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Report 494: Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

March 2023

CANBERRA

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Chair's foreword

The Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit warmly commends officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for their dedicated work to assist Australians across the globe, including those stranded offshore during the pandemic, and every day since. One of the most impressive things during this inquiry was the Committee's visit to the 24-hour crisis centre.

Through this inquiry, the Committee reviews the Auditor-General's report on the effectiveness of DFAT's crisis management arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic. DFAT coordinated and facilitated the return of Australians who were stranded overseas due to travel restrictions and border closures.

It is important that the Australian Public Service, including DFAT, learn from the unprecedented global crisis that COVID-19 posed, so that the Australian Government will be better prepared to assist our most vulnerable citizens during future crises.

The Committee supports the areas for improvement identified by the Auditor-General and found it peculiar that DFAT disagreed with two recommendations due to 'framing' but nevertheless appears to have acted on them (which is welcome).

We focused in this report on matters relating to DFAT's data capability, response coordination, assistance for vulnerable Australians, and procurement practices under the crisis management framework (relating to repatriation flights).

Regarding the confusing and misleading public messaging to stranded Australians in 2020 and 2021, the Committee clearly notes its deep concern regarding DFAT's evidence that no advice was provided to inform public statements made by Ministers in the previous government (including the Prime Minister). The Committee's observation that *"government ministers have a responsibility to be as fully informed by sensible and evidence-based advice from public servants as possible before making public commitments in such sensitive areas"* should not have been necessary.

The Committee considers that more could and should have been done by the Commonwealth later in the pandemic regarding the lack of adequate quarantine facilities which was one of the key constraints upon DFAT's ability to bring stranded Australians home. A response to the 2021 Halton review of hotel quarantine was never provided by the previous government.

The Committee makes several recommendations to strengthen Australian Government's future crisis response including that:

- the Australian Government formally respond to the 2021 Halton review into hotel quarantine arrangements

- the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet incorporate human rights considerations into the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework, learning from the decision to block Australian citizens from returning from India
- the Auditor-General consider undertaking an audit of the updated Australian Government Crisis Management Framework to consider whether it adequately reflects lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.

I thank all of the contributors to this inquiry, particularly the DFAT officers who appeared at the public hearing and facilitated the site inspection of the department's crisis management facilities by the Committee. I also thank all Committee members who participated in this inquiry, continuing the bipartisan tradition of the JCPAA. Finally, I thank the Committee Secretariat for its support and professional excellence throughout this inquiry.

Mr Julian Hill MP

Chair



Abbreviations

ABF	Australian Border Force
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AGCC	Australian Government Crisis Committee
AGCMF	Australian Government Crisis Management Framework
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
CCCI	COVID-19 Crisis Citizen Information
CCD	Consular and Crisis Management Division
CEC	Consular Emergency Centre
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease of 2019
CPRs	Commonwealth Procurement Rules
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DITRDC	Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications
ECU	Emergency Call Unit
FCF	Facilitated commercial flight
GWO	Global Watch Office
Home Affairs	Department of Home Affairs
IDCs	Inter-departmental committees
IDETF	Inter-Departmental Emergency Taskforce
JCPAA	Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit
NCC	National Crisis Committee
PGPA Act	<i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i>

PM&C	Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
TRS	Travel Registration System



Members

Chair

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Deputy Chair

Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC

Members

Dr Michelle Ananda-Rajah MP

Senator Catryna Bilyk

Senator the Hon Matthew Canavan

Hon David Coleman MP (*until 22 March 2023*)

Dr Carina Garland MP

Hon Dr David Gillespie MP (*until 15 February 2023*)

Mr Ian Goodenough MP (*from 6 March 2023*)

Senator Karen Grogan

Dr Daniel Mulino MP

Ms Peta Murphy MP

Mr Henry Pike MP (*from 22 March 2023*)

Mr Sam Rae MP

Senator Tony Sheldon

Mr Aaron Violi MP

This committee is supported by staff of the Department of the House of Representatives.



Terms of reference

The Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit will inquire into and report on matters relating to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT's) crisis management arrangements as contained in Auditor-General's Report No. 39 (2021-22) *Overseas Crisis Management and Response: The Effectiveness of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Management of the Return of Overseas Australians in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

The report found that *“DFAT applied its crisis management arrangements to support the return of Australians and adapted these to deliver a new program of flights and financial assistance”*. The pandemic has, however, highlighted *“weaknesses in responding to standard and complex, and large-scale crises”* and that *“DFAT's underlying crisis management structures and capabilities require strengthening to ensure it is prepared to respond to future major and complex crises”*.

The Auditor-General made nine recommendations, seven of which were agreed to by DFAT.

The Committee will report and make recommendations on any matters arising from consideration of the report and submissions, including examination of DFAT's response to the report and progress in implementing agreed recommendations.

List of recommendations

Recommendation 1

- 2.76** The Committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provide it with an update on the status of projects planned or commenced in response to the Australian National Audit Office’s findings, including progress of implementing the recommendations, by the end of August 2023.

Recommendation 2

- 2.84** The Committee recommends that the Australian Government publish a formal response to the 2021 Halton review into national hotel quarantine arrangements.

Recommendation 3

- 2.89** The Committee recommends that the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), in its 2023 review of the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework, incorporate human rights considerations in the framework, and outline measures to ensure that any crisis response limiting or restricting human rights is necessary, reasonable and proportionate. PM&C should also require relevant entities to update their entity-level crisis management policies and plans to reflect this change.

Recommendation 4

- 2.91** The Committee recommends that the Auditor-General consider undertaking a performance audit of the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework and include within the audit scope whether the updated framework adequately reflects lessons learned from COVID-19.



1. Introduction

About the inquiry

- 1.1 On 15 September 2022, the Committee resolved to undertake an inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) crisis management arrangements, based on matters contained in Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22 *Overseas Crisis Management and Response: The Effectiveness of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Management of the Return of Overseas Australians in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*.
- 1.2 On 20 September 2022, the Committee issued a media release announcing the inquiry and inviting submissions. The Committee also invited a submission from DFAT as the audited agency. The inquiry received three submissions and two supplementary submissions, listed at Appendix A. A public hearing was held on 16 December 2022. A list of witnesses and organisations that appeared at the hearing is at Appendix B.
- 1.3 A copy of this report, transcript of the public hearing and submissions received are available at the Committee's website at https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Public_Accounts_and_Audit/DFATcrisismanagement.

Report outline

- 1.4 This chapter provides background on the inquiry, including a brief summary of the situation during the COVID-19 pandemic that led to border closures and Australians being stranded overseas. It then outlines the Australian Government's crisis management framework, under which DFAT provided assistance to return Australians from overseas who were struggling to get flights due to the pandemic.
- 1.5 Chapter 2 considers the Auditor-General report under inquiry, reviews the evidence received by the Committee and outlines the Committee's concluding comments and recommendations.

Overseas Australians during COVID-19

- 1.6 COVID-19 is an infectious respiratory disease that emerged in late 2019 and became a global pandemic. In Australia, COVID-19 was listed as a disease of pandemic potential under the *Biosecurity Act 2015* on 21 January 2020,¹ and declared a human biosecurity emergency by the Governor-General on 18 March 2020.²
- 1.7 In response to the pandemic, and alongside other countries, the Australian Government began introducing travel restrictions to stem the flow of international arrivals in early 2020. Country-specific restrictions were implemented in February and early March 2020.³ From 9pm on 20 March 2020, the Australian Government closed its borders to all non-citizens and non-residents. From 28 March 2020, all international arrivals were required to quarantine for 14 days at designated hotels or other facilities at their port of entry.
- 1.8 State and territory governments led the determination of designated facilities and enforcement of quarantine requirements, with the support of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and the Australian Border Force (ABF) where necessary. On 10 July 2020, following discussions with state and territory governments, the Australian Government introduced caps on passenger arrivals at major international airports to alleviate pressure on hotel quarantine programs. A timeline of key events is included in Appendix C.
- 1.9 Border closures and travel restrictions in Australia, and around the world, led to significant disruptions in travel plans and international air traffic, reducing options for Australians seeking to return to Australia using commercial airlines. In March 2020, DFAT estimated there were around 879,000 Australians abroad, with the largest numbers in New Zealand (119,900) and Indonesia (108,067).⁴ This is an aggregate figure which does not specifically relate to the number of Australians seeking repatriation assistance at that point.
- 1.10 The Australian Government activated the standing arrangements under its crisis management framework to guide its response to the pandemic. A component of this framework is the repatriation of Australians and other approved foreign nationals, as indicated in the next section.

