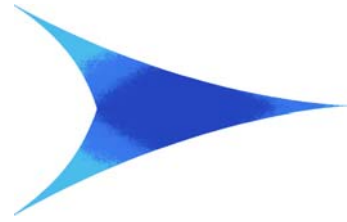


# **The Southern Cross Group**

*Promoting Mobility in the Global Community*

*www.southern-cross-group.org*



Submission to the Australian Bureau of Statistics

## **Counting All Australians: Towards Including Overseas Australians in Australia's Census**

18 August 2003

***The Southern Cross Group is an international non-profit advocacy and support organisation seeking to speak for and work with the million-odd members of the Australian Diaspora worldwide.***

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### ***Annex A***

US Federal Register Notice Census Test 21 April 2003

## **Question 1 This Submission**

This submission is in response to the July 2003 invitation to members of the public and Census users to comment on the views put forward by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in its Information Paper on the 2006 Census of Population and Housing (the Information Paper).<sup>1</sup>

The Southern Cross Group (SCG) welcomes the opportunity to participate in this discussion. Although this submission goes beyond simply answering the questions posed by the ABS in its Information Paper, the SGC has attempted to respond within the narrow confines of the suggested format.

The Southern Cross Group ([www.southern-cross-group.org](http://www.southern-cross-group.org)) is an international non-profit advocacy and support organisation active on matters of concern to Australian expatriates. It is run by an entirely volunteer committee of expatriate Australians around the world and Australians at home and is funded by donations. It is the philosophy of the SCG that Australians who live outside Australia are nevertheless an integral part of the Australian community in the globalized world of the twenty-first century, despite their geographical distance from Australia. They share the "common bond of citizenship".

Since its formation, the SGC has sought to raise awareness in Australia of the extent of the Australian Diaspora and the particular issues its members face. The SCG is working to establish better links between the Australian expatriate community and the Australian community at home and its decision-makers. The Australian Diaspora, in the view of many overseas, is a rich but under-utilised resource for the country. A common complaint among expatriates is that to Australians at home, expatriates are simply "out of sight and out of mind".

Every Australian overseas is an unofficial ambassador for Australia. A significant and major way in which expatriate Australians have been dismissed comprises the failure by the ABS to engage in any work to date to enumerate overseas Australians or ascertain further statistical information about them. Not only have overseas Australians been excluded from the Census, but there has also been no separate survey work focussing on this significant percentage of Australian citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 'Information Paper, Census of Population and Housing, ABS Views on Content and Housing' 2 July 2003, ABS Catalogue Number 2007.0.

The SCG submits that this must change. It will not be easy to count overseas Australians, whether in the Census or by other means, but the reasons for doing so in the long term are compelling.

This matter is of major national importance, because we know today that the number of Australians overseas (ca. 860,000) is approximately equivalent to 5% of the Australian resident population.<sup>2</sup> While this figure is only an estimate, it cannot be ignored.

We know that Australia's population is aging, and that the country faces a major skills shortage in the coming decades, and we know that many of Australia's brightest and best skilled citizens live overseas. Equipped with their excellent Australian educations, much of Australia's talent has left Australia. Government must put in place concrete measures to encourage these individuals to eventually return home, by actively "caring" for the expatriate population and developing more inclusive policies.

For example, on page 70 of its Information Paper, the ABS states that "citizenship data are also used in costing reciprocal social security arrangements with other countries". This statement shows a lack of understanding of the impact of such agreements on Australians overseas. Reciprocal social security agreements do not only benefit migrants from other countries resident in Australia who have contributed to an overseas social security scheme before moving to Australia. They also benefit Australian citizens living overseas who contribute to a social security scheme overseas who may one day wish to take a foreign pension in Australia and/or remove one of the barriers inhibiting expatriates from returning to Australia before the end of their working life. But the Census currently collects no information on this group of users. It is submitted that Australia should be prioritising new social security agreements in countries where there are the largest numbers of Australian expatriates, i.e. taking its own citizens into account rather than focussing only on the needs of its migrant population. The collection of data in this area would have

