

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Parliamentary Delegation
to
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTS
AND INSTITUTIONS

23 to 30 April 2010

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Senator for Queensland
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The Delegation was accompanied by Mrs Sue Hogg, Mrs Heather Ruddock and Mr Robert Bilyk.

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Recommendation

That the institutions and parliaments in Sweden and Denmark not visited due to the rearranged itinerary be the subject of a delegation visit in early 2011.

Foreword

In April 2010 an Australian Parliamentary delegation continued the custom of undertaking a biennial visit to certain parliamentary, commercial and international institutions in Europe which are significant to Australia.

The original program proposed visits to Sweden, Denmark, France, Belgium and Germany. However, the activities scheduled for the first week in Sweden and Denmark had to be curtailed due to extraordinary circumstances, namely the eruption of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajokul and the subsequent emission of an ash cloud which brought European aviation to a halt.

Nonetheless, the resumption of an amended program in the second week still proved to be a worthwhile opportunity for delegation members to build on the already strong links between Australia and the European Union and to discuss matters of mutual interest in detail at both formal and informal levels in France, Belgium and Germany.

In this light, it is important to ensure that an Australian parliamentary delegation visits Sweden and Denmark in early 2011 so that this part of the dialogue into which so much planning had been invested, can be finalised. This is a formal recommendation of the delegation which I endorse.

The delegation arrived in Europe at an important time in the bi-lateral relationship. The expanded role for the European Parliament as the Treaty of Lisbon came into effect in late 2009 meant that key areas of interest for Australia in areas such as agriculture, justice and the impact of the Global Financial Crisis were topical. Furthermore, campaigns for the British general election and a regional election in North Rhine-Westphalia provided an interesting backdrop to discussions.

The program included meetings with parliamentary counterparts in France and Belgium, at the European Parliament in Brussels, and with officials at the European Commission in the same city.

A useful starting point at these meetings was the number of similar, global, challenges that parliamentarians and officials face in both Europe and Australia. This common ground, and the fact that the inter-parliamentary dialogue is now well-established, led

to robust, frank and good humoured dialogue that benefited all participants. The fact this was a bi-partisan parliamentary (as opposed to Government) delegation, also meant that various approaches to common issues could be explored. The delegation's visits to various commercial and international organisations was also conducted in the same spirit and provided useful perspectives on themes related to energy and food security.

Of course, delegation members are keen to absorb as much information as possible in the limited time available. But it is also worth noting that at each institution visited, our European counterparts were also keen to hear the Australian perspective, and in some cases to learn that commonly held perceptions are not always established in fact. Our appearance over two days before the European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand provided the opportunity for EU parliamentarians to question Australian MPs and senators on a range of issues related to migration, privacy laws, trade and agricultural policy. I have no doubt that perceptions about Australian policy in some of these key areas have now changed amongst the members of this influential committee.

The delegation was also honoured to spend Anzac Day at various commemorations in France and Belgium. This day is important to Australians and large numbers of our fellow citizens attended these ceremonies, many of whom had made a considerable effort to be present due to the disruption to flights to Europe. The dignity with which French and Belgium officials hosted the various ceremonies, and their hospitality to Australian visitors, is another indication of the strength of the bilateral relationship.

Finally, this report was compiled on the delegation's return to Australia, but tabling has been delayed due to the calling of the 2010 federal election.

(John Hogg)

President of the Senate and Delegation Leader

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 In 2010, an Australian parliamentary delegation continued the tradition of undertaking a biennial visit to certain European parliaments and institutions. The original itinerary included visits to Sweden, Denmark, France, Belgium and Germany and was scheduled to depart Australia on 16 April and return on 2 May 2010.

1.2 However, the itinerary had to be curtailed at short notice due to major disruptions to European air traffic following the release of large clouds of ash from the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull which erupted in March and started emitting an ash cloud on 14 April.

1.3 The President of the Senate had already departed Australia on 14 April and arrived in London before airports were closed, while the rest of the delegation were unable to depart Australia on schedule. While in London, the President undertook a range of activities that are the subject of a separate report which will be tabled in the Senate.

1.4 After flights resumed some days later, the rest of the delegation departed Sydney on 22 April and joined the President in Paris to undertake the rest of the program planned for France, Belgium and Germany.

1.5 While it is regrettable that the full itinerary could not be followed, the delegation still managed to undertake valuable visits to parliaments and institutions in the time available in the second week which continued dialogue and supported links between Australia and Europe.

