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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

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**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ELECTORAL MATTERS**

Monday, 27 November 2006

Members: Mr Lindsay (*Chair*), Mr Danby (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Brandis, Carr, Hogg, Mason and Murray and Mr Ciobo, Mr Griffin and Mrs Mirabella

Members in attendance: Senators Hogg and Murray and Mr Danby and Mr Lindsay

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The adequacy of electoral education focusing on but not limited to:

- the current status of young people's knowledge of, and responsibilities under, the Australian electoral system;
- the nature of civics education and its links with electoral education;
- the content and adequacy of electoral education in government and non-government school programs of study, as well as in TAFE colleges and universities;
- the school age at which electoral education should begin;
- the potential to increase electoral knowledge through outside school programs;
- the adequacy of electoral education in indigenous communities;
- the adequacy of electoral education of migrant citizens;
- the role of the Australian Electoral Commission and State and Territory Electoral Commissions in promoting electoral education;
- the role of Federal, State and Local Governments in promoting electoral education;
- the access to, and adequacy of funding for, school visits to the Federal Parliament; and
- opportunities for introducing creative approaches to electoral education taking into account approaches used internationally and, in particular, in the United States, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom and New Zealand.

WITNESSES

MacGREGOR, Ms Anne Margaret, Co-Founder, The Southern Cross Group..... 1

Committee met at 7.45 pm**MacGREGOR, Ms Anne Margaret, Co-Founder, The Southern Cross Group**

CHAIR (Mr Lindsay)—Good morning. Thank you very much for making yourself available. I declare open this public hearing of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters inquiry into civics and electoral education. Today we are hearing from a representative of the Southern Cross Group. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath but the hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and warrants the same respect as proceedings of the respective houses.

Ms MacGregor, before the public hearing commences I have to advise you that the committee's proceedings in Australia are protected by parliamentary privilege. However, I caution you that what you might say while overseas is not protected by parliamentary privilege. *Hansard* will record the discussion and the committee may consider authorising the publication of the transcript on the committee's website. However, if you have any concerns about the transcript being published, please advise the committee now or at the end of the discussion. That is the formal bit out of the way. I do not think you are likely to say anything that would require parliamentary privilege. Is that your understanding?

Ms MacGregor—That is my understanding.

CHAIR—We have a submission from you. Do you wish to present any additional submissions or would you like to make a short opening statement to the committee?

Ms MacGregor—We do not have any additional submissions at this time, but I will say a few words which summarise the thrust of our submission by way of opening statement. The Southern Cross Group's submission to this inquiry, which is focussed on civics and electoral education, has tried to grapple primarily with the issue of the low levels of electoral participation by the significant body of Australians who now either live overseas or who are overseas at the point of any federal election. We started with the premise that at any one time there are probably about a million Australian citizens abroad, either living abroad or abroad for a shorter period—whether that be weeks, months or maybe a year or more. We also know that the demographic of the Australian diaspora is younger than the demographic of the Australian population. Significantly, a lot of people leaving Australia for whatever period are young people, people in their twenties and thirties primarily.

We know that parliament has given Australian citizens who are leaving Australia the right to vote while they are abroad, and yet the level of participation in federal elections is quite low when one considers the number of expats who are outside the country on election day. For example, in 2004 there were approximately 68,000 votes issued overseas and in 2001 there were about 63,000. When one thinks of the hundreds of thousands of Australians overseas who are of voting age, we then have to ask ourselves: why is this participation so low? There are two main reasons that we have identified for that. The first is a matter which we have put before the committee before—which is the fact that under section 94A of the Commonwealth Electoral Act there is a provision which says that if you come off the roll for any reason and it is more than three years since you left Australia to live abroad, you cannot re-enrol until you return to

Australia and live at an address in an electorate for one month or more. So we have this three-year drop-dead problem.

The other significant reason why, when everyone who leaves Australia actually has a right to vote under the law when they leave, such low levels actually do end up participating once they are abroad we feel is largely down to education. There is a lot more that can be done to let people know that the rules are different when you are abroad and how to maintain your right to vote if you would like to vote. We hear from a lot of people in the diaspora, especially when an election is approaching and they start to think about whether they are on the electoral roll, who look into the matter, find out that they are no longer on the roll and get quite upset. They did not know what they had to do to preserve their right to vote. They have fallen foul of the three-year drop-dead date in the law and they say, 'Well, nobody told me. I didn't know.'

