



DEPARTMENT OF
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COMMUNITY
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Mr John Russell
C/o Shandwick Public Affairs
12 Avenue de Tervuren
B-1040 Brussels
BELGIUM

Ms Anne MacGregor
C/o Freshfields Deringer
Bastion Tower
5 Place du Champ de Mars
B-1050 Brussels
BELGIUM

Dear Ms MacGregor and Mr Russell

Thank you for your letter of 13 December 1999 about a social security agreement between Australia and Belgium.

The issue of Australians being able to benefit from their Belgian pension contributions when living outside of Belgium has been of interest to us for some time.

Negotiations regarding a social security agreement were held in Brussels in September 1993 and a Belgian delegation was to visit Australia for further negotiations during 1995. Unfortunately, the Belgian authorities advised in late 1994 that they were no longer interested in continuing negotiations towards an agreement with Australia.

Since the 1993 negotiations Australia has continued to indicate its interest in pursuing the possibility of an agreement. In November 1998 the Department wrote to the Australian Ambassador in Belgium about the issue. At around the same time, Departmental officials met with the Counsellor of the Belgian Embassy in Canberra and subsequently provided a range of material including information about Australia's social security system, the Superannuation Guarantee and a copy of the social security agreement between Australia and the Netherlands.

While we remain hopeful that further discussions on a social security agreement with Belgium will eventually take place, the timing will ultimately depend on the Belgian authorities. Although you mention in your letter that the Belgians indicated renewed interest in entering into a social security agreement with Australia in recent discussions with Australian health officials, this has not been conveyed to the Australian authorities.

You should be aware that even if it were decided to proceed to negotiations, our experience is that it would take some years to finalise an agreement and there can be no guarantees at this stage about the coverage that an agreement would afford. I would add that an agreement on social security would need to be negotiated separately to any agreement on health.

Mr Benny Sammut (A/g Director, Agreements) would be happy to discuss the issue with Mr Russell. Mr Sammut will be contactable over the Christmas period (apart from the public holidays) on 02 6244 5861.

Thank you for your interest in this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J A McWilliam', written in a cursive style.

J A McWILLIAM
Assistant Secretary
International Branch

16 December 1999