Aims and objectives of the delegation

1.6 The delegation adopted the following aims and objectives for the visit:

- To strengthen relations with the European Parliament, Belgian Parliament and European Commission.
- To gain an appreciation of the dynamics of key changes and current political developments in the European Union following the Lisbon Treaty's entry into force on 1 December 2009.
- To reinvigorate and strengthen ties with the Swedish Parliament and Government.
- To gain an understanding of Denmark and Sweden's respective outlooks on energy security, sustainable development and renewable, traditional and nuclear energy and smart technologies.

- To gain an insight into future directions of the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and to pursue cooperation with the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.
- To participate in Anzac Day commemorations.

1.7 At a meeting prior to departure, the delegation also decided to explore immigration and the integration of migrants; the Greek economic financial situation and possible impacts; the use of small to medium size enterprises (SME) to meet Defence Force capability; and the new organisational and operational arrangements for the European Parliament

1.8 Due to the unavoidable change to travel plans mentioned above, the delegation was not able to visit Sweden and Denmark, so did not undertake meetings with their respective parliaments, nor visit various institutions associated with energy and sustainable development. Nonetheless, the delegation believes that the curtailed program still met many of the original aims and objectives, and was worthwhile in fostering ongoing links with European parliaments and institutions.

Acknowledgements

Australia

1.9 Prior to departure, the delegation received two oral briefings supported by written materials. The delegation particularly wishes to thank staff from the Parliamentary Library in the Department of Parliamentary Services, in particular, Nina Markovic, Senior Researcher and Anita Talberg, Researcher.

1.10 Officers of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) were also very helpful, in particular, Monica Hart, Executive Officer, Ministerial, Cabinet and Parliamentary Services, John Griffin, Assistant Secretary, EU and West Europe Branch, Neil Hawkins, Assistant Secretary, Northern, Southern and Eastern Europe Branch and Steven Barraclough, Director, Northern Central and Eastern Europe Section. Finally, Robert Owen-Jones, Assistant Secretary, Multi-Lateral Negotiations Branch from the Department of Climate Change provided advice on subjects related to his area of expertise.

1.11 The delegation also particularly appreciates the work of the Parliamentary Relations Office (PRO) staff. In addition to the usual work involved in planning such a mission, PRO staff went to extraordinary lengths to re-arrange travel after European air services were suspended due to the Icelandic volcanic eruption. When air services resumed on Thursday 22 April, there was considerable competition for the few available seats, but delegation members were still able to travel thanks to the work of PRO officers. The contribution of Fiona Way and Lynette Mollard is particularly appreciated in this regard.

France

1.12 The delegation records its thanks to the Parliament and Government of the Republic of France for the hospitality and courtesy extended to it during its visit, in particular: Monsieur Jean Cabannes, Director of the Secretariat-General to the President of the Senate and Monsieur François Gautier, Diplomatic Adviser to the President of the Senate; Monsieur Karim Mouttalib, Director General, Musée du quai Branly; the Mayor of Fromelles, Monsieur Hubert Huchette; the Mayor of Bullecourt, Monsieur Jules Laude; and the Mayor of Villers-Brettonneux, Dr Patrick Simon.

Belgium

1.13 In Belgium the delegation was honoured to be hosted by Mr Armand de Decker, Chair of the Belgian Senate, and the Mayor of Ieper (Ypres), Mr Luc Dehaene.

1.14 While in Brussels, the delegation also had meetings with Members of the European Commission, including Mr Michael Starbaek Christensen and Mr John Bell.

1.15 Members of the European Parliament were also generous with their time, in particular, Mr Libor Roucek, Vice President of the European Parliament, and Ms Mara Bizzotto, the Chair of the Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand

Australian Missions in Europe

1.16 Finally, the delegation wishes to thank the staff at all the Australian posts who assisted with the visit and preparation of the program of meetings. The delegation was well served by the Australian Embassies in all the countries it visited, and provided with thorough briefings on arrival in each country and it appreciated the thought and attention put into both the programs and the well-being of the delegation. Particular mention must be made of the assistance of embassy staff in re-arranging meetings due to unavoidable changes in travel plans, and in Paris, arranging appointments at short notice when the delegation found that it would be in that city for an additional day. Such visits take up the time and resources of embassy staff and their support and assistance is appreciated.

Paris

- HE Mr David Ritchie, Australian Ambassador to France;
- Mr Tom Menadue, First Secretary; and
- Ms Elizabeth Perkins, First Secretary.