¹ *Biosecurity (Listed Human Diseases) Amendment Determination 2020*.

² *Biosecurity (Human Biosecurity Emergency) (Human Coronavirus with Pandemic Potential) Declaration 2020*.

³ On 1 February 2020, the Australian Government agreed to implement a 14-day ban on foreign nationals entering Australia from China. The Australian Government subsequently decided to extend the China travel restrictions (on 13, 20 and 27 February 2020) and implement additional restrictions for Iran (on 29 February 2020), South Korea (on 5 March 2020) and Italy (on 11 March 2020).

⁴ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22 *Overseas Crisis Management and Response: The Effectiveness of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Management of the Return of Overseas Australians in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*, paragraph 1.16, p. 18.

Whole-of-government crisis management framework

1.11 The Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF), administered by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), sets out standing arrangements for coordinating whole-of-government emergency responses within the Australian Government. The AGCMF was last updated in November 2022 (version 3.2) to reflect the updated administrative arrangements, including the establishment of the National Emergency Management Agency. The version of the framework in place at the time of the pandemic was version 2.2, which had been updated in December 2017. This report refers to the current version (version 3.2), unless a specific reference to the previous version is necessary.

1.12 Under the AGCMF, DFAT is the lead agency for response and recovery in an international crisis, which is defined as:

An international incident that requires an Australian Government response. This may include natural disasters, humanitarian crises, terrorist acts, major transport incidents, civil unrest, overseas health emergencies or outbreaks, kidnapping of Australians overseas and chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear incidents which impact or may impact Australians or Australia's national interest.⁵

1.13 The role of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, supported by the department, is outlined in the AGCMF as follows:

- Maintain international relations with foreign governments and/or international agencies.
- Issue/update travel advice.
- Provide advice to Government on numbers of affected Australians overseas.
- Provide consular assistance to Australians and Permanent Residents (crisis only), including citizens of consular partners.
- Deploy additional Australian Government resources and/or state based expertise, as required (in consultation with relevant ministers).
- Approve evacuation of foreign nationals, as required (in consultation with relevant ministers including the Minister responsible for Home Affairs, Defence, and states and territories).
- Approve the repatriation of injured and deceased Australians and other approved foreign nationals (in consultation with the Minister responsible for Home Affairs, Defence and Health).

⁵ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework*, November 2022, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/publications/australian-government-crisis-management-framework-agcmf>, p. 52, viewed 17 February 2023.

- Activate financial assistance packages, including humanitarian funding to countries affected by international crises.⁶
- 1.14 Other ministers who may be involved in responses to international crises include those responsible for: Emergency Management, Home Affairs, Health, Defence, Cyber Security, and Communications.⁷
- 1.15 In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, DFAT's role included issuing and updating travel advice, providing Australians overseas with access to flights to return to Australia, and financial assistance. This inquiry focused on the latter two aspects of DFAT's role, as examined in the Auditor-General's report.

⁶ PM&C, *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework*, pages 52–53.

⁷ PM&C, *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework*, pages 53–54.



2. DFAT's return of overseas Australians in response to COVID-19

Background

- 2.1 Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) provided support to overseas Australians¹ to access a range of different flight arrangements to return to Australia.² The Australian National Audit Office's (ANAO) audit report outlines two main phases in DFAT's provision of this assistance.³
- 2.2 During phase one, from January 2020 to September 2020, DFAT managed two evacuations of Australians from Wuhan on 3 and 9 February 2020, and returned Australian passengers from the Diamond Princess cruise ship anchored in Tokyo on 19 February 2020.⁴ There were 27 more contracted flights from 31 March 2020 to 6 June 2020, including from Peru, Argentina, South Africa, Nepal and Uruguay.⁵
- 2.3 During phase two, from October 2020 to February 2022, DFAT established a program of facilitated commercial flights (FCFs).⁶ The FCF program involved working with contracted airlines to coordinate flight schedules, managing communications with Australians registered with DFAT, and coordinating with relevant authorities to ensure testing and quarantine arrangements were in place.⁷

¹ Consular assistance is generally only available to Australian citizens. During crisis events services may be extended to permanent residents. This report uses the term 'Australians' to refer to both Australian citizens and permanent residents, as they received the same services during the pandemic.

² Types of assistance included supporting overseas Australians with scheduled and non-scheduled commercial flights; organising sweeper flights and ground transport to transfer passengers to international airports; and securing seats for Australians on flights to Australia organised by other governments to repatriate their citizens, cargo flights, medivac flights, and RAAF flights returning from delivering humanitarian supplies: see Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), *Annual Report 2019–20*, p. 91.

³ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22 *Overseas Crisis Management and Response: The Effectiveness of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Management of the Return of Overseas Australians in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*, paragraph 1.20, p. 18.

⁴ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 1.22, p. 19.

⁵ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 3.61, pages 65, 97.

⁶ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 1.24, p. 20.

⁷ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 2.6, pages 25–26.

2.4 DFAT reported that since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, it assisted with the return of 61,769 Australians, including 33,531 Australians on 227 FCFs.⁸ Of the 227 FCFs, 148 were with Qantas Airways under an agreement established in October 2020, and 79 were with other airlines, including Singapore Airlines.⁹

Audit findings

2.5 Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22 examined the effectiveness of DFAT’s overseas crisis management and response arrangements in meeting the Australian Government’s objectives for returning Australians from overseas in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic. To form a conclusion against the objective, the ANAO adopted the following high-level audit criteria:

- Was DFAT appropriately prepared to manage the return of overseas Australians, as part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Has DFAT responded effectively to achieve the government’s objectives for managing the return of overseas Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic?

2.6 The audit report under inquiry is one of six performance audits conducted under phase two of the ANAO’s multi-year strategy that focuses on the effective, efficient, economical and ethical delivery of the Australian Government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰

2.7 The audit report concluded that:

DFAT adapted its crisis management arrangements and established a new program of activity to provide assistance to a large number of overseas Australians affected by COVID-19, although it did not meet key government objectives. DFAT’s underlying crisis management structures and capabilities require strengthening to ensure it is prepared to respond to future major and complex crises.¹¹

2.8 The ANAO made nine recommendations, seven of which were agreed to by DFAT.

Chapter overview

2.9 This chapter discusses key findings from the audit and DFAT’s actions to address them, with particular focus on:

- data capability
- coordination of the crisis response

⁸ DFAT, *Annual Report 2021–22*, p. 79.

⁹ Ms Lynn Bell, Assistant Secretary, Crisis Preparedness and Management Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 19.

¹⁰ Australian National Audit Office, *ANAO COVID-19 multi-year audit strategy*, November 2022, <https://www.anao.gov.au/work-program/covid-19>, viewed 17 February 2023.

¹¹ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 7, p. 8.

- assisting vulnerable Australians
- procurement during the crisis.

Data capability

Traveller registration system

- 2.10 In April 2020, DFAT developed an online portal on the Smartraveller website called the Traveller Registration System (TRS).¹² Overseas Australians who had been unable to return home were advised to register their details through the portal. The TRS was supported at the backend by the COVID-19 Crisis Citizen Information (CCCI) system, which recorded individual registrant details and supported DFAT's monitoring and reporting on the status of returning Australians. The system was closed to new registrations in November 2021 as travel restrictions were lifted.¹³
- 2.11 The audit found shortcomings in data quality and completeness in relation to the CCCI system, including:
- over 6,000 registrations whose accounts appeared to have been created after the person had returned to Australia
 - fields that were inconsistently filled. For example, 31 registrants included the term 'elderly' as a marker of vulnerability, the youngest of which were 69 years old. However, the ANAO identified a total of 9,295 registrants aged over 69 years and only 26 per cent of these were assessed as vulnerable
 - fields that were not used or had the majority of entries left blank, including those for recording chartered flight priorities, post additional information (free-text), last attempted contact, and last successful contact
 - lack of user access controls, data assurance and oversight processes, systems monitoring, and data validation to ensure data integrity.¹⁴
- 2.12 The ANAO also found inconsistencies between the figures DFAT reported to government for registered and returned Australians, and those recorded in final flight manifests. This resulted in significant variance between ANAO's analysis and DFAT's reporting (by up to 59 per cent for some figures).
- 2.13 The accuracy of DFAT's monitoring and reporting of the number of registered and returned Australians was significant as it showed whether the department was able to meet a key government objective of bringing registered Australians home by Christmas 2020. On 18 September 2020, the then Prime Minister stated during a press conference in Sydney:

¹² Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 3.134, p. 80.

