

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE SENATE FOREIGN
AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE REFERENCES COMMITTEE
REPORT –**

The (not quite) White Paper

*Australia's foreign affairs and trade policy, Advancing the National
Interest*

The Government thanks the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee for its report on *Advancing the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper*. The Report makes four recommendations. The Government response to these recommendations is provided below.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that upon the commissioning of any future White Paper, the Minister for Foreign Affairs shall refer the proposal to the parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT). The Joint Committee shall undertake broad public consultations regarding the proposed content of the White Paper, and shall report its findings to the parliament. The report shall inform the development, by government, of the White Paper, and shall be published along with the White Paper as an accompanying document.

NOT ACCEPTED

The White Paper on Foreign Affairs and Trade: *Advancing the National Interest* is a document to explain the Government's foreign and trade policies. It is not a vehicle for policy development. The purpose of the White Paper is to set out to the Australian public the Government's foreign and trade policy goals and its strategies for achieving them. The White Paper articulates these goals and strategies clearly and successfully. Parliamentary involvement before and during preparation of a future White Paper would not make that document a clearer or better explanation of the framework for the Government's foreign and trade policies than the present White Paper.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that in the event of a ministerial statement by the Foreign Minister, or other major government announcement dealing with Australia's foreign or trade policies, the Senate shall refer that statement or announcement to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee for examination and report.

NOTED

This is a matter for the Senate.

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Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade prepare an annual Foreign Policy Outlook Statement containing a succinct account of issues arising in the preceding twelve months and any adjustments to policy arising from them. The statement should be tabled in the parliament by the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

NOT ACCEPTED

The release of the White Paper is but part of the Government's efforts to improve public awareness and understanding of Australia's foreign and trade policies. There are many other activities by Ministers and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade which also contribute.

Ministerial speeches are an important part of the Government's public diplomacy. In 2003, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Trade each delivered about 30 major policy speeches. In addition, throughout each year the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade releases to the public a great number of information booklets, reports and studies about its priorities and activities in support of the Government's policies. The department's annual report provides an account of objectives pursued and activities undertaken in the previous year and a detailed account of the department's use of public money. The "Secretary's Review" at the beginning of the annual report provides a succinct account of the international year in review and the foreign and trade policy outlook.

The Government also considers that there is ample Parliamentary scrutiny of the Government's foreign policy. This is demonstrated in the significant number of inquiries undertaken by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade and the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Australian Bureau of Statistics develop mechanisms for accurately enumerating the numbers of Australian citizens living overseas, with a view to facilitating their full participation in the Australian Census.

NOT ACCEPTED

The Australian census is conducted on a "de facto" basis, that is it counts all people who are actually in Australia on census night, whatever their usual residence might be. The census does not count Australian residents or citizens overseas on census night however long the duration of their absence might be.

For official population purposes, those residents overseas on census night for less than twelve months are added back into the population using information from passenger

cards provided by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and overseas visitors in Australia for less than 12 months are excluded.

The ABS currently has no plans to include those Australians who are overseas in the 2006 Census. At this stage it is not regarded as practical, nor is a quality outcome achievable. This is supported by evidence from the past experiences of Canada and the USA when they have attempted to include overseas citizens in their respective censuses. Despite their efforts they have only managed to count a small proportion of these people.

The ABS publishes monthly statistics in Overseas Arrivals and Departures, Australia (ABS cat. no. 3401.0) on the number of Australian residents leaving Australia for overseas and returning from overseas. These statistics are based on information from outgoing and incoming passenger cards provided by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. Selected characteristics are available on request including age, sex, duration of stay/absence, country of citizenship on passport, and country of where most time was/will be spent. Whilst these statistics do not provide a stock of Australians living overseas, they do provide information on trends in the flow of Australian's travelling overseas and those returning over a long time series.

The ABS is currently taking part in a trial project being undertaken by the OECD which has the aim "to embark collectively on a joint compilation of available data on the stock of immigrants in OECD countries". This trial will be drawing on data from a variety of sources in each country including censuses, population registers and surveys, and has the possibility of being a cost effective method of obtaining information on Australians living in other OECD countries.