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Mr John McWilliam
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13 December 1999

Dear Mr McWilliam,

Social Security Arrangements between Belgium and Australia

We are both Australians who have been living and working in Belgium for some years. Recently we have become concerned at the implications of the fact that there is no bilateral social security agreement between Australia and Belgium. This effectively means that money contributed to the Belgian social security system by ourselves will never be of benefit to us if we retire back to Australia.

After talking with other Australians in Belgium, we believe that there is sufficient concern among the Australian community in Belgium to work for change in this area. Accordingly, we are planning to set up a small action group of Australians in Belgium who have common concerns in this and other fields.

We have discussed our preliminary ideas with Ambassador Kenyon in Brussels, and with Jane Lambert, First Secretary at the Embassy. We understand that in July this year, when a delegation from the Department of Health visited Belgium, new interest was expressed on the Belgian side in entering into negotiations for a bilateral social security agreement, or perhaps entering into joint negotiations for health and social security arrangements at the same time.

John Russell is planning to be in Australia for two weeks from 19 December and will be in Canberra during that time. We wonder if it might be possible during that time for John to meet with yourself or someone in your Branch.

At this stage, we are planning to hold a first meeting to constitute our new group in Brussels on Tuesday 25 January 2000. We would however be very pleased to have an opportunity to meet with you beforehand and discuss any ideas you might have as to how a group such as ours might best assist your Department in working towards a bilateral social security agreement between Australia and Belgium.

At present we are also monitoring proposals by the European Commission to include third country nationals within the framework of EU Regulation 1408/71 and would be happy to inform you of latest developments on that subject as well which are of interest to all Australians living in the European Union.

We look forward to hearing from you and to discussing prospective meeting dates.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Anne MacGregor". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Anne MacGregor / John Russell