

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Reference

1.1 On 16 October 2003, the Senate referred the following matters to the Legal and Constitutional References Committee, for inquiry and report by 1 September 2004:

- the extent of the Australian diaspora;
- the variety of factors driving more Australians to live overseas;
- the costs, benefits and opportunities presented by the phenomenon;
- the needs and concerns of overseas Australians;
- the measures taken by other comparable countries to respond to the needs of their expatriates; and
- ways in which Australia could better use its expatriates to promote our economic, social and cultural interests.¹

1.2 On 23 June 2004, the Senate agreed to extend the reporting date for this inquiry to 5 October 2004. Due to the prorogation of Parliament on 31 August 2004, and the need to thoroughly consider the evidence received in order to finalise its recommendations, the Committee tabled an interim report on 1 October 2004. The inquiry lapsed on 15 November 2004, the eve of the 41st Parliament. On 6 December 2004, the Senate re-referred the inquiry for report by 8 March 2005.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.3 The Committee advertised the inquiry in *The Australian* newspaper on 3 December 2003, 17 December 2003, 28 January 2004 and 11 February 2004, and wrote to over 50 organisations and individuals, inviting submissions by 27 February 2004. Given the subject matter of this inquiry, however, it was evident that other approaches were required. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) disseminated details of the inquiry to its overseas posts; the Southern Cross Group (SCG) emailed its members and posted the terms of reference and supplementary information on its website and forwarded submissions from members; and several chambers of commerce surveyed their members and sent consolidated responses.

1.4 The Committee is appreciative of the response it received: some 677 submissions from individuals, groups or associations were received by the end of

1 *Journals of the Senate* 108, 16 October 2003, p. 2580.

February 2004, with several supplementary submissions and associated documentation being received in the following months (see Appendix 1 for the complete list of submissions). Submissions were placed on the Committee's website.

1.5 The Committee held public hearings in Sydney on 27 July 2004; in Melbourne on 28 July 2004; and in Canberra on 29 July 2004 and 4 August 2004. A list of witnesses who appeared before the Committee is at Appendix 2, and copies of the Hansard transcript are available through the Internet at <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard>.

1.6 The Committee hopes that this inquiry has shed some useful light on many expatriate issues, and that it will be only one of many to explore the ramifications of an increasingly global workforce in the 21st century. The Committee notes, for example, that the Lowy Institute released a report on Australia's diaspora (the Lowy report) towards the end of this inquiry.² The Committee notes that there is a considerable amount of common ground between this report and the Lowy report.

Acknowledgments

1.7 First and foremost, the Committee thanks the SCG for its considerable assistance in disseminating information about the inquiry and in facilitating the handling of submissions from SCG members; and for supplying a steady stream of comprehensive submissions and useful background information.

1.8 Thanks must also go to all submitters and witnesses. Many individual submitters went to considerable lengths to outline their personal situation, and to articulate ways in which the Australian Government could or should reconsider its policies or practices to better encompass the realities of a considerable proportion of its citizenry living beyond its geographic borders. Government agencies and departments, in particular the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA), also assisted in providing useful background information. The written input of many overseas-based chambers of commerce and alumni associations is also greatly appreciated.

1.9 The Committee thanks all witnesses who gave evidence to the Committee and, in particular, those who travelled from abroad or from distant parts of Australia.

Scope of the report

1.10 Chapter 2 considers the characteristics of Australia's expatriate community, including the reasons why Australians go and stay overseas. Chapter 3 looks at ways of determining the size of Australia's expatriate community.

2 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).

1.11 Chapter 4 considers concerns regarding communication between expatriates and government, and looks at ways to develop the role of the Australian Government in relation to expatriates.

1.12 Chapters 5, 6, and 7 address the concerns of expatriates, particularly in the areas of citizenship and voting rights, and repatriation to Australia.

1.13 Chapter 8 looks at measures taken by other countries in respect of their expatriates. Chapter 9 considers schemes in place to engage with expatriates, and looks at ways expatriates can contribute to the Australian community whilst still abroad. Chapter 10 presents a summary of the Committee's conclusions and its recommendations on a range of matters relating to Australian expatriates.

Note on references

1.14 References in this report are to individual submissions as received by the Committee, not to a bound volume. References to the Committee Hansard are to the official Hansard. Page numbers may vary between the proof and the official Hansard transcript.