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<sup>2</sup> Figures provided to the SCG by DFAT in early 2002 suggest that at the end of 2001, there were an estimated 858,866 Australians living overseas. This data is published at [www.southern-cross-group.org/statistics/stats\\_ausos.html](http://www.southern-cross-group.org/statistics/stats_ausos.html). However, the recent DFAT White Paper entitled 'Advancing the National Interest' of 12 February 2003 states that there are an estimated 720,000 Australians overseas. In its 10 August 2003 submission to the Inquiry by the Australian Senate's Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee into the abovementioned White Paper, the SCG has queried DFAT's various inconsistent figures. In the January 2003 version of its brochure *Hints for Australian Travellers*, at page 28, DFAT states that "at any one time there are some 800 000 Australians living overseas".

significant long-term implications for Australia's economic, investment and budgetary policies.

In all areas of policymaking, Australia must start to recognise the significance of its overseas citizens and listen to their voices. While these individuals choose to live outside their country, links must be strengthened with them so that Australia's "offshore brains" can contribute more effectively into Australia using the wealth of experience they have gained overseas. They are a vital resource for the country.

Professor Graeme Hugo of Adelaide University, currently undertaking DIMIA-sponsored research into the emigration of skilled Australians, has also raised the issue of who should be counted as being among Australia's population:

'The increased mobility of Australians raises some fundamental questions about who should be counted as being among Australia's population. Traditionally, the national population has been counted as those resident on the night of the Census and there is provision for those who are temporarily overseas to be identified and included by members of their household remaining in Australia. But what of the Australians living on a long term or permanent basis in other countries? These are estimated to be 830,000 by the Department of Foreign Affairs (*The Australian*, 11 August 2001) equivalent to 4.3 percent of the 2001 resident population. Moreover, they are a selective group in terms of age, education, income and skill. In a globalising world it may be that we should be seeking alternative conceptualisations of what constitutes the national population. In the past the bulk of a nation's citizens and permanent residents were resident in that country. However, with globalisation an increasing proportion of nationals are likely to be absent for considerable periods, while there will be larger numbers of foreign nationals present in country. This raises the question as to whether national Censuses should seek to include nationals who are living and working overseas on a permanent or long-term basis.'<sup>3</sup>

In short, the current philosophy has to change: Australia can no longer afford to write off those who are brave enough to go overseas. It will be a poorer nation in the longer term if it does not harness the resources of its Diaspora and develop overtly inclusionary policies. A significant number of other countries are already successfully and actively grappling with these issues. Australia is now conspicuous in its lack of activity.

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<sup>3</sup> "Emigration of Skilled Australians: Patterns, Trends and issues" by Graeme Hugo, Paper Presented to DIMIA Immigration and Population Issues Conference, Sydney, 7 May 2002. Professor Hugo's current research into the emigration of skilled Australians is outlined on the Southern Cross Group website, where a copy of his May 2002 paper can also be downloaded: <http://www.southern-cross-group.org/overseasvoting/giscaresults.html>.

Accurate and better data on the expatriate population is essential for Australia do to this. The ABS's role is crucial.

This paper sets out the Southern Cross Group's initial thoughts as to how positive steps might be taken to eventually count Australia's overseas citizens in the national Census. It does not purport to be the final word on the subject. The purpose of this document is to launch discussion in Australia and among expatriates on this important topic. A great deal of further work will need to be done, involving all stakeholders, before the goal of enumerating all Australian citizens can be realised.

**First**, the SCG submits that Australians in Australia on Census night in 2006 should be asked to identify whether they have immediate Australian-citizen family members normally living overseas, and to identify which country these individuals are in. This would provide much-needed data on the overall number of Australian citizens overseas and their worldwide geographic spread. Present information available from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is inconsistent, and in any case will only ever be a very rough estimate based on consular activity. Data ascertainable from DIMIA arrival and departure cards is also limited. The SCG has stated elsewhere that with 5% of Australians overseas, many Australian citizens at home have an Australian-citizen family member overseas. Part of the key to ultimately reaching all overseas citizens lies in successful communication strategies targeted at their families at home.

**Second**, it is submitted that the ABS should engage in at least one "Test Census" of overseas Australians in several key countries between now and the 2011 Census. The questions asked of overseas Australians would be different to those posed to Australians at home. The Test Census would provide an opportunity to test the feasibility and cost of counting overseas Australians and enable the ABS to examine the quality of data collected. The SCG has not looked in depth at which countries should be used in the Test Census. Those countries chosen should reflect geographic diversity and have significant numbers of Australian citizens. The SCG notes that the United Kingdom, the United States and/or Canada, and Hong Kong may be suitable test countries, although others could also be considered.

