

CHAPTER 9

PROMOTING AUSTRALIA'S INTERESTS THROUGH ITS EXPATRIATES

Introduction

9.1 As the Committee noted in Chapter 2, the majority of Australian expatriates remain well-disposed towards Australia and willing to promote its interests while abroad. As many submitters told the Committee, 'each and every Australian who ventures abroad is an ambassador for their country'.¹

9.2 The most frequently mentioned manifestation of this is the promotion of Australia as a tourist destination to overseas friends, neighbours and colleagues. Other expatriates mentioned a range of activities which they undertake voluntarily to 'show the flag', for example, by speaking about Australia at local schools.

9.3 But as many expatriates themselves realise, there is much more that can be done. In this chapter, the Committee will consider ways of harnessing the expertise of its expatriates, both overseas and back in Australia, and at ways in which they might be encouraged to remain involved in and to contribute to Australian affairs while abroad. This chapter addresses:

- engaging with academic expatriates;
- engaging with expatriate professionals;
- engaging with expatriates at overseas posts;
- encouraging expatriates to invest in Australia; and
- expatriate networks.

Engaging with academic expatriates

Fellowship schemes

9.4 As the Committee noted in Chapter 2, Australia, with a population of 20 million, cannot hope to support the depth of research across all fields that other larger developed countries can. We do 'punch above our weight' in niche areas, but cannot realistically ever hope to do so across the board.

9.5 It is almost a rite of passage for young Australian researchers in many disciplines to undertake post-doctoral experience abroad. And as the Committee has noted, many never return to Australia as their abilities are observed and the opportunities to further their careers abroad, in larger, more amply supported centres

1 See, for example, *Submission 459*, p. 2.

of excellence open up. The Committee applauds the creation of internationally competitive knowledge that this may bring about, as it reflects well on Australian education, and on the Australian work ethos. It also notes recent research into researcher attitudes, which shows the chief driver in the life of a researcher is the excitement of discovery; other important factors include the adequacy of research funding and infrastructure, support and a career path. Salary is not the primary driver.²

9.6 Bearing these things in mind, perhaps the major requirement for researchers is to have the opportunity to work with the brightest and best minds in their field. If those minds are currently abroad and can be attracted to Australia, or encouraged to return to Australia, they may attract others to follow and thus help develop the critical mass required for innovation to flourish here. Many overseas-based Australian researchers have indicated that they are well-disposed to returning to Australia, so the issue is, how to induce the key players amongst them to come back. One academic outlined the dilemma:

One of the dilemmas faced is that we want our best Postdoctoral Fellows to gain experience in overseas positions but also want them to come back. What would attract them back? What would they come back to – an uncertain career path, low incomes, fewer options? For a returning Postdoctoral Fellow the ability to enter the various Senior Fellowship schemes is now very limited. Many do not attempt it and, of those that do, many fail and become demoralised. What about bringing home the senior scientists? Federation Fellowships were aimed at doing this, but they are now being awarded to senior Australian scientists. Does this mean that top-flight overseas researchers do not even see a Federation Fellowship as sufficient incentive to return? What can be done?³

9.7 Various strategies have been adopted over recent years to entice skilled expatriates home. The Federation Fellowship scheme mentioned above was set up in 2001, under the Australian Government innovation action plan, *Backing Australia's Ability*. The aims of the program are to attract and retain outstanding researchers of international renown, to build world-class research capability in Australia, and to forge stronger links with the international research community. A key plank of the Federation Fellowships is the monetary support: the provision of an internationally competitive salary of some \$235,000 per year for five years; an additional 26 per cent from the Australian Research Council (ARC) for on-costs; and support that at least matches the salary by the host higher educational institution or research organisation. Up to 25 such Fellowships may be awarded annually.

2 Research Australia 2003, *Health and Medical Researcher Opinion Poll 2003*, p. 4, as quoted in A Pettigrew, 'Nurturing and Supporting our Greatest Asset', in FQ Wood, ed, *Beyond Brain Drain*, UNE, 2004, p. 113.

3 A Sinclair, 'Recruiting and Retaining Scientists: Issues, Dilemmas, Diaspora and Strategies', in FQ Wood, ed, *Beyond Brain Drain*, UNE, 2004, p. 145.

