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SENATE

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Reference: Australian expatriates

TUESDAY, 27 JULY 2004

SYDNEY

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SENATE

LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 27 July 2004

Members: Senator Bolkus *(Chair)*, Senator Payne *(Deputy Chair)*, Senators Buckland, Greig, Kirk and Scullion

Participating members: Senators Abetz, Barnett, Mark Bishop, Brandis, Brown, Carr, Chapman, Crossin, Eggleston, Chris Evans, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Harradine, Harris, Humphries, Knowles, Lees, Lightfoot, Ludwig, Mackay, Mason, McGauran, Murphy, Nettle, Sherry, Stephens, Stott Despoja, Tchen, Tierney and Watson

Senators in attendance: Senators Bolkus, Kirk and Payne

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

a) the extent of the Australian diaspora;

b) the variety of factors driving more Australians to live overseas;

c) the costs, benefits and opportunities presented by the phenomenon;

d) the needs and concerns of overseas Australians;

e) the measures taken by other comparable counties to respond to the needs of their expatriates; and

f) ways in which Australia could better use its expatriates to promote our economic, social and cultural interests.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 8.37 a.m.

GILMORE, Dr Rowan, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Institute for Commercialisation

CHAIR—Good morning. This is the first hearing for the Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee inquiry into Australian expatriates. The inquiry was referred to the committee by the Senate on 16 October 2003 and is being conducted in accordance with the terms of reference determined by the Senate. The committee has received over 670 submissions for this inquiry.

The terms of reference for the committee to consider include the extent of the Australian diaspora, the variety of factors driving more Australians to live overseas, cost benefits and opportunities, the needs and concerns of overseas Australians, measures taken by other comparable countries to respond to the needs of their expats and ways in which Australia could better use our expats to promote our economic, social and cultural interests.

Witnesses are reminded of the notes they have received relating to parliamentary privilege and the protection of official witnesses. Further copies are available from the secretariat. Witnesses are also reminded that the giving of false or misleading evidence to the committee may constitute a contempt of the Senate. We prefer that all the evidence be given in public but, under the Senate's resolutions, witnesses do have the right to request to be heard in private session. We would also ask witnesses to remain behind for a few minutes at the conclusion of their evidence in case Hansard staff need to clarify any such evidence.

We welcome Dr Rowan Gilmore from the Australian Institute for Commercialisation. You have lodged submission No. 225 with the committee. Do you wish to make any amendments or alterations to that submission?

Dr Gilmore—No.

CHAIR—Would you like to start with an opening statement?

Dr Gilmore—Yes. Perhaps I could summarise the key points. Firstly, I think it is well known that there are almost one million overseas expats. Many of those are highly skilled, and it is our belief that they are an underutilised national asset. My own personal experience has been as an expatriate for 15 years in the US, UK, Switzerland and South-East Asia. I found that my Australian colleagues were often in highly professional and skilled jobs and that most of us expressed surprise that as expatriates our expertise was never tapped into. It has been my own personal experience that many Australians overseas want to give back but find a lack of mechanisms to do so. Equally, many find it difficult to come back and to get back into networks within Australia once they do return.

The second summary point I would like to make is that we have launched a service called ExpatriateConnect, which essentially 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.

ExpatriateConnect has three main user groups. The first is expatriates themselves, expatriates who seek to give back or who participate perhaps in search of opportunities for themselves. Those opportunities may be to do business, it may be simply to contribute, or it may be ultimately to establish networks or to repatriate and to seek opportunities for when they do repatriate.

The second user group is small businesses looking to qualify markets or who may have questions about entry into overseas markets, and seeking on-the-ground mentoring advice or assistance, or they may just want a sounding board in order to establish whether they should consider entry into markets in which those expats are resident.

The third group is a relatively recent addition, in that it was suggested to us as a result of our launch of ExpatriateConnect, and that is for research institutions themselves. There are many researchers who are seeking overseas linkages and, in particular, universities who are seeking to re-establish contact with alumni. It is our view that it may not just be Australian expats who may wish to register; it may be individuals with linkages to Australia, perhaps through attendance at Australian universities, and so ExpatriateConnect also provides a mechanism for universities to re-establish contact with alumni.

ExpatriateConnect was launched at Bio 2004 in San Francisco in early June by the Premier of Queensland, Peter Beattie, and simultaneously in London by Nobel Laureate Peter Doherty at Australia House. I attended the launch at Australia House. There were over 450 Australian expats that attended. It was one of the largest expat events that has been held at Australia House.

Subsequent to the launch, we have had 1,600 expatriates who have registered profiles on the system and offered expertise, nearly 150 companies seeking advice and mentoring, and about 45 research organisations seeking expatriates. This is, I must say, on a budget that is very minimal, and we have not yet performed any significant marketing through the channels that might be available to us.

By way of background, the Australian Institute for Commercialisation is a not-for-profit institution established by the Queensland government in 2002. We have a staff of 12 and our funding comes predominantly from the Queensland state government, with some assistance from a number of other states. We are supported in terms of ExpatriateConnect by three states—Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales. However, it is our firm belief that, in order for this initiative to be successful, it needs to be a national initiative, and we believe there are clear national interests, considerations beyond the ambit of any one particular state to drive this.

In summing up, I would like to point out that there has been considerable media interest generated as a result of the launch of ExpatriateConnect, not only in the Australian press but also in local Australian press overseas. Most of that press has focused on the brain drain. It is our view that the brain drain is inevitable, that it will always happen, but if we look at the reasons behind why people temporarily emigrate in order to further skills, that should be seen as an opportunity. There is the opportunity for those who want to repatriate, so that when they do want to repatriate we need to ensure that we can encourage productive re-entry. But there is also an opportunity amongst those who do not want to repatriate, and that is to tap into their skills and, in many cases, their evident desire to remain linked with Australia. It is those two groups in particular that we think ExpatriateConnect targets.

CHAIR—Thank you, Dr Gilmore. I will just take you to one part of your submission on page 3. It is probably the part that I agree with most:

> Today's reality is that Australia has a pool of globally networked Australians living abroad who can act as an extended resource for the nation.

You go on to expand on that. I think you describe your organisation as a networker of networks. What you are essentially saying to us is that our focus should be on the opportunities that are available to the nation, given a global environment and a global economic environment, as opposed to seeing it as a net loss for the nation.

Dr Gilmore—That is correct, not only because a lot of the so-called brain drain or people that compose the brain drain ultimately want to repatriate and bring back enhanced skills to the nation. Clearly there is a large number of expatriates who are in fairly highly skilled and highly paid professional positions overseas who want to contribute and who are seeking a mechanism to contribute to Australia.

I touched purely on the mentoring and the skills aspect of potential contribution but perhaps also relevant is the fact that many will be high-wealth individuals who are seeking investment opportunities as well. Perhaps some consideration might also be given to mechanisms for those individuals to invest in commercial opportunities within Australia.

CHAIR—Is that also part of the problem, in that you really cannot categorise the sorts of resource that we do have overseas? It might be research based; it might be small business based; it might be professional consultant. Should we try and do anything other than maybe facilitate flows of information about the people and where they are and what they can provide? Are you doing much more than that?

Dr Gilmore—No. In fact, we have done very limited market research in launching ExpatriateConnect as a service. It is based mainly on gut feel and not on quantitative data. One of the ways that ExpatriateConnect may well become self-funding is through an analysis of profiles of individuals that register; looking at their demographics and their skills mix. There is potentially valuable information in analysing and collecting the attributes of people who register on the system. But the direct answer to your question is, yes, I agree, there is a need, but we have not yet been able to quantify that.

CHAIR—I suppose the two fundamental questions are, how do you identify the resource, or do you identify it, and how do you then best utilise it? I am sure overseas posts have a role in both those challenges, but should it be left to Foreign Affairs or to Austrade, or should we be looking at some stand-alone institution like yours with a complex webpage, or both?

Dr Gilmore—We believe that the motivation for the AIC entering this space was in order to help small start-up companies seeking to export, but of course the potential applications go way beyond that. We think in this particular space our independence and support from the states is perhaps a useful positioning for such a site.

In answer to how to attract expatriates, in launching ExpatriateConnect we formed a partnership with Southern Cross Group, which is one of the largest existing networks of

expatriates, with a predominantly European membership base. That has been invaluable, not only in organising the launch in London but also in attracting membership from within the Southern Cross Group and from allied organisations. For instance, the European branch of CPAs has advertised the launch and spread the reach to accountants and so on.

The term we use in the submission—network of networks—implies that the Southern Cross Group is a founding partner and has certainly been a valuable leg up to attract an initial critical mass, but we are also hoping to establish linkages with other groups such as Anzatech and Advance in order to extend the reach. That is one mechanism. A second mechanism that would be useful would be for foreign posts to simply make information available to Australians at functions they host or, when people come in to register for passports, give them a sheet of paper suggesting that they may want to look at the site and register to establish linkages with like-minded Australians.