¹³ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraphs 3.134–3.135, p. 80.

¹⁴ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, Appendix 8, pages 103–104.

... I would hope that those who are looking to come home, that we'd be able to do that within months and I would hope that we can get as many people home, if not all of them by Christmas.¹⁵

2.14 On 23 October 2020, the Prime Minister reiterated this statement as a commitment:

Now, I can confirm when we made our commitment on the 18th of September. There were registered, some 26,200 Australians. 4,100 of those were vulnerable. So far, 1,278 of that vulnerable cohort have come home. ... So we continue to make good progress towards returning Australians home. And we want to do that as effectively and quickly, as safely as possible.¹⁶

2.15 The government's objective, to bring Australians registered with DFAT as at 18 September back home by Christmas, was reaffirmed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs on 28 October 2020.¹⁷

2.16 When asked whether the department had been consulted before the statement was made by the Prime Minister on 18 September 2020, DFAT informed the Committee that:

DFAT did not prepare a brief for the 18 September 2020 meeting when National Cabinet agreed that all jurisdictions would continue to work towards enabling more Australians to return home by increasing the existing caps on international passenger arrivals.¹⁸

2.17 An interagency taskforce, led by DFAT, was established to support the return of Australians before Christmas 2020. On 25 September 2020, DFAT reported to the government that there were 26,200 Australians registered as wanting to return to Australia as at 18 September 2020, around 4,000 of whom were assessed as vulnerable. This figure differed from the ANAO's analysis that there were 45,958 people registered as at 18 September 2020.¹⁹ When asked about the discrepancy in DFAT's reporting and the total number of registrations, the ANAO explained that:

When DFAT reported the number to government, it was based on who wanted to return in the immediate period going forward, rather than the total number of Australians registered.²⁰

¹⁵ The Hon Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister, 'Press Conference — Sydney, NSW', *Transcript*, 18 September 2020, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-43027>, viewed 17 February 2023.

¹⁶ The Hon Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister, 'Press Conference — Australian Parliament House, ACT', *Transcript*, 23 October 2020, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-43100>, viewed 17 February 2023.

¹⁷ Senator the Hon Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 28 October 2020, pages 91, 102.

¹⁸ DFAT, Submission 1:2, Answer to Question on Notice 1, p. [1].

¹⁹ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, Appendix 9, p. 105.

²⁰ Mr Alex Wilkinson, Executive Director, Performance Audit Services Group, Australian National Audit Office, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 17.

- 2.18 DFAT also commented further on the reasons for possible discrepancies within the registration system:

When people registered to return, there wasn't always an immediate intention to return. Because of the psychology of the pandemic—people wanted a safety net and thought they might never be able to come home—people registered just in case, which I can so easily understand. But when the time came—when a flight was available and it was offered to people—sometimes that timing was not the best timing for them, and they ended up deferring their arrival back into Australia. So the numbers don't necessarily accurately mirror an immediate intention to return for that cohort of 26,200.²¹

- 2.19 DFAT advised the Committee that of the 26,200 Australians registered as at 18 September 2020, 24,800 had returned by Christmas. DFAT commented however that it could not say 'the exact people who were registered on 18 September are actually the ones that returned', as some people who registered after that date were able to return first if they were assessed as vulnerable.²²

- 2.20 As noted above, the ANAO was unable to verify these passenger numbers due to data quality issues. The audit concluded that:

DFAT data and reporting indicate it did not meet all of the government's objectives. The ANAO could not verify DFAT reporting on: the number of Australians and vulnerable Australians it assisted to return to Australia; and Australians who accessed facilitated commercial flights administered by DFAT. Reporting could not be verified due to data quality issues and unclear methods underpinning its reporting on Australians registered with DFAT.²³

- 2.21 The ANAO made a recommendation for DFAT to 'develop, implement and routinely test a fit-for-purpose crisis registration system that sufficiently validates registrant data to support business planning, program evaluation and reporting'.²⁴ DFAT disagreed with this recommendation. At the 16 December 2022 public hearing, DFAT explained that it had disagreed with the 'framing of the recommendation',²⁵ rather than the substance of it, and that enhancements have since been made to the registration system to make it fit-for-purpose:

The first registration system that was set up in the early days of the pandemic was, by its nature, very quickly done, and it was not perfect. As we have gone on through the pandemic, it has been refined. The new portal still uses Salesforce—it's a Salesforce based system—but it is much better. It's had more money spent on it. It's got a team now that looks after it, which we didn't have the luxury of during the pandemic because it was all hands to the pump just trying to get

²¹ Ms Kate Logan, First Assistant Secretary, Crisis Preparedness and Management Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 15.

²² Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 17.

²³ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, p. 79.

²⁴ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, Recommendation no. 9, paragraph 3.154, p. 86.

²⁵ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 16.

people out of the registration system and onto a plane. So we've had a bit more time to consolidate the gains. The registration portal we now have was tested for the first time after Russia invaded Ukraine, and it has been performing, I think, quite effectively. It's giving us what we need.²⁶

Other data quality findings

2.22 The audit report made a number of other findings in relation to DFAT's collection and use of data during its crisis response. These findings related to the management of information from DFAT's overseas posts in the early stages of the pandemic,²⁷ and data collected from its engagement with the public during the pandemic.²⁸

2.23 The ANAO made recommendations to DFAT to:

- establish a data and information strategy and capability to strengthen its capacity to rapidly and effectively source, analyse and use data from all sources for crisis planning and response²⁹
- capture and retain accurate and complete data from its engagement with clients in accordance with government information management standards, and for the purposes of monitoring its effectiveness in engaging with the public.³⁰

2.24 DFAT agreed to both recommendations, stating in its submission to this inquiry that its Consular and Crisis Management Division (CCD) is developing a Divisional Data Strategy which will:

... commit to stronger data practices, capability, and culture; formalise data sharing arrangements with relevant Australian Government agencies; set out data governance arrangements and identify roles that require specific data skills and ensure appropriate training.³¹

2.25 The CCD has also commenced a robotics project to improve efficiency and consistency of data capture, especially during fast-moving crisis situations.³²

²⁶ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 16.

²⁷ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraphs 3.25–3.28, p. 57.

²⁸ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraphs 3.114–3.118, pages 75–76.

²⁹ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, Recommendation no. 3, paragraph 3.29, p. 58.

³⁰ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, Recommendation no. 7, paragraph 3.119, p. 76.

³¹ DFAT, Submission 1, p. 5.

³² DFAT, Submission 1, p. 8.

Coordination of the crisis response

DFAT's arrangements

2.26 As outlined in Chapter 1, DFAT is the lead agency for response and recovery in international crises under the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF). DFAT's efforts to return Australians stranded overseas during the pandemic involved coordination with multiple government agencies, including:

- Department of Health, which was the lead entity for managing Australia's public health response to COVID-19
- Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs), including the Australian Border Force (ABF), which managed travel restrictions at the international border and any exemptions from the inward and outward travel restrictions
- Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (DITRDC), which was managing international arrival caps by placing conditions on airline timetables under the Air Navigation Regulation 2016
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), which coordinated advice to Australian governments and helped negotiate international arrival caps with states and territories (based on quarantine capacity)³³
- other Australian Government departments, such as the Treasury and the Department of Finance, who were consulted in the development of aviation sector support measures³⁴
- various state and territory government agencies, as required, to facilitate arrivals at international ports of entry.

2.27 Coordination took place via various fora. At a whole-of-government level, key mechanisms for coordinating the Australian Government's response to COVID-19 that were in place at the time were:

- Australian Government Crisis Committee (AGCC)³⁵—led by Home Affairs and PM&C, responsible under the AGCMF for coordinating the Australian Government's response to domestic crises, including public health emergencies

³³ Auditor-General Report No. 12 2021–22 *Management of International Travel Restrictions during COVID-19*, paragraph 3.13, p. 58.

³⁴ Auditor-General Report No. 40 2021–22 *COVID-19 Support to the Aviation Sector*, paragraphs 2.55–2.56, p. 42.

³⁵ When the AGCMF was revised in July 2021, the AGCC was replaced by the Australian Government Crisis and Recovery Committee.