Brussels

- HE Dr Brendan Nelson, Australian Ambassador to the European Union, Belgium, Luxembourg and NATO
- Ms Rhonda Piggott, Deputy Head of Mission
- Major General Brian Dawson, Defence Attache; and
- Dr Jonathon Lane, Third Secretary.

Bonn

- HE Mr Peter Tesch, Australian Ambassador to Germany;
- Mr Jason Shea, Third Secretary; and
- Ms Regine Pankuweit, Research Officer.

1.17 Without this generous assistance, the delegation's visits would have been less informative and the delegation thanks them and their staff for making the visit such a success.

Background

1.18 The delegation arrived in Europe at an interesting phase in the bi-lateral relationship. The Lisbon (EU Reform) Treaty had come into force on 1 December 2009 which created the new position of President of the European Council and gave the Parliament an expanded role in various areas including trade, agriculture, justice and home affairs which will have an impact on Australia.

1.19 The Greek Sovereign Debt Crisis was also receiving widespread media coverage during the time of the delegation's visit. A local perspective on the Greek debt crisis during the delegation's time in Bonn and Cologne was played out in a regional election in North Rhine-Westphalia that became an unofficial referendum on the performance of Chancellor Angela Merkel's role in providing German loans for a 'bail-out'.

1.20 Finally, the campaign for the British general election scheduled for 6 May was in its last stages as the delegation was in Europe and was the subject of widespread media coverage and particular interest in the European Parliament and Commission.

Chapter 2

Anzac Day Commemorations

2.1 Following delays to air travel, most of the delegation arrived in Paris on Friday 23 April and immediately commenced appointments. On Saturday 24 April, the delegation travelled to various First World War battle sites on the Western Front in preparation for commemoration services on Anzac Day.

2.2 The delegation arrived at Fromelles on the morning of 24 April and paid their respects at the War Memorial. Here the delegation met the Chief of the Australian Army, Lieutenant General Gillespie, and Mr Mark Green, the Defence Attaché at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. General Gillespie's briefing was a useful adjunct to the printed materials already received and was much appreciated. The delegation also inspected the Pheasant Wood site and received a briefing from Mr David Richardson and Mr Martial Delabarre of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission about the recovery of the bodies of Australian soldiers that will be reburied at the new cemetery. The delegation then visited the Fromelles town hall to be received by the Mayor, Mr Hubert Huchette.

2.3 The delegation then travelled to Peronne and inspected the Historial de la Grande Guerre, or Great War Museum, under the guidance of the Executive Director, Mr Francois Bergez. This modern facility sits behind the medieval castle and the delegation was impressed by the various displays set in recesses in the floor which simulated trenches.

2.4 En-route to Amiens, the delegation stopped at Villers-Bretonneux to inspect the cemetery and war memorial which would be the site of the dawn service the following day. That evening, the Ambassador, Mr David Ritchie, hosted a dinner for those attending the Anzac Day service. Guests included the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Stephen Smith MP, the Chief of Army, various other dignitaries and a range of Australian community members.

2.5 The delegation departed the hotel at 4.30am the next morning for the Anzac Day dawn service at the Villers Bretonneux War Memorial and Military Cemetery. The Chief of Army, the Minister and various Australian State dignitaries joined French officials in the solemnities. The President of the Senate, Senator the Hon John Hogg, laid a wreath on behalf of the Parliament of Australia. It is estimated that there were more than 3,000 people in attendance with the vast majority being Australians, young and old alike. The formalities at the military cemetery were followed by a breakfast reception at the town hall hosted by the mayor, Dr Patrick Simon, and a further wreath-laying at the village war memorial. A commemorative concert by the local brass and pipe bands in the covered market and the presentation of the Sadlier-Stokes scholarship concluded events at Villers-Bretonneux before the delegation departed for Bullecourt.

2.6 En-route to Bullecourt, the delegation stopped to lay a wreath at Petite Croix, a simple memorial in farming country that commemorates fallen Australian soldiers. The delegation arrived in Bullecourt in mid-afternoon to participate in ceremonies at the war memorial in the village where Senator Hogg gave the principal commemorative address before further ceremonies at the Australian Digger Memorial some two kilometres outside the town.



At the Digger Memorial outside Bullecourt

2.7 The delegation then travelled to Ypres, (in Belgium) where they were received by the mayor, Mr Luc Dehaene at the famous Cloth Hall that had been devastated during hostilities but rebuilt after the war. That evening, the delegation participated in the Last Post Ceremony at the Menin Gate which has been held every evening since 1928 and only interrupted during the Second World War German occupation.

