development of distribution channels and increasing incomes as major factors that will have a significant positive effect on regional food markets and food demand. The WA agricultural industry is seeking to maintain and improve its linkages with all countries in the Middle East to ensure that we have continued access to West Australian agricultural products and expertise.

In relation to fisheries, our fisheries agency, Fisheries WA, is regarded as the world leader in sustainable fisheries management and would be in a position to provide professional fisheries management advice to the Middle East and the Gulf region countries. Fisheries WA has already been involved in some work in this region to date. WA Fishing and related industries also offer

quality product and fishing technology which may be attractive to these countries. WA also has a growing international reputation as a supplier of quality seafood from a pristine marine environment. Niche and specialist markets, such as international restaurants and hotels, could offer good trade prospects in the Gulf region.

Lastly, in terms of the resources and energy sector, we consider that there are many opportunities to be explored in the resources sector—for example, exploring the opportunities for Western Australia's support services to the oil and gas sector—we believe there is considerable scope for export of oil and gas services and high technology services from Western Australia to the Middle East; exploring the implications for Middle East petroleum exports for Australia's role as a petroleum exporter; and also considering the implications of competition from the Middle East for export of LNG to Asia. Western Australia would also be keen to ensure that the state has access to Middle East markets, as there are good opportunities, as highlighted previously, for WA to provide services and expertise in high technology industries. Western Australia is also a world leader in mining and would benefit from access to Middle East markets.

In conclusion, we would like to state that Western Australia has already established a very positive relationship with the Middle East in a range of key trade areas, as has been highlighted. We believe sufficient attention has to be paid to the identification of impediments to and opportunities for further enhancement of trade relations with the Middle East. I will conclude on that note. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—I thank you, too, for the latest updates that you have given us in those figures. There are some quite impressive figures there, particularly with the Emirates and with Egypt. In your submission you mentioned that you were going to get direct air links I think from the Emirates into Dubai. Has that service started yet?

Mr Johnson—The situation is that some time ago it was announced that Emirates Airlines would commence direct services between Dubai and Perth. There has not been any confirmation of that at this stage. When this will happen we do not know. It is rumoured that it will happen some time maybe next year. It is a very important development as far as we are concerned. Having direct air links with Dubai would greatly enhance our position as a trading destination, particularly in the areas of fresh product, processed foods and also in the areas of education and training. Having direct access enables us to promote ourselves more favourably, as well as for the tourist industry.

CHAIR—How well developed is air freight between Perth and the Gulf regions at the moment?

Mr Johnson—Any air freight to the Middle East from Perth has to go via either Singapore or Kuala Lumpur. As far as Singapore is concerned, we have good connections. We have at least five flights a day. To Kuala Lumpur, we have one, sometimes two, a day. The problem more often is not so much getting to Singapore. The on-carriage demand from Singapore and Kuala Lumpur to the region is strong and therefore our companies are immediately disadvantaged.

CHAIR—Is that part of the reason why Victoria seems to have inched slightly ahead of WA in terms of—

Mr Johnson—I would say it certainly would be a contributing factor. Another factor why Victoria has gained from a prominent position over us is the fact that they have a much larger manufacturing base. For example, motor vehicles are a popular export to the Middle East. Camry and Holden Statesman act as taxis, and various other cars, and we do not produce those. But it would certainly be a contributing factor. There is no question about that.

CHAIR—How much cooperation is there between the states in terms of targeting some of these markets, or is it a bit like it was 25 or 30 years ago when every state went in there and to hell with the rest?

Mr Johnson—From a West Australian point of view we believe that we have far stronger cooperative arrangements not only with the states but particularly with federal government agencies. We have established an arrangement with Austrade whereby we have a dedicated person working for Western Australia in their Bangkok, Taiwan and Manila offices. It is an arrangement that we are also trying to pursue as far as the Middle East is concerned. Another example of our cooperation with a federal agency would be the fact that we have developed a Middle East Market Access Program to assist West Australian companies, small to medium sized particularly, to get information, contacts, appointments, whatever, to a certain value, which is \$1,000, using the Austrade network. We are using this very much to try and encourage the small to medium sized companies, the manufacturers, companies that need that sort of assistance, to develop those linkages with the Middle East.

Mr Jacob—Can I just add two points before we move on. On the matter of air freight to Singapore and on to Dubai, most of our goods that go into the Middle East might require refrigerated containers or G-tainers, and this is obviously a problem. We have a lot of exports of fresh food, be it agricultural or even marine products. Another point Simon mentioned was the Middle East Market Access Program. We have mentioned in our submission that we require an enhanced Western Australian presence in the Middle East, and this is the first step towards that end.

Mr Johnson—It is a stepping stone, in our view. Like everything else, it is subject to funding, but throughout government there is an acknowledgment of the importance of the Middle East and the importance of having an on-ground presence in the Middle East. Fingers crossed, hopefully at some stage we will get that.

CHAIR—You are relatively happy with the arrangements with Austrade. Are there any particulars areas in which you believe that from a federal situation we could help?

Mr Johnson—If we went back to the Emirates Airlines I think any assistance that can be provided by the federal government in facilitating Emirates to develop direct air links into Perth would be greatly appreciated. Again it is refrigerated cargo, perishable cargo, that we are talking about. If we are feeding into a hub like Singapore we are competing with product coming from all over the place, and that puts us at a disadvantage. Anything that can facilitate direct transportation links to the Middle East would be appreciated. It does not have to be Emirates. If Gulf Air wanted to come here, we would be equally as happy. A Middle East airline would be greatly appreciated. One of the reasons why Emirates have deferred coming in here—you would have to check with the airline itself—is the fact that there might not be sufficient business for Perth in its own right and therefore there needs to be a linkage and that could be with another

city within Australia. Domestic carriage of passengers becomes an issue and therefore there would be quite a lot of opposition from domestic carriers to that. But from our point of view, direct air links would be a significant boost to West Australia's trade, to enhancing Australia's and Western Australia's position as a destination and as a source of goods and services.

CHAIR—How well has e-commerce developed in terms of your relationship with the Middle East?

Mr Johnson—To be honest with you, I could not really answer that accurately. E-commerce is a phenomenon that is happening right across the board. I do not think the Middle East is an exception to that. I would say that it is progressing as well as anywhere else. And I think it would vary. Places like Dubai, I would suggest, would be significantly more advanced than, say, Egypt or Yemen and places like that. There would not be a consistent pattern. But it is with us; we will grow with it and so will they.

Mr Murali—From a TAFE International perspective there are already online services and online courses being offered to certain countries in the Middle East—engineering related courses and English language courses. I do not know whether you would consider that strictly as e-commerce, but certainly electronic links have been established and education services are already provided direct to students in the Middle East. They are keen to expand on those aspects.

Senator GIBBS—I would love to talk about sheep! There has been a fair bit of publicity about live sheep exports. Has that been sorted out? What is the situation with live sheep exports at the moment?

Mr Johnson—Live sheep exports are an ongoing business concern. I personally am not able to comment on exactly what it is. The best people to comment on the live sheep business per se would be another government agency, AgWest Trade and Development, which is very close to that particular industry.

Mr Jacob—I can narrow that scope. The only problem that we in fact had was with Saudi Arabia, so we have to put that in the right context. The live sheep exports to all other Middle East countries are continuing, or being maintained at least. I think the relationship is probably at a political level more than at trade level. It is being sorted out, I guess.