- National Crisis Committee (NCC)³⁶—led by Home Affairs and PM&C, facilitated cooperation and coordination between the Australian Government and the relevant states and territory governments in response to domestic crises.³⁷
- 2.28 The AGCMF also listed the Inter-Departmental Emergency Taskforce (IDETF) as one of its whole-of-government coordination mechanisms. The IDETF is led by DFAT and is responsible for managing the whole-of-government response to overseas incidents or crises that impact or threaten to impact Australians or Australia’s interests overseas.³⁸ The IDETF was not convened for the government’s response to COVID-19, with the whole-of-government COVID-19 response led by PM&C and Home Affairs via the two mechanisms listed above.³⁹
- 2.29 There were also inter-departmental committees (IDCs), working groups and taskforces established at different levels to coordinate crisis response efforts across government. Examples include the COVID-19 Deputies IDC, chaired by a PM&C Deputy Secretary, which assumed a lead role in coordinating the COVID-19 response across the Australian Government with a focus on international travel restrictions; and the ‘Taskforce to assist Australians to Return’ led by DFAT, which was charged with maximising opportunities for Australians, particularly vulnerable people, to return to Australia following the Prime Minister’s statement of 18 September 2020.⁴⁰
- 2.30 DFAT had existing internal arrangements to coordinate its response to international crises. During the inquiry, the Committee conducted a site visit to examine these arrangements, which are described in Box 2.1.

Box 2.1 DFAT’s crisis management arrangements

On 16 December 2022, the Committee conducted a site visit to DFAT offices in Canberra to examine its crisis management arrangements. The visit included a tour of the following sites.

Crisis Centre

The Crisis Centre is regarded as the ‘engine room’ of the Australian Government’s response to international crises and coordinates the whole-of-government IDETF meetings. It can be activated within an hour’s notice and draws from a surge staff capability of around 200 officers across the department who form the ‘Crisis Cadre’.

In its submission to the inquiry, DFAT informed the Committee that following the ANAO audit it has expanded the number of staff who are crisis ready by almost 60 positions to better prepare for a global crisis like COVID-19, including officers at senior executive

³⁶ When the AGCMF was updated in July 2021, the National Coordination Mechanism (NCM) replaced the NCC as the primary committee for national coordination, communication and collaboration during a crisis response and recovery.

³⁷ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework*, version 2.2, December 2017, p. 23.

³⁸ PM&C, *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework*, version 2.2, December 2017, p. 23.

³⁹ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, Appendix 7, Note a, p. 102.

⁴⁰ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 3.34, pages 58–59.

level. In October 2022, DFAT established a third crisis centre in a different building 'to provide redundancy during concurrent crises and in instances where the primary premises become compromised'. At the 16 December 2022 public hearing, DFAT explained that:

... the crisis centres in DFAT's RG Casey building were co-located and don't work during a pandemic. We couldn't really use them because our staff were at risk of contracting the virus. So we have set up a third crisis centre in our London Circuit office, here in Civic, because that separation enables us to better manage a large-scale crisis.⁴¹

The Crisis Centre was recently activated for the Ukraine crisis. It was active for 13 weeks, including approximately five weeks of 24/7 operations, which was the longest time the centre had been continuously activated for a single crisis.

Global Watch Office

The Global Watch Office (GWO) provides DFAT with a 24/7 incident monitoring and response capability. It alerts Australian government agencies to world events that could impact post security, trigger a consular emergency, require a humanitarian response, or are of geopolitical significance. Australian Government agencies, portfolio ministers' offices, partner foreign ministries and international organisations use GWO as their first point of contact for the department in select situations.

The GWO has 20 staff operating in three shifts per day, with two to three staff rostered on per shift.

Consular Emergency Centre

The Consular Emergency Centre (CEC) operates on a continuous 24-hour basis and provides urgent consular and passport assistance to Australians overseas. It is the public face of the department and the initial point of contact for Australians during a crisis. The CEC can connect consular clients with domestic counselling services such as Lifeline and other state-based support services, and works with Australian law enforcement agencies such as the Australian Border Force, the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

In 2021–22, the CEC responded to 66,638 calls, an increase of 23 per cent compared to 2020–21. The CEC has a total of 19 staff operating across three shifts per day, with three staff rostered on each shift.

Emergency Call Unit

The Emergency Call Unit (ECU) is activated during a crisis if phone calls from the public exceed, or are expected to exceed, the capacity of CEC resources to respond in a timely manner. The ECU is staffed by DFAT's surge capability. If the volume of calls exceeds the

⁴¹ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 8.

capacity of the ECU, DFAT maintains a memorandum of understanding with Services Australia to enable additional operator support.

The ECU handled over 16,000 calls in 2021–22, over half of which were in August 2021 following the fall of the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

- 2.31 The ANAO noted in its audit that DFAT did not have ‘a single document which clearly explains its crisis management framework and sets out key crisis functions and accountabilities for these’,⁴² and stated that ‘there would be value in DFAT consolidating its different sources of guidance to show how individual mechanisms relate to core functions and how these operate together as a system for crisis planning and response’.⁴³ The audit recommended that:

DFAT consolidate its policy and guidance for crisis management, drawing on the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework. The framework should set out key crisis management functions and assign clear accountability for these, and for the development and assurance of key capabilities.⁴⁴

- 2.32 DFAT agreed to the recommendation. In its submission to the inquiry, DFAT stated that it is ‘developing a consolidated crisis management framework with clearly articulated crisis management functions and accountability arrangements’, including integrating existing documents into ‘an improved single reference point on crisis preparedness, and governance and responsibilities during crisis response’.⁴⁵

Coordination with states and territories

- 2.33 DFAT’s activities to bring overseas Australians back home also required coordination with state and territory governments. This was because the states and territories led the implementation of the National Cabinet’s decision for all travellers arriving in Australia from 28 March 2020 to undertake their mandatory 14-day quarantine at ‘designated facilities’—for example, hotels.
- 2.34 The then Prime Minister’s media release on Friday 27 March 2020 stated that, from no later than 11:59pm Saturday 28 March 2020:
- Travellers will be transported directly to designated facilities after appropriate immigration, customs and enhanced health checks.
 - Designated facilities will be determined by the relevant state or territory government and will ordinarily be in the city of entry where the traveller has cleared immigration, but facilities in other areas may be used if required.

⁴² Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 2.13, p. 27.

⁴³ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 2.18, p. 28.

⁴⁴ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, Recommendation no. 1, paragraph 2.19, p. 29.

⁴⁵ DFAT, Submission 1, p. 3.

- These requirements will be implemented under state and territory legislation and will be enforced by state and territory governments, with the support of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and the Australian Border Force (ABF) where necessary.
 - The Commonwealth will provide support through the ABF and ADF for these arrangements across Australia, and that states and territories would meet the costs and determine any contributions required for travellers arriving within their jurisdictions.
 - Air and maritime crews will be required to continue to undertake the existing precautions they are following where they self-isolate in their accommodation if they enter Australia until their next work voyage.⁴⁶
- 2.35 Hotel quarantine arrangements were established by states and territories over that weekend and fully operationalised by 28 March 2020.
- 2.36 On 10 July 2020, ‘in order to manage and maintain quarantine arrangements across the jurisdictions’, the National Cabinet agreed to impose caps on international arrivals at a number of ports of entry from 13 July, comprising:
- Perth—a cap of 525 international arrivals per week
 - Brisbane—a cap of 500 international arrivals per week
 - Sydney—a cap of 450 international arrivals per day (as first announced on 3 July).⁴⁷
- 2.37 These passenger caps changed throughout the pandemic, with the lowest cap imposed in January 2021 when passenger caps in New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia were temporarily halved.⁴⁸ Some jurisdictions also suspended the arrival of international flights into their ports of entry at specific times as they dealt with COVID-19 outbreaks.⁴⁹ The arrival caps remained in place until November 2021, when borders were reopened to fully vaccinated travellers and quarantine requirements transitioned from hotel to home quarantine.⁵⁰
- 2.38 The capping of passenger arrival numbers limited the number of people who could enter Australia and thus resulted in fewer inbound international flights. At the public hearing on 16 December 2022, DFAT commented that the passenger cap, imposed

⁴⁶ The Hon Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister, ‘Update on coronavirus measures’, *Media Release*, 27 March 2020, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-42761>, viewed 17 February 2023.

⁴⁷ The Hon Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister, ‘National Cabinet’, *Media Statement*, 10 July 2020, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-43995>, viewed 17 February 2023.

⁴⁸ The Hon Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister, ‘Statement—National Cabinet’, *Media Statement*, 8 January 2021, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-44036>, viewed 17 February 2023.

⁴⁹ Flights into Melbourne were suspended on 1 July 2020 and into Adelaide on 16 November 2020. Flights resumed for both Melbourne and Adelaide airports on 7 December 2020. Flights into Melbourne were suspended again on 14 February 2021 and resumed on 9 April 2021.

