The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the department) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments concerning the parliamentary entitlements framework to the Parliamentary Entitlements Review Committee.

The main impact of the current entitlements regime on the department arises through the implementation of the entitlements and allowances provisions for overseas travel for Parliamentarians, portfolio and non-portfolio Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries. Overseas travel by former Prime Ministers, Governors-General and former Parliamentarians, including former Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, may also have an impact on the work of DFAT and its overseas posts.

**Overseas study travel**

After serving a three year term, federal parliamentarians are entitled to spend the equivalent of an around-the-world first class airfare on overseas study tours. There is no limit on the number of trips within the price range. They can downgrade their airfare to business class or economy class and take their spouse. They receive a new entitlement every three years. The proposal for a study tour must be approved by the Special Minister of State before an airline warrant will be issued. Members must acquit their travel and lodge a written report following their trip which is tabled in Parliament.

In August 2008 the Foreign Minister, Mr Smith, wrote to all backbenchers and shadow ministers, inviting them to make use of the services available from the department for their official overseas travel. A booklet and leaflet were distributed with the letter from Minister Smith – copies are attached for the Committee’s reference (Attachment A).

The guidelines were issued so that parliamentarians are aware of the type of assistance which can be provided by the department. The department also emphasises that the extent to which overseas posts are able to assist varies from country to country; however, posts will do their best to assist, within the scope of available resources. At times, parliamentarians also arrange their own study tour programs by using personal contacts or requesting assistance through foreign embassies in Canberra.

Assisting parliamentarians with their study tours involves a high volume of work for posts, in particular for smaller posts. There can also be problems with the timing of visits. Many parliamentarians seek to use their entitlement during the July-August winter parliamentary recess. However, it often proves difficult for posts to arrange a comprehensive program at this time in the northern hemisphere as this is the main summer holiday period.

This year some posts advised it proved difficult to secure appointments with the same foreign officials (repeatedly), for different individual visits, as many study tour topics have included similar issues, such as climate change and innovations in renewable energy.

Generally, the administrative arrangements for study tours work well. However, the administrative burden on posts can be best managed through better planning and
scheduling of individual tours. The clear definition and articulation of objectives by parliamentarians for their study tours also assists posts in developing useful visit programs.

*Other overseas travel issues*

Posts are frequently requested to arrange programs and make accommodation and other logistical arrangements for official overseas visits by non-portfolio Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries. The Department of Finance and Deregulation (DoFD) is responsible for the cost of official overseas travel, including airfares, accommodation, ground transport, incidentals, tips, gratuities and porterage, and non-portfolio-related official hospitality, while the relevant portfolio department is responsible for other costs incurred during the overseas travel.

Frequently, posts are requested by the non-portfolio department to make advance accommodation bookings which require payment of a non-refundable deposit. DoFD will only reimburse these costs to the post if the visit is approved by the Prime Minister. If the visit is not approved by the Prime Minister and the booking is cancelled, it is the responsibility of the relevant portfolio department to reimburse the post. The department encourages our overseas posts to reach agreement in advance with the other department that the latter will meet such costs. However, it would be useful if the responsibilities of other portfolio departments towards meeting such costs for travel, or cancelled travel, by their Ministers or Parliamentary Secretaries, were more clearly enunciated.

DoFD will pay for the cost of non-portfolio related Australian Government hospitality when a Minister or Parliamentary Secretary is travelling overseas, while the relevant portfolio department is responsible for the cost of portfolio-related hospitality. From the department’s point of view, DoFD funding for non-portfolio related Australian Government hospitality could potentially be useful, but there appear to be no clear guidelines on the meaning of “non-portfolio related Australian Government hospitality” and how it may be used. It would be useful to clarify the meaning of the entitlement and its application.