Mr Johnson—The last I heard was that there had been quite a lot of discussions about the particular problems with Saudi Arabia and that there had been some trial shipments going across from Australia to Saudi Arabia. I am not too sure where the situation has gone from there.

Senator GIBBS—It has not really dropped? Are there still the same amount of exports?

Mr Jacob—No. The export of live sheep to Saudi Arabia from Western Australia has dropped significantly.

Senator GIBBS—What was their problem?

Mr Johnson—It would be best to get this clarified from an agency like AgWest which would be much closer to it. My understanding is that there was a quarantine situation, where it was alleged that some of the sheep from Australia had a disease. From memory, I think it was blue tongue, but I cannot remember exactly. This was disputed and eventually, from my understanding, it was resolved. But to what degree exports have returned to that market, I am not too sure.

Mr Murali—Senator, I am happy to take that question back to our agriculture agency and provide a written response to the secretary in due course.

Senator GIBBS—Thank you very much. You were talking earlier about education. Which Middle East markets would be the best opportunities in the VET sector for Western Australia?

Mr Murali—The strong feeling that we get from our Department of Training and Employment is the UAE as a specific destination. There is a lot of interest in the UAE and Abu Dhabi towards delivery of TAFE related education courses. That is because a delegation has gone there, as I highlighted in my overview. That could be seen very much as a springboard towards extending our influence throughout the region, so that is the first case. But there is certainly interest in other areas of the Middle East as well. That is the strong feeling that we get.

Senator GIBBS—Do you want to attract students to come to Western Australia or do you want people from Western Australia to go over there to train people?

Mr Johnson—Both.

Mr Murali—Both, yes.

Senator GIBBS—When we were in Adelaide yesterday witnesses there were saying that they felt South Australia was the best place to attract students from the Middle East. Would you agree?

Mr Johnson—Not for fear of causing any major concern, no. Western Australia has a very good track record, certainly in the education area. In addition to the UAE, there has also been interest from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt and Jordan. We have, for example, sponsored a veterinary postgraduate student to study at Murdoch University. It is really a question of promoting Australia as an education destination, irrespective of the state at this stage. I think there is a great tendency for students to go to Europe and to the United States and we have to promote Australia as a destination of high-quality, cost-effective education. I think it goes both ways. Students coming here is fine, certainly in the graduate and postgraduate area, but equally if you are looking at education long term, you have to also look at developing close relationships with universities and colleges in the area in order to develop courses collaboratively.

Senator GIBBS—When students from overseas come to Australia, I assume they are like our students and they get part-time work and all that sort of thing, or do they tend to be so wealthy that they do not have to?

Mr Johnson—There is some provision, I think, for students to work part time.

Mr Jacob—A certain number of hours.

Mr Murali—For a certain number of hours.

Senator GIBBS—It boosts the economy, doesn't it? You have to provide housing and other things.

Mr Johnson—We estimate that the inbound student education market is worth around \$390 million a year to Western Australia.

Senator GIBBS—That is not bad. It would be nice to double it.

Mr Johnson—When we have direct air links with the Emirates, I am sure it will, yes.

Mr Jacob—I can contribute a little bit more on that issue. The main issue is that Australia—at least in the Middle East perception—is a destination of high-quality education, be it long term over a four-year period or postgraduate of two years, or even short-term courses. With the long-term courses they tend to think that Europe or the US is a better destination than Australia, but there is a major focus on our side here, at least, on the short-term vocational courses, because I think there are many more opportunities in the Middle East—be it in the building, oil and gas or mining sectors.

Mr Murali—And the delivery of more specialised education services in the region.

Senator GIBBS—We are probably a safer destination than Europe, too, do you think?

Mr Johnson—I do not think that would become an issue. The main issue is the perception back home of whether you have a degree from a university in Great Britain or a university in Australia and how that enhances your prospects of employment. I think that would be much more of an issue, rather than whether one place is safer than another.

Mr Murali—By way of comment and comparison, Australia faced a similar situation with South-East Asian countries in the past. Being originally from Malaysia myself, there was always a perception that a degree from the United States or the UK might be better—

Senator GIBBS—Harvard or Cambridge.

Mr Murali—Yes, that is right—as opposed to coming to Australia. But that perception has changed over the years, because of the amount of effort that has gone into developing twinning arrangements with Australian universities, et cetera. We would like to see similar opportunities promoted with the Middle East.

Mr PYNE—The universities have always acted very independently in the past, certainly with respect to South-East Asia. They have had their own trade delegations and set up their own stalls at trade shows and education conferences around South-East Asia, probably to the detriment of them overall because they have spent the same amount of money trying to promote their universities when they may have been more successful if they had pooled their resources.

Is there any suggestion, with respect to the Middle East, that there might be a review of that strategy and perhaps the universities might work more closely together to try and promote Australia as an education destination, even if it is perhaps the seven or eight premier universities? Sometimes even each department at a university competes for overseas students.

Mr Johnson—The comment you make is a very valid one. Living overseas, you see Australia competing more with themselves rather than with the universities in the UK or other countries. As far as Western Australia is concerned, some years ago an organisation called the Western Australian International Education Marketing Group was established. This consists of 19 institutions, including the five universities that we have. They do generic marketing, promoting Western Australia as an education destination. That does not preclude each university doing their own thing and going to exhibitions themselves, but it greatly enhances Western Australia by promoting it as a destination for education as a whole.

To some extent IDP acts for most of the universities. It is a problem, but from Western Australia's point of view, we do have this overall marketing group which has been very successful. They now have offices in Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore and are looking at possibly setting up something in China, if there is enough interest within the group of 19. The group also includes TAFE International. They have done promotional work in the Middle East and I am sure that that will continue.

Mr PYNE—That is a Western Australian—

Mr Johnson—Yes. As to universities as a whole across the country, I am not aware of any joint approach as far as they are concerned, but certainly from a Western Australian point of view there is this marketing group which has been very successful.

Mr Jacob—To add to that, the WAIEMG attended a few trade shows in the Middle East, particularly in Dubai, to try to attract students to come over to Western Australian institutions to study long term. They have attended two trade shows so far—last year and the year before last.

Mr PYNE—Sometimes the media and some politicians and others in South-East Asia promote the idea that Australia is a great place to have an education but they might be a little bit racist; therefore, you might look elsewhere. Is there any suggestion from the Middle East that Australians are in any way erring on the side of racism?

Mr Johnson—No. To the contrary. Australia has an exceptionally good name in the Middle East. My personal view is that it is seen as a country that does not have any ulterior motive or any hidden agenda and that, to me, is a great plus. I do not see that as a problem at all.

Mr PYNE—The One Nation palaver that occurred in Asia, which was beaten up quite substantially around North-East Asia and South-East Asia, did not cause any concern in the Middle East, that you are aware of?

Mr Johnson—I am unaware.

Mr Jacob—I think we have to look at it in the context of the number of students coming here from the Middle East. In that context it was not a major issue compared to, say, South-East

Asia. It never was an issue, at least from our point of view. We had never heard of such things, particularly from the Middle East students here, or at least from the institutions.