Annexe 8 of our submission sets out a number of suggestions for active efforts that can be undertaken, primarily by the AEC but with the help of DFAT as well, to catch people before they leave the country so that there is a greater chance they will stay involved while they are abroad. Now of course once you are out of the country it is not compulsory to vote, but we would argue that in many ways, especially among young people, voting should become a habit. We have compulsory voting in Australia and we therefore, over the years, have developed, if you like, a culture of participation because of the fact that we have compulsory voting. There is evidence from other jurisdictions to suggest that, when young people get out of the habit of voting or do not establish the voting habit young, as time goes on they are likely to remain non-voters. We therefore feel that there is quite a nexus between informing those people going abroad—who are, for the large part, young; and many of whom are going to go back to Australia at some point—and trying to keep them involved while they are away. Educate them better as to what the rules are, make it easy for them to understand what they have to do, and then you are likely to have them involved while they are away and subsequently have them involved when they come back.

When we say 'active effort' I think there is information there. If you look at the AEC website, you will see that there is quite good information there about what expats have to do or what you should do if you are going overseas. But we would really call that a passive source of information. A website can never jump out and grab you and say, 'Hey, read me, I'm important, before you go.' People are only going to think about it perhaps when they pick up a flyer somewhere or if they are leaving to go overseas from the international terminal at the airport and someone gives them a brochure. Then they will think, 'Oh, yes. I didn't think about that. I'll have to look at the AEC website.'

So we strongly urge the government to look at implementing some effort—we do not think it will be all that expensive—to generally raise the level of consciousness and the level of awareness among people who are leaving. There are also things that you can do to reach into the diaspora once people are away, but I think catching people before they go—which really is not happening at all at the moment—is really a very important step that we can take without having to amend the Commonwealth Electoral Act. While we have this limitation in the law that you cannot re-enrol if you are off the roll within three years of leaving the country to live abroad, at least we should be telling people that that limitation is there so that, if they want to stay enrolled and want to participate, they have that option.

Senator HOGG—Would a simple, but not necessarily total, solution to your problem be that, when a person makes an application to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for a passport, that form in some way doubles as an application to register to vote as well? That would thereby overcome some of the problem, although not all of the problem, that you have outlined. That would need to be thought through, but it seems to me that one of the difficulties when people do travel is that they are focused mainly on the travel and they are not going to focus on the need to register to vote. If they were one and the same, given the rigours required in terms of getting a passport for your identity and so on, it would seem logical to me if those two could be linked.

Ms MacGregor—Yes, I think that is a very good suggestion and you are very right. When people are going abroad they are concerned about booking their ticket, booking their accommodation and organising what they are going to do. They are not so concerned and just do not think about an election and what they have to do, unless an election is imminent.

Senator HOGG—That is correct.

Ms MacGregor—Your idea of putting something about voting on the actual passport form is perhaps a step further than we have suggested, but we have certainly said that in all Australian post offices where you have the passport application forms on display you should have a brochure next to them which talks about whether you are going overseas for electoral purposes. Certainly I think we should catch people at that point. But do not forget: passports are issued for a period of 10 years. Not everybody going on a trip has to apply for a passport every time. You will get the people who have never had a passport before or have to get a new passport because the one they have is about to expire. And of course you can also catch a certain amount of people already overseas, because there are a lot of people already overseas who have new passports issued to them by a mission overseas. So you can catch them that way as well.

Whether you put it on the same form or whether you make it compulsory that, once you give them a new passport, they get a little brochure in their package with their new passport, I think certainly it is key to catch people at that point of interaction with DFAT. That is a key way that we should not miss.

Senator HOGG—My real point is that the onus of proof in terms of getting a passport from the department of foreign affairs is probably at the same level or less than what you would need to get on the electoral roll. It would seem that all that there would need to be is an acceptance that the information that was appearing on the form for your passport application would not need to be duplicated—there would be no breach of privacy. I think this is where a lot of the difficulty comes with people. When they are filling in forms for the sake of forms and if the form in some way could have a common user purpose then that would, as I said, not overcome the difficulties that you have outlined but start to minimise and give those who want the right the right to vote when they are overseas.

Ms MacGregor—I think that is a very good idea. I think you are correct in the fact that there is probably too much form filling that has to go on. It is still impossible, for example, to enrol through the internet. You still have to physically sign a form and either fax it in or post it in to enrol or to change your enrolment with the AEC. I think that is a very good idea. It does not solve the entire problem because not everybody is getting a passport for every trip, but it

certainly does solve part of the problem. You would have to tailor it because a lot of people who are applying for passports would already be on the roll.

