Biometric test lab to improve security
Correspondents
The Australian
JULY 27, 2004

THE Federal Government will investigate facial recognition technology, iris scanning and fingerprinting as ways of identifying people entering Australia.

The Biometric Testing Facility was launched in Canberra last week by Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone.

It has the potential to greatly enhance Australia's border security effort, she says.

While there is no clear time for the introduction of the new technologies, Senator Vanstone says the facility's work could prove invaluable to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

"The testing facility uses practical applications of technologies such as facial recognition, fingerprint and iris scanning to assess how these technologies could be integrated into DIMIA'S existing processes," Senator Vanstone says.

"These systems present the possibility of a new line of control in managing our borders."

Biometric technology is a powerful weapon in the fight against identity fraud, as it enables travellers' identity documents to be linked to unique physical characteristics, she says.

"This testing will give DIMIA substantial information on which to define its long-term biometric strategy.

"Testing will take place between July and December this year, with a report to DIMIA in January 2005."

Opposition immigration spokesman Stephen Smith welcomes the new facility, saying biometrics is a very useful identity tool, which can be used broadly.

"Labor welcomes the effort by the government to utilise this new technology," Smith says.

"Senator Vanstone has made it clear that she regards the use of biometrics as for entry purposes only – identity fraud for entry into Australia, and I think that's a mistake," he says.

"Biometrics can be used for compliance purposes as well."

Senator Vanstone later released a departmental publication, Managing the Border, saying it highlighted the dramatic impact of the government's efforts to combat people smuggling.

"The publication, covering border compliance activity in 2002-03, shows that there were no unauthorised boat arrivals in that period, compared with a peak of more than 4000 people in 1999-00 and 2000-01," Senator Vanstone says.

"However, we should not be lulled into a false sense of security."
"There is no doubt that there are people smugglers still trying to take money from vulnerable people and families on the promise of reaching Australia."
The Government remains committed to the Pacific Solution, under which would-be asylum seekers are processed offshore, she says.

AAP

This report appears on australianIT.com.au.