

Southern Cross Group E-Bulletin to Members
22 August 2001

Australian Bilateral Social Security Agreements

Dear Southern Cross Group Friends,

As you may be aware, Australia already has a number of bilateral social security agreements with other countries. Currently, the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties of the Parliament of Australia is considering new bilateral agreements on social security between Australia and the following countries: Canada, The Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, and Germany. It is also considering a new protocol to an existing social security agreement with Austria.

Bilateral social security agreements are a way of ensuring that Australians who live in other countries do not lose out on social security entitlements after contributing to state social security schemes as non-nationals in their country of residence. These agreements close gaps in social security coverage for people who move between countries and help overcome barriers to pension payment in the domestic legislation, such as requirements on citizenship, minimum contribution record, past residence record and current country of residence.

For example, at present there is no bilateral social security agreement between Australia and Belgium. An Australian citizen who has worked their whole life in Belgium and never become a Belgian citizen, and contributed for 30 years to the Belgian social security system, has no entitlement to receive a Belgian pension on retirement if they chose to move back to Australia, due to restrictions in Belgian law. Our Group has several members who have been directly and devastatingly affected by this unfortunate situation.

Australia already has bilateral social security agreements in force with Austria, Canada (old), Cyprus, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands (old), New Zealand, Portugal (old), and Spain (old). Note that the agreement with the United Kingdom was terminated by Australia earlier this year. Details as to the UK termination are up on our website at

<http://www.southern-cross-group.org/sys-tmpl/ukaustaliasocialsecurity/>

The Joint Standing Committee is inviting comments on whether it is in Australia's interest to be bound to the terms of the proposed agreements. The Southern Cross Group will be putting in a short submission on behalf of Australians overseas. We fully support bilateral social security agreements and would like to see Australia enter into more of them with additional countries. Negotiations are already underway with Croatia, Finland, Norway, Switzerland, Chile, Slovenia and the USA.

We would welcome your comments to help us prepare our submission, particularly if you live in one of the abovementioned countries. If you live in a country with which Australia

has no bilateral social security agreement yet, and have suffered negative financial consequences as a result, or expect to in the future, we'd also like to hear from you. E-mails should be sent to anne@southern-cross-group.org

Submissions are due in Canberra by Friday 31 August 2001 concerning the treaties with Canada, The Netherlands and Spain and the Austria protocol. We know time is short, but would still appreciate your input. We expect submissions on the treaties with Germany and Portugal to be due in mid September. A public notice inviting submissions on the latter will appear in The Australian this weekend.

If you wish to make your own personal submission to the Committee, the e-mail address is jsct@aph.gov.au

If you would like more information about Australia's bilateral social security agreements, go to

<http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/international/agrmnts.htm>

or

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jsct>

In the future, we'll be working with your support to try and get Australia to enter into more bilateral social security agreements.

Best regards,

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