The department notes that the Committee is to have regard to the “entitlements of former Prime Ministers (including a head of authority to provide any entitlements), Governors-General and former Parliamentarians”. We note that some former Prime Ministers and some former parliamentarians, including former Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, travel overseas from time to time, and may seek the assistance of our posts (and the department in Canberra). We understand that former Prime Ministers and accompanying spouses are entitled to be provided access to cars at overseas posts which maintain a car fleet, for specific journeys only, that this entitlement does not extend to the use of commercial hire vehicles, and should not be used for commercial purposes (advice provided by PM&C). However, beyond this we are not aware of any formal written guidelines which specifically address overseas visits by such individuals, and the range of issues which may arise. It would be very helpful to have written advice on the entitlements of such individuals when travelling overseas to enable DFAT to provide clear guidance to posts.
Other issues

DoFD is responsible for preparing handbooks which set out ministerial and parliamentary secretary entitlements and indicating whether these are the responsibility of DoFD or the relevant portfolio department. The department has access to the November 2007 printed version of the two handbooks, which we rely on in administering those entitlements which are the responsibility of the department, and in providing advice to other staff in the department, overseas posts, and the relevant ministerial and parliamentary secretary offices. We note the importance of ensuring that the same terminology is used in relation to the same entitlements for both ministers and parliamentary secretaries, to avoid confusion.

We also consider it would be particularly helpful if the content of some of the listed entitlements could be clarified by DoFD. For example, the handbooks provide that the portfolio department is responsible for “membership fees of business organisations related to portfolio or Ministerial (Parliamentary Secretary) responsibilities”. It would be particularly helpful to have clear guidance as to what kinds of membership fees and business organisations are covered by this entitlement.

We understand that DoFD intends shortly to publish these handbooks on-line, and consider this will be very useful in enabling departments to keep up with changes to the entitlements as they occur.
AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE

OVERSEAS TRAVEL BY FEDERAL PARLIAMENTARIANS

ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WHO TO CONTACT ABOUT YOUR PROPOSED VISIT</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS ARE MADE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booking travel and accommodation</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passports and visas</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND BRIEFINGS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country specific travel advices</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIMING OF VISITS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE FROM AUSTRALIA’S OVERSEAS POSTS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranging appointments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits to Australian war graves and memorials</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits to development assistance projects</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY OVERSEAS POSTS</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport services</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of the diplomatic bag</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHEN TRAVELLING UNOFFICIALLY</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ON RETURN TO AUSTRALIA</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAVEL CHECKLIST</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

This booklet is designed to help you make the most of your official travel overseas. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), through its resources in Canberra and at overseas posts, can assist you with developing programs, arranging appointments and providing background briefing. The booklet also contains important information about the administrative aspects of organising your travel. If you are travelling overseas as part of an official parliamentary delegation, the Parliamentary Relations Office (PRO) will handle the majority of your pre-departure arrangements and should be your first point of contact.

The extent to which overseas posts are able to assist varies from country to country but they will always do their best to help, within the scope of available resources.

Who to contact about your proposed visit

The Ministerial, Cabinet and Parliamentary Services Section (MCP) in DFAT can coordinate arrangements including arranging appointments, itineraries and all liaison with Australian overseas posts.

In order to provide assistance with your visit MCP will require the following information:

- your itinerary, including flight numbers and times of arrival and departure;
- the nature of any assistance requested;
- where appointments are sought, specific topics to be discussed;
- whether arrangements are being made with anyone else (eg diplomatic missions in Canberra);
- your biographical details for passing to the post (this is essential for appointments with foreign government and parliamentary officials); and
- whether you will be accompanied.
Australian diplomatic posts overseas

We encourage you to contact MCP rather than making a direct approach to our overseas posts. Involving DFAT in Canberra leads to better coordination of assistance and reduces the risk of communications going astray.

Other countries’ diplomatic missions in Australia

Arrangements for overseas visits are sometimes made through foreign diplomatic missions in Canberra. These missions can assist with appointments, as well as providing briefing material. Where a foreign mission in Canberra extends an official invitation, that mission becomes the main contact point for arranging programs and coordinating travel and other arrangements in their country.

However, it is advisable to inform MCP of arrangements made in this way. You may, for example, also wish to take advantage of an on-the-spot briefing by the relevant Australian post. During the planning stages of a proposed visit, the Australian post may also be able to make additional suggestions for the program and to work with host authorities to ensure the most effective programs are put together.

Finally, advising DFAT ensures that a program has in fact been arranged. On occasions, parliamentarians have arrived in a foreign country only to discover that their hosts are unaware of their visit. If the Australian post overseas is aware of your travel plans, there is a much greater chance of avoiding this kind of mishap.