Mr Johnson—Or, when you visit the market, from people you talk to. I have never heard anything like that and, as I said earlier, I believe that Australians have a good reputation in the main.

CHAIR—Have you had much migration from the Middle East to Western Australia?

Mr Johnson—That is a curve ball. I would not be able to comment on that.

Mr Murali—I would not be able to comment on that either. Again, I will take it on board to check it out and get back to the committee. There are, I believe, large groups of migrants from that region over here. Again, that is more anecdotal than proper evidence, but we certainly get a perception that there is a large Middle Eastern community here, maybe more so in the eastern states than in WA.

Senator BOURNE—It is interesting what you said, Mr Johnson, just now, that Australia does not seem to have the baggage of the Americans or the Europeans. We have heard that a lot over the last few days. I think that is a pretty general perception, which we did not have before we started this, so that is quite good. You mentioned TAFEs going online and developing relationships with institutions over there. How far have those relationships developed? Do you know if they have places where people can go, or do they have to just study online if they are studying with Australian institutions?

Mr Murali—As far as I am aware, Senator, at the moment it is online, according to the information I have been given. Again, I could get back to TAFE International and find out exactly what services they are offering. The Midland College of TAFE here is offering business related courses online to students in the UAE. As far as we understand, there are other such ventures in the pipeline.

Senator BOURNE—So they are courses that would not really need any experimental things, for instance, where you do not actually need a laboratory or anything like that; you could do it all online.

Mr Murali—That is right, yes. My understanding is that there would be straight-out business related, finance related courses where the class contact may not necessarily be all that crucial.

Senator BOURNE—Yes, or essential. You also mentioned perishables. I was wondering how far it would be by air.

Mr Johnson—In terms of time?

Senator BOURNE—Yes. What is the comparison?

Mr Johnson—To Singapore, I would hazard a guess at five to six hours.

Mr Jacob—From here to Singapore is about five hours, and from Singapore to Dubai is about eight.

Senator BOURNE—So you would cut that really considerably if you had a direct flight?

Mr Johnson—Direct, it would be a 10-hour flight, yes.

Mr Jacob—And not only that, you have time in Singapore.

Senator BOURNE—Of course, and that could be part of your problem.

CHAIR—If you miss connections, it sits on the deck in the sun.

Senator BOURNE—Yes, it would be nice and hot at Singapore airport. How big would that market of perishables going through Singapore be now? I suppose that is not as relevant as how much could it grow. What is the potential? Do you think it is quite large?

Mr Johnson—I think the potential is very large. There is some product being airfreighted at the moment. In addition to the commercial flights, we do have three freighters coming through here which do the run Singapore-Auckland-Perth-Singapore. The problem is the on-carriage from Singapore to Dubai and other places. If I was a betting man, I would say that 10 or 15 tonnes a flight would not be unrealistic.

CHAIR—There is a perception, is there not, that our produce is clean and green. I think that is the expression.

Senator BOURNE—Yes.

CHAIR—Which is a great sales point.

Mr Johnson—We are very good at what we do.

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Johnson—We tend to knock ourselves, but we are very good at what we do. We produce very good product and we are very competitive, in terms of both price and quality, particularly quality. I do not have any doubt at all in my mind that we would be able to do very well.

Senator GIBBS—Would you be looking at charter flights? What sorts of flights do you mean?

Mr Johnson—Commercial flights we are looking for. The idea of Emirates is that they were going to establish a scheduled service to Perth, linking Perth to Dubai. It would be like any commercial airline, and they would have two or three flights a week between Perth and Dubai.

Senator GIBBS—Do you send produce on commercial flights?

Mr Johnson—Yes.

Senator GIBBS—I did not know that.

Mr Johnson—Down in the bottom.

Senator GIBBS—There is enough room, is there, with everyone's bags?

Mr Johnson—Yes. It depends who is travelling, I have heard. If you are talking about Madonna, no. It varies, depending upon the aircraft type. A 767 would be around about 10 tonnes; a 747 would be anything up to 20 tonnes. It depends on the distance and on the load factors, but they would carry between 10 and 20 tonnes per flight on a 767 to a 747.

Mr Jacob—On top of that, of course, you need the facilities for refigitainers. After saying that, you have two distinct ones: a normal carriage and the refrigerated carriage.

Senator GIBBS—Yes.

Mr Jacob—Just one more word I thought I would mention: besides 'clean green' there is another word called 'healthy'.

Senator BOURNE—I will just finish off by asking about Dubai. Dubai is somewhere we have all really become aware of over the last couple of days because everybody is talking about how it looks like becoming, as you have pointed out, the Singapore of the Middle East. Is there any sort of coordination federally that you know of—and we are seeing people federally in January so we can ask this—to have some sort of an office in Dubai where Australia could be represented with all the different states having their own representation there, separate but all in the one place, to save costs and so on? Is there anything under consideration?

Mr Johnson—To my knowledge, no. In London we have an office and in Shanghai the Commonwealth government are developing a central office and we have joined them, and DFAT have an office there and we are moving in there.

CHAIR—Certainly it should involve the Australian Tourist Commission.

Mr Johnson—Yes. As far as I am concerned, it is a great way to go. From my knowledge, there is Austrade, of course, in Dubai. Victoria have an office there. South Australia had appointed a consultant. I am not too sure what that relationship is like. Certainly, if we can get the funds and get it accepted, we would like to have a presence there. At this stage that would be a dedicated person working from the Austrade office.

Senator BOURNE—Yes. In Queensland they were saying the Gold Coast wanted their own person there. The Queensland Tourist Office wanted their own person there. It seems to me there is huge potential.

Mr Johnson—Dubai, of course, is a major transshipment and commercial centre. But there are huge opportunities in all the countries in the Middle East.

Senator BOURNE—Yes, that is a good point.

Mr Johnson—I think we sometimes tend to be drawn by the bright lights, but Saudi Arabia, which is not an easy place to get to, is a market of great potential, as is Kuwait. Iraq in the past has been a great market for us and still has potential through the United Nations food for oil program.

Senator BOURNE—And Iran, too.

Mr Johnson—Our exports to Iran have grown quite considerably. Again, it is predominantly commodities, of course, but as Iran ‘comes out’ I think it is a great opportunity.

Senator BOURNE—Do you think Dubai would service all these areas adequately?

Mr Johnson—It does already. There is a big port. It has really done very well in developing itself as a hub. Its sister city, Sharjah, which is literally kilometres away, has now become quite a major airfreight hub. That services not only Iran and the Gulf region but also central Asia.

Mr Jacob—One of the reasons why we think we need a presence—and likewise all the other states need a presence—is there must be some amount of good faith regarding what we can supply and what the market requires. We need somebody there to give us, depending on what we have, a focused approach to what our business people here would want to sell—not at a high level where there are opportunities in oil and gas. Everybody knows that. It does not mean anything to our local small to medium business people here. We would really need specific, probably even to the point of tender, information which we can pass on to business people and they will take some interest and say, ‘Okay, let’s pursue this.’ There is a role for both federal and state government to go to that level. That is probably the reason we want to push for a dedicated presence and somebody who can be a bit more focused in actually having that link.

Senator BOURNE—It seems like everybody is in agreement on it.

Senator GIBBS—Everybody has got a love affair with the Middle East at the moment.

Mr Jacob—Especially with the oil prices at \$30.

