

*The Political Officer
in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade*

- The Canadian high commission in Canberra has used local staff to do some reporting.
- In Australia, the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has issued instructions that all cables to and from posts should be limited to three pages, with summaries no longer than ten lines. Only ministerial records of conversation, transcripts and non-DFAT documents which cannot easily be sent by fax or e-mail are exempt. "The fact that an issue has high priority would not be grounds for exceeding the page limit -- on the contrary, reports on the most important issues need to be especially concise and accessible to senior readers in Canberra". Heads of mission must personally approve messages longer than three pages. Messages must also indicate what follow-up action is required.

PROPOSAL: The department should issue a directive on mission reporting, affirming that political and economic reports are an obligation not a discretionary activity, and establishing minimum requirements for all missions.

PROPOSAL: Missions should be instructed to prepare annual reporting plans in conjunction with geographic bureaux and other stakeholders, which specify the nature and frequency of the reports to be prepared commensurate with the size and composition of mission staff.

PROPOSAL: The department should adopt Australian rules in respect of the length of reports.

PROPOSAL: Missions should be instructed to explore the feasibility and cost of employing foreign nationals to assist in meeting mission reporting obligations.

Networking and lobbying

- In the early 1980s, the Canadian embassy in Washington established a Congressional liaison office within the mission to begin systematic tracking of legislative initiatives with the potential to affect Canadian economic and commercial interests. The data generated served to develop strategy for lobbying Senators and Congressmen, their policy and legislative assistants, and committee staff on issues of importance to Canada -- notably the Free Trade Agreement.