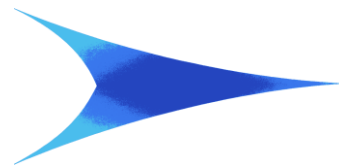


The Southern Cross Group

Promoting Mobility in the Global Community



MEDIA RELEASE

Overseas Australians Should Enrol to Vote Now

The Southern Cross Group (SCG) today strongly urged all Australian citizens of voting age overseas to make sure that their electoral enrolment is in order now, before the 2007 Australian federal election is called.

Jacqui Mowbray, spokeswoman for the SCG in Sydney, said that 2006 changes to the closing date for the electoral roll, coupled with limitations in the law on enrolling from abroad, meant that many Australian expats who had left Australia in recent years faced a very real prospect that inaction on their part would lead to them becoming disenfranchised for their entire sojourn abroad.

“Australians overseas must organise their electoral enrolment now, and not wait until the Prime Minister calls the election”, she said. “The old seven day window between the calling of the election and the closing of the electoral roll is gone. Once the election is announced, the roll will close almost immediately.”

Those already enrolled in NSW, Queensland and the ACT may have been affected by re-distributions. Checking enrolments using the [Australian Electoral Commission \(AEC\) online enrolment verification facility](#) is essential.

It is not compulsory for Australians outside the country to vote. But failing to maintain one's federal electoral enrolment and not voting in even one election once abroad can mean that an expat loses their right to vote for the rest of their time overseas.

The law states that if a person is not on the electoral roll, they may only enrol from outside Australia if an application is made within three years of “ceasing to reside in Australia”.

The SCG estimates that there are at least 500,000 Australian citizens of voting age overseas who are not on the electoral roll and who are currently disenfranchised because the law prevents them from enrolling.

Although it is estimated that some one million Australians now live outside the country, low overseas voting levels in Australian federal elections testify to widespread diaspora disenfranchisement.

In the 2004 election, only 68,544 votes were issued by overseas posts. In 2001, the figure was 63,016, and in 1998, 65,086. In 1999, only 57,955 votes were issued overseas for the referendum on the Republic.

Most of the votes issued abroad appear to be issued to Australians who are only temporarily abroad on business trips or holidays at the time of the election. Numbers of expat Australians registered with the AEC as “Eligible Overseas Electors” (EOEs) are low. As of 31 May 2006, only 16,047 persons were on the roll as EOEs.

“Australians who move abroad should not simply assume that they don't need to do anything and will always be entitled to vote in Australian federal elections for as long as they live overseas simply because they are Australian citizens”, said Ms Mowbray. “The AEC is continually updating the electoral roll, and it will delete a person from the roll if it is established that the person has left their old address and the AEC has heard nothing from them. Due to the three-year limitation on enrolment from abroad, deletion from the electoral roll spells civil death for many overseas Australians.”

Even if an expat Australian is on the roll as an EOE, if he or she fails to vote or apply for a postal vote in an election, the AEC has the right to delete their name from the roll. So on the one hand, voting while overseas is not compulsory. But on the other hand, those who do not vote in even just one election face disenfranchisement for the rest of their time abroad. Many expat Australians know that it is not compulsory to vote while overseas and “skip” one election, mistakenly believing that they will be able to vote “next time” if they choose. Current Australian electoral law generally means that is not the case.

“We urge everyone in Australia who has Australian family members, friends and colleagues overseas to pass on this important information” said Ms Mowbray.

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Further Information

SCG Leaflet ***What You Need to Know about Voting in Australia While You Live Overseas***
[A4-size version](#) or [US letter-size paper version](#)

[AEC Information and AEC forms on electoral enrolment](#)

[AEC online enrolment verification facility](#)

[More on Expat Disenfranchisement](#)

[Statistics on Overseas Voting](#)

[GetUp! Blog on expatriate enrolment and disenfranchisement](#)

About the Southern Cross Group

The Southern Cross Group is an international non-profit volunteer-run advocacy and support organisation for the Australian diaspora. Since its formation in early 2000, the SCG has established a consistent track record of intelligent and timely submissions to Government on a host of Australian expatriate issues. The Group is best known for its work in reforming Australian citizenship law. It has also been active on the issue of expatriate disenfranchisement in the Australian electoral process, and was the driving force behind the establishment of a broad-based dedicated Australian Senate Committee Inquiry into Australian expatriates held in 2003-2005.

The SCG has no paid staff and is funded by donations which go towards offsetting overheads such as software licensing fees, web hosting costs, postage, stationery, and communications expense. [Please help the SCG by making a donation.](#)

For more information about the SCG, [click here](#). Contact us for advertising and marketing opportunities.

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