**Finally**, using the experience of one or more Test Census, all Australian citizens overseas should be included in the 2011 Census.

People who are not Australian citizens would not be included in either the Test Census or the 2011 Census. Although this will mean that some members of the wider “Australian Diaspora” in the broadest sense are not included,<sup>4</sup> the SCG believes this limitation to be necessary.

## **Question 2            A New Topic – “Overseas Australians”**

The SCG submits that there should be a new topic, entitled ‘Overseas Australians’ included in the 2006 Census. This topic would be a pre-cursor to the 2011 Census which would incorporate Australian citizens overseas.

## **Question 3            Define the Topic**

The scope of this new topic ‘Overseas Australians’ is to more accurately ascertain the number of Australian citizens residing overseas at the time of the 2006 Census and to identify the countries in which they reside.

The SCG proposes that the questions posed under the topic “Overseas Australians” be designed to extract fairly basic information: whether a person in Australia on Census night has Australian-citizen family members living overseas, their sex, and their country of residence.

It may not be appropriate to ask Australians at home to give the name of that family member/s, although this issue requires further research.

It will be important to know the relationship of the person overseas to the person in Australia. There may be some double counting. For example, an overseas Australian with three siblings in different households in Australia might be named by all three, as well their parents. For this reason, it may be advisable to limit the definition of “family member” in order to limit double counting.

It may not be feasible to ask those at home to identify anything more than the country where their family member resides, although the SCG notes that if complete name and address details could be provided, such data could be used to access overseas Australians for a Test Census.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, non-citizen members of the wider Australian Diaspora would include those overseas-born children of Australian citizens by descent who themselves do not qualify for Australian citizenship by descent, and those who have forfeited their Australian citizenship under the now repealed Section 17 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* or had to renounce it under Section 18 of that Act.

A definition of “residing or living abroad” will need to be developed. Australian citizens overseas on holidays or on business trips should be excluded. “Residing” might usefully be defined as “has lived overseas for one year or more or has left Australia within the last twelve months with the intention to reside outside Australia for one year or more”.

Privacy issues need to be considered. Some overseas Australians may not want to be identified by name.

#### **Question 4            Topics to Remove from the 2006 Census**

The SCG does not believe that it is appropriate for it to comment on this issue.

#### **Question 5a            The Purpose of the Topic “Overseas Australians”**

The purpose of the “Overseas Australians” topic is to gather crucial information regarding the number of Australian citizens residing overseas. This information is needed by Government to develop policies inclusive of its overseas citizens, and legislation which does not discriminate against this group of citizens and indeed facilitates their eventual repatriation. The issue of the costing of bilateral social security agreements has been touched on above.

There are a number of important reasons why the 2006 Census should attempt to ascertain the number of Australians living and working abroad and the countries in which they reside.

**First**, as mentioned above, the exact number of the Australians Diaspora is presently unknown. The current estimation is that there are approximately 860,000 Australians living and working overseas. This number is roughly equivalent to *double* the population of Tasmania.

**Second**, Australians working overseas play an important and growing role in improving the international competitiveness of Australia. They contribute economically, politically and culturally to Australia. Most support Australian products, Australian companies overseas and Australian exports. They learn invaluable skills including languages, intercultural work relations, cultural awareness and unique work practices that many eventually transport back to Australia. In order to understand and appreciate the contribution that overseas Australians are making for Australia it is critical that Australia better understand how many Australians are living overseas

and where these overseas Australians are living. This can only be done if Australians living and working abroad are included within the Census.

**Third**, Australians living and working overseas contribute to raising international consciousness and awareness about Australia and Australians. They are important ambassadors in building relations between people of their host countries and play a key tool in building Australia's profile to the outside world. Again, in order for the Australian government to better tap into these resources and attempt to generate more inclusive policies regarding Australians abroad, the number of Australian 'ambassadors' and the countries in which they reside is crucial information.