Senator HOGG—Yes, but let us look at the group that you are particularly focusing on—and I must declare an interest here. I have a 21-year-old and a 23-year-old daughter who are about to travel overseas—they are both on the electoral roll, by the way—but they are only going for a short period. It seems to me that that is the target audience that your submission seeks to capture.

Ms MacGregor—Yes.

Senator HOGG—Those people are more than likely to be first-time applicants for a passport and they are more than likely to be first-time applicants to get on the electoral roll. It just seems to me—

Ms MacGregor—I think that is true. I think we would catch a lot of people that way.

Senator HOGG—Thank you.

Mr DANBY—Can I congratulate you, by the way, on this submission. I think it is excellent. It is very systematic and it is an area that JSCEM—both generally and in this inquiry—have not examined enough, particularly when you say there are a million Australians overseas at any one time and 500,000 who are overseas long-term. Can you tell me a little bit more about two things. Firstly, do you have any reason to connect the low youth enrolment figures at the moment with the high number of young people travelling overseas? Secondly, do you have any views about this knocking people out after three years if they do not have an address? Would you extend that period? Do you have any particular feeling about that?

Ms MacGregor—Taking your first point first, we do not have any data that directly links the low levels of youth enrolment in Australia with the fact that a lot of young people are going overseas. We do not have anything that would directly link that scientifically but I think it stands to reason that, of that large group of young people going abroad, since there are something like 18 per cent of people in that young age group who are not on the electoral roll, some of those are the ones that are going overseas. In fact, a lot of them might think: 'I'm going overseas next year for two years on a working holiday visa to London. Perhaps I should get on the roll, but I'm going overseas anyway so I won't really worry about it.' I am only hypothesising here what could go through a young person's mind. We do not have any hard evidence to connect them, but if you pick up some of those young people as they leave the country and educate them then I think you are going to solve part of the problem that you have in Australia with low enrolment amongst youths.

On your second point of whether I have any thoughts on the three years, I have many thoughts on the three years. The Southern Cross Group has mulled over and discussed this issue for a number of years really, since we came into existence in the year 2000. I think what we need to do fundamentally as a nation is think more broadly about how we want to engage with our diaspora. We have a million people abroad. That is a lot of people. We have a population of 20 million, with one million abroad; that is a very high percentage of Australians abroad. In this day and age, where everybody is connected, where people move in and out of the country, where people are reading newspapers on line every day, where people are on the phone every day and it

is probably cheaper than it has ever been to stay in touch on a regular basis with email and so forth, is it really appropriate to say to that body of Australian citizens who have been abroad for a certain amount of time and for one reason or another fallen off the roll and now cannot re-enrol, 'You can no longer participate in our democracy'?

An idea which has come through from many places is that in some way we need to be able to say that those who are voting in Australian elections but do not live in Australia still have some type of connection or tangible link with Australia. If you have somebody who has lived away for 60 years and has never visited Australia and may still be an Australian citizen but has this extremely tenuous link, if any, with Australia and is not keeping up with what is going on then arguably perhaps that person is a person who maybe should have less of a right to vote from abroad than somebody who is far more engaged with the country, visits on a more regular basis and so on and so forth. I think the problem we have at the moment is that the three years is fairly indiscriminating. Once you are off, you are off, and the only way to get back on is to go back and live at an address in Australia for one month or more. That works for some people who have been disenfranchised because, for example, they come to the end of an employment contract overseas and then go back home for a while and then go overseas again. If they have a period at home, they can re-enfranchise themselves. But, for a lot of people abroad, if you are in employment you probably only get four or five weeks of holidays a year. To get home and to live at an address for one month or more is not going to be possible.

Mr DANBY—Can I just interrupt you for a second. In the recent Italian elections, the expatriate vote was decisive in the Italian Senate.

Ms MacGregor—That is right.

Mr DANBY—Do you know what the criteria are for other countries? What I do not understand with the Italian situation is that all Italians, no matter how long they have been out of the country, are entitled to vote in Italian elections. Is there somewhere we could get a table of what the criteria are in other countries?

Ms MacGregor—Yes. If you look at the submission we made to the inquiry into Australian expatriates in early 2004—I think it was February 2004—by the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, which eventually reported in March of last year, our submission to that did have a lot of information attached to it on the situation in other countries. Various submissions that we have done over the years have discussed other countries, the way that they deal in general with their diaspora and also the way that they enfranchise their expatriate population.