CHAIR—Or \$35.

Senator GIBBS—And it looks like it will go up.

Mr PYNE—You mentioned the Iraqi market and the food for oil program. How is Australia involving itself in the Iraqi market? What is your opinion of the sanctions on Iraq and whether perhaps they should be relaxed or not relaxed? Could you give us your view on that? We have had lots of views on that from lots of different people with political axes to grind, but it would be interesting to hear from an economic point of view your views on the Iraqi situation.

Mr Johnson—Iraq traditionally has always been a great market for us. I do not really want to comment on the sanctions. That is a federal issue, and we all go through that, but on a personal

basis—I am not sure if my colleagues here would comment as well—there are opportunities in Iraq. People think it is only for food but it is not; it is for a wide range of products and services. At some time in the future these sanctions are going to be lifted. I feel that, under the United Nations mandate, if we can trade and develop and maintain linkages with businesses in Iraq we should. It is a market that has always been a good market for Australia. It still is. We export around about \$100 million a year into the market.

Mr PYNE—What were we exporting before?

Mr Johnson—Predominantly food products.

Mr PYNE—What was the dollar value?

Mr Johnson—We could get back to you on that one. We might have some figures prior to the Gulf War. It was quite a sizeable market for us.

Mr PYNE—Do you know the general percentage drop in trade since then?

Mr Johnson—We can get back to you on that. I would not have that off the top of my head, no.

Mr PYNE—Because you had hoped, perhaps when sanctions were lifted, you could return to that sort of level of trade in Iraq.

Mr Johnson—The analogy was made to me that there are black countries, grey countries and good guys. The United States and the United Kingdom are definitely the bad guys. Countries like France and maybe some other European countries are the good guys and we are in the grey.

Mr PYNE—Are we in the grey because of our closeness to the United States?

Mr Johnson—I would suggest so, yes.

Mr PYNE—Could you perhaps let us know what the percentage and dollar values were for trade with Iraq pre the Gulf War and what they are now? That would give us an idea of what they may return to when the sanctions are lifted.

Mr Johnson—We will give it just from the Western Australian point of view. Is that okay?

Mr PYNE—Yes, from the Western Australian point of view, give us an idea what they might return to if sanctions were lifted. Do you get much lobbying from Western Australian business about the Iraqi sanctions, or from Western Australian farmers?

Mr Johnson—I have not had any experience of that.

Mr Jacob—Just that one company who is interested.

Mr Johnson—We had a company who was interested in safety training, particularly in the oil industry. There does not seem to be any impediment to their doing business there provided they follow the guidelines set out by the United Nations. My understanding is that payment is through a bank in New York. I can think of a lot worse places than having payments made through New York.

Mr Jacob—That actually is BNP (New York).

CHAIR—Does the Western Australian government have any official view, or private thoughts, on the boat people who have come here from the Middle East? Has that had any major effect on the state? Are there any particular concerns that the state might have?

Mr Murali—It is difficult to quantify at the moment, but certainly I think there was a previous question in terms of perceptions of racism. I think, because the bulk of such refugees are from that region at the moment, the longer the Australian government takes to process these people and give them the legitimacy to stay in this country—or not—the greater the perceptions of racism might become. Certainly from that point of view there is some anecdotal feeling about the relationship there, but aside from that we do not have any major issues in that regard.

Mr PYNE—How many of the migrants are being kept here in Western Australia?

Mr Murali—A very large proportion is in the detention centre in Port Hedland. The other large proportion is in Woomera, South Australia.

Mr PYNE—Western Australians have traditionally had large migration from South Africa because of your proximity to Africa, so I would have thought that Western Australia would have been a destination of choice for many Middle Eastern migrants seeking to leave the Middle East, as opposed to going to Tasmania or Sydney or Melbourne, simply because of the geographic proximity. Would you say that that was true and probably likely to be even more so if you did have direct air links?

Mr Johnson—That is a factor. For some countries, it really depends on the support that is there. South Africans come and settle and then it becomes a community and it attracts people to come through. That often is a larger determining factor. Certainly from countries like Indonesia I would say that that would apply. I do not know about from Malaysia. Yes, it is a factor, but what opportunities exist and what community network is available for people to tap into become larger determining factors than geographic location.

CHAIR—We do not necessarily sell ourselves very well in some of these places. In your submission, in terms of education, you make the statement that there is basically a fair ignorance in Middle Eastern countries about the opportunities we have here. The Australian Information Service, which used to do a bit of promotion of Australia, has gone. Is there an argument for trying to create a greater sense of knowledge of Australia's facilities and its attractions? I suppose, if that were so, it would have to be a federal government instrumentality that would take it on.

Mr Johnson—I think we all have a view on this. My personal view is that Australia, in many regards, does a very good job of selling itself, but it also holds back on selling itself properly. I

think we can do a much better job, certainly in countries like the Middle East and so on, not only in selling ourselves as a destination for tourism or for a market for products but also in helping to change the perceptions. The general perception of Australia is that it is a great place for a holiday ‘but there ain’t nothing there’, and that is just so untrue.

I strongly believe that you need to get people here. Rather than us telling them, we need to get people to come here. Whenever you have people coming here, the first thing that they always comment is, ‘I didn’t realise you had all this stuff here.’ We are a sophisticated economy, we have world best practice in many factors and many industries, we are very innovative and we are a very friendly and multicultural society. There are perceptions that really need to change.

On bringing people here—businesspeople and government people, particularly the decision makers—I have never known them to go back disappointed. Surprise is what we have. But the key to all this is the follow-up. It is all very well having people coming here and saying, ‘Oh, Australia is great!’ but they get distracted. We have to follow this up. We have to really work hard at this. It is a big wide world out there. You cannot just do it once. It is ongoing.

Mr Murali—To add to that, I think a concerted effort has to be put into creating the perception that this is a positive destination, because people in that region already have a perception of the United States and Europe, et cetera and you are competing with that perception. There has to be a very focused effort on changing that perception and saying that Australia is just as attractive a destination as the US or Europe might be.

Senator GIBBS—It was the Gold Coast, wasn’t it, who were saying that they were competing with Orlando—‘Come to the Gold Coast’?

Mr Murali—Yes.

Mr Jacob—Quite often, when we say ‘here’, Perth is left out. We hope that will be taken on board as well.

Mr PYNE—I can assure you Perth is never left out!

Mr Jacob—We have had dignitaries come to Australia and not come to Perth.

CHAIR—The Australian Tourist Commission does pretty well on their visiting journalists program, and they make very great play of that. Hundreds come in every year and they claim they could never buy the publicity themselves, and that is probably very true. I understand that our trade people do a little bit of it. Does the Western Australian government have any sort of visiting program for journalists?

Mr Johnson—Yes, we do. We have a buyer visitor program for businesspeople as well. Again, I think they do an excellent job on the tourism side, but the perception needs to be addressed. I think your initial question was whether it is a federal matter. I think it is everyone’s responsibility. I do not think one particular part of government takes responsibility for this. I think this is a national matter and we all should be doing the same thing.

