

CHAPTER 3

THE EXTENT OF AUSTRALIA'S EXPATRIATE COMMUNITY

3.1 This chapter examines:

- how the number of Australian expatriates is determined and reasons why this number is difficult to determine accurately; and
- what might be done in the future to determine more accurately the number of Australian expatriates.

Determining the extent of Australia's expatriate community

3.2 Traditionally, the national population of Australia has been counted as those who are resident in Australia on the night of the population census.¹ The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) informed the Committee that the Australian Census is conducted on a 'de facto' basis which counts all people who are actually in Australia on census night, regardless of where their usual residence might be, and does not count any Australian residents or citizens overseas on census night.² Then, for official population purposes, those residents overseas on census night for less than 12 months are added back into the population using information from passenger cards provided by DIMIA, and overseas visitors in Australia for less than 12 months are excluded.³

3.3 Australians who have moved overseas on a permanent or long-term basis are not included in the Australian Census. This may be particularly pertinent given that, according to the Hugo report, 'the bulk of these people have retained Australian citizenship, especially since dual citizenship was introduced in 2001.'⁴ Further, as outlined in Chapter 2, the majority of these people also still consider Australia to be their home. The Hugo report also argued that, given modern globalisation, it may be appropriate for Australia to seek alternative conceptualisations of what constitutes its national population.⁵

3.4 The Hugo report presented evidence from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) which estimated the number of Australian citizens living on a long-term or permanent basis in other countries as being 858,886 as at 31 December 2001. This is equivalent to 4.3 per cent of the 2001 resident population.⁶ In addition,

1 Hugo report, p. 19.

2 *Submission 645*, p. 1.

3 *ibid.*

4 Hugo report, p. 20.

5 *ibid.*, p. 19.

6 *ibid.*

DFAT identified a further 264,955 shorter-term 'visiting citizens'.⁷ The Committee notes that this is a significant number of Australians.

3.5 The SCG drew the Committee's attention to apparent discrepancies in DFAT data in relation to the number of Australian expatriates. For example, the SCG noted that the DFAT White Paper entitled *Advancing the National Interest* of 12 February 2003 stated that the number of Australians living overseas is estimated to be 720,000.⁸ In its submission to this inquiry, DFAT estimated the number of Australians resident overseas as 759,849 for the period 2002-2003. However, DFAT stressed that this was an estimate only as it was not possible to obtain figures on Australian residents from all countries.⁹

3.6 In its submission to this inquiry, DFAT noted that, while the Australian expatriate community is large, it is difficult to quantify. Due to the diversity and the number of countries Australians reside in, it is difficult to obtain reliable data in relation to the number of Australian expatriates.¹⁰ According to DFAT, the Australian expatriate community:

... includes a highly transient population of young students, volunteers and working holiday makers as well as senior, successful long term residents and dual nationals, some of whom have a high profile in government, business, the arts, sport, the media, and academia across the globe.¹¹

3.7 DFAT informed the Committee that it 'uses what sources it can to estimate the size of expatriate communities as a tool in providing protection, primarily in emergency situations, to Australians overseas'.¹² In particular, two sources are used: estimates from DFAT's overseas posts on the size of their respective Australian communities; and details of those Australians who register with DFAT.¹³

3.8 Overseas posts employ different strategies and sources to estimate the size of the Australian community in their respective jurisdictions. However, because of the different methods of collecting this information in each country, 'no direct comparison can be made between data provided by different countries'. Further, for many Australian overseas posts, such as in the UK and most of Europe, reliable sources of data are not available since some countries have made decisions to cease collecting those data.¹⁴ DFAT presented evidence to the Committee showing that, as at 13

7 *ibid.*

8 *Submission 665*, Appendix G, footnote 2, p. 2.

9 *Submission 646*, pp. 5-6.

10 *ibid.*, p. 4.

11 *ibid.*, p. 3.

