



MEDIA RELEASE

Inquiry into Overseas Australians to go ahead

The Southern Cross Group (SCG) welcomes the endorsement by the Australian Senate today of Senator Nick Bolkus' proposal to conduct a parliamentary inquiry into all aspects of the Australian diaspora.

In the United States, Robyn Stephenson, the SCG's North American Coordinator, said: "This is an unprecedented step in Australian history. For the first time, the some 860,000 Australians who live overseas will be given an open invitation to tell decision-makers at home their concerns as part of this inquiry. The inquiry will be a unique opportunity for the voices of those in our diaspora to be heard."

The terms of reference of the inquiry, which will be carried out by the Senate's Legal and Constitutional References Committee, can be expected to be similar to the text of Senator Bolkus' motion. The inquiry will look at:

- (a) the extent of the Australian diaspora;
- (b) the variety of factors driving more Australians to live overseas;
- (c) the costs, benefits and opportunities presented by the phenomenon;
- (d) the needs and concerns of overseas Australians;
- (e) the measures taken by other comparable countries to respond to the needs of their expatriates;
- and
- (f) ways in which Australia could better use its expatriates to promote our economic, social and cultural interests.

Anne MacGregor, SCG Co-founder in Brussels, said that the SCG had lobbied for a broad parliamentary inquiry into the diaspora for some time and was very pleased at today's news. "With almost a million Australians outside Australia," she said, "it's time we started thinking about Australia as the sum of its entire people, wherever they are in the world. Australia needs its expatriate community, and it's our experience that Australians overseas want to be included and involved in the life of Australia, despite their geographic distance. A strong relationship between Australia and its overseas citizens can only strengthen its place in the global economy." She urged Australians at home and abroad to participate in the inquiry by making submissions once it is opened. Details will be carried on the Southern Cross Group website as they become available.

The stories of 33 expat Australians are told in a new book just published by the Southern Cross Group and Global Exchange, entitled "Australian Expats: stories from abroad". The editors will promote it in the week of 20 October around Australia. For further information, see:

<http://www.southern-cross-group.org/bookproject/overview.html>

The Southern Cross Group is an international volunteer-run non-profit advocacy and support organisation for the Australian diaspora.

Further information: Anne MacGregor, in Brussels till 17/10/03: tel + 32 2 5050 266, mobile 32 474 950 131, in Australia from 19/10 to 25/10: mobile 0419 232 016, anne@southern-cross-group.org

Robyn Stephenson, Michigan USA, Tel/Fax +1 (616) 392-6228, robyn@southern-cross-group.org

Bryan Havenhand at Global Exchange, +61 2 4929 4688, mobile 0402 004 181, bh@globalexchange.com.au

www.southern-cross-group.org
www.globalexchange.com.au