When travelling as a member of a parliamentary delegation

If you are travelling overseas as a member of an official parliamentary delegation, the Parliamentary Relations Office (PRO) in Parliament House should be your first point of contact. The PRO liaises with DFAT in arranging the delegation’s program and briefing.
How travel arrangements are made

Booking travel and accommodation

Travel and accommodation may be booked through the Parliament House travel agency HRG Travel.

Passports and visas

The usual practice is for you to arrange your own travel documents, including passports and visas, through the PRO. Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries generally use the services of their own Departments to obtain passports and visas.

You are encouraged to advise the PRO of any visa requirements as soon as you know your travel plans. It can take up to four weeks to issue a passport and obtain the necessary visas. If you have a query about visa requirements for a particular country contact the PRO in the first instance.

You should consult the PRO to see whether you are entitled to use a diplomatic or official passport for your travel. Please note that if you wish to travel to Taiwan, a short-term, special issue ordinary (blue) passport should be used. Special arrangements may also apply for travel to Israel. Some countries will not issue visas in passports with less then six months validity eg Indonesia and South Africa.

Funding

The Ministerial and Parliamentary Services Group of the Department of Finance and Administration (DOFA) is authorised to fund the following travel:

- official overseas travel by Ministers and their representatives, Presiding Officers and their representatives and the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition;
- all official parliamentary delegations; and
- travel by parliamentarians who have qualified for the overseas study travel entitlement.
If you are travelling in any of these categories you should talk to the Ministerial and Parliamentary Services Group about the financial details of the visit prior to your travel. You will also need to liaise with them after you have travelled regarding acquittals and reimbursements of any official expenditure.

**Background briefings**

Requests for briefing on foreign policy matters should be addressed in writing to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, or for trade related issues, the Minister for Trade, setting out your specific areas of interest.

Background briefs on a wide range of countries, including information on bilateral trade and development assistance issues, are available from DFAT’s website ([www.dfat.gov.au](http://www.dfat.gov.au)) which is linked to the Austrade and AusAID sites.

The Parliamentary Library and other Commonwealth departments can also provide briefing material on issues outside the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio. Please contact these agencies directly.

**Country specific travel advices**

Parliamentarians planning overseas travel in an official or personal capacity are encouraged to monitor DFAT travel advice updates and bulletins on the department’s website at [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au).

**Timing of visits**

Early advice on proposed timing of visits is vital. Posts will advise if there are any difficulties with proposed dates due to local elections, holidays or festivals, etc. that may impede or detract from the effectiveness of a visit at a particular time.

In many places, it can be virtually impossible to arrange a comprehensive program for visitors across holiday periods (e.g. July/August in Europe and North America). If travel to the northern hemisphere during the peak holiday time is the only option, it is highly advisable to request MCP to seek early advice from posts about what form of program will be possible.
Assistance available from Australia’s overseas posts

Arranging appointments

MCP will coordinate the arrangements for your visit with our overseas posts. You should provide MCP with details of your areas of interest, objectives, issues to be raised, and the type of appointment required. Such advice should be as detailed and specific as possible. This will assist our overseas posts in obtaining the appropriate level of access and interlocutors with relevant expertise.

The more notice you provide the better placed DFAT will be to assist in arranging a constructive program, particularly as there can be delays in finalising appointments overseas. Last minute requests will inevitably limit the service that can be provided. In a number of countries parliamentarians and senior government officials require several weeks notice together with a list of the specific topics to be discussed before agreeing to a meeting. You should also bear in mind that in many regions, travel between and inside particular countries can be surprisingly difficult due to irregular or unreliable local connections.

The extent to which overseas posts are able to assist varies from country to country but they will always do their best to help, within the scope of available resources.

Generally, Heads of Mission are happy to brief visiting parliamentarians on local conditions, subject to any other government priorities. Specific requests for meetings with Heads of Mission should be made to MCP before departure.