9.8 The selection criteria for Fellowships stresses the importance of the potential of the proposed research to contribute to designated national research priorities, namely an environmentally sustainable Australia, promoting and maintaining good health, frontier technologies for building and transforming Australian industries, and safeguarding Australia. While the Fellowships are open to resident Australians and foreign nationals as well as expatriate Australians, there has been an increase in the number of applications from this latter group (27 per cent of applicants in 2004) and an increased success rate.⁴

9.9 Other planks of *Backing Australia's Ability* included the establishment of the ARC and other centres of excellence in biotechnology, and information and communications technology, which serve to expand the potential job market for all skilled researchers; and competitive grants through ARC Discovery and Linkage programs.

9.10 Both the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) have also been active in providing support for skilled expatriates wishing to return to Australia. The NHMRC Burnet Award, introduced in 2001, provides five years' funding to medical researchers of high calibre and international standing. The Howard Florey Centenary Fellowships provide two-year support for the return to Australia of more junior postdoctoral researchers to continue in a biomedical research career. The CSIRO Postdoctoral Program, established in 2001, aims to support 25 fellowships per year, with an emphasis on new areas of science and collaborative proposals.⁵

9.11 The states have also become active in this area. For example, as part of its innovations initiative, the Victorian Government has put in place a \$10 million trust fund, the annual interest from which goes to a company, the Victorian Endowment for Science, Knowledge and Innovation (VESKI), which was established in 2003. One program launched by VESKI to attract outstanding expatriates back to Victoria has been the Victorian Innovation Fellowship, which offers up to \$100,000 p.a. for up to five years. VESKI executive director Dr Greg Trainor explained that VESKI's first Fellow was Professor Andrew Holmes, a world-renowned expert on polymer semi-conductors, from Cambridge University, whom they had been able to attract back to continue his research for five years with the assistance of a Federation Fellowship, the VESKI Fellowship and matching infrastructure support from Melbourne University and the CSIRO. An added bonus was that Professor Holmes was bringing with him a team including three expatriate Australians.⁶

4 <http://www.arc.gov.au>.

5 DEST, *Submission 664*, pp. 21-22.

6 *Committee Hansard*, 28 July 2004, p. 33.

9.12 Dr Trainor explained that the VESKI scheme was attracting applications from expatriates at a crucial stage of their careers, with the latest round of applications being primarily from applicants ranging in age from 26 to early 40s:

A number of these people are at the point in their careers where they are just starting families or their families are young, and one of the key drivers for coming home is the education system and getting their families back here to be educated. They are a fantastic opportunity for us at that age. I think the way we have put the applications out and the way we have pointed them is also responding to the group that is looking to come back.⁷

9.13 Queensland's approach has been slightly different. Through its Smart State Fellowship program, launched in 2003, it aims to retain or attract back promising early career researchers by providing \$150,000 in grant funding, matched by research organisations and industry co-sponsors, totalling \$300,000 over three years. Four fellowships were offered initially, to researchers working on the geomorphology of tropical rivers, molecular farming, obesity management and computer chip manufacture. The program recognises the need to help build critical masses of internationally recognised and competitive research and to develop researcher networks.

Short-term return schemes

9.14 Worthy as the above fellowships and other similar initiatives undoubtedly are, it has been recognised that there is an enormous wealth of expertise and knowledge residing in our expatriate researchers that, for personal or professional reasons, is unlikely to be attracted back to Australia on a long-term or permanent basis. This recognition has led to the development of other approaches to tap into the skills of our expatriate researchers, approaches that do not necessitate their permanent relocation.

9.15 The New South Wales (NSW) Expatriate Return Awards are a joint initiative of the University of Sydney and the NSW Department of Education and Training. The Awards aim to attract back researchers for periods of three to six months to enable the re-establishment of links, to provide expertise and to develop longer-term collaborative linkages, as well as involvement in a schools outreach program. Funding is provided to cover the researcher's temporary relocation to Sydney, and that of his or her immediate family, plus a living allowance. Two such awards have been offered in each of 2003 and 2004, with the initial evaluation of the program deeming it 'enormously successful'.⁸ It has been observed that 'the success of the NSW Expatriate Return Awards Program suggests that the key to harnessing the resources of the

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

8 L Field and B Gaensler, 'The New South Wales Expatriate Return Awards Program and the Network of Expatriate Australian Researchers', in FQWood, ed, *Beyond Brain Drain*, UNE, 2004, p. 156.

Australian diaspora is to identify opportunities which emphasise mobility and flexibility.⁹

9.16 South Australia has taken another approach, with its 'Thinkers in Residence' program starting in 2003. Two or three world-class thinkers will be invited to Adelaide annually, for periods of residence from two to six months, during which time they will give master classes, public lectures, and undertake mentoring, writing and publishing activities. Universities, non-government agencies and companies have been invited to sponsor thinkers.