One of the things that differentiates this network from the existing expatriate networks is that it has been my experience that those existing networks tend to focus more on establishing a feeling of identity amongst existing expats in country. They seek to bring people together and I think that perhaps they are only beginning to look at how they can establish linkages back with Australia. The clear focus of ExpatriateConnect is on the linkage between needy Australian entities—particularly small businesses without resources to expand overseas—and expatriates existing overseas who, for a variety of reasons that I have indicated, may wish to establish or help links with Australia. It is very much focused on the link between expatriate communities and Australia rather than developing an expatriate community per se.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator PAYNE—Dr Gilmore, thank you for your submission. Regarding the aspects of your funding that you were talking about with Senator Bolkus, I think you said you had received additional funding from the other states and so on. That is not necessarily aimed at ExpatConnect, is it? That is for the AIC?

Dr Gilmore—The arrangement we have with other states is to deliver project based outcomes.

Senator PAYNE—Is that very specific?

Dr Gilmore—In the case of South Australia and New South Wales, portions of that funding are specifically directed at ExpatriateConnect, providing basically a badged version of the web site to their agencies who can then use it as part of their support to in-state SMEs.

Senator PAYNE—What is the perception—from your viewpoint, of course—of what those state governments think they will get out of supporting that?

Dr Gilmore—I think it is an additional tool that they can offer through their innovation centres. In the case of New South Wales, for instance, they have a number of regional innovation centres—as does Queensland—and that will be an additional service when companies approach those innovation centres seeking assistance or support or ideas that could perhaps assist those companies wishing to export.

Senator PAYNE—Essentially your operation—not the AIC itself—in this particular area is more as a facilitator than anything else.

Dr Gilmore—Yes. In fact, the AIC sees itself as a catalyst addressing areas of market failure. Because we are publicly funded, we are very careful we do not displace private service providers and try and focus on areas that have not been addressed, such as linking small businesses with a broader expat community. That, I think, is a good example of an area where catalytic activity is needed to establish the network and to put in place mechanisms. It may well be that longer term such a service could be privately funded and, in that instance, we would step back.

Senator PAYNE—Would you accept private funding yourself?

Dr Gilmore—We would seek private funding for sponsorship of the site.

Senator PAYNE—Are you in the process of doing that?

Dr Gilmore—We have tried. We have not been successful so far.

Senator PAYNE—It strikes me as a nebulous sort of challenge that you have set for yourself and one in which it is therefore difficult to measure results. How are you going to measure results?

Dr Gilmore—Many aspects of commercialisation are indeed nebulous and there are a number of issues we have with metrics, particularly relating to the time lag between input of funding and measurable outcomes. I think that is a different issue. In the case of ExpatriateConnect, in fact, the outcomes are more clearly measurable. There are metrics which are input related—for instance, number of profiles registered, number of small businesses on the site, number of universities seeking alumni—and they are perhaps activity based measures rather than value creating measures.

I think the value measures will ultimately come to number of contacts made, so we will seek to measure the number of businesses that have established a query with an expat. That is a measure of interconnectivity. Because we will not have direct contact with those SMEs, it will be harder to measure, but it would be useful to measure the ultimate outcome of those contacts; whether a business has in fact taken the step of partnering or engaging or utilising that advice given by the expat. Also, the number of businesses that approach the state innovation centres and use the service are value measures that are fairly easy to implement that we will, in fact, look at implementing.

Senator PAYNE—The commercial result, though, is the one that comes out of the advantages that the SMEs gain, which is, as you identified, the hardest to measure.

Dr Gilmore—It may well be that the states will put in place measures similar to what Austrade does. I know Austrade seeks export-ready companies. That is an opportunity that this might create but long term the benefit derived from exporting would be measured in dollars of trade and dollars of business done with that company. We would like to know that because it is a clear value measure. It is probably beyond our capability to measure that.

Senator PAYNE—Are you endeavouring to build any relationship with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade either through Austrade or the consular side of things?

Dr Gilmore—Yes. We have had discussions with both the minister's office and the department. The minister's office has offered to provide names of trade consuls and the department has offered to look into the possibility of using the site to promote Australia in a consistent way and to make available resources to expats in their promotion of Australia.

CHAIR—We have focused on the economic benefits so far but it seems to me, looking at the experience of other countries, that you could look at a political benefit as well, in that the people we are talking about are quite often well connected one way or another in an industry sector, in a community sector. That sort of resource can provide some important information/intelligence to Australian representatives overseas. Are you geared up to explore that area as well or are you just based on the research and economic side?

Dr Gilmore—We could be, is the answer to that. There is no reason why we could not do that in the profile. When an expat enters his profile into the system we currently ask for profession and, if he wants, he can attach a more detailed resume and so on. It is possible that we could seek or enter specific fields that request linkages with other government organisations and political linkages, if the expat chose to reveal them. Certainly in the case of Israel, for instance, the strength of the Israeli lobby in the US and in other countries is very heavily influenced by the connectivity between Israel as a nation and its expatriates abroad.

One wishes that Australia's expats had a similar influence overseas in promoting non-economic ties as well as economic ties. ExpatriateConnect allows any Australian business to do a search so that, provided you have an ABN, you are able to search for profiles that match a particular fit. The system then provides a list of profile names to the seeker. That seeker might be a business; it might be a political body; it could be a government. The seeker can then choose to initiate contact on a one-on-one basis with individuals on that list.

We have to maintain the balance between protecting the identity of expats—and we do that through use of a profile and a profile name and we do not release the email address; that is initially done by the system—and the need to protect the expat from being overexposed and perhaps overburdened. They are features of the system we are yet to encounter. In some sense maybe that is a problem we wish we had.

CHAIR—Are you finding that there might be a cultural problem within our departments overseas, particularly say Foreign Affairs? It is often one's experience that if you do go to a Foreign Affairs type function overseas, the usual suspects are there. But there is a wider resource of Australians who could also benefit from connecting and we could benefit from their connecting. Reflecting on the days when I was a minister and would go particularly to Asian countries, I would always ensure the aid workers were invited to come along because for me they were on the ground and had a real connection with some of the underlying factors and trends in a community. Do we need to change that aspect of foreign affairs or do you think that is changing now?

Dr Gilmore—If I could answer that question in terms of my own personal experience as an expatriate in the US in the eighties and, more recently, in Geneva from 2000 to 2002: my

experience was that the embassy would often have functions but they tended to be social gatherings to which the community was invited. In my view those social gatherings were a missed opportunity to seek the input of individuals who may or may not be known to the consul or the trade representatives but who, nonetheless, still had an enormous amount to contribute, perhaps because they worked for multinationals and their linkages to Australia were not visible to people in the consulate.

I did not see personally the activity that might result in the sorts of arrangements and sense of community that you alluded to during your time as immigration minister. Having said that, the support of the High Commissioner in London for the launch of ExpatriateConnect was very good and most appreciated. I know he went out of his way to involve members of the community and to offer Australia House as a platform.

Another example of my experience in Geneva is that Geneva tends to be home to many aid workers and tends to be an R and R centre for individuals working in Africa, for example. In the community in Geneva, even though they are expatriates resident in Switzerland, their skills and knowledge of the African subcontinent is probably not known to anyone in the Australian community other than their close friends. That seems to me a resource that would be valuable to diplomatic staff as well.

CHAIR—There is a flip side to this coin—that is, that quite often Australian citizens in Australia commute between this country and their country of origin. For instance, yesterday I spent some time with a person whose family is high up in regional government in China and he is looking at trade opportunities and so on. Is that a resource that we should be looking at as well, not necessarily those who live in Australia permanently but those who use this as a satellite post in one respect or use their country of origin as a bridge for trade opportunities?

Dr Gilmore—I believe it is. That is one reason why we have looked at ExpatriateConnect trying to be as inclusive as possible. It is possible to focus exclusively on the Australian diaspora and look only at residents overseas who are Australian nationals, but the example of alumni, for instance, is a tremendous opportunity. Perhaps the current goodwill with Malaysia is in part because of Malaysian alumni who have studied at Australian universities. Maintaining linkages with that community seems to me to be a worthwhile way to engender future goodwill between nations.

Senator PAYNE—Senator Bolkus knows that I just spent a relatively brief time in Africa, in Mozambique and Kenya. The efforts of the Australian posts in both of those countries—Mozambique is a representative post from Harare—were to ensure that Australian expatriates involved in the delivery of services on the ground were effective—whether it was refugee support through UNHCR or IOM, support for people living with HIV-AIDS and people who had benefited from an education experience in Australia, for example, in Mozambique, people who had taken up Australian development scholarships and then returned to their own country, which of course is required. They were making significant efforts to include them in the meetings and the events for this particular small delegation of Australian parliamentarians.

I think that is a growing activity on the part of DFAT and the various posts, which is very valuable and probably reflects a growing appreciation of the importance of that engagement. But to be in Northern Kenya at a refugee camp, which does not in fact currently bear description, and

meet a young woman from Adelaide working there with UNHCR and IOM, and reflect on her experiences and what she can give to the process when she comes back, is a very important part of that exchange. We were pleased to do that.

CHAIR—That brings me to my last question, which is about resettlement, before we let you go, unless Senator Payne has another one. Quite often I suppose what you are finding is that there is a person there—a research capacity, a resource—who could be of interest to an Australian company in Australia and they might be attracted back. What sort of problems do you think we should focus on in that resettlement process?

