

Mr Alan Johnson
Managing Director
Horwarth Management Services Ltd
Chairman
Australian Chamber of Commerce
HONG KONG

21 September 2001

Dear Mr Johnson,

The Southern Cross Group and Australian Expatriate Issues

For some time myself and SCG Co-founder, John Russell, have been meaning to get in touch with you to discuss the work of the Southern Cross Group and to learn more about the Australian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong.

The Southern Cross Group was formed as a non-profit organization to work with and speak for the some 820,000 Australians who now live overseas. We held our founding meeting in Brussels in January 2000 and constituted the Group with the aim of working to remove some of the legal, administrative and practical barriers which Australians overseas encounter. We also try to provide a contact and support point as well as an information resource for expatriate Australians who experience hurdles of this nature. We now have a membership of around 1,000 Australians all over the world. Membership is free and simply involves registering for our e-mail bulletin list online.

So far, we are most known for the work we have done to change Australian citizenship law so that all Australians may hold dual citizenship. You may be aware that Section 17 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* currently takes away a person's Australian citizenship automatically when they acquire a second citizenship. After a long campaign, and much support from our members worldwide and others, the Australian Government announced on 3 August that it would repeal Section 17, and introduced a bill into Parliament to this effect on 23 August. We hope this legislation will be passed in the coming weeks. Although China currently does not recognize dual citizenship, for many Australians who live in countries which do allow dual citizenship, this will mean that they can apply for citizenship in their host country without losing their Australian citizenship.

At present we are focusing on helping expatriate Australians to vote overseas in the forthcoming federal election, and looking at ways to have the current legislative framework on overseas voting amended. Research which our Group has conducted indicates that as many as 500,000 Australians overseas may be unfairly disenfranchised by Sections 94 and 94A of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*. Our website carries details and information on

overseas voting and we will shortly be contacting many Australian expatriate groups around the world asking them to circulate this information among their members in the lead up to the election.

Our website also contains copies of all our press releases, position papers and government submissions since our formation. In particular, our submission to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs of 6 July 2001 sets out our thoughts on many of the broader issues facing expatriate Australians today and contains a list of eleven recommendations to Government. This can be downloaded as a pdf file. We are in the process of putting up links to many expatriate groups' websites on our website, and we will put up a link to your website shortly.

Both myself and SCG Co-founder John Russell, in Brussels, would be glad to have an opportunity to discuss with you how the Southern Cross Group and the Australian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong might work together in the future. We understand that there are some 46,000 Australians in Hong Kong, but so far very few of those on our e-bulletin list are from Hong Kong, although we believe that Australians in Hong Kong are affected by many of the issues we have been looking at. For some time we have been considering the possibility of organizing an information forum on expat issues for Australians in Hong Kong, and wonder if this might provide an occasion for our organizations to work together in the coming months.

Please feel free to get in touch with either one of us. John can be contacted in Brussels on +32 2 743 4220 or at john@southern-cross-group.org. I can be reached in Washington DC on +1 202 508 8057 business hours or +1 202 483 0567 at home, or at anne@southern-cross-group.org.

Best regards,

Anne MacGregor
SCG Co-Founder
North American Coordinator