9.17 The Lowy report was supportive of short-term academic return fellowship schemes piloted at the state level, and recommended the establishment of a national scheme. Such a scheme could support expatriate researchers to return to Australia to undertake specific joint research projects with identified Australian partners, for two to three month periods.¹⁰

Networking of researchers

9.18 With the widespread adoption of the Internet, collaborative options amongst researchers globally have blossomed. The universality of the Internet means that it is also a powerful tool for keeping Australians in touch with one another, and informed of fellowship possibilities, job opportunities and the like. The universities have led the way, with alumni associations most visibly active in attempting to maintain links with their researchers who go overseas and to track their careers. The Sydney University Graduates Association of North America (SUGUNA) noted, however, that its understanding of the *Privacy Act 1988* was that it prevented the universities from disseminating names proactively – alumni had to specifically opt in to its network.¹¹

9.19 Sydney University proposed a networking scheme to bring together all Australian researchers living abroad and to provide opportunities for them to engage and reconnect with research groups in Australia. Professor Les Field told the Committee that federal funding for this Network of Expatriate Australian Researchers (NEAR) had been sought under the ARC Networks Scheme.¹² However, the Committee understands that such funding has not been forthcoming.

9.20 The Committee recognises the benefits to be gained from maintaining links with Australian expatriates in the academic field. In particular, Australia has a considerable investment in their education, and it would be preferable not to lose the benefits of this investment. The Committee acknowledges the opportunities for collaboration provided by fellowship schemes, and supports and encourages these schemes to attract back major researchers.

9 *ibid.*

10 Lowy report, p. 59.

11 SUGUNA, *Submission 193*, p. 1.

12 *Committee Hansard*, 27 July 2004, p. 58.

Engaging with expatriate professionals

Attracting expatriate professionals

9.21 As well as return fellowships for expatriate academics, the Lowy report was supportive of return fellowships for industry professionals. The World Class New Zealander Program was given as an example of a scheme of sponsored short visits by professionals, to attract international expertise and knowledge.¹³ The Lowy report suggested the establishment of a scheme, funded by the private sector, to support the return of Australian expatriate business people. The return visits could be aimed at sharing best practices or creating opportunities for collaboration or business ventures.¹⁴

Networking of expatriate professionals

9.22 The Committee received evidence that Australia may be missing out on opportunities for economic development, due to a lack of opportunities for professionally skilled entrepreneurs. Mr Tony Surtees told the Committee that many Australian expatriates, with entrepreneurial skills gained in a dynamic global market and seeking to return to Australia, found it difficult to tap into local capital markets. He observed that:

It is a global market for talent and it is a global market for capital. We need to have people who have these enterprise creation skills that have a proven track record of success internationally. We need to be able to harvest and build on those skills and capabilities and provide people with a return channel back to Australia so that while they are sitting overseas making decisions about what they might do there is some pathway for them.¹⁵

9.23 Mr Surtees suggested to the Committee that there was a need for an organisation aimed at facilitating information exchange, and identification of business opportunities, for skilled entrepreneurs (including expatriate Australians) who are seeking to create new business ventures in Australia. Mr Surtees told the Committee that government needs to provide an environment for the creation of such a networking organisation,¹⁶ which would:

... ultimately have to be one that identifies those talents, identifies and codifies the capacities and the opportunities that people are willing to engage with, can identify where these people reside and how well qualified they may be to act in a certain capacity, and then has that database and information base available to those government and private enterprises that

13 Lowy report, p. 60.

14 *ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

15 *Committee Hansard*, 28 July 2004, p. 18.

16 *Committee Hansard*, 28 July 2004, p. 23.

may wish to engage them. That is a fairly straightforward proposition and not an expensive one.¹⁷

Engaging with expatriates at overseas posts

9.24 As many submitters pointed out, attracting academic expatriates and expatriate professionals back to Australia is only one small part of the broader equation. Probably half of the longer-term expatriates will never return; many who do will only do so in retirement. It is therefore important to consider how to engage with Australian expatriates and how to involve them in promoting Australian interests while they are abroad.

9.25 A constant theme of submissions to the Committee was the relationship of the submitters with the relevant missions abroad. There was a general expectation, either voiced or implicit, that Australian diplomatic posts should be both more responsive to the needs of the expatriate community, and involve that community more in their public diplomacy activities.