Dr Gilmore—I think the interest of the states is on repatriation and then attracting high-calibre individuals back to their state. The VESKI initiative in Melbourne, for instance, is an example of one scheme, and Federation Fellowships another, and so on; so repatriation is certainly of benefit to Australia. I think from the expatriates' point of view it is a case of managing expectations. After you get over sticker shock and the shock of the tax system and the shock of salaries, expats come back with a pretty powerful-looking resume that often does not count for a whole bunch because of the Australian culture, to a certain extent. That is my own personal experience.

The biggest problem in repatriating is the lack of networks and the lack of intimate knowledge of the system in Australia. I do not think there is a solution to it but managing the expectations of expatriates when they repatriate, if there were a way to do that, would make good sense, because it ensures that they will be happy and productive and will stay.

CHAIR—Yes. I suspect that we could go on all day with this.

Senator PAYNE—It just strikes me that there is a natural opportunity cost involved in the decision to become an expatriate, for whatever period of time, and that is part of it. It strikes me as part of the process. It is like perhaps entering politics and then deciding to leave politics and go back into the corporate world: your networks are completely different; they are completely interrupted from a previous professional existence into politics—'We of course not being real people, being politicians, you understand.' They strike me as similar sorts of opportunity costs in some way, and they are choices that you make.

Dr Gilmore—I think so. But when you become an expatriate I am not sure you recognise that there is an associated cost in terms of severing Australian networks. The decision to go overseas is based on opportunities and perhaps the only associated cost one considers is distance from family and so on. The costs hit you when you repatriate, and perhaps you are ignorant of them. I have repatriated twice in my career from extended periods away and for extended periods coming back, and the cost of repatriation is something that does take you by surprise. It certainly took me by surprise.

Senator PAYNE—Even the second time?

Dr Gilmore—Yes, in terms of the networks, in particular.

CHAIR—Dr Gilmore, thanks very much. I am sorry we do not have more time to go through this but I think we have found both your submission and the evidence this morning quite useful.

Dr Gilmore—Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to submit.

CHAIR—Thanks for coming down from Brisbane.

[9.12 a.m.]

DOUGLAS, Ms Elena Joy, Chief Executive Officer, Advance-Australian Professionals in America

CHAIR—I welcome Ms Elena Douglas from Advance-Australian Professionals in America. You have lodged submission No. 676 with the committee, which is one that is hard to miss; it is very substantial. Are there any amendments or alterations you wish to make to it?

Ms Douglas—Yes. I have brought all of the attachments, printed out, if this could be added to the record.

CHAIR—Would you like to start with an opening statement?

Ms Douglas—Thank you for this opportunity to present to the Senate inquiry. My colleagues across America look forward to the opportunity to present by videoconference later in the year. As you know, the driving spirit and intention in nearly all the submissions you received was the desire of Australians abroad to be connected to Australia, to be considered part of Australia, but most importantly to be of use to Australia while they are overseas. It is for this inquiry to determine whether it is in the national interest to constructively engage Australians while they are overseas. What is certain is that Australians abroad, in our experience, want to be your ambassadors, our ambassadors at large.

While our submission covered all of the terms of reference, I would like to actually focus in this brief presentation on (f), the ways in which Australia could better use its expatriates to promote our economic, social and cultural interests. We at Advance have been working on turning Australians abroad into effective ambassadors at large since we were founded in May 2002 by a group of emerging Australian professionals and Ken Allen, the consul general in New York.

I would like to make some observations from our experience of two years in doing this and then conclude with the recommendations we made to the inquiry. Before I commence, I did want to point out that both the Canadian government and the Singaporean government have identified Advance as best practice in galvanising an expatriate community for the economic, cultural and social advancement of a home country.

My first reflection is that Australians respond passionately to specific and measured opportunities to advance Australian interests, and large numbers of them are willing to get involved. At Advance what we focused on in the first instance was developing a live and active community, not just a database. Now our focus is putting that community to work. We have 3,000 members who have registered in the two years, and over 65 per cent of these are active members. We now also have a core of over 100 active committee members, each of whom gives more than 10 hours a month of their time, and there are many who are working more than 40 hours a month for Advance, so that right now we are getting about 1,000 hours a month of the time of extremely able Australian professionals being put to work across the United States.

In June, we had a real turning point for our organisation, with 80 people attending a three-day Advance leadership summit. They came from across the US. We brought together representation and presentations from Invest Australia, DFAT, the Wine Bureau, the consulate and the public diplomacy team and also ambassadors from the UN Mission, because it is very important to us to align our activities with existing Australian government representation on the ground.

Our members find it very satisfying to work on projects that use their professional expertise and insight. They do not want to get together just for social events. There is enough of that. What they want to do is come together as experts in a field and act as advisers and contributors to Australia's interest. For this reason, all our activities are led by management teams and they are run in the areas of finance or technology, creative industries, life sciences, public interest and affairs, food, wine and tourism, and property services. This, I think, responds to something you raised earlier.

My other reflection is the fact that not just emerging and mid-career professionals but also eminent Australians in the US want to support our activities and support Australia. 'Our Australians' in America Hall of Fame displays the people who have already been prepared to lend Advance and Australians in America support and mentoring in various ways. Our founding patrons, Lachlan Murdoch, Anthony Pratt and Peter Lowy gave us the initial seed funding to allow our organisation to get up and running and to have a track record before we then went to governments, state governments and other agencies to ask for partnerships.

My third reflection is that it is possible to amplify existing Australian government enterprise and organisations already on the ground. But in order to do that you need to well understand what Australia's agenda is on the ground and you need to work very closely with the existing Australian agencies. We have developed partnerships to that end with Invest Australia, Axiss, Austrade, the Wine Bureau and DFAT. It takes a lot of work but I think it is critical. It is critical for our members and it is critical for the agencies, because they do not want to see expatriates coming along and interfering or duplicating. They want to see expatriates come along to support and amplify what they are doing. I think that is a really important issue for the inquiry to examine.

We have only been doing this for a couple of years and in the first instance we were building that community as our priority, but now we have some concrete examples of successes. The Smart Returns Fellowship announced by Premier Beattie was in response to a meeting organised by Advance between the education minister from Queensland and Australian expatriate Dr Bryan Gaensler. We have done things in New York. We maintained and curated an art exhibition for 13 Australian artists in New York. We curated the work, we staffed and promoted and ran the gallery for a month. Some of the artists got permanent representation in commercial galleries as a result.

We have been able to regularly do very good introductions. This is one of the main sources of value amongst expatriates—assisting Australian businesses and government enterprises on the ground through getting them much better access than they would get if it were not for this network, the database and the actual live knowledge of the people on the ground that we have been able to develop. It is getting people into places they would not otherwise get into. I can give more examples of that.

My fourth reflection is that more Australians, who are currently abroad, will return to Australia if they are invited, welcomed and understood. Expatriates, to a large extent, do understand that it is going to be hard to return when they have been away. But what we are about to do now is to start a program with corporates here in Australia to get their support and partnership so that they can identify themselves as employers of expatriates and welcome the expatriates. Then, on the ground in the US and abroad, we will be providing networking, support, advice, CV translation and, on our web site, much more information about the transition, about salary expectations et cetera. We are also working on a major media project to change perceptions in Australia about the value of Australians abroad and those who come back.

I will quickly give our 10 representations an overview. We recommended additional demographic research, economic research and the development of a comprehensive immigration policy and political and high-level representation of the diaspora. We recommended that this unit be put inside either the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade or the Department of Education, Science and Training. We recommend an annual expatriate business leader summit be established and the outstanding issues of political representation for Australians be addressed. We thought it was important to commence communications with Australians as they are leaving the country, not waiting until they are already abroad, by which time it is much harder to be in touch with them. We suggested the creation of an expatriate portal which would centralise all federal government services as they relate to expatriates.

Recommendation 6 was a realignment of DFAT policies to ensure that all posts are making the best possible use of expatriates. We talked about facilitating the return of Australians from abroad; a recommended model for offering financial support to diaspora organisations; and a project to change perceptions in Australia about the diaspora. Many of these we are doing ourselves but we do think they are worthy of overall government support as well.

Finally, we want to promote Australia as a prime destination for talented professionals from all over the world, so that it is not just getting some of our own talent back but promoting out into the world economy that this is a marvellous place for professionals to build their careers. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you. I do not know where to start with the questions. Maybe we will start with the broader issue that it seems the way your organisation is going is where people do self-nominate and do become part of the organisation. There are some models that look at accreditation. I presume you would think that is probably a bit too cumbersome as a process and the 'let all flowers bloom' process is probably the better way to go. Is that the case?

Ms Douglas—Yes. It is easier for us to have created this organisation in the United States because to work in the United States you already have to achieve a visa, which separates you from the rest. You must have a degree and you must have proven yourself to the American government and proven that you are a valuable, highly skilled employee. If we were running this in London we would have to tweak the model somewhat to keep the focus on the people who are the easiest ones to translate into immediate, economic value, if you like.

CHAIR—Yes. At the same time you are suggesting a network be built up as well. Reflecting on what you were suggesting in terms of that annual business type of forum and so on, I am part of a Greek government based network which works on two levels: one where they network

politicians around the world of Greek background but also another one that networks business and community interests around the world and has an annual type of conference in Greece, where main players—whether it is the US lobby or whatever—get together. Are you envisaging a similar sort of thing on a business level and community level?