The perception that needs to be addressed is that this is a sophisticated economy, an economy that is not a quarry in a paddock—it is much more than that—and it is that image that I believe we need to work on. It is a great destination for education. We have fantastic education facilities, good research and development capabilities. We are innovative. Pushing this does not have to be blatant. It has to be subtle but it has to be consistent and it has to be strong. I think it is very important, especially as we become less and less dependent on commodities, that we have that third pillar, for want of a better word. We have to really promote and sell ourselves.

Senator BOURNE—I notice you mention that you see Dubai opening itself up or promoting itself as the equivalent of Singapore, meaning opportunities for IT services from here. Has anything been done about that? Have IT services from Perth or from WA to Dubai been promoted?

Mr Jacob—Not IT services per se but the capabilities that we have. Companies on their own have gone to the Middle East: for example, AB Video. In Saudi Arabia there is a museum convention centre for which a WA company has supplied all the audiovisual, which is a sophisticated multimedia kind of thing supplied for that particular museum convention centre. That in itself is publicity. Likewise, Multiplex, which is a huge company here, has just built a tower and now has another contract to build another one. Fittings, in the IT area particularly, with wired communications, obviously involve other companies, particularly Western Australian companies that they are familiar with. That itself is a good marketing exercise, but on a structured campaign we have not taken an IT based trade show to the Middle East.

Mr PYNE—But there are individual companies themselves over there?

Mr Jacob—That is right.

Mr PYNE—On the migration issue, we talked briefly about the refugees, illegal migrants, arriving and you referred to attitudes towards racism. My own experience in Adelaide has been that attitudes towards Middle Eastern refugees have hardened since the arrival of illegal migrants because there is a feeling that they are trying to jump the queue or whatever. You left me with the impression that the attitude amongst people who live in Western Australia had not hardened towards Middle Eastern illegal migrants. Is that the case or have I misread what you were suggesting? I would think it would be difficult to believe that there had not been some hardening of attitudes.

Mr Murali—I would say that there has been a hardening of attitude here in Western Australia towards the group of illegal immigrants from the Middle East, principally because the media has paid it so much attention over here. In the newspaper you read that, in every other boatload that comes across to Ashmore Reef, the composition of the illegal arrivals is 58 Iraqis and two Bangladeshis, for instance. There is definitely a hardening of perception.

Mr Johnson—There is also a growing feeling of disgust about the people who promote this trade. Yes, people do not like people jumping the queue, but this trade in people, purporting that they can get people through legally, is the area that we should really nip in the bud, and it is a global problem. These people should be the ones that we are targeting. We need to get a message out through our embassies and consulates, ‘Don’t believe these people. This is the

proper way of doing it.’ I think we owe people in the country of origin explanations about what is happening.

Mr PYNE—The danger is, of course, that legitimate markets in the Middle East will be targeted because they might be perceived to be illegal markets who have been given refugee status down the track. Obviously, the way to solve the problem is to make sure that they are processed quickly and efficiently and dealt with so that we can say to the Australian people, ‘We have this problem under control. Only legitimate people are being allowed to stay, illegitimate people are being sent home and the legitimate migration program is going on without too much of a problem.’

Mr Johnson—I would like to think that, as a country, we are a very tolerant people and that people who genuinely come through the system, regardless of where they come from, are accepted into our society. It is the illegal aspects—people trying to queue, the people who promote this trade—that are the real problem. We need to get the message out through our own embassies in the countries of origin, in countries like China, and Indonesia, where this trade seems to be prominent: ‘Get those guys, put them on a boat and sink them!’

Mr Jacob—As far as commerce and trade are concerned, although the committee has a wider reference, we are looking from the point of view of trade, and that is our submission as well. Mostly, the other will be covered by the Ministry of the Premier and Cabinet. Maybe I should point out where we are coming from.

Mr Murali—From our perspective, the Ministry of the Premier and Cabinet has certainly made it very clear to appropriate Commonwealth agencies, as well as in the submissions that we put forward to DIMA in the annual migration and humanitarian intakes, that we do not condone queue jumping. We are very keen to ensure that the source and transit countries of the illegal immigrants are made aware of Australia’s stance on queue jumping, et cetera. We certainly think that a lot of effort has to be devoted to that area to ensure that the perception that we give is against queue jumping and is against the traffickers who traffic in desperate human beings. At the same time, there is also a perception in a large section of the community that these people are desperate, and that is why they are doing these things, so our rage should be directed towards the traffickers rather than the actual immigrants. I think that slowly we can put the effort in and slowly start turning the perception around.

CHAIR—I thank you very much indeed for your attendance here today. If there are any other matters we need some additional information on, we will get the secretary to contact you. We will also send you a draft of the evidence, for you to make any corrections that you might think are necessary. The Hansard officer may wish to check some of your evidence, so could I ask you to remain for a minute or two and check with them before you go. Thank you very much indeed. That has been a most helpful contribution.

Resolved:

That *Market Opportunities in the Indian Ocean Region May 1998* by the Department of Commerce and Trade of the government of Western Australia and *Western Australia’s Exports in the Middle East* be accepted as evidence.

Mr Jacob—Just to elaborate, that is our Indian Ocean markets strategy for the state, which was relaunched in 1998, and the other one is the update of the figures we submitted earlier.

CHAIR—Thank you.

[10.07 a.m.]

KAMALKHANI, Dr Zahra (Private capacity)

CHAIR—On behalf of the subcommittee, I welcome Dr Zahra Kamalkhani of the Edith Cowan University. The subcommittee prefers that all evidence be given in public, but should you at any stage wish to give your evidence in private you may ask to do so and the subcommittee will give consideration to your request. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence on oath, I should advise you that these hearings are legal proceedings of parliament and therefore have the same standing as proceedings of the parliament itself. I invite you to make a short opening statement, if you wish, and then we can proceed to questions.

Dr Kamalkhani—I will make a summary of my submission paper and try to explore the main issues that are discussed or have taken the attention of the committee. The issues that are discussed are mainly motives and the pushing factor in home and transit countries and exile-coping strategies among recently arrived Muslim and Middle Eastern refugees in Western Australia. I have to explain that what I call recently arrived Muslim refugees are those who have been here as late as a few months ago and as early as a decade ago. Then we are talking about refugees who have arrived in Western Australia, approximately, for example, since 1991-92 and up to a few months ago.

The focus group that I have is Afghani, Iraqi and Somali, but in my submission paper I focused on the Iraqis and Afghans. Not only are they illegal refugees but I can say there are three major categories: one group consists of those who came under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees program, another group consists of boat refugees and the third group consists of sponsored refugees. I can further explore those.

Australia has been faced with this problem of the arrival of these groups of refugees much later than western and northern European countries. This in itself is interesting, particularly when I look at my own study in Norway among Iranians in the eighties and nineties. That was the time that you could experience the flow of Iranian refugees coming to countries all over the world, particularly in Europe. That in itself gives me some idea in comparing how they deal with the situation and how Australia is dealing with the situation and what is the advantage and disadvantage in the series of programs that have been initiated and conducted here.

The national political history of the home countries and transit countries of these refugees has generated continuously sets of pushing factors in out-migrations and in the flow from one country to another until final destinations in Australia. This has been going on, I can say, since the 1970s. You can see the results of those things that have happened in any of these refugee camps today. They are not the sorts of refugees that you can say about, 'Look at it. Are they coming directly from Iraq or Afghanistan? What is their situation?' We have to look at their situation in the last three decades, the countries they have been passing through and they leave as the transit country.