12 *ibid.*

13 *ibid.*

14 *ibid.*

February 2004, the number of Australians staying in an overseas country for more than three months who registered with an Australian post was 88,711.¹⁵

3.9 DFAT noted that passport issue and voting statistics, and numbers of Australians in receipt of Centrelink pensions are useful in helping to estimate the size of the long-term resident community. However, it is difficult for DFAT to provide a realistic estimate of Australians who are also dual nationals of their country of residence because they are rarely identified as Australian. For example, passport issue statistics indicate that there is a significant Australian dual national population in, for example, the UK, Greece, Italy, Lebanon and Vietnam.¹⁶

3.10 DFAT also has an online register of Australians overseas (ORAO) where Australians who wish to register may do so. This registration information helps DFAT locate Australians in an emergency and is also used actively to send important information to each Australian registered. DFAT encourages use of the online register by Australians planning to reside overseas for extended periods, and those travelling to locations where there are security risks as outlined in DFAT travel advisories. Each of DFAT's 143 destination-specific travel advisories promotes the ORAO registration system and encourages all Australians (expatriates or travellers) to register.¹⁷

3.11 DFAT informed the Committee that, ultimately, 'the utility of ORAO is a function of the number of people who choose to register'.¹⁸ DFAT estimates that, based on available figures, approximately 14 per cent of Australians residing overseas choose to register. However, there are a number of reasons why Australians do not register, including because they are dual nationals or they are residing in certain countries that may have local support systems available to them.¹⁹

3.12 Concerns about privacy may be another reason why some Australians do not register. DFAT assured the Committee that information provided by those who register is strictly protected by the *Privacy Act 1988* and is not shared without express permission. Further, DFAT 'adhere(s) strictly to the purpose for which information was given, which is to be able to contact Australians overseas in an emergency or with critical information'.²⁰

3.13 Ms Lara Cummings, an expatriate living in Spain, argued that the extent of the number of Australian expatriates is:

... obviously highly significant and ought to be accounted for and considered through Australian government and institutional policies. The

15 *ibid*, p. 5.

16 *ibid*.

17 *ibid*, p. 6.

18 *ibid*.

19 *ibid*.

20 *ibid*.

estimated million Australian expatriates should also be understood to be a very diverse group which does not predominantly consist of high earning executives but includes a very diverse range of individuals from scientific and academic researchers, teachers and nurses to volunteer workers and fruit pickers.²¹

3.14 In response to questioning at one of the Committee's public hearings, a representative from DIMIA noted the difficulties in determining at what particular point an expatriate becomes an expatriate for 'official' purposes. He also spoke of his own experiences living and working overseas:

That is a very difficult question to answer. Even for young backpackers who go on working holidaymaker programs and work in pubs in England for 12 months, it does not take long for them to regard themselves as Australian expatriates working overseas, whereas you have other people working in New York for 20 years. So you have one extreme to the other. I have served overseas with the Australian government and I felt like an expatriate even though I had very direct and regular connection with Australia. Your sense of Australianness is enhanced the minute you leave the country. It is very difficult to answer your question, and certainly there is no way for us to make judgments about when a person feels that they have become an expatriate.²²

3.15 The Hugo report noted that estimates of the number of expatriates may be inaccurate because, for example, some Australians are effectively working and living overseas but return to Australia at least once a year and still regard Australia as a permanent place of residence. However, such Australians are regarded by DIMIA statistics as 'short-term' departures. The Hugo report argued that, based on anecdotal evidence, this phenomenon is rising (particularly in the US and Asia).²³

Possible ways of more accurately determining the number of Australian expatriates

3.16 The Hugo report made the point that the increased mobility of Australians throughout the world raises some fundamental questions about who should be included in any count of Australia's population.²⁴ For example:

Should we be attempting to count the population who identify themselves as Australians, regardless of where they happen to be on the night of the census? ... Should we be looking to new conceptualisations of national populations?²⁵

21 *Submission 610*, p. 1.

22 *Committee Hansard*, 29 July 2004, p. 34.

23 Hugo report, p. 28.

24 *ibid.*, p. 19.