Ms Douglas—Yes. I think it is going to happen anyway. The community of Australians in the United States—the CEO of McDonald's, the CEO of Coca-Cola, the 2IC of IBM, Doug Elix—all these men and women meet regularly and we work closely with them. They are all passionate about doing this and they want to see presidents' clubs formed for CEOs of companies abroad to come down to Australia and have a week of activities. There is enough momentum building in organisations like Merrill Lynch, which already does a lot of work with Australian CEOs, taking them to the United States. A number of the things we recommended occur are things that are at some level of development either under our auspices or in partnership with us. The Prime Minister gave us a welcome address to use at our leadership summit, as did the shadow minister for trade. I think Australian expatriates, especially the senior ones, would like the interest to come from that level; they would like to see that. That is what our recommendation was about—having the Australian CEOs from abroad come down to Australia.

CHAIR—You mentioned the concept of a home based portal.

Ms Douglas—Yes.

CHAIR—I presume that is based on self-nomination as well. Are there any security problems that we would need to address in that respect—not just in terms of privacy of individuals who may want to get on it but also in terms of people who may be bodgie nominees?

Ms Douglas—That particular portal was more a recommendation that government services, superannuation and all the services that expatriates access be easy to access from abroad and when they left there was one place they knew they could go to find out all the relevant organisations that can work with them while they were abroad. It was more an information portal rather than a membership portal. I think organisations like our own already cover off the membership database, membership directory types of applications. ExpatriateConnect has a different model, but deals with the membership.

CHAIR—Do we need to further consider a separate portal which, for instance, may provide linkages to your organisation and other similar organisations throughout the world?

Ms Douglas—To all of them. That is right, yes. Like a one stop shop, yes.

CHAIR—The other issue I raise at this stage, before other senators ask questions, is the one about university development internships for promising Australians. I saw recently a venture launched by the Cheung Kong organisation with the Australian government, where something like 25 or 50 internships were made available for Australians to go into Asia to work with universities and Australian companies there—and the reverse flow as well. Should we be looking at something like this, where Australians abroad can actually come back home for a three-month internship and work with an appropriate organisation?

Ms Douglas—Yes. All of the fellowship schemes allow Australians the return fellowships. The New South Wales and the recently announced Queensland one are all excellent initiatives. It is not realistic, especially in the sciences, to expect vast numbers of Australians to return forever. At least you are getting the benefit of their experience, and then the collaborations from that continue even after they have left. Those are very important. There is another concept that is being discussed by a number of people in New York, which is to fund an American professorship somewhere in various fields; for the expatriate community to fund a professorship in an area that Australia would benefit from. That would be held by the best candidate. They need not be Australian, but that sort of flow of expertise.

CHAIR—Where would you base that? Washington?

Ms Douglas—It is a response. At the moment there are lots of scholarships for young Australians to go abroad. But what if you brought one of the best professors in the world here? Then thousands of students benefit rather than just the five students who get the scholarships.

Senator PAYNE—Some of your recommendations are interesting. I am looking, for example, at No. 8, which seeks financial support for diaspora organisations.

Ms Douglas—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—Why?

Ms Douglas—Because with small amounts of investment in that community you could get massive economic, cultural and social benefits for Australia.

Senator PAYNE—All over the world?

Ms Douglas—You pick the models that make the most sense. There are key places. There are two types of services that I am referring to there. One type is like what Advance does, which is set up networks that have as their focus the generation of economic, social and cultural benefits by using expatriates abroad.

The other is more the support services, more like the Citizens' Advice Bureau model. The level of what DFAT holds as its responsibility to Australians abroad is more in the case of emergency. It is not really providing any support. There is a case for some support in a Citizens' Advice Bureau type model, similar to what the Southern Cross Group have been doing from the outset. On the other side, the organisations like ours, we have pitched projects to state governments and they are funding them now. So we are already receiving government funding, but only through the pitching of projects and them deciding whether or not that is of value to them. No-one is giving our organisation money to do with it what we will. It is a service delivery model.

I do think that making sure these organisations that already exist work better and more closely together—to get better leverage out of them, to get better alignment with existing government resources on the ground—makes sense.

Senator PAYNE—How do you pick the good ones? How do you pick the winners?

Ms Douglas—Probably a tender process is an appropriate methodology to use. There needs to be a policy. What is it that you want to achieve? Once that has been decided and you have decided which department this is housed under and which agencies stand to gain the most, then those agencies could tender for the various services they think they could get.

We are working toward a model where we use whatever resources Australia has on the ground. However many Austrade business development managers are on the ground in the United States, for instance, what if you were able to use the expatriate community in such a way that those Austrade people could achieve four times more in a year than they would have without the access to that resource for the contacts, the opportunities, the leads? That is the way to look at this—being able to set up programs that facilitate Australia's existing activities through the use of expatriates.

It is the same with the cultural objectives of the public diplomacy program of DFAT. What if, as is the case now in New York—this is living and breathing on the ground every day—we were running all sorts of cultural programs that the consulate could not do if it just relied on its own resources of two or three people? We have teams of people running art galleries and running all sorts of events, meaning that the Australian projection into New York is so much richer now. That is being done without any additional government money. That is the way to think of it, as amplifying what is already on the ground. We are never going to have thousands of paid Australians in any city in the world on the ground, whereas if you fund an Advance type model, then you can have big groups of skilled people amplifying and working closely with the existing government agencies and representatives.

Senator PAYNE—Ken Allen briefed the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade early in the piece in relation to AAPA and its initial activities, at least. The review that you suggest should be conducted by whom?

Ms Douglas—Whoever gets this expatriate affairs unit as their responsibility.

Senator PAYNE—My observation of the activity of most of our posts internationally, both as you refer to in what you describe as the large ones and more generally in even the small ones, is that they are pretty stretched doing what they already do.

Ms Douglas—They are. I absolutely agree.

Senator PAYNE—It might be ideal, or idealistic perhaps, to pursue your concept of realigning the approach of the posts to make better use of expatriates, but it seems to me they have a big challenge right now doing what they do in the countries in which they are operating.

Ms Douglas—The reason for that recommendation is just to get better value.

Senator PAYNE—Out of what?

Ms Douglas—Out of their existing resources.

Senator PAYNE—I think they already do a very good job.

Ms Douglas—They do an amazing job. But, for instance, take experiences we have had in New York. The consulate in New York took on doing the Bali benefit. Expatriates from our network did the graphic design for free. We were the volunteers on the night. We did the video presentations. We got our friends who were editors back in Australia to produce amazing video imagery.

We had journalists produce the segments. We just rolled up our sleeves and activated all this activity that, if it were just the staff on the ground in the consulate, would have been impossible. That is Ken Allen's mission.

Senator PAYNE—That is great. I understand that. I am not sure what the next component is that perhaps I am missing. It sounds to me like that is a fantastic thing. I know it is happening elsewhere to greater and lesser degrees.

Ms Douglas—Yes. It is just looking around the department to make sure that that is part of the way of operating. 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 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, this and this? We need to get into these companies. Which contacts do you have in this and this company?'

That is the methodology I am talking about: we become this well-organised resource, as we have proved we can be in New York. We take that model of having a well-organised expatriate community ready to deploy when called into action by the existing government agencies. That is what I am talking about with the realignment of the DFAT policy: to actually see that best practice which is occurring in different places and say, 'Can we set that up wherever we are?' Lots of posts are already doing it but they could do it more with the support of an Advance.

Senator PAYNE—I am struck by the contrast in contemplating what the New York post is capable of versus what the Kathmandu post is capable of.

Ms Douglas—I do not think there would be a role for an organisation like ours in the Kathmandu post. I have been to the Kathmandu post. I was there on Australia Day about six years ago, on a fellowship. The main point is that the terms of reference of this inquiry is to look at ways in which Australia could better use its expatriates to promote our economic, social and cultural interests. I am saying I believe the way of doing that is creating a facilitating organisation like Advance as a methodology for doing that, and then working with existing government agencies. That is just the methodology.

Senator PAYNE—You are the CEO. How does Advance pay you? How are you supported, without wishing to invade your privacy too badly?

Ms Douglas—The Advance patrons—the founding patrons—gave an initial injection of money. This will be their third year, being optimistic.

Senator PAYNE—You are grateful for their support?

Ms Douglas—We are very grateful for their support and the relationships and partnerships we have with the state governments now. We run a lot of activities for New South Wales, Queensland and Victorian governments. We run state of origin networks for all those state governments around America.

Senator PAYNE—I thought you were going to say you run State of Origin Football games.

Ms Douglas—No. We have a lot of corporate sponsorship for events and things like that. We rely on US and Australian corporates.

Senator PAYNE—That is great. Thank you. I may have some more names for your New York network.

Ms Douglas—Thank you.

Senator KIRK—You talked briefly about—I think you called it—smart returns that the Queensland government has in place. Could you elaborate on that for us and also give us some ideas as to how you think the Commonwealth government might be able to provide a similar sort of scheme to encourage the return of Australians from abroad.

