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**An Overview of the Response at the  
Federal Level**

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# Foreword

Human smuggling and trafficking reports have been significant media items in Australia for some time. Given the prominence of migration issues on the public agenda, this report seeks to contribute to present discussions by separating the myths from the facts. This report summarises:

- what we know about human smuggling and trafficking to Australia;
- what we do not know; and
- how the Australian Government has responded.

In Part 1 of this report, it is noted that despite the public interest in interceptions of sea vessels carrying illegal migrants, the largest number of people who are detected by Australian authorities are those who overstay their visa and work illegally. The second largest group are those who are intercepted at Australian airports, either because they are using false or fraudulent travel documents, or because they are found to be intending to work in Australia in contravention of their visa.

There are indications that transnational organised crime groups are becoming increasingly involved in people smuggling and trafficking to Australia. The recent interceptions of sea vessels have uncovered highly organised people-smuggling operations. Similarly, immigration officials at airports report high levels of presentation of fraudulent, stolen, or altered travel documents. The increasing involvement of organised crime groups in the illegal migration process is concerning both from a criminal justice and a human rights perspective.

In Australia, as in other countries of the world, limited evidence is available about the nature and incidence of human trafficking. There is some anecdotal evidence of trafficking activity occurring in various industries, including hospitality, manufacturing, and agriculture. The sector that has received the most media attention, however, is the sex industry. It appears from academic reports that most female undocumented workers working in the sex industry have entered that industry voluntarily, having come to Australia for that purpose. These reports suggest that the issue of deception or coercion is most likely to occur in relation to working conditions,

including the repayment of debts to organisers, rather than the nature of the work involved.

Part 2 of this report presents an overview of the Australian Government's response to the issues of human smuggling and trafficking. These are discussed under the headings of legislation, law enforcement, international cooperation, economic assistance, services for victims of trafficking, education programs, and research and data collection.

The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) is currently taking part in the Global Program Against Trafficking in Human Beings, which was launched by the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention in March 1999.

The Global Program will collect data on different routes for smuggling and trafficking human beings, and the structures and methods used for transporting and subsequently exploiting them. A global inventory of best practices used in addressing organised crime involvement in smuggling and trafficking, including special legislation and institutional arrangements, will be created.

**Adam Graycar**  
**Director, Australian Institute of Criminology**  
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