

This article appeared in the newsletters and on the websites of various Australian expatriate groups in the United States in October and November 2000.

A New Group Promoting Global Mobility

Anyone who has lived and worked outside of their country of nationality knows that there are various hurdles and administrative burdens to be overcome that simply don't occur when you work at home. Although the WTO has done much in recent years to increase the free flow of goods and services around the globe, much remains to be done to smooth the way for the "free movement of persons" so that the individuals necessary to sustain increased globalization can work internationally more easily.

For example, why do Australians have to give up their Australian nationality if they decide to acquire another? And why, if we contribute, as the law says we must, to national social security systems in the countries where we work and pay taxes, can we not necessarily enjoy the full benefits of these systems?

In early 1999, the Australian Citizenship Council put out an Issues Paper addressing Australia's current law on dual citizenship. In Belgium, myself and another Australian, John Russell, organized a submission to the ACC to which 34 local Australians signed their names, advocating that the current law on dual citizenship be amended. The process of organizing this submission confirmed our existing view that there was a need to form an organization which could lobby for change on a range of mobility issues in a collective fashion and under one banner. In January 2000, following a public meeting, *The Southern Cross Group* was formed to promote mobility in the global community.

Since the Group's launch we have issued a position paper on dual nationality, which is available on our web site. Contacts are now beginning with the Australian Government and media. Although the Australian Citizenship Council recommended earlier this year that the Citizenship Act should be amended to allow the retention of Australian nationality, we are a long way from seeing this recommendation become law. The Shadow Minister for Immigration, with whom our Group has established contact, has come out in favour of the ACC's recommendation, but it is unclear when or if the Government might introduce a bill to amend the Citizenship Act.

In the area of bilateral social security agreements, Australia does not presently have an agreement with the United States, but negotiations are underway. Our Group was recently informed by Canberra that another round of talks with the USA has been successfully concluded and an agreement is foreseeable in the medium term. There are a number of other countries where an Australian bilateral agreement on social security would similarly be appropriate.

It has become clear in the few months since our launch that the Group has a role to play for Australians and other expats in North America and elsewhere, despite the fact that the impetus for its establishment was in Europe. The Group presently runs due to the voluntary efforts of a "hard core" Committee of about twelve individuals who give their free time to draft letters and position papers, research issues, lobby decision makers and respond to e-mails from all over the world. Our website was recently launched and will continue to be developed. Our Committee

includes public affairs consultants, a journalist, lawyers, business people and others, and new enthusiasts are always welcome. We also have a Committee member based in London. Further, a team of law students from Adelaide has been giving their volunteer time to help on research at home. Our wider “membership” of individuals on our e-mail bulletin list now numbers over 400 with people worldwide. There are currently no membership fees and efforts have been made to communicate electronically wherever possible.

A career move has recently brought me to Washington DC, and with it the opportunity to discuss ideas with people on this side of the Atlantic as to how we can work together in the future on mobility issues. We hope that The Southern Cross Group can be a voice to speak to decision makers on behalf of individuals who have common concerns in order to achieve change which benefits us collectively in the long run.

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