Ms Douglas—The smart returns is similar to the Sydney university fellowships. I am not an expert on that fellowship or any of the others. I just very much support their use by Australia. The smart returns is not just for academics. It is also for professional people in various fields who are able to apply for that to contribute their knowledge and learning. That is something distinctive about the Smart Returns Fellowship, because it could be people from industry, particularly in areas of innovation. In terms of the federal government, 'Let a thousand flowers bloom.' The more of these return schemes that are funded, the better for Australia.

It is not realistic for many of our most highly skilled scientists, especially those that are in very resource intensive fields like astronomy. There are lots of fields. As to the funding of other universities, there is no university in Australia that can compete with some of those major endowed universities, particularly in the United States. When we have lost people to those places, then these scholarships provide means of getting that talent back to interact. If the collaborations are here for three or six months, then they set up projects that continue. It would be good to see more of that.

Senator KIRK—Both the schemes—the Sydney university one and the smart returns—are for a limited period of time. Is that correct? You are saying a three-month or six-month return to Australia for the purpose of collaboration?

Ms Douglas—Yes. They are limited to a period of time. Where they came from was an understanding that you can get a lot of benefit without people coming back forever.

Senator KIRK—You have mentioned that in some highly skilled areas, such as the sciences, it is very difficult to get Australians to return to Australia because the jobs are not nearly as rewarding or as highly paid as they are in the United States. Has your organisation thought at all about how in other areas we can encourage Australians to return from abroad?

Ms Douglas—Yes. What we are doing in that area is setting up a footprint here in Australia, so we are working with Australian corporates to get them to put their hand up as employers of expatriates and they are really interested in receiving CVs from expatriates. We are calling that the Bringing Our Talent Home project. That is one of the reasons, other than this inquiry, that I am over here at the moment: to develop the relationships with some key corporates to be our founding partners of that initiative.

How it will work is that on their web site it will say, 'We are expatriate employers,' and on our web site it will have a listing of all these employers who are really going out of their way to employ these people wanting to return and then to back to the US. We do intend to expand our activities internationally, so that, in the other places we expand to, we will run preparation seminars on how to convert your CV into Australian, salary expectations, cost of living comparisons on the web site and that sort of stuff; so just facilitating that process. Our estimation is that 10 per cent of Australians who are currently abroad are hot targets for return. They want to return.

I did not mention the lack of networks. The way we are addressing the lack of networks issue is we are creating a network in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne—we have not decided if it will be monthly or bimonthly—for repatriates to network. There will be contact points in different industries, so that people who are overseas and want to return to that industry can fire away an email to these contact people. Each of our corporate partners would need to identify someone at their human resources department who would specifically answer the queries of expatriates.

Senator KIRK—You say there is no government involvement in that project thus far.

Ms Douglas—Not thus far. All these things can go faster and they can be more aligned with government objectives to the extent that there is government funding, but we are not sitting around waiting for the government to fund our activities.

Senator KIRK—I understand.

Ms Douglas—But we believe it would make a huge difference if this was all part of a formal government department, there was a clear policy and organisations like us interacted with it.

Senator KIRK—That is all. Thank you.

Senator PAYNE—It occurs to me, Ms Douglas, that one of the challenges in persuading expatriates to return or assisting them when they are thinking about returning is, if they are partnered and have children, their partner—who may be not an Australian citizen—may be looking at certain challenges in gaining employment here or have lifestyle concerns or whatever it might be.

Ms Douglas—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—Does Advance do any work in that area?

Ms Douglas—One of our main human resources is the partners of spouses who cannot get working rights in America—the trailing spouse. That is how we are resourced.

Senator PAYNE—The trailing spouse, did you say?

Ms Douglas—There is a word for it, yes. There is a web site called trailingspouse.com. That is at the engine of our growth.

Senator PAYNE—Not having been one, I have never looked.

Ms Douglas—That is the engine of our organisation abroad. There are a lot of highly skilled women in particular who have followed their partners abroad on an L1 visa. If you have been expatriated and your company pays for you, you get an L1, which means your partner can work. If you are an H1B, if your partner has just got their own visa through a company and not been brought over, the partner cannot work. We have this huge pool of talent at work. That is one of our secret weapons.

Here in Australia, that is part of the difficult decision-making process, but anecdotally it does appear the decision to return is often not career based. Particularly for the people in the United States, it is most unlikely that a superior role—certainly in an income sense—will be what they are coming to here. It would be very rare for people to be returning to a high-income bracket. Certainly the children and partner decision-making is key. I think Professor Hugo refers to the fact that a key opportunity for the Australian government, if it wants to get people to return, is the hook of grandparents, the beautiful lifestyle and the wonderful beaches. That is really the main reason people return.

Senator PAYNE—You mentioned in your remarks a media project to, I think you said, change perceptions.

Ms Douglas—Yes.

Senator PAYNE—What is your view of 'perceptions' and what is the nature of the media project?

Ms Douglas—Expatriates are of one: there is a tall poppy syndrome that people who are abroad are seen to have betrayed the country in some way. Once they leave, they are not seen as Australian. They have given away part of being Australian and that stuff. That perception is one that there is a lot of sentiment about abroad. People find that really disappointing—that people are not interested in what they do or the world outside sometimes.

Senator PAYNE—I do not think it is restricted to their view of expatriates. I think people are just basically interested in their own world.

Ms Douglas—Yes, that is probably true. I was astounded that in the bulk of the submissions that was the sort of sentiment expressed. Formalising a project where what Australians are doing abroad and how they are contributing their time back to Australia will be ameliorating that.

Senator PAYNE—Thanks very much.

CHAIR—Will that be the primary objective of any research into the resource across the world? You mentioned that you proposed some research studies into the benefits of the networks and so on. That sort of research would be useful for a media campaign, wouldn't it?

Ms Douglas—Yes. In terms of researching the potential benefit, the Indian expatriate group set a target of $5 billion of foreign direct investment. I think we made a recommendation that one of the elements in future research be the potential economic value of Australian expatriates in terms of things like FDI. Even in New York now in our work with Invest Australia, we are setting up an advisory council for the Invest Australia representatives on the ground—the Axiss representative on the ground in New York City, for instance—and that has been populated by Advance members who are senior people in major US banks. They are going to have a target of how many meetings they set up, how many additional deals that they are able to facilitate, and ultimately they want to have a target of foreign direct investment that they support Invest Australia and Axiss to achieve.

CHAIR—You could argue, though, that that happens anyway. There are Australian companies going to New York all the time and they are trying to get investment, trying to get capital. Where do you think that the value is added by the Australian network over there?

Ms Douglas—Just speed: rather than who you know, you are able to ring me. You are going to have a meeting with Lehman Brothers. I can print out for you the profile of the eight Australians inside Lehman Brothers. I can ring them all up and get them to have lunch with you. It is formalising it and making it more efficient. It is the same natural human process of reaching out to who you know to get an inside run—just sort of on steroids. That is all.

CHAIR—My last question on this—and Senator Payne asked it—is about the census. How do you think that would operate? Self-nomination again?

Ms Douglas—These were recommendations that we discussed. We were really delighted to see Professor Graeme Hugo's report. That was a real turning point for this whole area: he made a recommendation about that. We went through the proposal and could see enormous value in Australians abroad being included in that census, consistent with what the US is now doing—including their Americans abroad in their census. That is a very technical question: how do you achieve that? I am sure better brains than I can contribute to the answer.

CHAIR—We might just wind up here. Thank you for the submission and thank you also for your time this morning and the evidence. I think this is going to continue to be a fascinating inquiry and already we have some new ideas as to where we take our recommendations. Thank you very much.

Ms Douglas—There is a big group of us who worked on that submission and we are very happy to help in any way you want us to.

CHAIR—In the meantime, while the inquiry is going, if you become aware of something that you want to raise with us that others may have raised or you might want to elaborate on, please feel free to do so.

Ms Douglas—Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you.

[9.52 a.m.]

BUTCHER, Dr Melissa, Researcher, Australian Research Council Post-Doctoral Fellow, Research Institute for Asia and the Pacific

CHAIR—Welcome, Dr Butcher. You have lodged submission No. 476 with the committee. Do you wish to alter or amend it?

Dr Butcher—No, that is fine.

CHAIR—How about an opening statement?

Dr Butcher—Sure. My submission is based on research that I have been running for the last two years at the Research Institute for Asia and the Pacific. I am really looking at how Australian expatriates interact when they are living and working particularly in Asia. That is my focus area: what we are doing well and what we are not doing so well. What are the consistent challenges that we face, especially in terms of trade? It is understanding the impact that migrating to and moving between other cultures has on transnational employees; identifying the cultural effects of transnational corporations and trade flows in the region; identifying best practice and input into intercultural business and communication programs. At a broader level, it is looking at Australia's relationship with Asia and how expatriates and transnational employees in particular are the interface between Australia and Asia.

The submission, as you will see, focuses on four of your terms of reference in particular: the variety of factors that are driving Australians to live overseas; the cost benefits and opportunities presented by that phenomenon; the needs and concerns of overseas Australians; and the ways in which Australia could better use its expatriates to promote our economic, social and cultural interests.

