NEW high-tech passports to be rolled out from October this year would be computer hacker-proof, a Senate inquiry has heard.

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade passports official Bob Nash told a Senate inquiry into privacy laws today the new ePassports were due to be released by October 26.

Mr Nash said the deadline had been set to ensure Australians could still take part in the US visa waiver program, which was also switching to biometric passports.

Biometric passports include a computer chip which contains an image of the person and other personal details.

Mr Nash said the department had conducted two privacy assessments and was well aware of concerns by consumer groups that the chips could be read remotely by computer hackers.

"Our testing to date has failed to prove it's a possibility, frankly," Mr Nash said.

"But it remains a very strong perception and we've taken a view that in the longer term at least it will be possible to do it."

Mr Nash said the department had decided to protect the chips with a code, called a basic access control, which will mean it cannot be unlocked and read unless the code is entered.

He said the chips would contain the same information that the current paper-based passports held.

"I think that it comes back to the point about what is being proposed is nothing different to what exists currently," he said.

"There is no more data involved in the passport process, there is no more data held centrally."

AAP

This report appears on australianIT.com.au.