9.26 The submission from DFAT stated that Australian missions are active in Australian expatriate communities and organisations, and encourage expatriates to play a role in advancing Australia's interests.¹⁸ There is recognition that expatriate professionals are a valuable source of information on local business issues, for example, and overseas posts frequently use expatriates to convey and advocate key messages in pursuit of Australian objectives.¹⁹

9.27 The Committee is concerned, however, that evidence to the inquiry suggests that many missions are not sufficiently engaging with expatriate communities. The Lowy report acknowledged the positive activities undertaken by some diplomats, but noted that:

...the level and form of engagement that occurs between Australian missions and expatriates depends largely on the personalities of the senior diplomats in each post and in particular the head of mission.

9.28 When asked about whether overseas posts are encouraged to be inclusive of expatriates, a representative of DFAT responded as follows:

[Posts] are always encouraged to be as inclusive as they possibly can. What we find sometimes is that parts of the Australian community that are most closely involved with the embassy are those that choose to be. Other parts of the community do not want a lot to do with the government; they do not see a lot of benefit for themselves in that relationship. So the relationships, the dialogue and the interchange that develop are often based on a process of self-selection, if you like.

17 *Committee Hansard*, 28 July 2004, p. 22.

18 *Submission 646*, p. 9.

19 *ibid*, p. 10.

The heads of embassies and missions are always active in engaging and including as many people as possible, but some businesspeople – some expats – choose not to be involved or as involved in that exercise. But the objective is always to harness the skills of the community as much as possible and to be as inclusive as possible in doing that.²⁰

9.29 While acknowledging that DFAT could always do better, its representative pointed out that DFAT consular services were there for all Australians, and that perhaps inevitably it was the short-term travellers, not the expatriates, who tended to dominate the available post time as they were the ones more likely to get into trouble through unfamiliarity with the ways of the country concerned. He reassured the Committee that DFAT 'would never consider the relationship with the Australian communities to be a low priority activity'.²¹

9.30 Both Advance and the various chambers of commerce described for the Committee how Australian missions and Australian expatriates could work together more fruitfully.

9.31 Advance was formed in the US in May 2002 by a group of emerging Australian professionals, with seed funding from Lachlan Murdoch, Anthony Pratt and Peter Lowy, and assisted by the Consul General in New York. Its aim was to bring together Australian expatriate professionals in the US to work together on specific projects to advance Australia's interests. This has included working closely with existing Australian agencies such as Austrade, the Wine Bureau, Invest Australia and DFAT.

9.32 The Chief Executive Officer of Advance, Ms Elena Douglas, gave an example of the kind of cooperation DFAT posts could obtain from organisations such as hers. She pointed out that expatriates from the Advance Network had assisted the New York consulate in organising a function to raise funds for the victims of the Bali bombing. More specifically, Advance networkers did the graphic designs free of charge; they were volunteers on the night; they did the video presentations; they provided video imagery; journalists produced segments.²² She stressed that her 3,000 members found it satisfying to work together on projects which used their professional expertise and insight; they did not want to get together just for social events.²³

9.33 Ms Douglas's message to DFAT was:

Do not assume you can only do what you can do with your two or three staff in your post. Reach out to the expatriates. You do need a facilitator to do that and that is what we see our role to be, where the consulate staff can

20 *Committee Hansard*, 29 July 2004, p. 17.

21 *ibid*, p. 21.

22 Ms Elena Douglas, *Committee Hansard*, 27 July 2004, p. 16.

23 *ibid*, p. 11.

come to us – or the Invest Australia staff or the Austrade staff – and say, 'Okay, we want to do this. Can you help? Who can you get to do this, and this and this? We need to get into these companies. Which contacts do you have in this and this and this company?'²⁴

9.34 Similarly over the last 15 years, the 15 Australian New Zealand American Chambers of Commerce (ANZACC) in major cities in the US have worked closely with major Australian governmental entities to help achieve their specific economic and cultural goals. The presence of the chambers, especially in cities not having an Australian consulate, gives Australia a presence there that they would not otherwise have, a presence regarded as 'very significant' by SUGUNA.²⁵ The chambers also work closely with the US Government and major US city governments to enhance business relations, tourism, trade and investment and to promote understanding between the three countries. As the ANZACC national president, Mr Ron Delmenico, told the Committee:

By working as a conduit between the Australian government and the largest contingent of Australian citizens living abroad, we can help guide policy efforts towards those topics of greatest concern and those which will provide the greatest impact for the Australian government.²⁶