There are around 100,000 Australians living and working in the Asia region. The motivations for leaving Australia tend to include career development, financial benefits; the idea of excitement or opportunities, challenges, looking for a challenge outside of Australia; and also, which was quite surprising to me, the idea of gaining cross-cultural experience, using corporate employment, if you like, to learn more about other cultures. There is also, I guess on a personal level, a strong trend: a chance to reinvent yourself when you are overseas, which was something that came through quite strongly as well, by expatriates.

In terms of benefits and the opportunities that are being offered by this movement of people to Asia, the development of cultural competencies is paramount. We live and operate within a global world, even within Australia. We are increasingly a diverse community. What I mean by cultural competencies is developing the ability to work in culturally diverse environments where you need greater flexibility, different strategies of communication, higher tolerances to stress and to issues of ambiguity. These are skills that expatriates are actually developing as they live and work in different countries, and skills that we can utilise when they come back to Australia.

Some of the greater challenges that expatriates face include immense stress on relationships, which is one of the key factors there; feelings of isolation; the loss of relationships in business networks—listening to the other speakers this morning, that was a recurring theme; at a deeper level, feelings of cultural confusion; and starting to question what are your values and beliefs.

That is where organisations like Advance and the chambers of commerce, which are present in quite a few of the larger financial centres in Asia, are quite important in terms of re-creating those Australian comfort zones, re-creating places where Australians can gather, where they can network, where there are social opportunities.

In terms of the needs and concerns of overseas Australians, those cross-cultural challenges that they face in work related issues are really the most important. The workplace is the greatest point of challenge for expatriates overseas. If they do not make adaptations there, then they are going to have a very uncomfortable experience, and the chances of project failure increase. That is, in particular, an area where you start to see people adapting; the way that they work and the way that they engage in different circumstances and with other cultures as well.

Communication can be difficult, forming local relationships, which is really crucial in establishing a sense of wanting to increase Australia's engagement or embed ideas about Australia and what Australia is really about, and what we can offer Asia. Developing those interpersonal relationships is really important, and yet it is an area that some expatriates have difficulty with. Isolation and frustration are words that come up quite often. Stress on relationships—the idea of the trailing spouse—can particularly be a source of conflict for expatriates. These are some of the concerns that they are facing.

Lastly, the ways in which Australia could better use its expatriates to promote our economic, social and cultural interests: I look at this from different levels. There is the high-level reflection on the place of Australia in Asia in general. This was something that I found quite striking. The majority of participants in the research had a strong feeling that it was only when they left Australia that they realised that Australia's place in Asia is actually not quite as important as they had thought it was before they left, in the context of being right in the middle of Asia and comparing it to countries like China, so that on a higher level we need to reflect on the place of Australia in Asia in general.

Establishing a more visible presence in some countries is necessary; countries that are harder to adapt to, such as India, which is one of my research sites. Time and again I hear from Indian businessmen that if you are serious about doing business in a country like India you need to establish a presence there. You cannot just fly in and fly out. At the same time, though, it is a country that is more difficult for expatriates to establish a life they are comfortable with.

We need to develop a more outward oriented perspective at home, starting with increasing our own understanding of Asia, improving what we would call Asian literacy, encouraging engagement with Asia, ensuring as much as possible a well-prepared community living and working in Asia. The general consensus is that, especially in the corporate sector, we have moved away from sending teams to Asia who you wanted to get out of your office in Australia basically. We are sending better, more highly skilled people to head up our offices in Asia. We have realised that we need to have our best teams in Asia which can deal with the cultural

differences there. That is a good sign. We are moving beyond that; we are getting more sophisticated in that approach.

Introducing intercultural training is becoming more popular within the corporate sector also. It is still not as popular as personally I would like to see it used, but at least it is there and is being used by corporates and transnational corporations. Developing interpersonal relationships is vital in the process of promoting our economic and cultural interests in the region but, as noted, it is an area of difficulty which needs to be worked on as well.

There are organisations, like Advance and also Asialink and the Young Professionals Project, which can help expatriates because a lot of the expatriates refer to the process of coming home as even more difficult than going to Asia and re-establishing their lives in Asia. Actually coming home can be more problematic. I would argue that is another reason to support organisations like Asialink and the University of Sydney. We have the Young Professionals Project as well, which is about networking; matching, if you like, or trying to match returnees with companies of interest and that sort of thing. In terms of supporting those organisations, it would be a sign of recognition that the government supports the engagement of Australians with other countries and other cultures, so it feeds back into that higher level reflection at a government level on Australia's place in Asia. Thank you.

CHAIR—Thank you. I will start off with the question of cultural training, cultural competencies and so on.

Dr Butcher—Sure.

CHAIR—To what extent is this something that can be enhanced pre-departure? You mentioned Asialink, you mentioned the University of Sydney.

Dr Butcher—Yes.

CHAIR—How do their programs contribute to the greater sensitivity to cultural differences? How can they be expanded, if they can be?

Dr Butcher—In terms of the importance of training, when I speak to some expats they are quite happy with the fact that they did not do any training but they have managed to get by. But by and large I would say the majority of them would say, 'I wish I had known this before I went,' or, 'I wish I had known that, or even a little bit of the language,' for example. Personally, I do a lot of cultural training with aid sector workers and a little bit more—not quite so much but some—with transnational corporate employees as well. The feedback is that when they are in country, some of what they have gone through in that process is invaluable.

The government, I think at the moment, is tendering out for a really large review and evaluation of intercultural training in Australia. It is going to be an Australia-wide study. The tenders closed, I think, last Monday. That is going to be a very interesting study when it is finally done. The successful tender will conclude that research at the beginning of next year. That is going to give us a better idea.

At the moment, with intercultural training, there are very diverse methodologies applied. You have everything from people who have lived overseas for perhaps 10 years, for example, who come back and are very country specific and you might just get country focused debriefings. There are different ways and different styles of doing it. Personally I think it is really important.

What is overlooked, even by those companies which are engaging intercultural pre-departure training, is debriefing when people come back. That is a very important part of the process. Some of the expatriates I interviewed had been overseas for several years and then came back to Australia and I interviewed them here after they had been back in Australia for some time. As I said, it is a very difficult process, so that debriefing when you come back from overseas is a very important part as well.

Pre-departure and debriefing training for families, for training spouses, for children: we know there is quite a bit of research done on the effectiveness of intercultural training which by and large says that it is effective, but, again, the family is often left out. If a partner is unhappy, if a partner cannot work, that puts increased pressure on their relationship; it is one of the key factors of project failure and for expats returning.

CHAIR—What is the primary objective of that study you mentioned?

Dr Butcher—To evaluate the effectiveness of intercultural training in Australia, Australia-wide. Off the top of my head, I cannot recall exactly what the frames of reference are, but that is the broad. If you are interested, I can find out for you.

CHAIR—Only to the extent that it seems to be reinventing the wheel. We keep on doing it.

Dr Butcher—Right.

CHAIR—At the same time it seems to me that those who actually have to confront the issues are probably working their way through them.

Dr Butcher—Yes.

CHAIR—They talk about training programs and whatever at home and abroad. We can look at the world's worst practice and the way Australians have been insensitive to the culture of Bali over decades, but at the same time you could probably look at progress made in a place like Hong Kong where there are many Australian citizens living, many of them of Chinese background but not only. But on a day to day working basis they actually work through to a greater degree of success the issues of cross-cultural awareness.

Dr Butcher—Yes.

CHAIR—Is that the way to do it? Is it to try and bring the networks together in that working situation abroad and get people to appreciate what has to happen both at work and at school while they are living abroad?

Dr Butcher—You mean to get together Australians and nationals of the country they are based in?

CHAIR—Yes. I am wondering whether the on the ground, in practice experiences are more effective than a few training programs at home.

Dr Butcher—Yes. Being thrown in the deep end and having to adapt is one way to do it. It is up to the company about how effective you want to be. If you need to get your team in, to hit the ground running, then I would probably argue that it is good to have some kind of training as well. I can list for you the number of deals that have gone wrong because of a misunderstanding of what the term 'contract' means, for example. What it means in Australia is very different to what it might mean in China, or what it might mean in India.

CHAIR—Sure.

Dr Butcher—They are the kinds of issues. Certainly when you are on the ground, you learn your day to day living as you go; you learn through your informal networks. You learn that through your Advances or an Australian Chamber of Commerce, for example, in a country like Singapore where you can meet and talk to other expats—'How do I get this?' 'Where is the best school,' et cetera. Those informal networks are very important.

In the Indian context, I was talking to a businessman there recently and, to be honest, a few of the Australian businessmen who have operations in India said it was more effective to use informal networks than to use Austrade in terms of getting their business networks, finding out who are the right people they should employ in India, for example; who are the right people to do JVs—joint ventures—with in India. Those informal networks can be very important as well. There are, I think, certain aspects of a culture where it will be useful to know those beforehand.

Even with intercultural training, we start with, for example, 'What is Australian culture?' When I do intercultural training, that is how we start. Start with your own culture first. Why do we do what we do the way we do it? Often in Australia we forget that we have a culture. Other people out there have cultures. We think of ourselves as normal. It is not until you are in another culture that you start to realise, 'Hang on, I'm the odd one out. I'm doing things differently here. What is it about my culture that I need to adapt?' That is one methodology. That is also the change management process, which is a useful skill that you can bring back to Australia and use within any corporate sector with any corporate organisation within Australia.