There are a number of countries that come to mind. France, for example, has seats in its Senate for its expat constituents. I think Croatia also has seats in parliament for its expats. I am at the moment, fortuitously, doing a crash course in Chinese law, and I saw the other day that there is a special committee of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress which is for overseas Chinese. So there are quite a lot of different ways of having the expatriate voice heard in a democracy which Australia has not really grappled with yet.

There are a number of ways we can look at it, but the way the law is at the moment with the 3-year drop-off is something we really do need to revisit because who ends up on and off the roll is

fairly arbitrary. Essentially, if you know what the rule is, it is pretty easy to stay enfranchised for many years when you go abroad. If you do not know what it is, you can really fall foul of it and then you stay disenfranchised for the rest of the time you remain abroad, no matter how closely connected you are.

Mr DANBY—My last question is on young people and cyberspace—where, I agree with you, a lot of them live, whether they are overseas or here. Do you have any views about the ones overseas enrolling or voting electronically? Are you proposing that they should?

Ms MacGregor—We support further work on electronic voting. There is good work that suggests—and we have mentioned that towards the end of our submission—that rates of participation among those groups will be higher if they can do it online. Obviously, there are security reasons at the moment, and the AEC has material up on its website in the overseas elector section which explains why at the moment it is not possible to enrol or vote online. That is fine, if the technology and the security is not up to it yet, but I think we need to really work towards it. Another thing with young people is that they seem to do everything with text messages these days. Everything is text messages in a funny language where there seem to be no vowels in the words, but that is what reaches this group of people. I think we really do need to intensify our efforts to have electronic voting and even electronic enrolment, because if they can do it online it will be much easier for them. Filling in a form and sending a fax these days is—

Senator HOGG—Antiquated.

Ms MacGregor—For a lot of young people, if they are not working in an office, to go and find a fax machine they have to go specially to a post office and it is really difficult.

CHAIR—Senator Murray from Western Australia now has some questions for you.

Senator MURRAY—Like Mr Danby, Ms MacGregor, I want to compliment you on your submission, on your previous submissions, which I have seen a number of during the years, and the various emails we parliamentarians receive from Southern Cross. You are a very effective advocacy group, in my opinion—

Ms MacGregor—Thank you.

Senator MURRAY—so you can take that compliment from me. Turning to the specifics, on a rough measure you are suggesting that the participation rate for Australians in elections is around seven per cent. What I do not have a feel for is how that compares with other democracies' foreigners overseas. Is it higher for Italians or Frenchmen or Americans? Is there anywhere where that sort of information is available for us to assess whether the participation rate of overseas Australians is lower or higher than expats of other countries?

Ms MacGregor—We have not gone looking for it, but I imagine that if you looked at the data available by individual countries you would probably be able to get some sort of fix on it for some countries. We could certainly have a think about that. We did not go looking for it when we were trying to prepare this submission, I must admit.

Senator MURRAY—My question really in the back of my head, where people feel they have a direct representation, such as a senator who in Italy is elected by their diaspora, I wondered if that has a motivating effect than where people are voting almost indirectly?

Ms MacGregor—You would be saying that at the present time our system is more indirect because we do not have these senators especially for the diaspora—is that what you are saying?

Senator MURRAY—I am just asking the question. I do not know what participation rates are affected by the different ways in which their parliaments and voting systems are constituted.

Ms MacGregor—I do not think we have enough evidence to really say anything definitive on that at the moment. I think that a lot of expats have said to me over the years, ‘Wouldn’t it be better if we had someone just worried about our interests, about our issues?’ A lot of people feel that when you go offshore you have still a local MP. You are still technically registered in an electorate and you vote for a local MP and you vote for a senator. You vote for senators in the state or in the territory but that MP or those senators are going to be clearly more focused on the people in their electorate. In one of our annexes to our submission we have given a breakdown of the number of EOEes at present in every single electorate, and in most cases it is only in the hundreds.

It is also I think quite difficult for MPs and senators to actually communicate with those EOEes because, having looked at the data about EOEes that the AEC actually has that gets transmitted through to the political parties and the MPs and so forth, not much gets through. Even if they wanted to really be in touch with them it would be very hard. In a sense, unless you are making direct representations to your MP from overseas, I think it is a more tenuous thing. You are probably right that people might feel more motivated if there was an electorate or several electorates for those overseas.