The problem started in the late 1970s, particularly in the Middle East during the Iranian revolution. That was the biggest event in the area and that has also created so many of the

refugees that I explained about in my submission. For example, the Iraqi government has sent so many Shii and those with an Iranian heritage or background to Iran prior to and after the revolution. That in itself created so much political turbulence and a flow of people into the neighbouring countries, and indirectly the revolution has also affected these people.

But Iran is the only one in the region receiving a large number of refugees. For example, the number of Afghani refugees in Iran, they say, is 2.3 million, and the number of Iraqis has not actually been published but I can say it is 1.3 million and it is increasing quite a lot. There are a large number. Iran always had Kurdish people not only located near the border but coming to the cities. There was a flow of refugees coming to Iran but at the same time there was a flow of refugees going out of Iran and, after a few years, for example, we can say that a large number of these recently arrived legal refugees actually lived in Iran before. There are those who have been sent out of Iraq a decade ago, or 20 years ago, and now they are coming to Western societies, and one can see why it is happening.

There are refugees who have been in the area for many years and now they are coming out of these countries. Not only do we have to look at the situation of the home countries of these refugees but also at the transit countries and how the situation in the transit countries is not only not getting peaceful but also how the tension is rising. We have to look at the political set of discourses, the political conflict in the area. For example, in Iran the question of Iraqi and Afghani refugees has always been a political issue, not only for the present government. President Khatami, who is a moderate person, has to deal with those who are non-moderate, more conservative, or those who are more willing maybe to have more Iraqi or other ethnic Muslim groups in the area. It has been a political issue in the area and it never rests. It is something that, particularly now, I think is getting even more serious.

Many Iraqis and Afghans know about this situation, although some of them have not lived in the area for 20 years. I am really surprised when I see them here in Western Australia and they speak Farsi and they even feel like Iranians, but they have not been recognised or they could not feel completely secure in staying in a transit country such as Iran, or even Pakistan or another place. But let us focus on the situation in Iran. They followed the refugee movement either through the illegal flow or, for example, as sponsored refugees, but they could not come through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for some very clear reason.

I can stop here because I would like to answer the particular questions that the committee is interested in and that it wants me to explore more or to focus on. But what I can say is that the issue of identifying refugees is a very serious matter here and it is in the context of political reality that we have to look at it. The definition of 'refugee' has been very clear since 1951, if I can remember the date, from the United Nations conventions for refugees. These refugees who are coming in a different sort of category, either under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or as a boat refugee or a sponsored refugee, actually share a series of problems that more or less look the same. Then the question is: how can we make a definition of who is a genuine refugee or who is not? Does it mean that those who stay in the camp are the most genuine refugees? I know many try to stay in the camp in order to be considered genuine refugees, but I know many Iraqi refugees who came prior to 1999 to Western Australia from the Rafha camp, which is located in northern Saudi Arabia, and they stayed between three to seven years in order to come out of the country, and it is still such a populated refugee camp. They share sets of problems. One can say their lives were in danger, their family lives were in danger,

particularly the women who had to follow their husbands, and the most difficulty that they had was how their husbands or their male relatives could stay in the country without having a problem. Then I can also explore some of the situations of women refugees either as spouses or those who came on their own refugee grounds.

CHAIR—Could I open the questioning by asking you how you personally regard our temporary visa system that is in place here for the Middle Eastern refugees who arrived on the boats?

Dr Kamalkhani—The temporary protection visa of three years was introduced in October-November 1999. I think the group that is coming after the introduction of this law consists mainly of single men, and the majority are from Hazara in Shiah populations. But it has created so many problems. First of all, coming from such a Middle Eastern culture—an Afghani culture or an Iraqi culture—they have the responsibility of the family. It looks as if the majority are single men—married single men or those who are not married—and the majority have a family in Iran or another place, in a transit country. In many places, for example, they have a mother or sister in Iran, they have a wife in Afghanistan to take care of the land and the house, and the man is here in the city. He knows that he will stay here for three years.

But it looks as if it has created a problem, mentally. They know that they have to take care of their families. Some of them get an allowance from the government and also they have Medicare here, but I do not know if it is different in other states. I notice that some of them have a Medicare card and they can get, for example, \$300 a fortnight. But they save this money to send to several places—Iran, Afghanistan—and they try to support their families. These single men need their families emotionally and they feel so insecure. They move from one state to another. After a few months in WA they move to Sydney or to the south because somebody promises to get them a job either on a farm or in the sort of cash money economy that has been integrated.

This has created not only settlement problems for these refugees but also a sense of continuous migration for them—they are moving from one state to another, and they do not know how long it is going to take. I am sure that in this process so many unpredictable things are going to happen. Psychologically, they are under severe pressure, and they are saying very clearly that, if they had known that their situation was going to be like this, they would never have decided to come as illegal refugees or as refugees out of Iran, leaving their families in transit countries. Now they are in the situation that not only are they unable to go back home due to expenses, due to security, due to political reasons or other things, they cannot go further here. That is very serious for several reasons. We are going to have people here on a three-year visa. They are insecure, single men in the city, meeting other ethnic community members, and they become not only low-class members of their own communities but a low-class ethnic group in the city.

I am sure if you look at it in a general perspective you can see that that is the way mental illness can happen. Crime maybe can happen. Bribery can happen. Somebody can abuse them. I am sure they do, because some of them have actually been paid only a few dollars to work in a garden. But when you look at this person, this person has had a real life, family, house, education and a profession. Are these people going to stay here for good like that, or after three

years will you send them to another country? How can we deal with these people during these three years?

I am sure it costs Australia a lot if this person commits a crime or becomes a sort of insecure member of society. That is very serious. I compare the situation of these people with those who are secure, who can get their passport after two years; this was really an advantage for them because they feel that they are secure now. They have an Australian passport. If you look at their statistics, 99 per cent, if not 100 per cent, of Iraqi, Afghani or Somali refugees apply for Australian citizenship after two years, the minimum period of waiting after the first time permanent residency has been issued.

That has been very positive compared to other countries. For example, Australia is unique because after two years you can get your citizenship. In Norway it can take 10 years, in Europe it can take several years, in Canada three years. But they understand this as an advantage and positive, because with a passport they feel secure. When you feel secure you try to establish things. They try to save money to buy a house. If you look at those Iraqis who came here eight or seven years ago, compared to many other ethnic groups in Western Australia, I am really surprised that, with the little money they earn, they do lots of saving. They save \$5,000 and they borrow money to buy a house for \$70,000 in order to establish family life and try to be independent. That is because they feel secure and confident that they can stay here as long as they like, and that is the way one can integrate a new member of society properly into society.

I can see that those groups coming here, under temporary protection visas, when they haven't got a family, which is very important to them, work very hard and they send maybe their last dollar that they earn here to their family back home. How can they live here? They cut all their own social activity. They do not go to the city because even with a concession card it costs them a dollar. They save that money. They try to get as much work as they are offered. This is not a proper way to integrate these people. I am not saying they are citizens but they are members of society, at least for the three years. But those who feel secure start to establish themselves. They say, 'I save the money. I don't go so often to the cinema or to the movies or spend on travelling between the states or other expenses, but I will purchase a house and try to establish myself,' and they do. They feel more secure.