CHAIR—We also have every culture in Australia.

Dr Butcher—Yes.

CHAIR—We have found in the past that people with those backgrounds, of each background, can be important in the cross-cultural training programs.

Dr Butcher—Absolutely. We have developed a method which we prefer to use when we do training. If we are talking about China, for example, we will have one country national who works with us. We have consultants from China, India and one Anglo-Australian for want of a better description. We have culturally diverse teams as trainers, to provide that perspective. We also have done training where we have trained culturally diverse teams. If you look at the bell curve of what makes an effective team, if you plot it on a bell curve—this is Nancy Adler's research—most teams perform at the peak. If you leverage difference properly, you can get a

team that is performing better than the average, so that with culturally diverse teams you tend to perform either very badly or very well; it is how well you leverage difference to perform well. That is what we want to try and do with training.

CHAIR—I remember when I was immigration minister and went to Shanghai, the migration officer told me then that he did not think there was an Australian company that had come into China to invest or to trade that did not have with them an Australian-Chinese citizen. Are you finding the corporate sector is embracing that sort of resource, both at home and abroad?

Dr Butcher—Australia has a fantastic resource of bilingual people which we can utilise. I am seeing that as a trend in a lot of the research. Two cases come to mind: a large multinational sending a young Chinese-Australian to head up their Beijing office; and a Korean-Australian heading up the Seoul office for another company. There can be a down side to that, too: sometimes there is an assumption that because they are from that cultural background and they speak the language they will automatically fit into that culture and understand the culture. Sometimes you can get a negative reaction from locals as well, and that has happened. There have been a couple of cases in India where that has happened. An American-Indian was sent back to work in India. He was born and brought up in the US and had a completely different way of thinking to the people he was working with. It was probably as unsuccessful, or as successful, as if they had sent someone from another cultural background.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you for your submission, Dr Butcher. I am very interested in what you have done and what RIAP does in this area, particularly the question of maximising Australia's engagement with Asia. Is there an age profile that you think works better?

Dr Butcher—It is quite hard to get good statistics—which is something to think about—on our diaspora. It differs from country to country. In a country like Singapore, the age would be lower—I would say mid-20s to mid-30s. You get a lot of single people or young couples going there. It is a much more entrepreneurial place. In a country like India you will find that the business people going there are much more mature. They are setting up, heading up offices there. It is a much more difficult country to live in and has fewer pull factors than a country like Singapore where you have the party lifestyle and that sort of thing as well.

Ideally, in terms of change management, I do not think there is any particular age profile. If you audit people's cultural competencies, one of the important factors is the willingness to learn: if you are willing to learn, then you can adapt. Some of the people that I have worked with have been in their 50s and 60s. The key factor, in terms of people that will be successful in cultural adaptation, is those people that have, from a very early age, experienced cultural difference. Some of the people who are heading up offices, for example, in India, are kids of diplomats. They were travelling from a very early age.

The people who enjoy the experience across the board tend to be people who went off backpacking across Iran with their parents when they were seven. One of the people heading up an office in India walked from Turkey to India in the sixties; those kinds of people. If I were hiring people to work overseas or to head either a diplomatic mission or a business, I would ask them, 'When did you first travel? How old were you when you first travelled?' Kids coming from second generation backgrounds are juggling different cultural expectations from an early age.

The idea of being bicultural, even tricultural—some of the kids in Western Sydney that I have worked with on previous projects—is not always an easy process. Some handle it better than others. Those who handle it well are gaining skills in being able to move between different cultures. There are different theories and different research that has been done about it. There are the stages of cultural awareness, where you start off being very ethnocentric, where Australia is the centre of the world and everyone else is kind of odd and outside that, to where you get cultural awareness.

Cultural awareness is that stage where you can have basically an awareness of other cultures, empathy; you can put yourself in the shoes of someone from a different cultural background. Sometimes that is at the expense of your own identity. That is when confusion starts to come in. Some of the expatriates who have lived for a longer time in Asia say things like, 'Sometimes I forget I have a white face,' or, 'I don't like being called an expat. I'm a local.' They have developed such a degree of empathy now that they perceive themselves as having another culture. That is the key, rather than the age they are now; it is the age when they first started engaging with difference and how well they coped with that.

Senator PAYNE—You were talking to Senator Bolkus about some of the pre-departure and then return training aspects of it which, it seems to me in your particular area of discussion here—that is, transnational corporations and their employees—is essentially down to the company.

Dr Butcher—It is.

Senator PAYNE—It is not a government issue.

Dr Butcher—No.

Senator PAYNE—How we go about encouraging the corporates to think that it is a good idea to use resources on this, to make their employees more effective.

Dr Butcher—In some ways the corporates are the public face of Australia. They are representing to some degree what is the Australian community, so they are putting forward a particular perception of Australia. Yes, that is a difficult thing and it is a high-level thing. When you look at successive governments and the approaches to Asia, it often comes down to the individual. If there is a high-profile individual in politics who is actively concerned with engaging with Asia, then suddenly it has a different profile.

How we make that systematic, I honestly do not know. Asialink, for example, and the Asia-Australia Society have been involved in roundtables where they tried to discuss with academics and politicians and trade how we go about raising this profile of Australia in Asia if for no other reason than you have two huge economies that are going to impact—China and India—and that Australia is right between. We are in a fantastic position to take advantage of that. We have large Chinese and Indian communities in Australia and the diasporic networks that they are creating. We are in the middle of this network, all based on interpersonal relationships, that we somehow need to promote.

As I said, it is a multilayered approach. We need that perception from the top—that there is a recognition that this is important—as well as at the bottom. That is the lead that transnational corporations will take: that it is important to be able to communicate well with your Asian counterparts; that it is important to be able to understand the way that they do business. There is often a misconception in the business sector that business is the same the world over, that business is business—you are there to make a profit, which is true to some extent—but the way that business is done is very different in other countries. That is something that we need to keep re-emphasising.

We do need some kind of lead from the top that it is important to get these things right. The government has in place at the moment—this is just one idea—the export promotion program, to incorporate in that some support for training, so that if a small to medium enterprise company wants to investigate India, for example, as a potential trading partner, there is in some way some support for them to do some kind of research or training program.

If the government is so inclined to invest in that way I think that would be quite worthwhile. As I say, these companies, if they can develop those relationships, are going to help strengthen our position within Asia, India, or in a particular country; so to somehow make it systematic within those programs that, if companies seek government support for trade programs, they also undertake these kinds of programs.

Senator PAYNE—Do you have any contact in your activities, either in this particular study or elsewhere, with organisations like Australian Business Volunteers, which was AESOP, and Australian Volunteers International and their placements?

Dr Butcher—Not in this research, but we do the training for the Youth Ambassadors for Development, which is the program before or a sister program to AVI.

Senator PAYNE—That is run by the government?

Dr Butcher—It is run by the government, yes.

Senator PAYNE—But AVI is not.

Dr Butcher—Yes, sorry. AYADs is the 18- to 30-year-old DFAT program to send people to Asia-Pacific programs, yes.

Senator PAYNE—You do what for them?

Dr Butcher—We do the pre-departure and debriefing training for them. We have now done the pre-departure for about 700 of those young people going to work in Asia and the Pacific and, yes, when they come back as well. Again, for some of those young people they have incredibly profound experiences. The debrief is probably more important in their case than the pre-departure.

Senator PAYNE—I was going to ask you about that. What do you do with the information you gain through the debrief process?

Dr Butcher—In terms of turning it into research?

Senator PAYNE—To turn into research. Given the AYAD, do you give it to the government? What do you do with it?

Dr Butcher—I would love to turn it into research. It is really valuable. At the moment it is just given in terms of a report or feedback.

Senator PAYNE—To AusAID?

Dr Butcher—To Austraining—not AusAID, sorry. It is an idea that we have been playing with for a while. It just comes down to our resources as well. If you would like to fund it, I can give you a proposal.

Senator PAYNE—I wish it was in my gift, Dr Butcher; it is not in my gift.

Dr Butcher—It would be incredibly valuable. You have kids who are, for the first time in their lives, dealing with sex workers in Thailand, or working in prisons in Cambodia, or seeing what poverty really means, or what a dead person looks like. It is really, for many of them, a life changing experience.

Senator PAYNE—Indeed. Across the range of submissions we have received, it seems that those submitters who are based in Asia give us the impression that Australians in Asia are very likely to go on to other overseas countries, to both live and work. Is that reflected in your survey?

Dr Butcher—Yes. Many of the participants I worked with had already lived in countries within Asia—Hong Kong, Singapore, Philippines—or they were based in KL, for example, and would travel regionally. Singapore is a stepping stone to London. That was quite common as well. My research is qualitative so I do not use statistical generalisations, but I would think that trend is there, yes.

Senator PAYNE—The other difference between what you tell us about your research sample—where they stayed only two or three years in Asia—is that many of our submitters appear to have spent a considerably longer time than that in the region.

Dr Butcher—Yes. There is this idea that Australians used to just do the European tour; we would go to Europe or England for a year, or we would travel around Europe. I am wondering if there is a change in thinking, where we now also incorporate in that a stint in Asia as well; we are seeing Asia as a stepping stone. The majority of time that participants did seem to spend in Singapore was somehow two to three years. There was a sense of being island-bound after that.

