

SMART MACHINES REPLACING CUSTOMS OFFICERS?



World travel grows and with the danger of terrorists' attack the security measures at the airports worldwide become stricter. The number of visitors traveling to Australia is expected to grow at an average annual rate of nearly 5% between 2006 and 2016. Thus the local authorities are naturally striving to make the traveling more convenient - for instance through the SmartGate project.

Passengers older than 18 years who possess an ePassport can use a kiosk when going through the customs at the Australian airports. Here they put their ePassport into the passport reader, answer few questions via touch screen and the kiosk decides whether they may go through the automated processing. The SmartGate then compares the electronic image of the person obtained from the ePassport with an image that the SmartGate's camera automatically takes. The sophisticated machine then allows the travelers to continue or sends them to a Customs Officer for manual processing if they were not eligible for the self-process.

The SmartGates are nowadays working at Brisbane and Cairns International Airports and should be also introduced at other major Australian airports. Sydney and Melbourne are scheduled to be the next airports for SmartGate installation.

Also people from New Zealand can look forward to faster walking through customs. The machines are going to be tested in Wellington in the next few months. The system is expected to be operational for all trans-Tasman travel in time for the 2011 Rugby World Cup. At the beginning the SmartGates will be available only for New Zealanders and Australians but it is expected that afterwards people from other countries will be also allowed to use them. Nevertheless, New Zealanders and Australians account for 60 per cent of all trans-Tasman travel therefore they will be the main users. Officials also hope this development will make it more difficult to use forged passport and that it will help to prevent identity thefts.

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