



SENATOR HON NICK BOLKUS

MR LAURIE FERGUSON MP

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

LABOR PROPOSES SENATE INQUIRY INTO OVERSEAS AUSTRALIANS

The Opposition has proposed that the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee conduct a comprehensive investigation into expatriate Australians and their needs and concerns. The Chair of the Committee, Labor Senator Nick Bolkus, has today given notice of the proposed reference.

Senator Bolkus said that there had been little recognition given to a growing trend for many Australians to live overseas.

'Official statistics show that as many as 850,000 Australians are now in this situation.

'Because of our high profile immigration program, public discussion has for too long assumed that population flows are virtually one way, towards Australia. It is obvious that this is a simplistic and somewhat misleading perception.

'We need 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.

'As our Consul General in New York said in a recent speech, we need to start thinking of the Australian diaspora as an integral part of the Australian nation and a crucial element in our successful participation in an increasingly integrated world.'

The push for the Senate inquiry has been strongly supported by the Shadow Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Laurie Ferguson MP.

'It is increasingly obvious that expatriate Australians have concerns and needs that cannot be addressed solely on a portfolio-by-portfolio basis.

'While bodies such as the Southern Cross Group have made significant contributions to debates about our citizenship system and other specific program areas, the strongest message we have received is the sense that overseas Australian feel somewhat disconnected with their home country, with proper use not being made of their skills, contacts and concerns.

'Labor's policy statement on citizenship was a first attempt to put the concerns of our expatriate community on the national political agenda.

'I am sure that the proposed Senate inquiry will be of tremendous importance in furthering this process.'

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