

## External Affairs cables

### Cablegrams and savingrams

Messages sent by telegraph between the Department of External Affairs in Canberra (or its successor the Department of Foreign Affairs) and Australian diplomatic posts overseas were known as cables or cablegrams. The cable system was quick and reliable but was expensive, and it was the usual practice for long messages that did not warrant immediate transmission to be hand-carried by couriers. Such messages, which were sent by safehand bag, were known as savingrams.

Apart from the different method of transmission, cables and savingrams were the same type of document. To the recipient the only apparent difference was the descriptor 'Cable' or 'Savingram', which appeared at the head of the message and the different coloured margins of the pages on which they were issued by the External Affairs Communications Centre. Cables had either red (inwards) or blue (outwards) margins, while margins on savingrams were either green (inwards) or yellow (outwards).

### Consolidated sets of cables

All cable and savingram traffic was handled through the External Affairs Communications Centre in Canberra. About 40 per cent of correspondence handled was sent or received on behalf of government agencies other than External Affairs. Notwithstanding this, the Communications Centre maintained chronologically ordered binders of inwards and outwards cables. Cables placed in these binders were normally annotated 'CFC' (Cable File Copy). Details of binders of cables held by the National Archives in Canberra are provided in the table below.

### Binders of cables held by the National Archives

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<u>Printed copies of inward cables, secret and below</u>	1942–79	A6364
<u>Printed copies of outward cables, secret and below</u>	1942–79	A6366
<u>Binders containing printed copies of inward and outward cables classified top secret</u>	1940–72	A6367

The binders of cables can be a valuable research tool. They include virtually all of the important correspondence sent to and received from an overseas post. Note that copies of many cables will be found on the departmental correspondence files relating to the subject dealt with by the cable.

## Sample cablegram

The diagram below illustrates the standard format used for all inwards and outwards cables and savingsrams. See the notes that follow for an explanation of each of the components of the cable.

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS	
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INWARD CABLEGRAM :FPG [1]	
	1.9318 [2] DATED: 29TH MAY, 1959 [3] 1519 REC'D: 30TH MAY, 1959 [4] 0830
FROM: Australian Embassy, DJAKARTA.	
272[5]UNCLASSIFIED [6]IMMEDIATE[7]	
Trade Union Visitors.[8] Your telegram 295.[9]	
[Text of message]	
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E.A.[10] (574/4/33)[11] L. & N.S. P.M.'s	
30th May, 1959[12]	
SEC A/Ss ER INF C&P S&SEA LA SEA [13]	

## Explanatory notes

[1] Initials of the Communications Centre operator who typed the cable. If two sets of initials are included here it denotes that the cable was sent in a code or cipher, and the first set of initials refers to the cipher operator (ie the person who deciphered the cablegram).

[2] The Communications Centre allocated a daily registration number to each cable, identified by the prefix 'I' (for inwards) or 'O' (for outwards).

[3] The date and time (local) that the cable was authorised for transmission.

[4] The date and time (local) that the cablegram was received by the Communications Centre. This does not appear on outwards cables.

[5] Post Serial Number. All offices (within External Affairs) used a running number system, starting from 1 at the beginning of each year.

[6] The security classification of the cable. For unclassified cables this was often left out. In many cases the cable was produced on pre-printed paper bearing the security classification.

[7] The transmission precedence of the cable. For routine cables this was often left out.

[8] The subject title of the cable.

[9] This is a reference to the cable with serial number 295 (ie the 295th cable sent to Jakarta in 1959).

[10] These letters are abbreviations for specific areas to which the cable should be forwarded for action (ie 'action addressees'). In this case, EA, L & NS and PM denote the Departments of External Affairs, Labour and National Service and the Prime Minister's Department. These references may indicate the presence of a relevant file in the series of one of these departments.

[11] The External Affairs file reference. This is not often found on cables.

[12] The date the cable was prepared by the Communications Centre.

[13] Abbreviations for the specific areas within government to which 'for information' copies of the cable would be sent.