2.8 At all these ceremonies, there were numerous Australian travellers of all ages from a cross-section section of metropolitan and regional backgrounds who expressed satisfaction that their elected representatives were also commemorating Anzac Day with them on behalf of the Parliament and people of Australia.

2.9 The following day, the Defence Attaché, Major General Dawson and Defence Adviser, Lieutenant Colonel Toohey, led a tour of battle sites in the Ypres region, including Hill 60, Polygon Wood and the Tyne Cote cemetery. This tour added useful context to the Anzac Day ceremonies held on the previous day. En route to Brussels, the delegation also toured the city of Bruges.

Chapter 3

Parliaments

3.1 The program had originally scheduled delegation meetings with the Presiding Officers and Parliamentarians at the Swedish, Danish, European and Belgian parliaments. Due to the disruption to air services and the truncated nature of the eventual schedule, the delegation was unable to meet with the Scandinavian Parliaments. However, as the delegation had an additional day in Paris, a meeting was arranged at the French Senate. The delegation undertook visits to the European and Belgian Parliaments in Brussels as originally planned.

The French Senate

3.2 Shortly after arriving in Paris, the delegation toured the Musée du quai Branly which houses a collection of indigenous art from Africa, Asia, Oceania (including Australia) and America. The delegation appreciated the time taken by the Director-General, Mr Karim Mouttalib, in explaining the various items on display.

3.3 The delegation then travelled to the French Senate at the Luxembourg Palace where Mr Jean Cabannes, (Director of the Secretariat General of the President of the Senate) and Mr François Gautier, (the Diplomatic Adviser to the President of the Senate) hosted the delegation.

3.4 The French parliamentary system involves a bi-cameral legislature and Senators are elected by indirect universal suffrage, in effect by their local municipal councillors and relevant National Assembly Members, sitting in an electoral college in each département, or administrative division. The Senate considers laws proposed by government or parliamentary initiative, refers bills to committees and also represents the local bodies of the Republic, namely municipalities, départements and regions (both in France and overseas).

3.5 Useful discussions were held on matters related to security of parliamentary buildings and facilities, dealing with the media and the issue of parliamentary funding. In relation to the media, it was noted that the French Senate tends to receive less news coverage than the lower house (or National Assembly) and does not have a resident Press Gallery as is the case in Australia. The delegation discussed a range of issues related to achieving a balance between providing access to the media while ensuring that parliamentarians are able to undertake their duties without undue interruption.

The European Parliament

3.6 On arrival, the delegation was hosted to lunch by Mr Libor Roucek, the Vice President of the European Parliament. This informal setting allowed delegation members the chance to meet other members of the Parliament and their staff in an informal setting in the parliament building overlooking Brussels.

3.7 Following this welcome, delegation members attended the first Australian-EU Inter-Parliamentary meeting as the guest of the Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand. This delegation (or committee) is chaired by Ms Mara Bizzotto (a member of the European Parliament) and the session with the Australian parliamentary delegation was conducted in two sessions on the afternoon of Tuesday 27 April and the morning of Wednesday 28 April.



The delegation was greeted at the European Parliament by Ms Mara Bizzotto, chair of the European Union Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand

3.8 The agenda for the meeting had listed various topics for discussion and prior to departure, Australian delegation members had been asked to prepare presentations on the following topics:

- EU-Australia relations, including progress on implementation of the Partnership Framework (including ratification of the Australia-EU Passenger Name Record Agreement);
- Global Financial Crisis, including Australian and EU responses, economic difficulties in some eurozone countries and the role of the G20;
- Trade liberalisation and agriculture, including the WTO Doha Round, FTAs and prospects for further reform of the Common Agricultural Policy;
- Integration of immigrants in the EU and Australia (including with respect to Muslim communities), minority issues and human rights; and
- Foreign Affairs - relations of EU and Australia with third countries in the Asia and the Pacific, developments in external relations.

3.9 This agenda led to wide-ranging discussions at both sessions on most of the issues listed above and all members of the delegation were able to make presentations and participate.

3.10 At the opening of the first session, Senator Hogg thanked the delegation on Relations with Australia and New Zealand for welcoming the Australian parliamentary visitors. He noted that this was a *parliamentary* as opposed to a *government* visit, stressed the importance of parliamentary relationships and reciprocal visits and the need for face-to-face interaction. Senator Hogg also stressed the bi-partisan nature of the Australian delegation.

