

The Australian Times – News for Aussies Living in London

19 December 2006

<http://www.australiantimes.co.uk/news.aspx?ID=479>

Government Snubs Overseas Australians

THE Southern Cross Group (SCG) has expressed disappointment with the Federal Government's recent response to Senate Committee recommendations made in an Inquiry into Australian Expatriates.

The Government rejected eight out of sixteen recommendations that were aimed to strengthen interaction between Australians living abroad and their homeland.

At the top of the rejection list was the recommendation to assist expatriate Australians to maintain their electoral enrolment while abroad and a further suggestion to establish a web portal devoted to the provision of information and services for expatriate Australians. It was hoped that this web portal would include a page of links to expatriate network websites, to facilitate engagement and information exchange in the expatriate community.

The SCG pushed the Internet as an important focal point of their recommendations and also pushed that the websites of Australia's foreign missions should include an on-line registration facility to enable local expatriates to register their professional profiles. This, in turn, would hopefully allow stronger engagement between missions and expatriates, providing a resource for missions in their work of promoting Australia's interests overseas, and allowing expatriates to be notified of upcoming events and news.

Another suggestion that the Government rejected was the idea of amending Australian citizenship law to ensure that children of people who renounced their citizenship under Section 18 of the Australian Citizenship Act are eligible to apply for Australian citizenship by descent.

In a statement, SCG Australian Co-ordinator John MacGregor said, "A number of very sensible proposals that the Government has rejected would make a big difference to the lives of many ordinary overseas Australians."

He went on to say the Government had dismissed many of the Senate Committee's good ideas and that they had "failed to put forward a strategy plan or blueprint for this country's future engagement with its million-strong diaspora."

The SCG is an international non-profit organisation run by volunteers and without profit to support Australian diaspora. They have to date made many submissions to the Government on a host of Australian expatriate issues.

The most notable are related to reforming Australian citizenship law and their actions and time spent on the issue of expatriate disenfranchisement in the Australian electoral process.