Visits to Australian war graves and memorials

The Office of Australian War Graves can provide advice and briefing on Australian war graves and memorials located in the countries to be visited. The Office of Australian War Graves can be contacted on 1800 026 185 or by e-mail at wargraves@dva.gov.au. Our overseas posts can assist in facilitating visits to these sites.
Visits to development assistance projects

Opportunities are also available for you to visit Australian aid projects in developing countries. This will allow you to see at first hand the way in which Australia’s aid program is implemented. MCP can make arrangements for these visits with relevant overseas posts.

Level of services provided by overseas posts

The level of assistance overseas posts can offer varies enormously because of their differing size and location. Large posts such as London or Washington, have more resources to draw upon, however smaller posts, may only have one or two Australian officers and few locally-employed staff, which restricts the assistance they can offer. In particular, posts may be unable to provide interpretation services. However they can always arrange for a reliable interpreter to be hired on request. The availability of these services, and of reimbursement of their costs, should be discussed with MCP and DOFA respectively before travelling.

Depending on the post’s resources, an officer from the mission may be available to accompany parliamentarians on calls. However, unless there are particular policy issues involved of importance to the Government, records of conversation are not normally taken.

Transport services

If requested, MCP will contact our overseas posts to ascertain whether they are able to organise airport transport on arrival and departure (particularly in countries where English is not in common use and transport services are difficult to arrange).

Please note, at busy transit posts such as London, Paris, Los Angeles, Singapore, Hong Kong, Bangkok, New York and Tokyo, official transport is only likely to be supplied by the mission in special circumstances. These cities, however, enjoy excellent taxi and limousine services and most hotels will also arrange airport transfers. DOFA can advise how you can be reimbursed for use of these services. Posts are very willing to provide up-to-date advice on which services are available and their approximate cost. MCP can request
them to make bookings on your behalf.

Our overseas posts are not responsible for arranging any special equipment or services required for children travelling with you. Should you need such items as cots, prams or car safety seats, you should contact your travel agent or communicate directly with the hotel or car hire company.

Use of the diplomatic bag

The diplomatic bag may be used to send official documents and material back to Australia provided the freight costs are paid to the overseas post at the time of despatch. Where a large quantity of material is involved you should make your own arrangements for the dispatch of such material to Australia through a commercial courier or airfreight service. Diplomatic bags coming into Australia from our overseas posts are subject to normal customs and quarantine regulations. Our overseas posts have to obtain prior approval from Canberra before dispatching any official gifts by bag and it should not be assumed that such approval will be given. It is not advisable to send fragile items by bag.

Australian posts cannot accept private, unofficial items for transmission to Australia by diplomatic bag. These can be sent for you by the post by commercial means, provided the costs are paid by you to the post before dispatch.

If you expect to receive voluminous material, it is advisable to budget an appropriate sum to cover the cost of returning the material to Australia.

When travelling unofficially

When you are travelling in a non-official capacity, you are still encouraged to notify DFAT of your visit and provide a copy of your itinerary so that you can be contacted if necessary. MCP can inform relevant posts of your visit in order to facilitate support should an emergency arise overseas. You should also check the latest country specific travel advice on the department's website at www.smartraveller.gov.au.
On return to Australia

In order to maintain the highest possible standards of assistance, DFAT values feedback on your visit and the level and nature of assistance provided by our staff both in Canberra and our overseas posts.

You are encouraged to write to the Assistant Secretary, Parliamentary and Media Branch with any comments or suggestions you may have, so these can be taken into account when planning future visits.
# Travel Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Funding</strong></th>
<th>Overseas study tour entitlement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Official Passports</strong></td>
<td>Check validity – some countries will not issue visas in passports with less than 6 months validity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visas</strong></td>
<td>Check visa requirements for countries to be visited including transit countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
<td>Check what vaccinations are required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flights and accommodation</strong></td>
<td>Flights and accommodation may be booked through the Parliament House travel agent HRG Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appointments</strong></td>
<td>Contact MCP if assistance is required with your programme of appointments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Briefing</strong></td>
<td>Contact MCP to arrange DFAT country background briefings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact the Office of Australian War Graves</strong></td>
<td>for advice and briefing on war graves and memorials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contact MCP for advice on visits to Australian aid projects</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country specific travel advice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On return to Australia</strong></td>
<td>Acquittal of travel – contact DOFA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provide feedback to DFAT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>