Senator MURRAY—You have made the point that the best way to connect with people is through official interaction such as consular and high commission offices and so on. I wonder about another angle and what your attitude is to it. I assume quite large numbers of Australians living overseas—and I really do not know so maybe you can help me—would put in tax returns so they would have contact with the tax office. Secondly, quite large numbers of Australians overseas would receive benefits from social security, particularly pensions, and if that was the case, do you think that is an area we should think about with respect to providing some kind of interaction?

Ms MacGregor—Yes, Australians overseas do put in tax returns, though not all of them. You need to have something in Australia to be able to generate to have to put in a tax return. If you have not got a bank account and you are not earning anything, you do not have a property that is generating income then you will not be doing a tax return. I think that is probably the case with a lot of young people. They pretty much leave Australia with all the money they have saved up in their back pocket. They will not own property and will not really have a reason to do a tax return while they are away.

Senator MURRAY—Is that true? I question that, because I think that is true of young people who are travelling, but the young people I know that have gone overseas to advance themselves professionally are often investors in Australia.

Ms MacGregor—That is true. Many do invest, in which case you are making a tax return. But there are some that have no real financial investments there. I would be one of those people. I left when I was 25. I took all my savings with me and the investments I have chosen to make since have been in property in Belgium where I now live, so I do not do a tax return.

Senator MURRAY—Do you think it would offend people if with their pension payment they received a leaflet suggesting that they consider re-enrolling, or with their tax return they received a leaflet?

Ms MacGregor—I do not think it would offend people. My general impression is that people are glad to receive information and that people are glad to know what they have to do. Most people read the information they receive very carefully and I think in all of these points where Australians overseas interact with officialdom in Australia in one way or another, whether it be with the tax office, or with DFAT, or with Centrelink, then yes.

In those countries with which we have, for example, bilateral social security agreements, you do find benefits being paid for a longer period abroad. In general, though, where there is no bilateral social security agreement, I think that Centrelink tends to only pay people for the first six months after they have gone abroad. So it would probably tend to catch people who were not in countries where we have a social security treaty in that initial two years after they have left, more than later. But in the countries where we have a social security agreement, obviously the payments can go on for longer. I should also say here that we do not have a social security agreement any more with the UK and we know that one-third of Australians abroad at any one time are in the UK, roughly. So that is a downside.

Senator MURRAY—My last question to you is this: I am always keen to trial things rather than to institute them as new systems. My impression of many young people I know who live overseas for a number of years is that they come back quite regularly for weddings of friends or relatives, or family occasions or whatever. If they are away for four or five years, they might return three or four times. The time to catch them is coming in and going out.

Ms MacGregor—That is right.

Senator MURRAY—But my feeling has always been that, if you try and catch people before they have gone through Customs, they are anxious and focussed on paperwork and getting themselves through. They only relax once they are through. My question to you is really a kind of speculative one. Do you think we should encourage somebody like the AEC to set up a booth for a week or two in, say, the Sydney departure area after you have gone through Customs just to see how many people they could attract and catch and see if there is real merit in setting up then some kind of permanent facility?

Ms MacGregor—Yes, I think that would be a very good idea. I agree with you; when you get to the airport you are worried about getting checked in, making sure your bags are not overweight and whether you have to pay excess baggage. It is only once you have gone through immigration and you get into the area where the lounges and the duty free shops are that you start to think, 'Right, now all I have to do is wait until they tell me to board.' I think that is a moment when people are more receptive. Sometimes they are actually looking to fill in a bit of time at that point, whether by just wandering around in the duty free or having a bite to eat

before they get on the plane. I think that is a good place to catch them and to just talk to people and say, 'If you are leaving, how long are you going for?' They say, 'Well I do not know', and you say: 'Well, did you realise that it is not compulsory to vote when you get abroad but we do encourage you to stay involved and to vote. You can become an eligible overseas elector, but, if you take yourself off the roll and you do not re-enrol within three years or we wipe you off the roll because we do not know what has happened to you, then be aware that if you stay abroad longer you actually will not be able to vote anymore'. A lot of people just do not understand that message. That crucial drop-dead three-year message really has to be communicated much more clearly.

Senator MURRAY—Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Could you explain to me your fundamental reason or reasons why you are concerned that there is such a low voting rate with Australians overseas? What is your concern?

