

FOREWORD

*The Australian diaspora represents a market, a constituency, a sales force and an ambassadorial corps.*¹

According to current estimates, at least three-quarters of a million Australians are living overseas permanently or long-term. This is a considerable proportion of the Australian population, and reflects the increasingly mobile and globalised world in which we live. Some of the key factors influencing this phenomenon include the rise of a global labour market; more accessible and economical international transport; and increasingly sophisticated communication technologies.

Many of these expatriate Australians are young, well-educated, highly skilled, and keen to see the world and to make the most of the opportunities presented to them. This has led many to fear that Australia is experiencing a 'brain drain' of its best and brightest workers, with damaging consequences for Australia's economy and society. In fact, the Committee learnt during its inquiry that Australia actually experiences a net 'brain gain' of skilled workers.

It is important, then, to move away from any negative perceptions and realise that, even though these Australians may be physically located outside Australia's borders, they nevertheless feel strong cultural links with their homeland. In the same way that most expatriate Australians still embrace Australia as their home, we should embrace our expatriate community as part of the Australian nation, and recognise that our expatriates are an important part of Australian society.

The Committee found during its inquiry that Australian expatriates present many potential benefits, opportunities and new considerations for Australian policymakers. Most importantly, the Australian Government needs to make greater efforts to connect with and engage our expatriate community. The Committee heard that many of the needs and concerns of expatriate Australians are not being adequately dealt with, and that Australian expatriates could be better recognised and included in the Australian democratic system. Further, expatriate Australians represent an underutilised resource: not only are they an asset in terms of promoting Australia and its social, economic and cultural interests; they are also ambassadors for our nation, which is otherwise disadvantaged by our geographic remoteness and small population.

The Committee has made a series of recommendations with a view to ensuring that this important part of the Australian community is recognised and embraced, its needs and concerns are addressed, and that we make the most of the opportunities presented by our global community of Australians.

1 M Fullilove and C Flutter, *Diaspora: the world wide web of Australians*, Lowy Institute Paper 04, Lowy Institute for International Policy, November 2004, (Lowy report), p. x.

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