⁵⁰ Senator the Hon Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs, ‘Next steps to reopen to the world’, *Media Release*, 1 October 2021, <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-release/next-steps-reopen-world>, viewed 17 February 2023.

as a result of the health requirements around quarantine, was the 'key constraint' in DFAT's ability to bring Australians home.⁵¹

- 2.39 The Australian Government did not establish a national facility for quarantine until October 2020, when it entered into an agreement with the Northern Territory Government for the provision of quarantine arrangements at the NT Centre for National Resilience (Howard Springs) facility. The initial agreement was from 23 October 2020 to 31 March 2021, at a capacity of 500 individuals per fortnight. This arrangement was extended, and capacity increased to a peak of 2,000 individuals a fortnight from May 2021, until the facility closed at the end of June 2022.⁵²
- 2.40 DFAT informed the Committee that changes to the passenger caps were communicated to it through DITRDC, but that it was not consulted by relevant state agencies prior to the adjustment of the passenger cap on the potential impact of the reduced cap on its efforts to bring overseas Australians home.⁵³
- 2.41 DFAT stated that in spite of the challenges, the consultation mechanisms 'were rigorous' and 'worked really well in terms of very regular engagement across Commonwealth and state governments', noting that 'officials [were] working around the clock to really try their best to make it work for as large a number of people as possible, weighing up risks of people being stuck overseas, overwhelmed hospitals, quarantine'.⁵⁴ DFAT further noted that at times it contacted states with requests for exemptions for vulnerable Australians who were on flights that would be above arrival caps, and that most states were 'excellent' on allowing compassionate exemptions on a case-by-case basis.⁵⁵
- 2.42 In a supplementary submission to this inquiry, DFAT noted that:
- A further lesson learned by the department during the pandemic was the requirement for Australian Government, with State and Territory Governments, to collectively improve our ability to work together to respond to crises across jurisdictions (for example, entry and testing requirements during a health crisis).⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 9.

⁵² Federal Financial Relations, *The Provision of COVID-19 Quarantine Arrangements at the Northern Territory Centre for National Resilience for Organised National Repatriation of Australians*, October 2020, <https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/agreements/provision-covid-19-quarantine-arrangements-northern-territory-centre-national-resilience>, viewed 17 February 2023.

⁵³ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 11.

⁵⁵ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 10.

⁵⁶ DFAT, Submission 1:2, Answer to Question on Notice 21, p. [27].

Assisting vulnerable Australians

Facilitated flights

2.43 As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, the ANAO described two phases in DFAT's efforts to bring overseas Australians back home. During phase one, DFAT arranged early evacuation flights from Wuhan and a cruise ship in Tokyo in February 2020, and managed 27 more contracted flights from 31 March 2020 to 6 June 2020. The audit report noted that 'flights activity ceased from the end of June 2020 until a standing arrangement was put in place with Qantas Airways (Qantas) in October 2020 for non-scheduled facilitated flights'.⁵⁷ This led into phase two of DFAT's response centred on facilitated commercial flights, of which there were 227 in total.

2.44 There was a gap of about four months, from the end of June to late October 2020, in which no evacuation flights were facilitated by DFAT for stranded Australians. The global environment for aviation was challenging, creating significant complexity for all governments, including issues in relation to landing rights, airline staffing, aircraft availability, and a myriad of health restrictions.

2.45 The ANAO found that although DFAT appropriately advised the government in March 2020 that it would not be possible to assist all Australians to return to Australia due to resourcing and other constraints in providing consular assistance to all parts of the world, further advice it provided to government at different points during the pandemic did not always have a clear evidence base.⁵⁸ In particular, the ANAO noted:

At the end of April 2020, DFAT advised the government that despite sizeable cohorts it was not planning 'further facilitated flights from regions in which there have been numerous opportunities to leave through such flights'. DFAT did not identify these regions or provide a rationale for adopting this position. Advice did not include a supporting analysis of risks for overseas Australians still seeking to return to Australia or sensitivities for the government.⁵⁹

2.46 The audit report further commented that:

Proposals to limit or cease crisis assistance should be supported by a documented policy framework. Processes for developing advice could consider questions such as: whether all citizens should have access to crisis assistance, irrespective of the difficulty or cost of providing the service; the circumstances under which Australians may not be assisted; and how this should be communicated to the public. This would help ensure such decisions are made

⁵⁷ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, footnote 148, p. 53.

⁵⁸ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraphs 3.8–3.9, p. 53.

⁵⁹ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 3.10, p. 53.

consistently and better enable DFAT to manage expectations of the extent of assistance it is able to provide.⁶⁰

- 2.47 DFAT informed the Committee that it is aware of 136 Australians (citizens and permanent residents) who died overseas with COVID-19 before 11 March 2022. Of these, 14 had been registered with DFAT, and three of these 14 registrants had been categorised as vulnerable.⁶¹ No evidence was received with regard to the location of the registrants or what support was provided.

Identifying vulnerable Australians

- 2.48 The ANAO noted in its audit report that DFAT identified vulnerable Australians who required assistance when they contacted posts and/or received registrations through its CCCI database.⁶² Data quality issues relating to the CCCI database are outlined earlier in the chapter. The ANAO noted the following shortcomings in specific relation to recording vulnerability:

- The online registration form did not have a specific field for registrants to include information about their vulnerabilities, with some registrants providing information in an 'additional information' free-text field. Prior to December 2020, DFAT used key word searches in this 'additional information' field to identify vulnerable Australians.⁶³
- In March 2021, DFAT developed a Vulnerable Client Policy which states that vulnerable Australians include individuals with no financial means to support themselves, visa issues and medical conditions. The audit found however that this policy did not make clear how assessments of vulnerability were to be documented.⁶⁴

- 2.49 At the public hearing on 16 December 2022, the Auditor-General explained that receiving information in free-text fields meant that 'your ability to control and utilise the data drops in a significant crisis environment'.⁶⁵ The Auditor-General further commented that free-text information also results in poor quality data:

... 'elderly', for example, was a term used a number of times within the free-text field. It doesn't give you a sense of the vulnerability for them to do a risk assessment against.⁶⁶

- 2.50 Once vulnerable Australians were identified, DFAT offered them an exclusive 48-hour booking window through a priority booking weblink provided by Qantas as seats became available. The audit report outlined some complications that arose with this arrangement. This included rejections of flight offers and the sharing of these

⁶⁰ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 3.13, p. 54.

⁶¹ DFAT, Submission 1:2, Answer to Question on Notice 6, p. [8].

⁶² Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 3.75, p. 68.

⁶³ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 3.76, p. 68.

⁶⁴ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 3.78, p. 68.

⁶⁵ Mr Grant Hehir, Auditor-General, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 16.

⁶⁶ Mr Grant Hehir, Auditor-General, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 16.

booking weblinks with other travellers, including via social media, meaning not all people who booked through the priority booking weblink had been listed as vulnerable.⁶⁷

- 2.51 The ANAO noted that reasons for passengers rejecting flight offers were not recorded by DFAT staff in a 'systematic or consistent way', making it difficult to support an analysis of key reasons for registrants not accepting these offers.⁶⁸ At the public hearing, DFAT noted that 'some people had extremely good reasons for not being able to return on the flights. They had jobs, they had leases, they had kids in school—all the complexities of life that meant they weren't able to travel on a particular date'.⁶⁹
- 2.52 According to the audit report, DFAT reported to government on 27 August 2021 that it had returned 5,598 Australians registered as vulnerable. The ANAO was not able to verify this figure against the final flight manifests and noted in the audit report that the 'variance between ANAO findings and DFAT's reporting ranged between 21 and 59 per cent'.⁷⁰
- 2.53 The ANAO recommended that DFAT 'develop clear policies and procedures for assessing and recording vulnerability to ensure it is able to appropriately demonstrate the basis of its decision-making on the provision of benefits to the public'.⁷¹ DFAT agreed to this recommendation. In its submission to this inquiry, DFAT informed the Committee that:
- In response to the recommendation, DFAT is enhancing policies and procedures for assessing vulnerability. DFAT has strengthened procedures and guidance in its Consular Handbook to ensure we can better demonstrate the basis of decision-making during crisis response, with consideration of the specific circumstances, and scale applicable to the relevant crisis. DFAT has also reviewed and expanded the vulnerability 'markers' that can be recorded against clients in its consular information systems.⁷²
- 2.54 As observed earlier in the chapter, DFAT has indicated improvements in its registration system to make it more fit-for-purpose. DFAT noted at the public hearing that 'in the new, better-fit-for-purpose registration system, there is now functionality built into the online public-facing portal, where there are vulnerability identifiers'.⁷³

⁶⁷ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraphs 3.82–3.86, p. 69.

