

Fact Sheet - Biometric Initiatives

As part of a broader identity management strategy to strengthen identification processes for non-citizens entering Australia, we have introduced biometric technology into some of our programmes and processes. This includes facial recognition and fingerprint matching technology.

With identity fraud estimated to cost the Australian community over \$1.1 billion per year, enhanced identity checking using biometrics reduces the opportunity for identity fraud to be used for fraudulent entry into Australia.

The main aim of collecting biometrics is to assist us to check or confirm a client's identity, and to detect identity fraud. More information about a client's identity and history will help us assess a client's visa or citizenship application.

Definition of Biometrics

The term 'biometrics' commonly refers to a measurable, physical characteristic or personal behaviour trait that is unique to an individual. Examples include fingerprints, the iris, ear shape, the way a person walks or a person's voice. These physical characteristics can also be referred to as 'personal identifiers'.

Personal identifiers such as fingerprints and facial images can be converted into biometric templates, allowing them to be searched against other templates very quickly. Biometric systems can be used to compare someone's personal identifiers against a stored copy (verification) or to search against all data holdings to see if a person is already known (identification).

Legislation

The *Migration Act 1958* and the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007* provide the legislative basis for collecting personal identifiers, including photographs, signatures and fingerprints, which enhance the Department's capability to establish and authenticate the identity of non-citizens at various stages of immigration, detention and citizenship processing.

Special provisions in the *Migration Act 1958* govern the collection of personal identifiers from minors under the age of 15 years and incapable persons. These include:

- restricting the personal identifiers that can be formally required to photographs and measurements of height and weight

- obtaining consent of a parent or guardian or an independent person before obtaining the personal identifiers.

Both the Migration Act and the Australian Citizenship Act specifically exclude the use of intimate test procedures such as taking blood tests or saliva samples.

The legislation also provides safeguards, including specifying the purposes for which personal identifiers can be used and disclosed, and establishing a strict regime for their storage and management. There are also provisions to ensure that identifying information will not be disclosed in certain circumstances and limiting the disclosure of the information to other countries.

Collection of Biometrics from Offshore Visa Applicants

Australia's offshore biometrics programme aims to strengthen border security and better protect visa applicants from identity fraud. Under the programme, all people, regardless of nationality, who lodge visa applications in designated countries, are required to provide fingerprints and a photograph as part of their visa application. There are some exclusions and exemptions.

Biometrics are currently collected from visa applicants in more than 20 countries across Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia and further expansion of the programme is planned.

We engage third party providers known as service delivery partners (SDPs) to collect biometrics from clients on our behalf in most locations. In some circumstances, such as where we do not have SDP services, we use mobile biometric collection capability to capture biometrics in other locations.

Collection of Biometrics at Airports

We commenced the collection of biometric facial images and fingerprints from passengers at the secondary line in airports between November 2012 and June 2013, with the deployment of a mobile biometric collection capability.

Until this time, passengers who were turned around at airports and returned on a flight within a few hours, did not have their biometrics captured. This important cohort are now captured by the use of mobile equipment that does not require a dedicated room to be set up for biometric capture, an important consideration given the lack of space at busy airports.

In addition, legislation allows for the capture of biometrics from any person in Immigration Clearance. Some airports are now capturing the biometrics of passengers who are being interviewed in order to determine if any identity information is already held by us. This is an

important tool for airport staff and allows a better understanding of the client to be developed, including any positive or adverse dealings in the past.

Verification of Biometrics at Airports

In March 2012, a pilot programme was introduced to verify the identity of passengers on arrival at airports, when that passenger had previously supplied their biometrics as part of their offshore visa application. Using handheld equipment, an airport officer is able to swipe the passenger's passport, take two finger scans and, within a minute, determine that the person in front of them is the person who applied offshore for a visa. Currently, this system has been deployed in Perth and Melbourne and will be rolled out to other airports in the future.

Collection of Biometrics from Onshore Protection Visa Applicants

We commenced the collection of biometric facial images and fingerprints from eligible protection visa applicants in December 2009.

The collection of biometrics may help clients who do not have identity documents in establishing an identity. It may also stop people taking someone else's identity or nationality. Protection visa applicants are not always able to provide documentary evidence of their identity and/or nationality. This may be due to circumstances such as the applicants fleeing from persecution in their home country, their documents being destroyed in conflict, or arriving on fraudulent documents.

Collection of Biometrics from Immigration Detainees

We introduced the collection of biometric facial images and fingerprints into the immigration detention process in December 2007. If a person is detained because it is reasonably believed that they are unlawfully in Australia they are required to provide a biometric facial image and fingerprints.

The purpose of collecting this biometric information is to enhance the integrity of the detention process by facilitating the identification of detainees and minimising the possibility of accidentally detaining people who are lawfully in Australia.

Collection of Biometrics from Applicants for Australian Citizenship

We commenced the collection of biometric facial images from citizenship applicants during the citizenship test process in December 2007. Under the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007*, a person seeking to sit the citizenship test must provide a photograph to us or allow a photograph to be taken of them.

Under the Australian Citizenship Act the minister must not approve a person becoming an Australian citizen unless the minister is satisfied of the person's identity.

Facial images are collected and used to identify, or authenticate the identity of, a person seeking to sit a citizenship test and to assist in combating document and identity fraud in citizenship matters.

Biometric Data Matching

Biometrics collected for us are automatically matched against departmental biometrics holdings under the *Migration Act 1958* or *Australian Citizenship Act 2007*, Australian law enforcement records and the Missing Persons records.

Air passengers arriving at Australian airports may have their biometrics checked against biometrics lodged during visa application.

To combat identity fraud, we have entered into international information sharing agreements with a number of countries, including but not limited to, the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand. These international information exchanges may involve the sharing of personal identifiers, including facial images and fingerprint data.

Where there is a match, additional information may be shared, such as biographical data, copies of travel and other identity documents or information from such documents, immigration status and immigration history and any criminal history information relevant to immigration purposes. Exchanged information can be checked against records in Australia. There are plans to increase the volume of data shared and to extend information exchanges and fingerprint match programmes to other countries.

Privacy Impact Assessment for Migration Amendment (Strengthening Biometrics Integrity) Bill 2015

A Privacy Impact Assessment is a decision tool used by the Australian Government to identify and mitigate privacy risks.

The Department conducted a Privacy Impact Assessment of the [*Migration Amendment \(Strengthening Biometrics Integrity\) Bill 2015*](#).

This Privacy Impact Assessment was tabled in the Senate on Monday 10 August 2015 with two actions recommended to mitigate any privacy risks. These include:

- Departmental staff (including Australian Border Force officers) will receive training to familiarise them with the new policy and procedural guidelines relating to the collection of personal identifiers and to ensure compliance with legislative requirements in the Bill.

- The Department will review and update relevant forms and notices to reflect its approach to the collection of personal identifiers.

Source: Department of Immigration and Border Protection