3.11 Senator Hogg noted that since the signing of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament had taken on a new role and that had been recognised in the appointment of Dr Nelson as Australia's Ambassador to the European Union which demonstrated the importance that Australia placed on the relationship with the EU. Senator Hogg also outlined issues of interest to the Australian delegation, namely security, climate change, the operation of parliament, transparency of government processes and ways of auditing the performance of government.

Migration

3.12 The delegation was then asked about Australia's migration procedures and members explained the principles supporting Australia's policy, in particular the fact that it was not racially discriminatory, and attempted to achieve a balance between refugee/humanitarian resettlement, family reunion and provision of skills that were in short supply. There was also discussion about the infrastructure required to support migration and it was noted that Australia had recently appointed a Minister for Population. It was interesting to note that the European Union does not have an explicit immigration policy, though parts of southern Europe are under greater pressure from migration than central Europe. It was agreed that this issue cannot be ignored by either Australia or the EU who both face challenges, particularly in relation to avoid exploitation of vulnerable people who may be the victims of people smuggling and other criminal activities.

Passenger Name Record Data

3.13 The next item discussed was the Partnership Framework which supports the bilateral relationship between Australian and the European Union and lists areas of co-operation. In particular, the main area of discussion covered the European Parliament's decision to review the Australian-EU Passenger Name Record (PNR) Data Agreement which is provisionally in effect but is still to be ratified by the European Parliament under its new powers.

3.14 The PNR Agreement provides Australian authorities with the details of EU passenger names for border security purposes. This has raised concerns and the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs is reviewing the data protection and privacy aspects of the Agreement. The Australian delegation members went to some lengths to explain that the use of this data was important to combat cross-border crime (and had led to arrests and prosecutions). Emphasis was also placed on the protection of the data, namely, that it went to a single point and was only retained for three years (compared to much longer periods in some

other countries). The point was made that the use of passenger name data supported modern travel systems that had replaced paper-based visas. This in turn led to a useful discussion about privacy issues and delegation members were able to outline the Australian position on this subject which was of interest to their European counterparts.

The Global Financial Crisis and Greek Debt

3.15 Discussion then turned to the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), which was a topical matter during the period of the delegation's visit as the situation in Greece had deteriorated significantly and the question of the EU response to this problem was receiving widespread media coverage. Concerns about so-called 'sovereign debt', or the ability of governments to repay their national debt had emerged in late 2009. When the newly elected Greek Government announced that its debt would be 12.5% of GDP, or more than four times greater than the 3% target set by the EU's Stability and Growth Pact, ratings agencies downgraded ratings for Greek bonds which in turn increased the borrowing cost.

3.16 The delegation provided background on the Australian response to the crisis, in particular, the strength of the Australian financial system had meant that no bank collapsed or required a government bail-out; the government stimulus which had added two percentage points to gross domestic product and supported the creation of jobs; the rapid reduction in official interest rates; and strong trade and investment links with Asia, particularly the increase in exports to China.

3.17 Of particular relevance to the discussion, Europe is the largest trading partner for Australia as almost a third of foreign direct investment in Australia is sourced from the EU, which in turn receives almost 10% of Australia's merchandise exports.

3.18 Delegation members were informed that the EU was pursuing four goals: (i) the development and maintenance of a stable financial system, (ii) economic support, (iii) employment, and (iv) promotion of a global recovery. The point was made that open markets are needed as well as cash injections, and a long term approach is required as it will take 10 years, or 7-12% growth per annum for the EU to return to the position that they were in 3 years ago. The GFC had affected the EU in different ways: Some countries such as Poland had avoided recession and continued to grow, while others such as Spain and Ireland had experienced severe recessions and substantially increased unemployment. The delegation asked about public attitudes in the EU following the debt crisis and the point was made that while the EU had been created with good-will, the current situation was a practical test of its ability to respond to a serious crisis.

Agriculture and Trade Liberalisation

3.19 This led to a presentation by one of the European Parliamentarians, Mr Richard Ashworth, on the future of farming in the EU. Currently 41.5% of the EU budget is spent on the 'preservation and management of natural resources' (or agriculture) and the priorities for the future are economic regeneration to address 16% youth unemployment, energy security, climate change, migration and food security. The observation was made that Australia is 'ahead of the game' in research and development in relation to climate change, but the issue of global food security was a challenge for both the EU and Australia if the United Nations target of 50% more food by 2030 could be met. The point was also made that agriculture had related benefits in the form of support for regional communities, animal welfare and the environment.