**Fourth**, fairness demands that these 860,000 Australians should be represented in the Census. Indeed, there is no reasonable basis for excluding these Australians. Many pay taxes in Australia, own property in Australia and have strong and continuing relationships with family and friends in Australia. It is undesirable and not in the national interest to exclude the Australian Diaspora from the Census. Australians abroad have a right to equal treatment.

**Finally**, the ABS states that one of its key objectives in the 2006 Census is to be 'accurate'. It is difficult to understand how the Census can be accurate in light of the fact that as yet there is no attempt to count 860,000 Australians in the Census. The ABS correctly identifies that special procedures and strategies need to be implemented to ensure the coverage of Indigenous, homeless and ethnic people in the Census,<sup>5</sup> however, as yet, Australians abroad are not afforded the same courtesies.

### **The United States Experience**

On 15 January 2003, the United States Bureau of Census announced that it would conduct a test Census in France, Kuwait and Mexico in 2004 to incorporate Americans living and working abroad.<sup>6</sup> The issue of incorporating overseas Americans in the Census was originally raised by Members of Congress leading up to the 2000 Census. However, the Bureau's landmark decision was not taken until compelling evidence was put forward by more than two dozen stakeholders at the November 2001 "Conference on an Enumeration of Americans Overseas in the 2010 Census".

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid at footnote 1, at page 13.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.Census.gov/Press-Release/www/2003/cb03cn03.html>.

The idea of the 2004 Overseas Enumeration Test is to ascertain the level of participation, quality of data, effectiveness of overseas outreach and whether there will be boundaries integrating overseas Census material with that gathered within the United States. The results of the test will be used for the purposes of the United States 2010 Census. The move has also been supported by the introduction of a Bill<sup>7</sup> in the House of Representatives to provide funds for the planning of a special Census of Americans residing abroad.

The United States has recently begun to recognise that in order for America's public and private sector leaders to give appropriate support to US citizens and US companies overseas, it is important to have accurate information on how many Americans live abroad and where they live. The Census of Americans Abroad Act was introduced into the US Congress in early April 2003. On 1 April 2004, the United States will be conducting a test Census of expatriate Americans in France, Kuwait and Mexico in preparation for enumerating Americans overseas in the 2010 Census – see the US Department of Commerce notice in the (US) Federal Register of 21 April 2003 at Annex A. Americans in those three countries will be able to file requests in writing or via the Internet for the Census count forms before that date, which will later be mailed to them. Copies of the forms will also be made available at US consular posts. American Citizens Abroad, a non profit, non partisan association dedicated to serving and defending the interests of individual US citizens living worldwide, has been key to bringing about these developments,<sup>8</sup> along with the Federation of American Women's Clubs Overseas,<sup>9</sup> and the Association of Americans Resident Overseas.<sup>10</sup> While US Government employees and military and their immediate families residing overseas are included in the decennial Census, an estimated three to six million private Americans living abroad are not. The non-profit organisations listed above will play an important role in reaching Americans abroad to encourage participation in the Census.

The Head of the Australian Census Programme at the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Paul Williams, has said that the Census is “all about providing high quality data to help decision makers in government, business and the community plan for a better future.”<sup>11</sup> But as the number of Australians living abroad rises, it is no longer

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<sup>7</sup> HR 680.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.aca.ch>.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.fawco.org>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.aaro.org>.

<sup>11</sup> ABS Media Release of 19 November 2002, “Snapshot complete: full range of 2001 Census data released”.

possible to achieve accurate data about the people of Australia when a constituency of almost one million people is being excluded.

### **Question 5b.            Output**

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What output would be required from the Census to support the uses that you have described?

The SCG has not researched to any great extent the range of data that could be output from the suggested inclusion of overseas Australians in the Census. Much would depend on the ability of the ABS to reach out to the Australian Diaspora in a manner that would encourage an adequate level of responses, and some judgment as to the degree of privacy expatriates could expect in respect of their responses.

As a minimum, the SCG suggests that essential outputs in respect of expatriates would include:

- The numbers covered by the responses to the survey or Census on a country by country basis. Presumably, there would need to be a statistical evaluation of these figures against data available from other sources such as DFAT, or Census data from other countries where nationality or other such indicators are covered by that Census.
- The age, sex, family composition, level of education and occupation of those covered in each response form.
- Length of time away from Australia and/or period before which return to Australia on a permanent basis is expected.
- Other nationalities held by those covered by the response.
- The Australian postcode of the location with which expatriates feel the closest affinity. Discussion within the recent inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters into the 2001 Federal Election highlighted the uncertainty relating to the impact on individual federal electorates if the electoral franchise was extended to more overseas Australians.