25 *ibid.*

3.17 The Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee's report, *The (not quite) White Paper, Australia's foreign affair and trade policy, Advancing the National Interest*, asserted the view that it is important that accurate figures are available, and that the Australian Census should provide for the inclusion of expatriate Australians in its statistics. That Committee was of the view that four percent of the population is no small number of people and, to the extent that an important purpose of census data is to enable governments and private sector decision-makers to plan for the future, the inclusion of accurate data on expatriates is vital.²⁶

3.18 The Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee recommended that the ABS develop mechanisms for accurately enumerating the numbers of Australian citizens living overseas, with a view to facilitating their full participation in the Australian Census. In its submission to this inquiry, DFAT expressed support for this recommendation because 'it would be useful to have more accurate and robust data on which to base consular contingency planning'.²⁷

3.19 The ABS submission to this inquiry echoed the *Government Response to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Report* in which that Committee's recommendation on the issue was not accepted.²⁸ In this inquiry, the ABS informed the Committee that it has no current plans to include overseas Australians in the 2006 Australian Census because 'this is not regarded as practical, nor is a quality outcome achievable'.²⁹ The ABS argued that 'unsuccessful' attempts by Canada and the US to include overseas citizens in past censuses support its position in relation to this matter. According to the ABS, these censuses were only able to include a small proportion of citizens living overseas.³⁰ The ABS argued further that, in any case, collection of information from people overseas 'could only ever be on a voluntary basis using media announcements asking people to register for a population census form'.³¹

3.20 The ABS submission also informed the Committee that the ABS publishes monthly statistics in *Overseas Arrivals and Departures, Australia*³² on the number of Australian residents leaving Australia for overseas and returning from overseas. These statistics are based on information from outgoing and incoming passenger cards provided by DIMIA. Selected characteristics are available on request including age, sex, duration of stay/absence, country of citizenship on passport, and country of where

26 Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee, *The (not quite) White Paper, Australia's foreign affair and trade policy, Advancing the National Interest*, December 2003.

27 *Submission 646*, p. 4.

28 http://www.dfat.gov.au/dept/senrep_wp.html (accessed 9 September 2004), pp. 3-4.

29 *Submission 645*, p. 1.

30 *ibid.*

31 *ibid.*

32 ABS cat. no. 3401.0.

most time was or will be spent. The ABS noted that, while these statistics do not provide a stock of Australians living overseas, they do provide information on trends in the flow of Australian's travelling overseas and those returning over a long time series.³³

3.21 In evidence at one of the Committee's hearings, a representative from DIMIA emphasised the importance of the information provided on passenger cards:

Going back to the passenger card, when people leave they will tell us what their intention is. That ranges from: 'Yes, I am going for good and I am never coming back,' to, 'I am going for less than a year.' The one in the middle is: 'I am going for more than a year, but not for good.' In a technical sense, we call those people who go for more than a year 'long-term departures'.

We now have the capacity to track people not only in a sort of a net aggregate sense—that is, counting the number out and counting them back—but to count individuals and to trace whether that person who said they were going to go for good actually did. We can only go back a short number of years to do that. That is about as far as it goes. So we do have a fairly good sense of how many people are overseas long term and permanently and we also have a pretty good sense of how many people who go and state they are going to do that actually come back within a fairly short time.³⁴

3.22 Professor Hugo also observed in evidence to the Committee that:

In Australia we are probably better off than any other country in the world in looking at our diaspora, partly because we are one of the very few countries that has an outgoing passenger card ... I believe that there is a great deal of opportunity in the future to use that information in more innovative and intensive ways to get more of a handle on what the diaspora is like and what its scale is.³⁵

3.23 However, the SCG submitted that information from DIMIA arrival and departure cards is limited.³⁶

3.24 The ABS also told the Committee that it is currently taking part in a trial project being undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This project aims:

... "to embark collectively on a joint compilation of available data on the stock of immigrants in OECD countries". This trial will be drawing on data from a variety of sources in each country including censuses, population registers and surveys, and has the possibility of being a cost effective

33 *ibid.*

34 *Committee Hansard*, 29 July 2004, pp. 34-35.

35 *Committee Hansard*, 28 July 2004, p. 1.