3.20 The Australian delegation was asked for its perspective and made the point that the Government is working through the World Trade Organisation to reform agricultural trade, and has long advocated that support to agriculture should be delivered with no or minimal distortion to production or trade through subsidies. It was noted that Australia has reduced its tariffs on agricultural and food products since the 1970s, but that millions of farmers around the world still compete in a market subject to tariffs and subsidies. The achievement of a balanced and ambitious conclusion to the Doha Development Round of trade negotiations remains Australia's highest priority in trade policy, and a successful conclusion will have long term benefits for future generations.

Conclusion

3.21 This wide-ranging and useful discussion over two sessions also included a dinner on the evening of Tuesday 27 April hosted by the Chair of the EU Delegation for Relations with Australia and New Zealand, Ms Mara Bizzotto, which allowed discussion to continue on a more informal basis before the resumption of formalities the following morning.

3.22 The delegation members were able to represent Australia's position on key issues to this important Committee in a considered dialogue, particularly in relation to privacy, PNR data, migration, and trade issues.

3.23 The meeting concluded with discussion regarding wider issues of how both the EU and Australia, which have common values and aspirations, should manage their relationship with major trading parties in Asia, particularly China and India, recognising that there were key areas of difference in relation to some aspects such as human rights. One of the European parliamentarians made the useful point that the EU, while not a *military* force, should be seen as a *civic* power. It was also agreed that the dialogue should continue.

The Belgian Senate

3.24 Before departure from Brussels, the delegation called on the Chair of the Belgian Senate, Mr Armand De Decker who held a private meeting with President Hogg, conducted a tour of the Senate and hosted the party to lunch. While Belgian Senators who had previously visited Australia were unable to be present on this occasion due to the parliamentary recess, this was a useful opportunity to renew links and undertake discussions on matters of mutual interest in the light of the meetings with the European Parliament over previous days.



Chair of the Belgium Senate, Mr Armand De Decker, greets delegation Leader and President of the Senate, Senator Hogg, at the Belgium Senate. (The Australian Ambassador, Mr Brendan Nelson, is in the background.)

Chapter 4

Institutions

4.1 The program had originally scheduled meetings with a variety of institutions to gain an understanding of Denmark and Sweden's respective outlooks on energy security, sustainable development and renewable, traditional and nuclear energy and smart technologies. While it was not possible to keep these appointments, the delegation was still able to attend meetings at the European Commission in Brussels to discuss climate change and research and innovation. In Germany, the delegation visited a number of private sector companies involved in research and development activities associated with sustainable energy and smart technologies; they also met with United Nations representatives in Bonn to learn more about climate change and measures to combat desertification.

Research, Innovation, Energy Security and Smart Technologies

4.2 In Brussels, the delegation visited the offices of the European Commission which is the executive arm of the European Union to meet staff from the Office of the Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science. This is a new post established in November 2009 with an aim of improving co-operation in science and innovation, based on the premise that no one country can address key research challenges such as food and energy security and population health.

4.3 Officials, Mr John Bell and Mr David Harmon, told the delegation that the European Commission is keen to support greater co-operation with Australia to expand the current focus on food science, information communication technology and health. It was pointed out that successful co-operative ventures often generated a snowball effect with other research projects.

4.4 An area of particular interest in the discussion was the problem of scoping large research projects so that costs did not blow out and the need to develop methods to measure the impact of tax funds invested in large, international research ventures. This led to a useful discussion about intellectual property and audit process to monitor these complex undertakings. It was noted that the Commission is currently examining strategies to identify and develop audit tools and subscribes to the relevant intellectual property protocols. The delegation asked if current Australian approaches to research development required review and it was suggested that Australian researchers tended to undertake bi-lateral projects when multi-lateral arrangements might produce even better results.

European Commissioner for Climate Action

4.5 At the European Commission, the delegation also met with Mr Michael Starbaek Christensen, the Deputy Head of Cabinet (or Office) of the European Commissioner for Climate Action.

4.6 The delegation asked Mr Christensen how the Commission dealt with the wide range of views on this subject and was told that while the diversity of opinion could not be ignored, there was general agreement that resources needed to be used more efficiently and that energy security was a common concern. Mr Starbaek explained that smart electricity grids were a key area of long-term investment, and that the Commission was required to examine costs and economic impact as part of its planning. The current GFC was helping the European Union meet its targets of reducing emissions by up to 30% by 2020 at a cost of 33 Billion Euros.

