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# Bright flight: the clever country packs its bags

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They are the "gold-collar workers", a new class of elite young Australians who are highly paid and highly skilled. They just work anywhere but here.

There are more members of this exclusive club than there are residents of the Northern Territory and Tasmania combined, a one-million-strong worldwide web of Australians who have chosen to live, work and play offshore.

According to some estimates, a good three-quarters will live overseas permanently or at least long term, suggesting that Australia, once the greatest beneficiary of the diasporas of other nations, has started to seriously disperse its own peoples, often to the great advantage of their new hosts. Now a growing chorus of Aus-

tralian academics is arguing fiercely that the Federal Government and the private sector need to rethink policy on the so-called cosmocrats, to exploit and capitalise on their talents and skills and perhaps, finally, lure them home.

But according to the latest research authored by the Lowy Institutes' Michael Fullilove and Chloë Flutter, while the number of expatriate Australians is growing markedly, concern in the public mind about the so-called brain drain may well be misplaced.

"The reality is both more complex and more hopeful," they say. "Expatriates can contribute to their home country by influencing Continued Page 13

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trade, investment and philanthropic flows, connecting local organisations to international developments and opportunities and projecting a contemporary national image... a logical approach for this country is to try to capture more of these benefits: to maximise the possible gains from emigration by engaging more comprehensively with diaspora."

According to the Harvard professor and author Samuel Huntington, economic transnationals are the nucleus of an emerging global superclass,

and he estimates there will be 40 million such world citizens by 2010. The Global Business Policy Council defines cosmocrats as an emerging class empowered by globalisation. It includes academics, international public servants and executives in global companies, as well as successful high-technology entrepreneurs in the ranks of this new elite.

Dr Fullilove and Dr Flutter also conducted specialist opinion polling of 1000 people for their report, which also revealed a profound cultural shift in the Australian public's attitudes to prominent Australians abroad.

## to take on a world of opportunities

This, too, overturned the traditionally suspicious "foreign poppy syndrome" attitudes expressed about the first wave of prominent young expatriates such as Germaine Greer and Robert Hughes in past decades.

Rather, the authors found positive responses from interviewees, underpinned by the strong belief that expatriates play both a significant role in building international networks but also project a good, strong image of the nation abroad.

Indeed, given Australia's small population, the report notes that a roll call of Australians in top international positions abroad is "extraordinary" and cited one US State Department official who still describes it as "the Axis of Ocker".

In business, Australians head up McDonalds, Rio Tinto, Pizza Hut, Santos, Dow Chemical, News Corporation, Polaroid and British Airways. They also hold senior executive positions in IBM, Merrill Lynch, Kellogg's, DuPont and UBS. Iconic US companies like Coca-Cola and Ford, have, until recently, been led by Australians. The editors of the *New York Post* and *The Times* of London are Australians. There are 20 Australian-born and -educated professors at Harvard and the Massachusetts

Institute of Technology, and many British cultural institutions are headed by Australians, including Sadler's Wells Theatre and the London Philharmonic.

The authors' picture of the diaspora is of a highly mobile group that has not turned its back on Australia but whose members remain well disposed to the land of their birth and keen to contribute to it. "Today's diaspora is mobile... expatriates are now more likely to move back and forward between Australia and other countries as opportunities present and their emotional ties to Australia remain strong."