We have to look at the situation of their children and wives and the way that they try to be settled. Maybe they are not 100 per cent settled; they are still thinking that one day they may go back home. But that is the good feeling that they have. At least they know that they can stay here as long as they like—and they need to be independent and to have all the security and economic possibilities of many other people in this society. But when I talk to those people who come and live here under the three-year protection visa—say, a single man—the only thing I can say is that one day they are in this house; the other day they are in Adelaide. One day they are in Sydney, because a friend promised them they are going to get a job, and then they know where they are going to live. It is very serious, and one has to look at what will happen to them.

I can see this person who is going to stay here three years—he has been already in Iran maybe for five, 10 years; he has been maybe in Pakistan for two, three years. He has been moving since the late 1970s. How long is this person going to move; which country is he going to after here? This is something that the international community have to look at to see what they are going to do with these people. He has not come out of Afghanistan only a year ago. He has been

travelling—some of them through Russia. Many of them now, particularly the boat refugees, go through Tajikistan, to Russia, to maybe Malaysia and then get a boat and come here. I can see the positive things for those who have a passport. They feel secure and immediately they apply for Australian citizenship, and this is very important. We have many other ethnic groups here that after 20 years do not apply for Australian citizenship, and the question is why they do not. If they do, that is an advantage. That is something that means they are going to feel they are living at home, and actually they live at home, and one can see that in the very near future their children will feel that Australia is the only country they know.

Senator BOURNE—I noticed that in the paper you gave us one of the points you made was that many of the women would rather stay where they are because they are comfortable there and it is part of a society they are aware of, and they have not been targeted necessarily because of their political activities, but of course they want to be part of the family so they come out here. That seems to lead us to a conclusion that, if they were able to, they would rather stay there, but of course it is so insecure for them that they have to go somewhere else. Do you find that that is the case not just with these women you were talking about here? This was in Iran, I think, and they were Iraqi refugees in Iran. Do you find that is the case with most of the women that you speak to?

Dr Kamalkhani—The very interesting thing is the differences between women's and men's feelings being in Australia and the way they have been integrated into the society. Yes, they say that if they had known that they were going to face such situations in Australia maybe they would have thought about it carefully. But they say that they compare their situation with that in Iran, at least in the last 10 years. The situation in Iran also has changed since the revolution. It has gone through a series of political, economic and social situations. The situation after the revolution in 1979 has been very critical and very difficult and hard maybe for many ethnic groups, not only Iranian, but the situation has quite changed in the last 10 years. For some Iraqis they have their own community in the city called Qum and that is a key religious city and still very traditional. The large population of Iraqis has actually moved or been encouraged to be located, to live, in this city.

These Afghans are mostly located in Mashad, in the north-eastern city of Iran very close to the border with Afghanistan. They prefer to stay there rather than come to Australia. They compare their situation with the transit countries such as Iran, but not maybe transit countries such as Pakistan or living in Iraq or Afghanistan. But there are two aspects to their life situation. One is cultural and the other is economic. Culturally, when they come here, the thing that happens is that they become much more isolated and excluded from society than they used to be in their home country or even in a transit country such as Iran.

They feel they become more isolated, and one of the reasons is that they live in a remote area. The husband is the person who tries to get a job, get out of the house, get a car and move socially, but the wife has got the full responsibility for the children and their education and her skills, particularly those highly educated Iraqi or Afghani women, are not recognised in Australia. They are middle-aged women, between 30 and 40. If you have a skill or profession in your home country, you always have a mother or sister to take care of your family or share the responsibility of your family. For example, they always were around you to take care of your children and you continue to study or to work. These women were actually highly professional, but when they come here they are a nuclear family. They have a husband and children and they

are living in a remote area. The English language they may have. Some of them are fluent in the English language but they still feel so isolated. The only way that they can move or they can integrate themselves within society is to go for further education and it takes several years to do so. They usually have children under school age or of school age, and they need full responsibility and full care. They can see that they will not have their sister or mother here in Australia. They even think that it is impossible with the rules that have changed. The situation has become more difficult in Australia. Maybe they will never get a chance to have their sister, mother or other relatives here in Australia. And actually it has happened. I know many of them have applied several times. After every two years they get a rejection of their application and they know that they are not going to have their own sister in Australia. These people I am talking about are Australian citizens. They came under the High Commissioner for Refugees as refugees and they are Australian citizens now, but they cannot see any chance to have a sister or mother as part of the family reunion here because of a series of requirements and changes and more restriction.

In this way the situation for women becomes even more difficult. Whenever Australia makes more restrictions on the family reunion, the women's situation becomes even more difficult, and they see themselves as very passive. Very clearly they say, 'We just sit and eat,' and take care of their family and responsibilities. But they had a very active life in their home country and even in the transit country. They had a mother or sister. They did not need to drive on a freeway for hours and hours or get a driving licence or have a car or have other resources to go outside and be active in the social arena, in social places. They could just go with the mother or sister, stay outside in the evening. With this cultural part, they really had an advantage. They lose many of these aspects of active social life here. But the other thing they are thinking about is that they have to join their husband here. With many of them the husband came first, and then after two years they joined them. They could not stay in Iran on their own. We are talking about a culture where women always think about the family and children's prosperity rather than looking at their own situation and their own individual interests, and that is because they are more devoted. Once they are here, they cannot go back. They have no resources or power to bring their sisters and other relatives to share some responsibility or some emotional or social life with them.

That is because the situation for a woman, I think, has become very difficult. I can tell you of a case of a woman who got Australian citizenship. She was so happy and she told me, 'Now I'm going to go back to Iran.' I can see that there is some flow of refugees who are going back to Iran, but the situation that Iran is in now, I am sure, is going to be more difficult for refugees. That has been the issue: why Iran, which has problems providing jobs for its own citizens, with such a difficult economic life and people leaving, high inflation, very expensive living standards, has more and more Iraqi or Afghani refugees. I can see that it is very much the political and religious reasons. They are going to support some of these groups as Muslims rather than thinking about their future and their life as a citizen in those countries.

Senator BOURNE—You are saying here, I think, that it is now on the political agenda in Iran: what do we do with refugees; should we repatriate them? That would be a nightmare, I would imagine.

Dr Kamalkhani—Yes, it is. The situation also for the Iranian government is very complex, because there are different groups of Afghanis coming in, and they are trying to control who is coming in. Smuggling is going on very much in Iran. I think they are sensitive to accept Iraqis,

but the Iraqis themselves have problems in the job market and with family life. They are saying that if they had had a chance to send their children to a proper school, if they had been sure that Iran would not send them back, if they had been sure that their husband was going to get a job, they would never have thought of coming to Australia.

The other problem is that for the majority of these refugees—most refugees or those who came in the last eight or nine years to Australia; these Muslim refugees—Australia is the first Western country that they have experienced. This is different from other Muslim migrants in Australia. For example, if you look at the Muslim Iranian or even the Lebanese or Turkish, they have always had the other experience of living in Europe or other Western societies, or at least they travelled back and forth. They were familiar with the Western lifestyle. They had lived in non-Muslim societies before. But not this group. In some cultural respects it becomes very difficult. They become more isolated. They remain very excluded within their own ethnic groups and it has also been difficult to integrate with non-Muslim or non-Iraqi or non-Afghani ethnic groups. I think that is an issue here.