4.7 Delegation members asked about the use of nuclear energy in Europe and Mr Starbaek agreed that this was a sensitive policy area for each individual member country. While electricity generated using nuclear power can be sold into the European grid, a number of new member countries have nuclear energy systems that need upgrading to be made safe to meet modern standards. At the same time, all member countries using this form of energy needed to upgrade to modern technologies as many European reactors are nearing the end of their useful life and need to be decommissioned or modernised. (The number of European nuclear reactors has been decreasing since its peak in 1988.)

SolarWorld AG

4.8 While production of oil and gas (mainly from North Sea deposits) has peaked, renewable energy is the fastest growing fuel source in the EU, rising from 4.4% of energy consumption in 1990 to 7.8% in 2007. In fact, in 2008, the EU added more capacity from renewable than traditional sources.

4.9 In Bonn, the delegation visited SolarWorld AG, a manufacturer of solar panels. Mr Milan Nitzschke and Ms Felicia Muller-Pelzer provided a briefing and explained to the delegation that while solar power is currently more expensive, it is expected that retail prices from the grid will reach parity by 2013 and that after that roof-top solar generated electricity will be cheaper than conventionally generated power. The delegation provided an overview of the growing use of solar power in Australia, in the context of readily available coal resources supplying traditional large power stations.

4.10 An interesting point of discussion was the growing availability of solar panels, the problem of quality control in a global market and the need for the development of standards. This was pertinent in view of the inspection the next day of the solar testing laboratory at TUV Rheinland in Cologne.

4.11 At SolarWorld, the delegation also received a briefing from Stefan Schurig, the Director of the World Future Council, a non-government organisation funded by the City of Hamburg to develop better policy and advise parliamentarians. Mr Schurig suggested that the traditional model of taking the resource (eg coal or oil) to the power generating source needed to be replaced by a model where power was produced at the place of need (eg on the house rooftop). He also suggested that feed-in tariffs were a short term measure to support the adoption of renewable energy at a local level, while a greater challenge was to persuade power companies that worthwhile profits could be made from renewable energy.



The delegation inspect solar panel technology in operation on the roof of SolarWorld AG at Bonn.

German Aerospace (DLR)

4.12 On Friday 30 April, the delegation visited the German Aerospace Centre (DLR) outside Cologne. This organisation undertakes a wide range of energy research activities for civilian and military purposes with a particular focus on linking research to practical applications.

4.13 Mr Bernard Milow and Mr Klaus Hennecke from DLR led an interesting discussion about some of the practical challenges of developing large scale solar power arrays in northern Africa which could provide more than 10% of Europe's electricity by 2050. While the sunlight is free, these projects present various challenges due to the considerable capital expenditure required for initial development. A further complication is that some of these sites are in locations far from where the power is required, and are sometimes politically unstable. So DLR is interested in developing further links with Australia, and Minister Carr is due to visit in June 2010. At the conclusion of the meeting, the delegation toured a prototype solar furnace which is capable of cutting through steel.

TUV Rheinland

4.14 Also in Cologne, the delegation visited the head office of TUV Rheinland, a large international company with an office in Melbourne and a high voltage testing laboratory in Adelaide. Delegation members were provided with a useful briefing on the challenges facing consumers to ensure that the components in complex transport and energy systems were in fact what they claimed to be in terms of quality and also in meeting modern standards to avoid child labour and exploitation. For example, it was estimated that some 15% of aviation spare parts are not genuine, and the problem of fake components is a global issue that cannot be only sourced to particular countries that may not comply with international standards.

4.15 At TUV, the delegation also toured the solar panel testing laboratory and saw panels being subjected to a variety of tests to ensure compliance with standards.



The delegation inspect the solar panel testing laboratory at TUV Rheinland

The United Nations

4.16 In Bonn, the delegation visited the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and received a briefing from the Executive Secretary, Mr Ivo de Boer. Mr de Boer provided a frank analysis of current perspectives on climate change and the global situation since the Copenhagen summit in December 2009. A particular challenge were the competing demands of emerging industrialised countries to develop competitive industries in the context of first world countries attempting to limit emissions.

4.17 Mr de Boer explained that his secretariat supports negotiation rather than implementation and he explained the model the secretariat used to measure carbon emissions. Mr de Boer said that he believed that the three key issues were (i) energy security and the price of energy, (ii) natural resources depletion, and (iii) lifestyle change as more than 5 billion people aspired to a first world standard of living. The delegation found these perspectives useful and discussed Australia's approach to both the overall topic and the Copenhagen Conference last year.

