
Highlights



A new family law system

This year started a four-year process to implement the new family law system announced in the 2005–06 Budget. A range of new services will help achieve **better outcomes for families** by strengthening family relationships and, where families do separate, helping them reach agreement on arrangements for their children outside the courts wherever possible.

We are working with other Australian Government agencies, especially the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, as well as community-based service providers and the legal profession, to implement the reforms.

Key achievements for us during 2005–06 were:

- passage of the *Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006*
- establishment of the first 15 Family Relationship Centres
- establishment of a new Family Relationship Advice Line (1800 050 321) and Family Relationships Online <www.familyrelationships.gov.au>, and
- expansion of the Contact Orders Program (now called the Parenting Orders Program).

(See pages 41–44 and 48.)

Security and counter-terrorism activities

We were instrumental in providing a **national legislative response** to issues arising from the 2005 London bombings. The Anti-terrorism Acts 2005, developed by the Department in cooperation with State and Territory jurisdictions, included significant new measures relating to **preventative detention** and **control orders**. In less than six months, a scheme of interlocking Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation was enacted and available for use if there is an actual or threatened terrorist attack in Australia.

We were also closely involved with the National Counter-Terrorism Committee and stakeholders in developing several **security initiatives**, such as:

- the National Approach for the Protection of Places of Mass Gathering from Terrorism, and
- National Guidelines for Protecting Critical Infrastructure from Terrorism.

Through their 24-hour operation, the **National Security Hotline and Watch Office** continued to achieve Australia's whole-of-government coordination for preventing or responding to threats to the nation's security.

(See pages 119–121, 143 and 150–151.)

International engagement

The Department plays an important role in ensuring that criminals cannot evade justice simply by crossing national borders. In 2005–06 we negotiated treaties with **Malaysia** on mutual legal assistance and extradition, and with **China** on mutual legal assistance. The Department also successfully negotiated an agreement with the **Hong Kong** government for the transfer of sentenced persons between the two countries for humanitarian reasons.

We also took the lead in representing the Australian Government in a number of international forums, such as:

- chairing the **Friends of Legal Services Group** in the World Trade Organization negotiations under the General Agreement on Trade in Services
- taking part in negotiations on the draft **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** and ratification of the **UN Convention Against Corruption**, and
- coordinating Australia's appearance before the **Committee on the Rights of the Child** established under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

(See pages 73 and 113.)

Combating identity crime

Identity crime is one of the fastest-growing crimes around the world, described as 'the crime of the new millennium'. In April 2005, the Australian Government announced the **National Identity Security Strategy** to combat the misuse of stolen or assumed identities. The Department is leading a cross-jurisdictional, whole-of-government approach to this important initiative.

Key achievements during the reporting period in implementing this strategy were:

- securing Council of Australian Government's (COAG) agreement to the development and implementation of a national identity security verification strategy to better protect the identities of Australians, and
- developing and successfully implementing a prototype document verification service that allows authorised government agencies to check Australian passports, citizenship certificates, birth certificates and drivers' licences online and in real time.

(See pages 112–114 and 116.)

Resolving native title claims through mediation

The Australian Government encourages the resolution of native title claims through mediated outcomes in preference to litigation. An example of this approach was the resolution of the *Wotjobaluk* claim over a large area of the Wimmera in Victoria in December 2005 – the **first occasion on which native title has been formally recognised in Victoria**. The Department, with the assistance of the Australian Government Solicitor, worked closely with the claimants, the Victorian Government and other respondent parties towards a negotiated resolution of the larger country claim and two other, smaller claims.

(See pages 82 and 87.)

Legal assistance to Indigenous Australians

We were instrumental in implementing two significant changes to the way in which Indigenous Australians receive legal assistance:

- the **open tendering process for legal aid services** was completed during the year for all States and the Northern Territory, with Indigenous organisations the successful tenderers (the contracts and program funding agreements are worth over \$144 million for 2005–08), and
- **Family Violence Prevention Legal Services were expanded** from 13 to 26 locations in rural and remote Australia, providing skilled and professional staff to address the needs of Indigenous Australians experiencing family violence and sexual abuse or who are at immediate risk of such violence.

(See pages 92 and 94–101.)

Responding to emergencies

The Department, through Emergency Management Australia, coordinated teams to assist in Australia's response to major emergencies in 2005–06 in Australia and overseas – Cyclone Larry, Tropical Cyclone Monica, the unrest in East Timor (now Timor-Leste) and Solomon Islands, and the earthquake in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The National Emergency Management Coordination Centre (NEMCC) has been continually active since January 2006.

Through the \$49 million **Working Together to Manage Emergencies initiative**, we manage two important funding programs: the Local Grants Scheme, to enhance the capability of communities to deal with emergencies and disasters of all types; and the National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund, to boost the recruitment, skills and training base of volunteer organisations.

(See pages 109, 134 and 141.)
