



Submission No 1

Inquiry into Australia's Overseas Representation

Name: K J Fisher

Submission 1

Dear Sir/Madam,

I would like to make a submission to your enquiry. I have been associated with Australia's overseas representations in several continents for many years. In the interests of brevity, I will limit myself to three points.

1. Geographic spread: Europe

We have multiple Embassies in EU countries, despite the fact that the EU has aspirations for a common foreign policy. While we obviously need Australian Embassies in the majors, because of the substantive bilateral relationships, we must gain very little from those in many of the minors, which offer neither substantive bilateral relations nor a serious insight into the EU. On the other hand we do not have Embassies in two of the most significant non-EU countries, Norway and Ukraine. In Norway we have a partner in a whole range of international affairs, from Antarctica to peace-keeping, and are more like-minded than with most EU countries. Ukraine is a major player in the future of East Europe, is a large country with yet-unrealised economic potential, and is a source of many immigrants to Australia.

Proposal: Close the Embassies in Budapest and Lisbon, and open in Oslo and Kiev.

2. Geographic spread: Pacific

Australian rhetoric is strong on our special role in the Pacific Island countries. Our performance there is much less so. At least we have resident diplomatic missions in most of the significant countries of the region, but we still are not represented in one of the largest, French Polynesia. Although not, obviously, an independent state, it is a partner in the Pacific Community and shares with us the common concerns of the whole Pacific region. It is politically volatile, and its future is uncertain. These are all reasons for us to open a Consulate in Papeete, for on the ground representation and to complete our vaunted (but under-delivered) claim to be a Pacific-knowledgeable country.

3. Activities/resources:

How many independent studies do there have to be before we get the message that our overseas resourcing is nothing short of pathetic. Even Luxembourg would be ashamed. In particular, the amounts allocated to public diplomacy, including all forms of cultural relations, are risible. The least your Report should do is to propose a substantial increase in funding for Australian public diplomacy, including especially in activities undertaken by the diplomatic posts themselves. Most posts are completely unable to respond to requests from Australians to undertake or sponsor public activities, exhibitions or events.

I wish you the best in drawing up your report.

K J Fisher