This data would also be significant in gauging the impact that returning expatriates might have on population growth in urban and regional areas and their related economies.

Other information which might be sought, particularly if a database for future contact is to be established, include:

- Names of the householder and others covered by the response.
- The mailing address of the household.
- Given that the use of e-mail is fast overtaking all other means of communication between Australian expatriates and their Australian contacts, the e-mail address for the head of household.

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**Question 6.            Classification Process**

SCG is not aware of any classification changes that would need to be made

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**Question 7.            Cross classification**

How, and with what other information, would the information be cross classified?

The SCG is unaware of any reliable Australia-based statistical information which could be used for cross classification. Some cross classification might be possible with data in the Census outputs of other countries where nationality of the respondents is identified in the foreign Census.

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**Question 8            Geographical Levels**

Initially it would seem appropriate to collect the data on a country by country basis. At some later stage it may be appropriate in those countries with a major Australian expatriate presence, to seek data based on some geographical basis e.g. Eastern , Central and Western United States, London and non-London areas in the UK, or for all countries location based on zip codes or post codes.

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**Question 9.            Other sources**

The information regarding the number of Australians overseas is minimal. As indicated above, DFAT recently referred to there being 720,000 Australians overseas in its White Paper. However, this figure is at odds with other DFAT data, in particular

figures provided to the SCG by the DFAT which suggested there were approximately 860,000 Australians overseas.

The ABS collection of data compiled from the DIMIA arrival and departure cards would be of limited value.

#### **Question 10. Consequences**

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In the SCG's opinion, the consequences of the new topic 'Overseas Australians' not being included in the 2006 Census are far reaching:

- There is no organization currently concerned with the collection of data on the Australian Diaspora.
- Failure to appreciate the nature of the Diaspora in the age of globalization will inhibit the policy and planning processes at the Federal and State government level, and of the private sector in respect of trade and commerce.
- The impact of proposed and existing Federal and State legislation on any program to harness the potential of the Diaspora will be impossible to assess. The SCG believes that within a reasonably short timeframe the need for such a program will be accepted by the Australian community.

The SCG is a volunteer based organization with very little income and at no time would it contemplate undertaking a collection of data on the scope envisaged in this submission.

#### **Question 11. Other comments**

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In the view of the SCG, the most convenient way to include Australians working and living overseas in the Census may be to adopt a model similar to that being floated in the United States. For example, dissemination of the questionnaire could occur through four primary methods:

- (a) The internet – Australians abroad could fill out the questionnaire on-line;
- (b) International organizations – the questionnaires could be distributed to appropriate overseas organizations for distribution to Australians in the countries in which they are operating;

- (c) Consulates and embassies – the questionnaires could be distributed to Australian consulates and embassies, where the questionnaires would be available to Australians in those countries;
- (d) Request for Questionnaire Forms (RQFs) – RQFs would be available through all of the above means, to be completed with address details and sent to the ABS so that the questionnaire could be mailed out at the appropriate time.

The completed questionnaires can then be returned via the post to the ABS or via the overseas Australian consulates or embassies to the ABS.

It may also be worthwhile for the ABS to conduct a ‘test’ Census for overseas Australians in much the same manner as that proposed in the United States. The results of the test Census could then be used for the purposes of the 2006 Census to effectively integrate Australians abroad into the Census procedures.

## **Conclusion**

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The Australian Diaspora must be given the right to participate in the Census with their fellow Australians. This will assist the increasing recognition and ever-growing understanding in Australia that Australians overseas are an important resource for Australia despite the fact that they may live geographically outside its territorial boundaries for part of their lives. Given that Australia’s Diaspora is its closest links to the foreign countries in which they work and live, participation in the Census will also ensure that Australia is better informed about the 5% of its population that contribute so much to Australia from afar.

## **Further Discussion**

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The SCG welcomes the opportunity to discuss the inclusion of Australians abroad in the Census with the ABS.

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