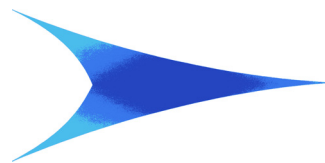


# The Southern Cross Group

Promoting Mobility in the Global Community



## MEDIA RELEASE

### Australian Expatriates Inquiry Report Tabled in Canberra

The Australian Senate's Legal and Constitutional References Committee tabled its Report in the Inquiry into Australian Expatriates in Canberra on 8 March 2005. The 168-page Report can be accessed here:

[http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon\\_ctte/expats03/report/report.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/expats03/report/report.pdf)

Hansard containing the remarks of Senators Bolkus, Tierney and Bartlett made on the tabling of the Report can be read at:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/dailys/ds080305.pdf>

In its introduction, the Committee states in the Report:

*In the same way that most expatriate Australians still embrace Australia as their home, we should embrace our expatriate community as part of the Australian nation, and recognise that our expatriates are an important part of Australian society.*

The Senate Committee has made **16 recommendations**. They include the establishment of a dedicated government information and services website portal for overseas Australians, and the setting up of a special policy unit within DFAT to coordinate and consult on diaspora policies.

Importantly, the Senate Committee also recommends that the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* be amended to ensure that children of people who lost their citizenship under the now repealed Section 17, as well as children of those who renounced their citizenship under Section 18, become eligible to apply for Australian citizenship by descent. This recommendation, if it becomes law, would provide access to Australian citizenship for the children of some 2,000 Australian-born Maltese citizens in Malta. These recommendations go beyond the changes which the Government has already explicitly said it will make to the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948*, announced on 7 July 2004, although no legislation has been tabled yet towards realising the 7 July 2004 announcement.

Perhaps most significantly, on the issue of **voting rights**, the March 2005 Report marks a fundamental shift in thinking among Australia's federal parliamentarians concerning the entitlement of Australia's overseas citizens to be engaged in the electoral process. The Senate Committee has recommended that the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* should be amended as follows to assist expatriate Australians to maintain their electoral enrolment:

- Australian citizens moving or living overseas should be entitled to register as an "Eligible Overseas Elector" if they left Australia in the previous three years, or have returned to Australia (for any length of time) in the past three years; and they intend to resume residence in Australia within six years of their departure; and
- Australian citizens who have been living overseas for six years should be entitled to renew their enrolment as an eligible overseas elector if they have returned to Australia (for any length of time) within the last three years.

This recommendation is explicitly supported by Government senators. If it becomes law, it will mean that many, although not all of the estimated 500,000 Australian expatriates who have lost the right to vote will be able to exercise their democratic rights from abroad. Although the Southern Cross Group continues to advocate that the right to vote is one attached to citizenship, and that no time limitation should be attached to that right for overseas citizens of voting age, there is no doubt that the Senate Committee's recommendation on voting is a very welcome step forward for the diaspora.

The Committee has also recommended that voting for overseas Australians should continue to be non-compulsory.

It should be noted that the Committee's recommendations on citizenship issues and voting rights are only recommendations at this stage. For them to be implemented, the Government would have to amend certain legislation.

The Southern Cross Group welcomes the Senate Committee's Report, and thanks Committee Chairman Senator Nick Bolkus and other Senators on the Committee, as well as the Committee's Secretariat staff for the efforts they have put in. The SCG would also like to thank all those Australians at home and abroad who took the time to make submissions to the Inquiry in late 2003 and early 2004. 677 submissions from all corners of the globe were logged by the Committee's Secretariat. They have contributed to a wide-ranging, comprehensive and carefully thought out Inquiry Report, a document which can now serve as an initial blueprint for Australia in engaging with its overseas citizens going forward.

8 March 2005

Further Information:

[www.southern-cross-group.org](http://www.southern-cross-group.org)

[http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon\\_ctte/expats03/report/report.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/expats03/report/report.pdf)

<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/dailys/ds080305.pdf>

<http://www.citizenship.gov.au/info/changes.htm>

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