9.35 The Committee recognises that many of our embassies and missions are doing their best to involve the local expatriate community, and applauds those ambassadors whose performance in this respect was singled out for praise by submitters.²⁷ However the Committee received evidence that this is not always the case. The Committee notes the suggestion of the Lowy report, that engagement with Australian expatriate communities should be made an explicit objective of DFAT, and should be included in post directives and ministerial directives to heads of mission.²⁸ As noted in the Lowy report:

Australia's expatriates should be seen as an integral element of our diplomatic efforts. A strategically located diaspora can help our international representatives to do their job: to gather information, build relationships and advocate Australia's interests.²⁹

9.36 The Committee notes that the websites of Australian foreign missions offer a range of information for Australians travelling to those countries, but only a very limited range of information for resident Australians. A small number of mission websites include links to local expatriate business or cultural groups. The website of

24 *ibid*, p. 16.

25 *Submission 193*, p. 6.

26 Mr Ron Delmenico, *Committee Hansard*, 28 July 2004, p. 39.

27 See, for example, Ms Merran Lowenthal, *Submission 317*, p. 2.

28 Lowy report, p. 50.

29 *ibid*, p. 46.

the Australian High Commission in London, for example, includes under the heading 'Australians in the UK', links to the Australia-Britain Society, ANZACC, and the Australian Women's Club.³⁰ The majority of mission websites, however, do not include such links.

9.37 Given the evidence of the beneficial nature of collaborations between mission staff and expatriates as discussed above, it would seem that every opportunity should be taken to encourage these sorts of collaborations. As discussed in Chapter 4, there is scope for improving the websites of foreign missions to include a facility whereby expatriates could register online with their relevant mission, giving details of their skills and contacts. In return, missions could notify expatriates of upcoming events and opportunities. This local online registration would be distinct from the DFAT online registration scheme, which is focussed on the need to be able to contact Australians in the case of emergencies.

Encouraging expatriates to invest in Australia

9.38 Many expatriates already invest in Australia. Others maintain properties in this country, either as residences for when they return or as investments. While the numbers of expatriates who do so already are unclear, it can reasonably be assumed that there is potential for more investment.

9.39 Australia's inward investment agency, Invest Australia, a collaborative venture with the states, territories and industry, has developed an investment marketing plan, *Partnerships for Investment*, to increase awareness of Australia as a competitive investment destination. Mr Garry Draffin, its Chief Executive Officer, described to the Committee his plans for an 'Australians Abroad network'. It aims:

...to tap into both the significant pride in and the significant loyalty to Australia that they have, to use them as ambassadors ... linking them into a network overseas to support what we are doing in trying to grow knowledge of Australia and build a network of people working to support Australia's inward investment efforts.³¹

9.40 While it might be expected that expatriate Australians would be aware of Australia's potential as an investment location, Mr Draffin indicated that this was not always the case. He also saw considerable merit in, and was already working with, existing agencies such as Austrade and networks such as Advance to promote the investment cause along with their existing financial interests. The Invest Australia website currently provides links to other Federal Government agencies, to partners in the states and territories, and to private sector providers, but not to any expatriate network at present. Mr Draffin cautioned:

30 See website for the Australian High Commission in London at <http://www.australia.org.uk/welcome/html/index.html> (accessed 26 November 2004).

31 *Committee Hansard*, 29 July 2004, p. 27.

I do think it is important that, whatever [website] model does come up, it allows people to be able to register and identify with a group of people with whom they have a common interest and a common value. Registering with an Australian dotcom web site that tried to be everything to all people I think would probably be a turn-off for what has to be a voluntary activity by these people overseas. So it has got to have those areas of specialisation.³²

9.41 The Committee believes the Invest Australia approach in promoting Australia as an investment destination shows considerable merit. Its accountability and reporting mechanisms are commendable and its work is to be encouraged.

9.42 As well as attracting investment dollars, potential exists for a greater contribution from expatriates to non-profit organisations and philanthropic causes in Australia, such as to universities and arts organisations. The Lowy report comments that Australian institutions need to connect with potential givers overseas and maintain sustainable relationships with them. In particular, a recommendation is made in the Lowy report that in their pursuit of fund-raising opportunities offered by expatriates, non-profit organisations should combine their efforts to achieve benefits of scale.³³ The Committee supports this recommendation.

Expatriate networks

9.43 There has been, in recent times, a growth in the number of websites which encourage individuals or organisations to register their details and, in exchange, find the details of potential business partners, researchers, employers or investors abroad. There is significant potential in these networks as a mechanism for engaging with the global community of Australians and in promoting Australia's interests overseas.

