

# Secretary's review



The overall aim of the Attorney-General's Department is *achieving a just and secure society*.

Under that broad umbrella, we perform an increasing range of important but discrete functions which, on the surface, have little to do with each other.

They range from national security and emergency management to advice on constitutional and international law; from legislative drafting to protective security; from copyright protection to telecommunications interception to family law reform; and so the list goes on.

A quick glance at the highlights section of this report will illustrate the breadth of these responsibilities.

Some of our functions involve developing policy and providing advice. Others are operational, such as extraditing people to face criminal charges in other countries or developing a background checking service for aviation and maritime workers.

There are four things to note about that wide spread of activities.

The first is that, despite their disparity, they are all jobs the Government needs to have done.

Secondly, while some of them are more publicly prominent than others, they are all important and they all contribute in one way or another to making Australia a more just and secure place.

The third is that these responsibilities vary from time to time. The Government gives us different things to do as circumstances and needs change. Our consistent ability to adapt to new governmental requirements, often at short notice, reflects well on the Department.

Our adaptability – the capacity to move with the needs of different times – is one of the main reasons why this Department is still at the centre of government 105 years after it was established on 1 January 1901.

Finally, these responsibilities are growing, as can be seen from our increasing policy and operational functions, budget allocations and staff numbers. This growth indicates that the Government has confidence in the Department's competence and its ability to handle additional tasks.

The Government's confidence is, of course, a positive reflection on the efforts of everyone in the Department. In that regard, I particularly want to acknowledge the great support provided over the last twelve months by the corporate services, information and knowledge services, and financial services groups.

It is interesting to compare the Department today with the Department of, say, 1999. Apart from the hugely heightened focus on national security and emergency preparedness, the main differences are:

- We have moved from being essentially a department providing policy and legal advice to a department with many more operational activities. These activities include the national security 24-hour Watch Office; the 24-hour National Security Hotline; the AusCheck background checking service; the implementation of programs (such as the computer network vulnerability assessment program) to protect critical infrastructure in cooperation with the private sector; and contracting for the provision of a large number of services such as Family Relationship Centres and Indigenous Family Violence Prevention Legal Services.
- Our operational activities are not confined to Australia. We coordinate national responses to all types of emergencies in Australia (such as Cyclone Larry) and overseas (the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami in the Indian Ocean); we participate in a large number of international government initiatives, including the Enhanced Cooperation Program in Papua New Guinea and improving anti-money

laundering capacity in our region; and we help neighbouring countries improve their laws and governance (such as drafting counter-terrorism laws for Cambodia).

- We are cooperating with many other departments in whole-of-government approaches to difficult problems, including the new approach to delivering government services for Indigenous Australians.

As this report shows, the Department has achieved some considerable successes during the year.

I thank each member of staff for their assistance in 2005-06 as we look forward to working together to meet the challenges that will arise over the next 12 months.



Robert Cornall AO



