

Context of the visit to the Gulf States

Background to the inquiry

- 1.1 The Minister for Trade referred an inquiry into Australia's trade and investment relations with the Gulf States to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs Defence and Trade (JSCFADT) on 14 August 2003.
- 1.2 The Trade Sub-Committee of the JSCFADT was assigned the inquiry. The formal terms of reference are included in the preceding pages. A map of the countries which are the subject of this inquiry is also included in the preceding pages.
- 1.3 This inquiry follows on from the work undertaken by the Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee of the JSCFADT in the August 2001 inquiry into Australia's relations with the Middle East.
- 1.4 The current inquiry, though more narrowly focused than the Middle East inquiry, aims to build on work done during the course of the previous inquiry, especially with regard to Chapter 6 'Australia's trade relationship with the region'. This visit report is one component of the inquiry.

Background to the visit

- 1.5 The visit delegation comprised five members of the Trade Sub-Committee. The visit was held from 10 - 23 April 2004 and involved 37 meetings, with over 60 people in five countries. Meetings took place with business people (Australian expatriate and local), industry peak bodies, chambers of commerce, government officials and parliamentarians.

Selection of countries to visit

- 1.6 Logistical and scheduling requirements mean that this visit was limited on this occasion to UAE, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. These countries represent Australia's largest trading partners in the region.
- 1.7 Mid way through the visit, the committee received an invitation from Qatar Airways to meet with its CEO in Doha, which the committee accepted – taking the delegation to a fifth country. The full program of meetings is included at Appendix A.

The role of the visit report

- 1.8 Parliamentary delegations in support of committee inquiries serve several purposes, including the following:
- To contribute to the parliament's understanding of the issues involved in the inquiry
 - To enhance awareness in Australia and in the countries of the inquiry
 - To provide opportunities for Australia's official representatives in subject countries to meet with and lobby high level officials, politicians and parliamentarians in those countries.
 - To facilitate high level contacts between Australian parliamentarians and overseas officials, politicians, parliamentarians, business leaders journalists and others for the purposes of the inquiry.
- 1.9 This particular visit was deemed by the government to be important for Australia and Australia's engagement with the region in the terms laid out above.

- 1.10 The visit report aims to capture the vast range of information and impressions gained during the visit, while they are fresh in the minds of the committee. The inquiry report will be a broader and more thorough account of all evidence obtained during the course of the inquiry. This visit report will be an important though subsidiary supplement to the report of the inquiry due to be published in late 2004.
- 1.11 This report will contain some recommendations based mainly on information and impressions gained during the visit.