Ms MacGregor—I think as the Southern Cross Group we generally want the diaspora to be more involved in Australian life and we want Australians at home to say: 'Hey, we have one million Australians abroad, but once they are abroad we should not just forget about them. They are actually important because they are still contributing to Australia; they are still part of Australia.' You are not just part of Australia when you are in Australia. When you leave Australia you go as an Australian and with all that imbues. I think Australians overseas are really making a huge contribution. It is not necessarily fair to just cut them off and say, 'Once you have gone and you have fallen off the roll for more than three years you cannot participate any more'. I think we will be richer as a country, more international and more wired into our international environment if we improve the relationship we have with our diaspora. Part of improving our relationship with our diaspora is to give them serious consideration to those people participating in our democratic processes one way or another.

CHAIR—In relation to information on the internet, on the AEC website, do you think that people actually go to the AEC website or do you think that they get their information, if they are going to get it, from some other source?

Ms MacGregor—I think that people go to websites when they are alerted to the fact that they need to do something. Very often—and I find this myself—you see a flyer somewhere which has some interesting information on it or something you think you need to follow up on and it has a website address. Then you think: 'Okay, I'd better have a look at that,' and you print out the form or whatever you need to do. I think brochures that you actually put in someone's hand as they are going through the departure gate are useful because they alert people to the fact that it is something they need to think about. They can then go to the website wherever they are in the world—in an internet cafe or whatever—and see what the full story is.

CHAIR—Most people these days have an internet address, particularly people overseas. Should the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade collect email addresses of Australians overseas, through a number of mechanisms, and should the AEC then be able to use that information so that when an election is called everybody overseas gets an email from the AEC saying, 'This is to alert you to the fact that an election has been called and this is what you must do to participate.' Have you thought about that?

Ms MacGregor—Yes. I think we have addressed that partly. There are two things to consider. A problem we need to think about is whether the list of overseas Australians that DFAT has can be shared with other agencies. At the moment you can sign up on the DFAT website, on the ORAO page. It is www.orao.dfat.gov.au. There is an online registration where you can tell DFAT you are going abroad, whether it be just for a week to Bali or whether you think you are leaving for a longer period.

CHAIR—Yes. I have seen that.

Ms MacGregor—If you are on that list—and I know because I am on it—for example, just before the last election you would have received an email from DFAT which said, ‘The federal election has just been called.’ There is also a sign up e-bulletin newsletter on the AEC website. If you are on that, I am not sure whether they send you a message. Perhaps they do. I cannot recall that I got one before the last election. So both agencies already have a facility for you to sign up, but you need to get people to the website and get them to agree to go on the mailing list before you have got their data. Once you have got it, DFAT says at the top of the orao registration page: ‘We will use it to send you travel advisories and election announcements.’ When you sign up for the AEC newsletter I think you can pick the different subjects you are interested in. One of the suggestions we have made in our submission is that there could be a special subject box to tick which says you are overseas and you want information pertinent to overseas Australians. But you still need to get people to the website in the first place, to get them to sign up and to heavily suggest to them: ‘It is a good idea to be on our mailing list, then you will know as soon as something happens.’

CHAIR—What about asking departing passengers who sign a departure card to put their email address on the departure card, in order to capture their address that way?

Ms MacGregor—Yes, you could do that. I am not sure about the data protection or privacy rules. You would have to look at that.

CHAIR—It would have to be optional, but putting it on the card would be consent to use of the email address to send them information from the AEC or from DFAT.

Ms MacGregor—Definitely. I think that is a very good idea, because that is a card that every single person leaving has to fill in. I think a lot of people would opt in at that stage.

CHAIR—That is right.

Ms MacGregor—You need a point where people focus on it, even if it is only fleetingly, for 30 seconds, and you will catch a larger number than we are catching now.

CHAIR—I have only one more question. You may not be able to answer this, but are you aware of any evidence to suggest that young people do not tend to enrol when they return to Australia following a period overseas?

Ms MacGregor—We do not have any hard evidence of that, no.

CHAIR—Ms MacGregor, I think we have what we need. I wish you seasons greetings and thank you for being with us.

Ms MacGregor—Thank you.

Senator HOGG—We have a housekeeping matter. We normally move to authorise the publication of the proof of transcript of the evidence, but at the start of the hearing the chair made it clear that this was not necessarily protected by parliamentary privilege. Ms MacGregor, whilst I do not think you have said anything that in any way goes anywhere near that, would you like to see the transcript before we authorise the publication or are you happy for me as a member of the committee to move to authorise the publication of the *Hansard* on the parliamentary database?

Ms MacGregor—I am happy for you to move the publication now. I am happy to check the spelling and so forth when I see the transcript.

Senator HOGG—That is fine. As you are in Belgium, I wanted to make sure you understand.

Resolved (on motion by **Senator Hogg**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 8.27 pm