⁶⁸ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 3.87, p. 70.

⁶⁹ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, Appendix 9, p. 106.

⁷¹ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, Recommendation no. 6, paragraph 3.80, p. 69.

⁷² DFAT, Submission 1, p. 7.

⁷³ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 16.

Overseas Financial Assistance (Hardship) Program

- 2.55 On 2 September 2020, the Australian Government announced the COVID-19 Special Overseas Financial Assistance (Hardship) Program to assist eligible vulnerable Australians overseas. DFAT explained that it had been introduced for two reasons:

The first reason was to cover the costs of people's airfares home if they didn't have the means. ...

The other reason was for those who were not able to return home because they couldn't get on a commercial flight. It was sort of sustenance for those overseas. It was money designed to sustain families until they could get home. Some of those were loans, and some were grants in particular circumstances of hardship and compassion.⁷⁴

- 2.56 The ANAO noted in its audit that:

As at 25 January 2022, DFAT dashboard reporting indicated DFAT had received 10,316 Hardship Program applications. Of these, 5717 had been approved. The ANAO did not observe any material variance between DFAT's reporting and the ANAO's analysis.⁷⁵

- 2.57 The Hardship Program operated until the end of March 2022. DFAT informed the Committee that it had issued a total of \$44.54 million under the program, comprising \$35.19 million in grants and \$9.35 million in loans.⁷⁶

- 2.58 At the 16 December 2022 public hearing, the Committee inquired about DFAT's publicisation of the program to eligible vulnerable Australians overseas. A submission to the inquiry from Mr Robin Hornby, who had been stranded in Thailand during 2020, stated that he had not initially been made aware of available financial assistance, and that once he applied for assistance, he encountered difficulties in providing required documentation while overseas for the application process.⁷⁷ DFAT informed the Committee that:

It was on the website. It was publicised. It went out through Smartraveller, the DFAT travel advice system. It was as public as we could make it. I know it was also disseminated through some of the Facebook user groups and so on.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 20.

⁷⁵ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 3.98, p. 71.

⁷⁶ DFAT, Submission 1:2, Answer to Question on Notice 25, p. [38]. Australian pension holders and minors (children under 18 years of age) were eligible to apply for grants instead of loans: see Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, COVID-19: Overseas financial assistance FAQs, September 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20200929115857/https://www.smartraveller.gov.au/COVID-19/COVID-19-overseas-financial-assistance-FAQs>, viewed 22 March 2023.

⁷⁷ Mr Robin Hornby, Submission 3.

⁷⁸ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 20.

- 2.59 DFAT also commented that, separate to its responses to the audit report, it had been working to improve Smartraveller to better disseminate information to the travelling public:

We have a new Smartraveller campaign launching—probably in January or February next year—and we have a new Smartraveller Instagram. So we have new ways of getting out to people. We’re particularly targeting young people who don’t look at websites anymore. We think Instagram is a good way of doing that. So that’s launched. Hopefully in the next pandemic there will be more public channels of information.⁷⁹

- 2.60 In its supplementary submission, DFAT informed the Committee that ‘as of 31 December 2022, a total of \$5.475 million remains owing in hardship loans, with \$3.271 million having been repaid’. DFAT stated that it is taking ‘a compassionate approach to the recovery of loans, including through repayment by instalment options and temporary payment deferrals on a case-by-case basis’. A Traveller Emergency Loan Unit was established in DFAT to manage the outstanding hardship loans.⁸⁰

Consideration of human rights during crisis

- 2.61 A submission to the inquiry from the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) noted that ‘crisis management frameworks in Australia, most notably the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework, do not sufficiently engage with human rights considerations as an integral part of any effective emergency response’.⁸¹ The AHRC was critical of the ANAO audit report for ‘mak[ing] no mention of human rights at all, particularly failing to consider this significant aspect of border closures when framing its nine recommendations’.⁸²
- 2.62 The AHRC’s submission commented that significant human rights impacts had resulted from the temporary ban on travel from India from 3 to 15 May 2021 during the Delta outbreak. The travel ban was first announced by the Prime Minister on 27 April 2021 on advice of the Chief Medical Officer.⁸³ On 30 April 2021, the then Health Minister made an emergency determination under the *Biosecurity Act 2015*, banning a passenger from entering Australian territory ‘if the person had been in India within 14 days before the day the flight was scheduled to commence’.⁸⁴ The Health Minister’s media release stated that this decision was ‘based on advice about the worsening COVID-19 situation in India’, with the determination to come into effect

⁷⁹ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 20.

⁸⁰ DFAT, Submission 1:2, Answer to Question on Notice 17, p. [23].

⁸¹ Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), Submission 2, p. 4.

⁸² AHRC, Submission 2, p. 2.

⁸³ The Hon Scott Morrison MP, Prime Minister, ‘Flights from India now paused as Australia sends emergency medical supplies’, *Media Release*, 27 April 2021, <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-43340>, viewed 17 February 2023.

⁸⁴ Biosecurity (Human Biosecurity Emergency) (Human Coronavirus with Pandemic Potential) (Emergency Requirements—High Risk Country Travel Pause) Determination 2021, s. 6.

from 3 May 2021, and failure to comply with it liable to 'incur a civil penalty of 300 penalty units [\$66,000], five years' imprisonment, or both'.⁸⁵

2.63 In a supplementary submission, DFAT informed the Committee that 'at the time of the decision to pause passenger flights from India to Australia (27 April 2021), 9,035 Australian citizens, permanent residents and family members were registered with DFAT seeking assistance to return to Australia'.⁸⁶ DFAT had previously informed the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 on 7 May 2021 that around 950 Australians registered with DFAT in India were classified as vulnerable.⁸⁷

2.64 Acknowledging that 'border closures can play a necessary and significant role in upholding other human rights, such as the right to life', the AHRC concluded that:

To improve crisis management planning it is necessary to evaluate and review existing crisis management frameworks to ensure that Australia is better prepared for future crises. Future planning must consider human rights to ensure crisis response measures that limit or restrict human rights are necessary, reasonable and proportionate.⁸⁸

2.65 As noted in Chapter 1, the AGCMF was last updated in November 2022 to reflect the updated administrative arrangements, including the establishment of the National Emergency Management Agency. DFAT advised the Committee that 'the update [of November 2022] did not consider broader issues', and noted that 'the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, who administer the AGCMF, will commence a comprehensive review of the AGCMF in 2023'.⁸⁹

Procurement during COVID-19

2.66 The *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) and Commonwealth Procurement Rules (CPRs) provide the framework under which government entities are required to undertake procurement activities. Paragraph 2.6 of the CPRs provides an exemption from the rules, to the extent deemed necessary by the accountable authority, in certain situations including 'for the maintenance or restoration of international peace and security, to protect human health, for the protection of essential security interests, or to protect national treasures of artistic, historic or archaeological value'.

⁸⁵ The Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health, 'Travel arrangements to be strengthened for people who have been in India', *Media Release*, 30 April 2021, <https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/travel-arrangements-to-be-strengthened-for-people-who-have-been-in-india>, viewed 17 February 2023.

⁸⁶ DFAT, Submission 1:2, Answer to Question on Notice 13, p. [18].

⁸⁷ Ms Lynette Wood, First Assistant Secretary, Consular and Crisis Management Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 7 May 2021, p. 16.

⁸⁸ AHRC, Submission 2, p. 4.

⁸⁹ DFAT, Submission 1:2, Answer to Question on Notice 8, p. [11].