9.44 The Committee was made aware of the operations of a number of expatriate networks, including ExpatriateConnect, the Advance databases, and the Victorian Expatriates Network (VEN), as discussed below.

9.45 A new online service, ExpatriateConnect,³⁴ was launched on 9 June 2004. In the words of Dr Rowan Gilmore, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Institute for Commercialisation, which manages the website:

[ExpatriateConnect] is a matching service that attempts to match small, needy Australian businesses with the skills and expertise of expatriates overseas, with the aim of providing mentoring and facilitating entry of small businesses into overseas markets in which those resident expatriates may have skills and expertise that could be of help.³⁵

32 *ibid*, p. 27.

33 Lowy report, pp. 61-64.

34 <http://www.expatriateconnect.com>.

35 *Committee Hansard*, 27 July 2004, p. 1.

9.46 Ms Anne MacGregor of the SCG, which collaborated in the setting up of ExpatriateConnect, described how the SCG used it as a networking tool:

[ExpatriateConnect] links in expats so they can help Australian businesses and so forth while they are away, but if expats were involved in ExpatriateConnect and were building their own networks back in Australia in their own professional communities at the same time, their landing home should be softened because some of those links have been established while they were offshore.³⁶

9.47 The US-based Advance organisation has formed industry-specific networks for entrepreneurs and investors, and for academic researchers. Noting that Australians retain a strong affection for their home states, Advance has launched 'state of origin' networks, commencing with the Advance Queensland network in June 2003. The intention is for state-based agencies and companies to have direct access to their expatriates, and to find a ready-made network of contacts, expertise and openings to further projects in the US.³⁷

9.48 As mentioned in Chapter 4, the Victorian Government has launched a multi-purpose network, the Victorian Expat Network (VEN). VEN's overall aim is to connect Victoria with its offshore expatriates and to build goodwill and meaningful connections with them.³⁸

9.49 More networks are proposed. Mr Garry Draffin, from Invest Australia, told the Committee of his organisation's proposal to develop an 'Australians Abroad Network' (AAN) which could operate off the existing Invest Australia website, with a password-protected sector to liaise with and link into networks overseas, and which would work closely with DFAT, Austrade and the state and territory governments. While the exact nature of the AAN has not been determined, Mr Draffin envisaged an opt-in network, promoted to expatriates and senior executives in Australia, so that they could be informed of the size and currency of Australia's economic abilities, and could network amongst themselves. He stressed that the intention was to complement what already existed.³⁹

9.50 Inevitably, the question has been raised as to whether there is a role for the Federal Government in coordinating or linking these networks, or developing a 'network of networks'. The Victorian Government representatives were of the view that the Federal Government should be involved:

The Victorian government ... proposes that the Commonwealth government develop linkages with the Australian expatriate community by: coordinating web sites dedicated to expatriates, including the web sites of projects such

36 *Committee Hansard*, 4 August 2004, p. 5.

37 *Advance, Submission 676*, p. 24.

38 Ms Faye Burton, Victorian Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, *Committee Hansard*, 28 July 2004, p. 27.

39 *Committee Hansard*, 29 July 2004, p. 24.

as VEN and VESKI and the initiatives of other state governments, as well as sites containing relevant Commonwealth government information for expatriates; informing expatriates of important Australian initiatives and events such as the Commonwealth Games, major tourism campaigns and migration initiatives; inviting contributions from expatriates to assist in promoting Australia's economic, social and cultural interests, including participation in activities such as ministerial visits, business consultations and cultural events; providing opportunities for interested expatriates to communicate with each other to develop common professional interests; and facilitating research into expatriate communities and their needs and of the benefits to Australia of returned expatriates.⁴⁰

9.51 By their very presence overseas, most expatriates are effective ambassadors for Australia in their local communities. The formal and informal networks in which they are involved can only be positive for Australia, particularly in promoting Australia as a tourist, educational, business or investment destination.

9.52 The Committee strongly supports the view that expatriates can be an effective method of connecting domestic business with international sources of trade, investment and knowledge.⁴¹ It is crucial that in an expanding global economy, it is recognised that expatriates can be a conduit for connections, investment and collaboration. Networks that facilitate this connectivity are to be encouraged, and the Committee acknowledges the achievements of the growing number of Australian expatriate networks. The Federal Government should facilitate access to these networks by including links to them from a central Federal Government expatriates web portal.

40 Ms Barbara Montjouris, Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, 28 July 2004, p. 28.

41 Lowy report, p. 25.

