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World stage beckons bright young Aussies

AUSTRALIANS delight in the achievements of our high-profile expatriates. We enjoy the success of "our" Nicole Kidman winning an Oscar, "our" Kylie Minogue putting out another hit record or "our" Andy Thomas flying in space.

But the foreign legion of expatriate workers achieving brilliance in their chosen fields are often forgotten.

Australians living overseas number one million. A growing movement to recognise them - by helping them and capitalising on their achievements - is gaining momentum.

The Senate last week agreed to an inquiry into expatriate Australians and their needs and concerns. This followed a push by Labor's Nick Bolkus and Laurie Ferguson. The inquiry, to start early next year, will be held by the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee, chaired by Senator Bolkus.

He says the inquiry will seek to "establish the extent of the Australian diaspora and the variety of factors that are leading more and more Australians to live overseas on an extended basis".

The issue was examined in August by Australian consul-general to New York, Ken Allen, in a speech at Washington's prestigious Georgetown University.

"In the 1950s and '60s, many talented young Australians left to escape what they regarded as a

stultifying, provincial culture," said Mr Allen, an Adelaide University graduate and former overseas investment banker.

HE went on: "Today, their motivations have little to do with any cultural anxiety and far more about their wish to test their talents on a world stage.

"The increasing integration of global economies, culture and media are expanding international opportunities which draw Australians overseas."

A lobby group, the Southern Cross Group, was formed in 2000 to represent the interests of these Australians living abroad.

But the Southern Cross Group and expats, such as Mr Allen, also are trying to maximise the benefits to Australia from this foreign legion.

They can provide valuable networks for Australian businesses seeking to export but lacking on-ground intelligence about foreign markets.

One problem the Senate inquiry will seek to address is how to better link the expats and the Australians wanting to get in touch with them.

One popular idea is an internet register, coupled with information for expats and businesses.

Whatever results from the Senate inquiry, it is important Australians living here embrace the changes of globalisation and seek to capitalise on them rather than fear them.