- 2.67 In its audit report, the ANAO noted that ‘exempt procurements remain subject to other requirements of the CPRs, including the core principle of achieving value for money’.⁹⁰
- 2.68 The ANAO observed some shortcomings in DFAT’s procurement activities during the pandemic. On 28 February 2020, the Secretary of DFAT retrospectively approved the application of paragraph 2.6 of the CPRs for evacuation flights procured on 1 February 2020. The approval document did not specify how DFAT would obtain value for money.⁹¹
- 2.69 On 14 November 2021, after travel restrictions were removed in Australia on 1 November, the Secretary noted the department’s advice on the likely need for further facilitated commercial flights and agreed to continue direct approaches to airlines to enable flexible procurements. This advice also did not set out how value for money would be achieved.⁹²
- 2.70 At the public hearing on 16 December 2022, the Auditor-General commented:
- I think our concern, across a number of audits, with using paragraph 2.6 is that simply setting aside the whole framework for procurement doesn’t give you a framework for procurement. We can understand why you would set aside some of the requirements in an emergency situation, but, in doing that, you still have to demonstrate value for money. ...
- They go, ‘We apply 2.6 and the rules don’t apply, but what does?’ This then becomes the question. And what we’d expect to see is a brief going to the accountable authority saying, ‘We shouldn’t apply the rules, and the process for procurement we’re going to undertake is this.’ And it should say why.⁹³
- 2.71 The ANAO made a recommendation to DFAT to develop emergency procurement guidelines to support officials to meet their obligations when the procurement rules are set aside during a crisis.⁹⁴ DFAT disagreed with this recommendation. At the public hearing, it elaborated that the disagreement, as with the recommendation relating to the travel registration system, was with the framing of the recommendation, rather than its substance.⁹⁵ DFAT informed the Committee that improvements have since been made to its procurement policy:
- ... in June this year [2022], the DFAT procurement policy was updated and now includes instructions on compliance with record-keeping requirements in a crisis. So the justification, such as it is, is that everyone was so busy trying to do, that there wasn’t enough of recording how and why we did. I think that gap has now been rectified with these updated procurement processes. The ones that have been implemented further emphasise the importance of achieving value for

⁹⁰ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 3.59, p. 65.

⁹¹ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 3.60, p. 65.

⁹² Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, paragraph 3.62, pages 65–66.

⁹³ Mr Grant Hehir, Auditor-General, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, pages 19, 21.

⁹⁴ Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22, Recommendation no. 5, paragraph 3.64, p. 66.

⁹⁵ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 20.

money and retaining sufficient records of the considerations made during that procurement process. In September [2022], a procurement record-keeping guide was published by DFAT for DFAT staff to use, including during a crisis; they are the direct flow-on effects, essentially, from the audit.⁹⁶

Committee comment

- 2.72 The Committee commends the efforts of DFAT officers in assisting overseas Australians in highly complex and unpredictable circumstances of the pandemic. A crisis of this scale, the speed with which it emerged, and its truly global nature was unprecedented in our modern globalised era and required an extraordinary consular response. The Committee also acknowledges the value of DFAT's 'everyday' work to support Australians overseas, dealing with various crises large and small. The extent of effort involved in providing these essential services was made clear during the site visit, where the Committee had the opportunity to speak to DFAT officers and observe the arrangements in person, including those that are staffed and closely monitored on a 24-hour basis.
- 2.73 The Committee acknowledges DFAT's generally excellent track record in managing major and isolated crises in many parts of the world. The pandemic however revealed some lack of preparation to manage a full global crisis in which issues erupted rapidly across the world. The Committee sees the ANAO's audit as an opportunity for DFAT, and the Australian Government more broadly, to learn from the response to the pandemic and strengthen the arrangements in place to improve our collective response in the event of another global crisis.
- 2.74 The Committee found it peculiar that DFAT disagreed with two recommendations due to 'framing', yet did not seem to disagree with the substance and in effect has acted upon them. The Committee has not been able to understand DFAT's rationale for disagreeing with the recommendations, but nevertheless welcomes DFAT's advice that it has largely implemented the suggested improvements identified in ANAO's recommendations, including the two recommendations it had disagreed with.
- 2.75 There are a number of recommendations that DFAT is still in the process of implementing, with most scheduled for completion by June 2023. The Committee considers there would be merit in monitoring the completion of these remaining recommendations to ensure all findings have been satisfactorily addressed.

Recommendation 1

- 2.76 The Committee recommends that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provide it with an update on the status of projects planned or commenced in response to the Australian National Audit Office's findings, including progress of implementing the recommendations, by the end of August 2023.**

⁹⁶ Ms Logan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, Canberra, 16 December 2022, p. 19.

- 2.77 The audit report highlighted a number of shortcomings in DFAT's data capability in the context of its crisis response. The Committee acknowledges the difficulties in gathering and using data in crisis situations, where rapid pace of events can make it challenging to collect and quality assure data.
- 2.78 The availability of reliable and accurate data is critical to ensuring a robust, evidence-based crisis response. Advice to government on the status and trajectory of the response should be supported by this data. Where data indicates that achievability of a government policy objective or commitment is at risk, timely advice should be provided to relevant ministers to ensure the government and the public, including those relying on government assistance, are informed of the evolving situation. Further, where data is not available, or data quality is poor, appropriate caveats should be included in advice to government to ensure informed decision-making. The Committee acknowledges DFAT's progress in implementing the audit recommendations relating to data capability.
- 2.79 On a related note, the Committee also considers that government ministers have a responsibility to be as fully informed by sensible and evidence-based advice from public servants as possible before making public commitments in such sensitive areas. DFAT's evidence that no advice was provided to Ministers before these public commitments were made is deeply concerning. Furthermore, if subsequent advice suggests that a public commitment may not be able to be kept, the relevant minister should revise the commitment to ensure the ongoing reliability and transparency of government responses.
- 2.80 During the inquiry, it became evident to the Committee the complexities involved in DFAT's efforts to bring Australians home in the midst of various international and domestic travel restrictions and public health requirements. The Committee notes the lack of adequate quarantine facilities in Australia was one of the key constraints upon DFAT's activities in this regard.
- 2.81 While the Committee acknowledges that quarantine arrangements had been negotiated and established on very short notice early in the pandemic as the crisis developed, the Committee considers that more could and should have been done by the Commonwealth in this space later on to enable stranded Australians to return from overseas. This is especially the case as the pandemic progressed and the virus evolved and became more infectious. It became clear that it was not going to be possible for states to provide and manage sufficiently secure quarantine facilities in hotels, hence their imposition of arrival caps, and there were calls by independent experts that expanded standalone, purpose-built quarantine facilities were needed.
- 2.82 The Committee notes that there had been two national reviews into hotel quarantine conducted by Adjunct Professor Jane Halton AO PSM in 2020 and 2021.⁹⁷ The 2021 review noted that the recommendations from 2020 had been largely implemented

⁹⁷ J Halton AO PSM, *National Review of Hotel Quarantine*, 23 October 2020, <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-review-of-hotel-quarantine>, viewed 7 February 2023; J Halton AO PSM, *National Review of Quarantine*, 12 October 2021, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/publications/national-review-quarantine>, viewed 17 February 2023.

and made nine further recommendations to Australian governments.⁹⁸ A response to the 2021 review has never been provided by the government.

- 2.83 Australia, like much of the world, has now largely transitioned into a state of ‘COVID normal’ and the Committee acknowledges that some of the recommendations were particular to the time the report was released. However, the Committee considers there would be merit in providing a formal response to the 2021 Halton review and implementing those recommendations that remain generally applicable, in order to better prepare for potential future public health crises.

Recommendation 2

2.84 The Committee recommends that the Australian Government publish a formal response to the 2021 Halton review into national hotel quarantine arrangements.

- 2.85 A key part of DFAT’s role during the pandemic was to assist vulnerable Australians seeking to return to Australia. The Committee acknowledges DFAT’s efforts to prioritise the return of registered Australians assessed as vulnerable during the pandemic and welcomes the improvements it has since made in identifying and recording vulnerability ‘markers’ in its consular information systems.
- 2.86 The Committee believes there are a number of areas in which service of vulnerable Australians can be strengthened. In particular, the Committee notes that there was a gap of approximately four months between June and October 2020 where no evacuation flights were organised for stranded Australians, after which a contract for facilitated commercial flights was arranged with Qantas. Speaking with the benefit of hindsight, the Committee is of the view that it would have been prudent if DFAT had examined pathways to establish an agreement for facilitated flights with Qantas and other airlines earlier in the pandemic. The Committee acknowledges that the commercial environment of the airlines was complex at this time. The Committee is optimistic that the lessons learned from the pandemic will assist with a greatly improved response to any future crisis.
- 2.87 Another key area relating to vulnerable Australians during crisis relates to the consideration of human rights. These issues relate especially, although not only, to Australians banned from returning to Australia stranded in India as the virus swept the population there. The Committee acknowledges the AHRC’s concerns that the whole-of-government crisis management framework is silent on the need to consider the protection of human rights as a key factor in a crisis response. In a public health crisis like the pandemic, certain restrictions on rights and freedoms may be necessary to ensure the protection of public health and the integrity of supporting institutions. However, these restrictions should be necessary, reasonable and proportionate in the circumstances, and decision-makers should turn their minds explicitly to these matters.

⁹⁸ J Halton AO PSM, *National Review of Quarantine*, 12 October 2021, pages 6, 8–9, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/publications/national-review-quarantine>, viewed 17 February 2023.

