

NEWS RELEASE

MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
SENATOR GARETH EVANS



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THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE JOINS THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY

A comprehensive range of the latest Australian foreign affairs and trade portfolio information will be available to domestic and world audiences when the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's trial six month Internet World Wide Web service goes online on Monday, 24 April.

The announcement was made today in a joint statement by the three portfolio ministers - the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Gareth Evans, the Minister for Trade, Senator Bob McMullan and the Minister for Development and Pacific Island affairs, Gordon Bilney.

Senator Evans said the DFAT service would join and link up to Internet services from other Federal Government departments through a coordinated Commonwealth/State/Local government page at the National Library of Australia's home page.

Internet is made up of telephone connections between computers around the world. Conservative estimates indicate that about 30 million computers access information provided by more than 3 million commercial, educational, institutional, personal interest and other providers. The World Wide Web is the easiest way of accessing Internet information, including multimedia material.

An immediate benefit of joining the so-called "information superhighway" would be to help large Australian missions overseas deal with the many public inquiries for information about Australia.

"The DFAT Internet service is a new element in Australia's public diplomacy efforts internationally," Senator Evans said.

"With instant communications and the increasing ease of publishing and broadcasting, international audiences important to Australia's interests are receiving their information in a rapidly growing variety of ways.

"It is the Government's policy to keep up with communications technology to reach these audiences and to promote Australia's capacities as a technologically advanced country," he said.

Senator Evans said two of the Department's public affairs branches initially would provide most of the information. The Parliamentary and Media Branch would make

available each day the latest ministerial and departmental news releases and speeches.

The International Public Affairs Branch (IPB) designed and would manage the Web pages as well as publishing its extensive range of public affairs material for international audiences, especially overseas media, to help promote Australian interests.

This included online versions of daily news items, feature articles and photographs and a range of magazines and newsletters such as the fortnightly policy magazine, *Insight*, the monthly *Science and Technology Newsletter*, the *Peace and Disarmament Newsletter* and the *Environment Newsletter*.

The DFAT service includes many publications such as a library of fact sheets on a range of aspects of Australia, all of the *Australia in Brief* booklet, the Department's Annual Report and Corporate Plan.

The Web pages include one-off publications such as *Australia and the United Nations* and information on special events such as the Global Cultural Diversity Conference beginning in Sydney this week.

Senator Evans said the Internet connection also would allow officers in Canberra and at posts to access databases and information banks around the world, speeding up and enhancing research capabilities.

In addition, IPB has established, as an ancillary service, a stand-alone dial-up bulletin board to allow Australian overseas posts and eventually other clients to download, at their own expense, high-resolution photographs and other large-file material which does not transmit easily via the Internet.

Pending registration of its own address, the DFAT service has a temporary Internet address through the Department of Primary Industries and Energy at: <http://www.dpie.gov.au/dfat/home.html>.

Australian missions abroad also are expected to publish material of particular interest to audiences in their country via their own Internet services with links to Canberra's for the more general departmental and Australian material. Our Embassy in Washington already has begun a service reporting a healthy access rate. The Washington address: <http://www.aust.emb.nw.dc.us>

For security reasons all DFAT computers able to access the Internet in Australia and at overseas posts are stand-alone and not connected to any departmental or post networks.

CANBERRA

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