36 *Submission 665*, Appendix G, p. 4.

method of obtaining information on Australians living in other OECD countries.³⁷

3.25 The SCG was highly critical of the approach taken by the ABS, particularly in relation to the exclusion of a large number of expatriates from the Australian Census:

Every Australian overseas is an unofficial ambassador for Australia. A significant and major way in which expatriate Australians have been dismissed comprises the failure by the ABS to engage in any work to date to enumerate overseas Australians or ascertain further statistical information about them. Not only have overseas Australians been excluded from the Census, but there has also been no separate survey work focussing on this significant percentage of Australian citizens.³⁸

3.26 While acknowledging that counting overseas Australians, whether in the Australian Census or by other means, would not be easy, the SCG argued that the approach of the ABS needs to change. The SCG argued that counting overseas Australians:

... is of national importance, because we know today that the number of Australians overseas ... is approximately equivalent to 5% of the Australian resident population. While this figure is only an estimate, it cannot be ignored.³⁹

3.27 The China-Australia Chamber of Commerce (AustCham Beijing) submitted that it has been unable to obtain an accurate figure on the size of the Australian population in China from either the Australian or Chinese Governments. In its view, the Australian Government should consider conducting a census to gauge the size and spread of Australian expatriates. Further, it submitted that there is a need for ongoing research into the needs of the Australian expatriate population since it is a 'dynamic' group with often frequent movement between cities and countries. According to AustCham Beijing, some of the many questions to be answered include:

Who are our expats? Where are they? How old are they? What do they do? What level of education do they have? What languages do they speak? Do they have kids? Do they have health insurance?⁴⁰

3.28 Part of the SCG's submission to this inquiry included a copy of its submission to the ABS 2003 Information Paper on the 2006 Census of Population and Housing. The SCG made a number of suggestions in relation to how Australian expatriates might eventually be included in the Australian Census. For example, the SCG put forward that Australians in Australia on census night in 2006 should be asked to identify whether they have immediate Australian-citizen family members normally

37 *Submission 645*, p. 1.

38 *Submission 665*, Appendix G, p. 1.

39 *ibid*, p. 2.

40 *Submission 637*, p. 1.

living overseas, and to identify where these individuals are living. The SCG argued that this is particularly important given that present information from DFAT is inconsistent and, in any case, will only ever be a very rough estimate based on consular activity.⁴¹

3.29 The SCG submitted that expatriate Australians should be included in the census because 'Australians working overseas play an important and growing role in improving the international competitiveness of Australia' and they 'contribute economically, politically and culturally to Australia'. The SCG also argued that in the interests of fairness, expatriate Australians should be included in the census:

Many pay taxes in Australia, own property in Australia and have strong and continuing relationships with family and friends in Australia. It is undesirable and not in the national interest to exclude the Australian Diaspora from the Census. Australians abroad have a right to equal treatment.⁴²

3.30 However, the Committee understands that a 'test' census held in 2004 by the US of its citizens based in three foreign countries (in preparation for the 2010 US census) was not as successful as hoped.⁴³

3.31 In his evidence to the Committee, Professor Hugo also expressed doubt about the proposal to include expatriate Australians in the Australian Census:

I think that it may be more advisable to undertake a survey of some kind of the expatriate community ... that would probably be a better way to find out about the expatriate community than an attempt to include it in the five-yearly census.⁴⁴

The Committee's view

3.32 The Committee considers that expatriate Australians should be considered as part of the Australian community. The Committee also recognises that it would be desirable to improve the methods of determining the number of expatriate Australians.

3.33 However, the Committee does not believe that it is necessary or desirable to attempt to include expatriate Australians in the Australian Census. The Committee agrees with the ABS that including expatriate Australians in the census presents considerable practical difficulties, and any data obtained would be of questionable

41 *Submission 665*, Appendix G, p. 4.

42 *ibid*, p. 7.

43 Statement by Charles Kincannon, Director, US Census Bureau, *Counting Americans Overseas: Lessons Learned From the 2004 Overseas Enumeration Test*, 14 September 2004, <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2004/testimony9-14-04.html> (accessed 19 November 2004); see also the Lowy report, p. 72.

44 *Committee Hansard*, 28 July 2004, p. 5.

quality. The Committee also notes that attempts made overseas to include overseas citizens have been not been very successful.

3.34 In the Committee's view, the ABS and DIMIA should continue their existing efforts to improve the statistical information in relation to Australian expatriates, particularly through the use of information from incoming and outgoing passenger cards. The Committee also encourages the ABS in its involvement in the trial project by the OECD, which could prove to be a useful and cost-effective means of obtaining data about Australians living in OECD countries.