- 2.88 The Committee notes advice from DFAT that PM&C, as the whole-of-government framework's policy owner, is planning to commence a comprehensive review of the AGCMF in 2023.

Recommendation 3

- 2.89 The Committee recommends that the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), in its 2023 review of the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework, incorporate human rights considerations in the framework, and outline measures to ensure that any crisis response limiting or restricting human rights is necessary, reasonable and proportionate. PM&C should also require relevant entities to update their entity-level crisis management policies and plans to reflect this change.**
- 2.90 The Committee notes that the ANAO has listed under phase three of its COVID-19 audit strategy⁹⁹ a potential performance audit of the AGCMF to examine its effectiveness in facilitating the Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰⁰

Recommendation 4

- 2.91 The Committee recommends that the Auditor-General consider undertaking a performance audit of the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework and include within the audit scope whether the updated framework adequately reflects lessons learned from COVID-19.**

Julian Hill MP
Chair
23 March 2023

⁹⁹ ANAO, *ANAO COVID-19 multi-year audit strategy*, November 2022, <https://www.anao.gov.au/work-program/covid-19>, viewed 17 February 2023.

¹⁰⁰ ANAO, *COVID-19: Australian Government Crisis Management Framework*, 2022, <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/covid-19-australian-government-crisis-management-framework>, viewed 17 February 2023.



Coalition members' additional comments

As a once in a generation pandemic, the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic were extraordinary and there are lessons to be learnt.

The Morrison Government declared the COVID-19 pandemic on 27 February 2020, before the World Health Organization declared it on 11 March 2020. The early acknowledgement and action in closing international borders meant the Government could put health and economic measures in place to protect lives and livelihoods.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's established crisis framework enabled it to successfully assist 61,755 Australians to return and facilitate 227 flights.

The response to the pandemic was tough but it allowed Australia to be one of the few countries to come out of the pandemic stronger, with over 95% of Australians vaccinated and saving over 40,000 lives. As of February 2023, more than 64 million vaccine doses have been administered. With misinformation undermining efforts, the Department of Health's *Is It True?* portal opened on 14 March and provided information on the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine rollout in more than 63 languages for multicultural communities.

In Australia from 3 January 2020 to 21 March 2023, there have been 11,380,700 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 19,447 deaths reported to the World Health Organization – meaning Australia has only contributed to 0.28% of the world's deaths and 1.5% of cases. Other large economies such as the United States, China and India who did not implement measures like Australia did, had significantly more cases and deaths. The United States for example, has confirmed more than 102 million cases (13.5% of global cases) and more than one million deaths (16.2% of global deaths) with only 69% of the population fully vaccinated.

There is no doubt that the JobKeeper payment and other Federal Government financial supports played a key role in supporting the national economy throughout the pandemic, ensuring businesses could keep employees connected. The Reserve Bank estimates the payment reduced total job losses by 700,000 between April and July 2020 and Treasury estimated the unemployment rate would have been at least 5% higher. The Morrison Government's \$314 billion in direct economic support including payments to individuals and support for businesses, contributed to Australia keeping its AAA credit rating – one of only nine countries to achieve this.

Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC

Mr Ian Goodenough MP

Mr Henry Pike MP

Mr Aaron Violi MP



A. Submissions

- 1 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
 - 1.1 Supplementary to submission 1
 - 1.2 Supplementary to submission 1
- 2 Australian Human Rights Commission
- 3 Mr Robin Hornby



B. Public hearing and site visit

Friday, 16 December 2022 — Canberra

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

- Ms Kate Logan, First Assistant Secretary, Consular and Crisis Management Division
- Ms Jo Talbot, Chief People Officer
- Ms Lynn Bell, Assistant Secretary, Crisis Preparedness and Management Branch

Australian National Audit Office

- Mr Grant Hehir, Auditor-General
- Ms Carla Jago, Group Executive Director, Performance Audit Services Group
- Mr Alex Wilkinson, Executive Director, Performance Audit Services Group

Friday, 16 December 2022 — Site visit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Crisis Centre, RG Casey Building, Canberra

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

- Lynn Bell, Assistant Secretary, Crisis Preparedness and Management Branch
- Madeleine Casey, Acting Assistant Secretary, Consular Modernisation and Capability Branch
- Matthew Hyndes, Director, Global Watch Office
- Shae-Lee Burnell, Assistant Director, Crisis Management Section
- Cherise Fraser, Policy Officer, Consular Coordination, Performance and Strategy Section

C. Timeline of key events

Table C.1 Timeline of key events in Australian Government response to COVID-19

Date	Description of events	Entities involved
09/01/2020	World Health Organization (WHO) reports that Chinese authorities made a preliminary determination of a novel coronavirus in Wuhan.	-
21/01/2020	COVID-19 is listed as a disease of pandemic potential under the <i>Biosecurity Act 2015</i> .	Health
25/01/2020	First case of COVID-19 in Australia is confirmed.	Health
01/02/2020	International travel restrictions are implemented for foreign nationals entering Australia from China.	Home Affairs; Health
01/02/2020	Travel advice for mainland China is raised to 'Level 4 – Do not travel'.	DFAT
3/02/2020; 9/02/2020	DFAT organises assisted departure flights from Wuhan.	DFAT
19/02/2020	DFAT evacuates 164 passengers from the Diamond Princess cruise ship anchored in Tokyo.	DFAT
1/03/2020	Inward travel restrictions on foreign nationals entering Australia from Iran implemented.	Home Affairs
5/03/2020	Inward travel restrictions on foreign nationals entering Australia from South Korea implemented.	Home Affairs
11/03/2020	Inward travel restrictions on foreign nationals entering Australia from Italy implemented.	Home Affairs
13/03/2020	Travel advice for all countries raised to 'Level 3 — Reconsider your need to travel'.	DFAT
15/03/2020	Compulsory 14-day self-isolation implemented for all international arrivals.	Home Affairs; Health
18/03/2020	Travel advice for all overseas countries raised to 'Level 4 – Do not travel'.	DFAT
18/03/2020	Governor-General declares a human biosecurity emergency period until 17 June 2020 (this was extended throughout the pandemic to until it expired in April 2022).	Health
20/03/2020	Inward travel restrictions on foreign nationals entering Australia from any country implemented.	Home Affairs

25/03/2020	Outward travel restrictions on Australians travelling overseas implemented.	Health; Home Affairs
26/03/2020— 29/03/2020	DFAT arranges facilitated flights from Peru, Argentina, South Africa, Nepal, and Uruguay, including passengers from the Ocean Atlantic cruise ship.	DFAT
28/03/2020	Mandatory 14-day quarantine at designated hotels and other facilities implemented by states and territories.	Health; Home Affairs; PM&C
10/07/2020	National Cabinet agrees on incoming passenger caps at major international airports.	DITRDC
2/09/2020	The Overseas Financial Assistance (Hardship) Program is announced.	DFAT
18/09/2020	National Cabinet agrees to increase the availability of quarantine places. Prime Minister states that government would seek to return overseas Australians by Christmas.	-
21/09/2020	Taskforce established to bring back Australians registered with DFAT (as at 18 September) by Christmas 2020.	DFAT
13/10/2020	DFAT and Qantas enter into an agreement for flight services for 12 months.	DFAT
20/10/2020	The Australian Government enters into an agreement with the Northern Territory Government to establish the Centre for National Resilience at Howard Springs, with quarantine capacity for 500 individuals a fortnight.	Health
22/02/2021	The agreement for Howard Springs is varied to increase capacity to 2,000 individuals a fortnight from May 2021.	Health
27/04/2021	Flights from India to Australia are suspended.	DITRDC
14/05/2021	Flights from India for returning Australians resume.	DITRDC
28/10/2021	The Australian Government removes the global 'Do not travel' advice for all destinations.	DFAT
1/11/2021	Fully vaccinated Australians permitted to travel overseas.	Health; Home Affairs
21/11/2021	DFAT closes its COVID-19 registration portal.	DFAT
1/12/2021	Australian international borders reopened to fully vaccinated eligible visa holders.	Health; Home Affairs
21/02/2022	Australian international borders reopened to include all fully vaccinated visa holders.	Health; Home Affairs
6/07/2022	Australian international borders reopened to include unvaccinated visa holders.	Home Affairs

Source: Auditor-General Report No. 39 2021–22 *Overseas Crisis Management and Response: The Effectiveness of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Management of the Return of Overseas Australians in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*, Appendix 5, p. 97; Auditor-General Report No. 12 2021–22 *Management of International Travel Restrictions during COVID-19*, Appendix 3, p. 115.