Mr PYNE—You have said that the Khatami regime in Iran is a more moderate regime. What is the current situation with cracking down on minorities in Iran?

Dr Kamalkhani—It depends which minority you are talking about, because they sometimes like some minorities and they do not like other minorities. I think maybe wherever you go you can face that situation. I understand that Iran did not like the Baha'i minority, at least during and after the revolution. But I cannot say it is the same situation in the last four or five years. There have been some positive changes.

Mr PYNE—It has a bearing on the sort of refugees that will be coming out of Iran, doesn't it—what sort of minorities are being cracked down upon? Do you know what I mean?

Dr Kamalkhani—No.

Mr PYNE—If the Iranian regime is moderate and not cracking down on its minorities, people are unlikely to feel the need to leave. But, if they are cracking down on minorities, people will try and leave. So it depends who has been under the hammer, I guess, as to how many refugees come out of Iran.

Dr Kamalkhani—Yes, that is what I said. They like some minorities but they do not like other minorities. For example, with the Iraqi minority as an ethnic minority, religious ethnic minority, or other Muslim religious minorities, I think Iran—at least not the Khatami regime; I think he tried to follow other conservative Islamic parties in Iran who are in favour of other ethnic Muslim minorities living in Iran. That is because the Iraqis are very good Muslims; they like them. But Iran cannot provide, or they are not willing to provide, all the necessities. They want them as members of the society, those who are fully practising Muslims, those who are practising Muslims even more than the average Iranian. I can see that selectivity has always been the case in Iran.

Iran maybe had some problems in the beginning, during the revolution, with some Jewish groups. Iran is populated by a Jewish minority, particularly in some cities. The Jewish minority were scared and went to Israel. But the situation for Jews has not been difficult. The only

difficult period was during the revolution and that was because they were very scared and they were harassed, and they thought their businesses were going to burn and many other things might happen to their families. At the same time they also had an invitation from Israel. If they wanted to, they could get permission to enter the country.

But we have so many minorities, both ethnic minorities and religious minorities, in Iran. There has always been some difficulty with some minorities. The most difficult period for some minorities was during the revolution, until the early nineties. But since Khatami came into power many things have been improved. One of the reasons is that he always tries to treat women, and minorities, as equal citizens and he tries to promote equality and mutual respect and other issues. However, what is said and what happens are always different in practice and different things may happen in different local areas that you are not aware of or you can never predict, such as hating each other or killing each other; Jewish people here or Christian priests in other cities.

It has never been that one case means the ideology for the state or that everybody is going to be against this minority group. It has always been that several cases happen, despite the state trying to promote equal respect for his own citizens. But I cannot say that in general the minorities have problems in Iran. I can say some minorities—religious or ethnic minorities; mostly on a religious basis—had problems, particularly up to the early nineties. But the situation has been more under control, more moderate and more flexible. For example, the Baha'is maybe never had a chance to travel back and forth to Iran before, but I can say that many of them do now. This has happened because of a series of agreements between Iran and the international community protecting minorities, and recognising Iranians who have multinationality. According to some agreement, some procedure, they can go to Iran and, for some particular purposes or for a limited time, they can stay there and then they can come back.

Mr PYNE—Many Baha'is still claim that they are persecuted in Iran by having their property taken from them, or they are sometimes jailed and even their lives taken from them. Would you say that is happening less now than it was two or three years ago?

Dr Kamalkhani—I can say it is much less now. I know this argument by many Baha'is, but I can say that the situation is much less. I can say also that there are very few Baha'is who actually live in Iran, but Iran has always punished those who left the country illegally, who left the country via the airport. When they go back to Iran they may have some punishment. But I do not think confiscating property on religious grounds has been an issue in Iran in the last four or five years.

Mr PYNE—With respect to the Jewish population in Iran, would you say that the recent trials involving the so-called 13 Jewish spies was an isolated incident? It received a lot of international attention.

Dr Kamalkhani—I cannot say much about other minorities, but if I can go back to the key issue that I raised here for Iraqi and Afghani refugees, their situation in Iran, I can say that they have no problem as such, like other religious minorities. But let us focus on the situation, if you do not mind, of these—

Mr PYNE—I think they have a plane to catch, rather than being dismayed by your comments.

Dr Kamalkhani—That is another argument. I can come back, if you like, and give another paper for the other minorities in Iran.

Mr PYNE—It is interesting to me because it is a barometer of the political situation in Iran and, if the political situation in Iran is a comfortable and stable one, it is less likely to lead to an influx of refugees into Australia, whereas of course if it is unstable there is going to be a greater number of refugees. The example of the trials involving the 13 so-called Jewish spies was, I thought, an unusual thing to be happening in a country that was claiming to be tending towards the moderate position of Islam as opposed to the previously hard-line stance that they adopted. I wondered whether that was an isolated incident or whether it was maybe President Khatami trying to indicate that he was still a strong leader of the Islamic world.

Dr Kamalkhani—That has been in court for many days, and many of the issues they discussed were in public. I know people were watching on television. Some of the Jewish people confessed, either forcefully or willingly. They confessed that they were receiving and the only issue was they had been receiving lots of money from overseas. Being in Iran when each dollar bought 1,000 Toman, if you had \$100 it meant you had the wage of a teacher for a month; so if somebody had received so many thousand dollars in their account there was an immediate suspicion.

I am not familiar with all the details from the court, but one of the key issues that raised suspicion was the money—how much money and why this money had come from a particular country to your account. That was the issue of money. I do not know how they explained it. You can always be under suspicion as a spy if you are Jewish. But I do not know the result of this court. It has been going on for many days. Much of the hearing was in public and on television and people could hear what was said—the accusations and how they defended themselves. But I cannot say that all the Jewish or Christian or other religious minorities have the same situation in Iran.

I can say that many Iranian Muslims may be in the same situation as those Jewish. They can be under suspicion of bribery. I could be under suspicion, if they did not recognise my research here. I could be under suspicion, because I am receiving money from a research institute, that maybe I am a spy, if I am not willing to show that I am not or if I try to present a document or try to convince them somehow. That is the issue. I cannot say that is only this particular group, but I am sure they are more vulnerable when they are very different from others. I am not familiar with the case at all, but I can assume those sorts of things—how the suspicion has arisen. They try to intervene. They try to pursue that sort of case in the justice system, but in that country you are not always 100 per cent sure who is going to take your case because there is always conflict between the moderates, the more conservative, the less conservative, as to which religious group is going to be giving the final vote to the court and who is trying to protect you. There is always tension and insecurity. There have been several cases like that, but I can see also that for many other Iranians it can be the same situation.

Mr PYNE—Thanks.

ACTING CHAIR (Senator Bourne)—Thank you very much for appearing. That has been very interesting evidence.

Mr PYNE—It has been very interesting.

ACTING CHAIR—If we have anything else we need to find out from you, would it be okay if we write to you?

Dr Kamalkhani—Yes.

ACTING CHAIR—That would be really good. Thanks. We will send you a copy of the draft transcript of your evidence. If you find there are things that have been written down wrongly, you can correct them and get that back to us. Thank you very much for appearing here. If we need any more information we will get back in touch with you.

Mr PYNE—Thank you very much.

Subcommittee adjourned at 10.51 a.m.