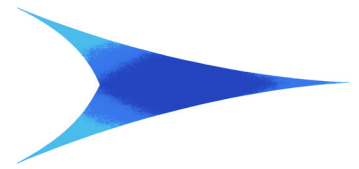


# The Southern Cross Group

Promoting Mobility in the Global Community  
[www.southern-cross-group.org](http://www.southern-cross-group.org)



## MEDIA RELEASE

### Diaspora Report Welcomed by Australian Expatriate Advocacy Organisation

The Southern Cross Group (SCG) has welcomed a new report recently released by The Lowy Institute in Sydney entitled *Diaspora - the World Wide Web of Australians* (authors: Michael Fullilove and Chloë Flutter). The 102-page document can be downloaded in pdf at no charge from the Lowy Institute's website at: <http://www.loyyinstitute.org>

We encourage anyone with an interest in the Australian Diaspora to read the Lowy Institute report. The SCG sees the report as containing a good generalised overview of ways to engage the Diaspora as a national resource and believes that it will be a catalyst for further community debate both in Australia and overseas. A positive aspect is that the report calls on Australian politicians to lead from the top by wholeheartedly embracing the diaspora.

However, apart from the issue of overseas voting rights, the report does not address the many and varied matters that need to be taken up and solved by Australian Governments at both the Federal and State levels as precursors to fully engaging with the Diaspora. Indeed, the authors themselves acknowledge that the paper is one-sided (page 2). The focus is very much on how Australia's public and private sectors can "exploit" or "mine" the Diaspora resource to further Australia's development. There is passing acknowledgement that "a diaspora that feels it is included in the national enterprise is more likely to contribute to it". But the writers have failed to fully grasp the essential fact that the relationship between Australians abroad and Australia can only flourish if it is a highway on which traffic flows equally in both directions.

Many overseas Australians who wanted to vote in Australia's last federal election but could not exercise that democratic right are likely to find the report's section on "engaging the diaspora in Australian democracy" somewhat frustrating reading. In a six-page discussion which sends mixed messages, the authors seem reluctant to adequately grapple with or directly articulate the key bottom-line issue facing Australia's Diaspora today: approximately half a million Australian citizens of voting age have no right to vote at home because provisions in the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 prevent them from enrolling. Is this acceptable, or even constitutional, in a modern democratic society which strives to participate in the global economy?

The authors note that data "suggests that existing electoral procedures inhibit some expatriates from voting" (page 66) and cautiously state that "current provisions for enrolment and voting outside Australia are complex and include several hurdles that could inadvertently disenfranchise expatriates" (page 68). While they do recommend a number of welcome steps "to increase the level of engagement overseas Australians have with our democratic system", they appear not to believe that the right to vote is an inalienable fundamental right that should attach to the citizenship of all Australians, no matter where they reside or how long they have lived abroad.

Additionally, the SCG notes that the Lowy Institute report seeks to define the nature of the Diaspora as consisting of several groups, all of which would seem to contain only Australian citizens in the legal sense. The SCG submits that the Diaspora is in fact much wider. There are many who have lost or been denied Australian citizenship as a result of restrictive provisions in the Australian Citizenship Act 1948. These provisions are generally now seen to be inappropriate in the modern globalised world and sit poorly with any drive to engage the Diaspora as a resource to promote Australian interests.

Another important group that should be included within the concept of the Diaspora consists of those who feel a close affiliation with Australian interests based on many factors even though they as individuals are foreign nationals and have no expectation of gaining Australian citizenship. These links may be associated for example with family ties, educational experience in Australia, long-standing commercial interests, or involvement with Australian cultural or expatriate groups. The diaspora arrangements of other countries prove that these are valuable individuals and that there is much to be gained from including them in a broad-based concept of Diaspora.

Fullilove and Flutter justifiably state that a "feature of our diaspora is the goodwill that exists among its members towards Australia" (page 22) and recommend that Australian "non-profit organisations should pursue the fundraising opportunity offered by the diaspora" (page 61). The SCG cautions however that there is much for Australia to give before it can reasonably expect to take wholesale from the Diaspora.

Those who have followed the work of the Southern Cross Group over the last five years and are acquainted with the material on its website will find few new or revolutionary ideas or data in the Lowy Institute report. Many of the recommendations and suggestions it contains have already been made by the Southern Cross Group to government in various submissions on the public record. The SCG's views on a wide range of diaspora matters, many not addressed in the Lowy Institute report, are most recently contained in its submissions to the Senate's Constitutional and Legal References Committee as part of the ongoing Inquiry into Australian Expatriates.

[http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon\\_ctte/expats03/submissions/sublist.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/expats03/submissions/sublist.htm)

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*The Southern Cross Group is a global non-profit volunteer-run advocacy and support organisation for the Australian diaspora.*