4.18 The delegation also visited the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and were briefed by the Chef de Cabinet, Mr Mohamadou-Mansour N'Diaye. This office is funded by the World Bank and is developing a ten-year strategy which is already leading to reform processes. Mr N'Diaye explained that approximately 2 billion people are affected by desertification, and that Australian expertise was highly regarded in areas such as agriculture.

Appendix

Amended Delegation Program

PARIS

Friday, 23 April

Tour of the Musee du quai Branly hosted by Mr Karin Moutalib, executive director

Visit to the French Senate, meeting with Mr Jean Cabunnos (Director Secretariat General to Prime Minister) and Mr Francois Gartier (Diplomatic Advisor to the President of the Senate)

Saturday, 24 April

Depart for Fromelles

Met by Chief of Army, Lieutenant-General Ken Gillespie

- visit Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery at Pheasant Wood
- meeting with CWGC staff, David Richardson and Martial Delabarre
- meeting with Mayor Hubert Huchette

Depart for Peronne

Guided tour of WWI Museum – Historial de la Guerre, Peronne

Visit Villers–Bretonneux Military Cemetery and War Memorial

Informal dinner at Amiens hosted by Ambassador with Mr Smith (Minister for Foreign Affairs) and other dignitaries and officials

Sunday, 25 April**ANZAC Day**

Attend ANZAC Day Dawn Service Australian National Memorial, Villers-Bretonneux

Attend breakfast with the official ANZAC Day party Villers-Bretonneux Town Hall

Participate in wreath laying ceremony at the French Monument aux Morts, Villers-Bretonneux Main Square

Observe presentation of the Sadler Stokes Scholarship and attend commemorative concert with performance by the Amiens Brass Orchestra, Villers-Bretonneux Market Hall

Depart Villers-Bretonneux for Bapaume

Attend luncheon at La Paix restaurant, Bapaume

Depart Bapaume for Bullecourt

Participate in wreath laying ceremony at the Petit Croix Monument

Participate in wreath laying ceremony in the Bullecourt Town Square. Senator Hogg to give principal Australian address

Participate in the ANZAC Day ceremony at the Australian 'Digger' Memorial followed by refreshments in the Bullecourt Town Hall

Depart Bullecourt for Ypres

Arrive Ypres

Attend reception hosted by Mayor of Ypres, Mr Luc Dehaene at the Cloth Hall

Attend Last Post Ceremony, Menin Gate.

Monday, 26 April

Depart for Ypres battlefields tour

Lunch in Bruges

Guided tour of Bruges

Depart Bruges for Brussels

Attend dinner hosted by HE Dr Brendan Nelson

BRUSSELS**Tuesday, 27 April**

Attend briefing at the Australian Embassy

Arrive at the European Commission and meet with members of the cabinets supporting Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn (innovation, science and research) and Commissioner Hedegaard (climate change)

Attend luncheon hosted by the European Parliament

Attend Inter-parliamentary Meeting with the Delegation for Australia and New Zealand (1st session)

Attend dinner hosted by the European Parliament

Wednesday, 28 April

Attend Inter-parliamentary Meeting (IPM) on climate change, energy security and renewable energy (2nd session)

Attend meetings with various parliamentarians

Attend luncheon hosted by the President of the Belgian Parliament

Depart Brussels for Cologne

Arrive Cologne

COLOGNE/BONN**Thursday, 29 April**

Depart for Solar World AG

Meet with Mr Milan Nitzschke, Ms Felicity Müller-Pelzer and Mr Stefan Schurid at Solar World AG

Meet with Mr Ivo De Boer Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Meet with Mr Mohamadou-Mansous N'Diaye the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Evening function hosted by the Australian Ambassador for local business and academic leaders

Friday, 30 April

Depart for German Aerospace Centre

Meet with Professor Ulrich Wagner Member of the Executive Board German Aerospace Centre (DLR)

Meet with Mr Bernhard Milow Energy Program Director for overview of energy research

Meet with Professor Robert Pitz-Paal and Professor Karl Heinz Funken for solar research presentation and inspection of solar furnace

Depart Solar World for Cologne

Arrive TUV Rheinland Holding AG for meetings with Mr Friedrich Heeder and senior executives

Depart TUV Rheinland

Saturday, 1 May and**Sunday, 2 May**

Departures

