

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
AUSTRALIAN CUSTOMS SERVICE

Question No. 52

Senator Stott-Despoja asked the following question in writing:

SmartGate:

- a) When will SmartGate and the use of biometric passports be rolled out nationally?
- b) What is the total cost to Government of the SmartGate system so far?
- c) What was the initial budget for the SmartGate system?
- d) It has been reported that the testing of SmartGate at Brisbane Airport exposed a number of flaws in the system - what were those flaws?
- e) What is the false rejection rate for SmartGate?
- f) How long has the SmartGate project taken to be implemented, from conceptualisation to national rollout?
- g) What safeguards are in place to ensure the privacy of people subject to facial recognition technology through SmartGate?
- h) Was a Privacy Impact Assessment conducted in relation to SmartGate? If so, please provide details. If not, why not?
- i) Provide details of any independent and/or expert review of the SmartGate project.
- j) What information regarding the SmartGate project is available to the public?
- k) Does the Government intend to mandate the use of biometric passports at any time? If so, when?

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

a) When will SmartGate and the use of biometric passports be rolled out nationally?

SmartGate is currently available at Brisbane and Cairns international airports and is scheduled to be rolled out to Australia's remaining international airports by June 2009 subject to negotiation with airport operators.

All Australian passports issued after 24 October 2005 are ePassports (biometric passports).

b) What is the total cost to Government of the SmartGate system so far?

In the 2005–06 Budget, the Federal Government committed \$61.7 million over four years towards the phased implementation of SmartGate into Australia's international airports. To date, the program is meeting forecasted expenditure.

c) What was the initial budget for the SmartGate system?

Cabinet Funding of \$3.3million for the SmartGate project was approved as part of a tri-agency program involving Customs, DFAT and DIAC for biometric work in 2004–05.

In the 2005–06 Budget, the Federal Government committed \$61.7 million over four years towards the phased implementation of SmartGate into Australia's international airports.

d) It has been reported that the testing of SmartGate at Brisbane Airport exposed a number of flaws in the system - what were those flaws?

The testing of SmartGate at Brisbane International Airport identified minor adjustments to the system that improved issues such as usability. These changes were subsequently re-tested to a high level of confidence prior to the public trial, which was conducted between 27 August and 9 September 2007.

During the trial, 1900 Australian ePassport holders were processed under controlled conditions during the trial period and the results confirmed that:

- the facial recognition process worked as expected;
- the traveller experience was extremely positive;
- feedback on system usability was favourable with minor refinements identified for improvement;
- the impact on airport and business processes was minimal.

e) What is the false rejection rate for SmartGate?

While Customs cannot reveal this rate for operational reasons, SmartGate has been developed with industry experts and refined over a five-year period, as outlined in the answer to Question 52 (i) below. Customs is satisfied with the accuracy of the technology and the performance of the solution.

f) How long has the SmartGate project taken to be implemented, from conceptualisation to national rollout?

A prototype SmartGate was developed and trialled at Sydney and Melbourne international airports between 2002 and 2005.

SmartGate was fully operational at Brisbane International Airport in August 2007 and Cairns International Airport in January 2008 following an extensive testing program. SmartGate is scheduled to be rolled out to remaining international airports by June 2009 subject to negotiation with airport operators.

g) What safeguards are in place to ensure the privacy of people subject to facial recognition technology through SmartGate?

Customs complies with the Information Privacy Principles as set out in the *Privacy Act 1988*.

The Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner (OPC) has assumed an active involvement in the SmartGate program from its inception. OPC undertook a detailed privacy audit of the prototype SmartGate solution in mid-2005 and has conducted follow up audits in August 2006 and March 2008.

Customs will continue to work closely with OPC as SmartGate is rolled out into other major Australian international airports.

h) Was a Privacy Impact Assessment conducted in relation to SmartGate? If so, please provide details. If not, why not?

The Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner (OPC) undertook a detailed privacy audit of the prototype SmartGate solution in mid-2005 and advised Customs on how to collect and store information.

OPC conducted a follow up audit in August 2006 and made three recommendations which Customs has acted upon. These related to:

- the treatment of biometric templates as personal information
- compliance with International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) standards
- working with other border agencies to ensure the highest level of security for personal data is achieved.

A further OPC audit occurred in March 2008 and this report will be evaluated when it has been received by Customs.

i) Provide details of any independent and/or expert review of the SmartGate project.

As part of the trial of the prototype SmartGate from 2002 to 2005, independent field evaluations were conducted by ACNielsen and the Defence Science and Technology Organisation (DSTO) which proved SmartGate to be highly accurate for identity verification purposes.

Dr Jim Wayman, an internationally recognised biometrics expert and Dr Tony Mansfield of the United Kingdom Biometrics Working Group in association DSTO have provided independent assessments of SmartGate and concluded that SmartGate streamlined the customs and immigration process for users and maintained the integrity of the border.

As part of the two week public trial at Brisbane International Airport between 27 August and 9 September 2007, independent evaluations were conducted by The Hiser Group (usability experts), Open Mind Research Group and the DSTO. The results confirmed that:

- the facial recognition process worked as expected;
- the traveller experience was extremely positive;
- feedback on system usability was favourable with minor refinements identified for improvement; and
- the impact on airport and business processes was minimal.

j) What information regarding the SmartGate project is available to the public?

Information on SmartGate is currently available on Customs internet and in-airport where SmartGate is operational. Customs has prepared a public information campaign and approval is pending.

k) Does the Government intend to mandate the use of biometric passports at any time? If so, when?

All Australian passports issued after 24 October 2005 are ePassports (biometric passports).