Senator PAYNE—A smaller island as opposed to a larger island.

Dr Butcher—Yes. Singapore was trying to combat this, as I am sure you are aware, by trying to make itself a little less staid—'You can dance on the bar tops now if you so choose.' But, yes, they either come back to Australia or they may go on to another posting somewhere. It depends. Again, it is difficult to get statistics, particularly in a country like Singapore because the Ministry

of Manpower in Singapore is very cagey about the statistics it releases on its foreign workers. It is hard to know who is coming and going.

Senator PAYNE—Sure—although I will not hold my breath until I meet the year 12 private school student from Sydney who has decided not to do the gap year in London but, 'Let's go to Hanoi.'

Dr Butcher—Instead.

Senator PAYNE—Yes.

Dr Butcher—That is an idea circulating at the moment. I think Alison Broinowski is quite keen on promoting an idea that we should be going.

Senator PAYNE—She is, indeed. I think it is a great idea.

Dr Butcher—I studied in India for three years. I did my PhD there. If you want to get to know a country—and really get to know it—that is a great way to do it. Yes, I would certainly support that idea, for what it is worth.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you, Chair.

CHAIR—Thank you, Dr Butcher. That is really useful.

Dr Butcher—Thank you.

[10.25 a.m.]

DiMECH, Mr Lawrence, President, Maltese Welfare (New South Wales) Inc.

CHAIR—We will move on to the Maltese Welfare Society in New South Wales Inc. Mr Dimech, welcome. You have lodged submission No. 77 with the committee. Do you need to alter or amend it, or would you like to start with an opening statement?

Mr Dimech—I do not have much to alter. I need to add a few things that have transpired since then.

CHAIR—Please go ahead.

Mr Dimech—What we have before us are the many phases of migration. As a migrant myself I can tell you that migration has a profound effect not only on your life but on the lives of your children, your family and your friends. As to the plight of the persons I am here to represent, they had little choice in their decision to relocate to Malta, as they were in their teens; nonetheless, they were born legally in Australia. They have signed away the right to be an Australian citizen, or to their Australian birth, as they have renounced their citizenship—sometimes under duress. If they decide to return to their country of birth, they will no doubt be an asset; the kind of people this country needs.

There is another issue that needs to be looked into: any provisions made have to extend to the children born, in most cases after their parents renounced Australian citizenship. This matter was not mentioned in my original submission; nonetheless, I need to bring the matter to your attention. The fact that some 300 Australians, living in Malta, submitted submissions to your inquiry shows that there is a need for these matters to be looked into, with the hope that in this globalised world a national expatriate policy will be considered.

CHAIR—Thank you. What numbers are we talking about? How many people do you think?

Mr Dimech—We are looking at perhaps some 2,000 Maltese who have been affected by this anomaly in the situation.

CHAIR—They are 2,000 Maltese living in Malta?

Mr Dimech—In Malta.

CHAIR—They would have renounced their Australian citizenship in which years?

Mr Dimech—Before 2002 you had to be a Maltese citizen. There was an age bracket. Up to the age of 19 you had dual citizenship. But then between 18 to 19 you had to renounce any other citizenship that you had. Therefore, the Maltese who went back to Malta were mostly young Maltese children with their parents. They wanted to live in Malta. They had to renounce the Australian citizenship to be able to live in Malta.

CHAIR—We are talking about people who were under 19 in the year 2002?

Mr Dimech—Yes.

CHAIR—There would not be all that many children involved, would there?

Mr Dimech—There was a long period because people had returned to Malta before the year 2000.

CHAIR—Yes, sure. But what I am trying to get at is that we are talking about people who, at the time of renunciation of their Australian citizenship, would have been around the age of 18 or 19?

Mr Dimech—From 18 to 19, yes.

CHAIR—And the most recent changes to the Citizenship Act do not pick up this problem?

Mr Dimech—This law does not apply any more in Malta now. They all have been given dual citizenship, as if they have never lost it before.

CHAIR—That is by the Maltese law?

Mr Dimech—Yes, by the Maltese government.

CHAIR—But the Australian proposed changes do not accommodate this problem?

Mr Dimech—That is right.

CHAIR—Do we know of any other countries in which there has been a similar problem?

Mr Dimech—With other nationalities?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Dimech—I do not know. This depends very much on the citizenship laws of that particular country, but I am not aware of anywhere else.

CHAIR—Of those 2,000 you talk about, do you have any idea as to how many would really want to come back to Australia?

Mr Dimech—I am not saying that they will all want to come back to Australia but there are some 300. They have signed a petition to your inquiry, indicating that they would like to regain their Australian citizenship, not necessarily to come back to Australia but to regain Australian citizenship.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you, Mr Dimech, for your submission. I think you said in your initial remarks that you thought we should develop a broad national expatriate policy. What do you think that should include?

Mr Dimech—I think in today's world, anybody of Australian descent should be regarded as Australian, and that is in short what I mean by it; irrespective of where they are living, irrespective of where they are.

Senator PAYNE—One example might be not having the time limit that you refer to. The amendments from 2002 said that people who renounce their Australian citizenship and were under 25 years of age could resume it.

Mr Dimech—Because the Australian law has changed and they have put an age limit on it.

Senator PAYNE—But you were finding that people were over 25.

Mr Dimech—Yes, in our particular case—the Maltese. Some of these people are over 25 years, because if they were not over 25, I would not have made the submission.

Senator PAYNE—Indeed. I do not have the details in front of me but the citizenship minister announced further changes earlier this month.

Mr Dimech—That would certainly include what we are talking about.

Senator PAYNE—That would address your problem?

Mr Dimech—Yes. The other aspects are the children of the people that have lost citizenship and who had children in that period had. We are not very clear whether it contravenes section 18, because the minister was not very clear about this or about the children of the people that lost citizenship between that period.

Senator PAYNE—I am sure we will be talking to the department at some stage, so we can certainly endeavour to clarify that.

Mr Dimech—It would be very unfair and very unreasonable if they had children and their children were not accepted. You might have a family where one child had Australian citizenship and the other one is not able to regain it.

Senator PAYNE—I know Senator Bolkus asked you about the numbers of people who might want to return to Australia.

Mr Dimech—I think it is an estimate. We were trying to get the exact number from the Malta government. I do not know whether we ever did, but other people perhaps from the Southern Cross Group would be able to identify the exact number. The number that we are playing around with is about 2,000 people but, as I said, they are not all wanting to come to Australia. We had the same problem with the Malta government when they gave citizenship to the children of Maltese migrants. They thought they were all going back to Malta, but that did not happen.

Senator PAYNE—What is the reason for the level of interest for those people who are in Malta about this in particular? Is there a particular motivator?

Mr Dimech—There is an enormous bond between Malta and Australia because practically every family in Malta has got somebody in Australia.

Senator PAYNE—Family here, yes.

Mr Dimech—Some of these people were born in Australia—they went back when they were 14 and 15—and have lived in Australia for many years. They were educated here. They still consider themselves Australian. They have changed their citizenship only because they had to live in Malta.

CHAIR—They all speak with a Maltese Australian accent too.

Mr Dimech—They do, yes. You went to Malta, I think, at one time.

CHAIR—That is right.

Mr Dimech—There is enormous interest in Australia and Malta. I probably cannot describe it. I just came back from there, and I had meetings with these people, and they said, 'Look, we're Australian. It doesn't matter what other nationality we took. We're still Australian and we would like to have the right to go back to Australia if we ever want to.'

Senator PAYNE—Was your meeting in that regard part of your exploration for this inquiry or was it just a general meeting?

Mr Dimech—No. I go to Malta periodically because of other work I do, but this time I took the opportunity to talk to some of these people.

Senator PAYNE—Thank you very much.

CHAIR—Just one final question: I think the experience has been in Australia, under the previous law, that people had to renounce their Australian citizenship were they to take up the citizenship of their prior right—I suppose is the way to put it. In many circumstances, and I think this happened particularly with people of Italian background, they may have taken up their Italian citizenship but they did not formally notify the Australian authorities that they had done so, so they maintained in practice both citizenships. Would that have happened with the Maltese at all?

Mr Dimech—No. I worked for many years in the Malta High Commission. The Maltese definitely had to renounce their Australian citizenship before being given back their Maltese citizenship; they had to produce a renunciation. At one time the department of immigration did not even know what to do with the renunciation, but you definitely had to produce a certificate of renunciation.

CHAIR—I think it is fair to say that the question of descent is covered in the press statement issued by the minister, but we will obviously focus on the detail of it.

Mr Dimech—Yes, the details are needed now, after the announcement of the minister.

CHAIR—Yes. Mr Dimech, thank you very much.

Mr Dimech—Thank you.

[10.39 a.m.]

HAVENHAND, Mr Bryan, Managing Director, Global Exchange

CHAIR—Welcome, Mr Havenhand. You have lodged submission No. 591 with the committee. Do you need to amend or alter it or would you just like to start with an opening statement?

Mr Havenhand—No, there is no real need to amend it. There have been a few pieces of proposed legislation since this inquiry began. One of them that is worth noting is the proposed changes to the citizenship law, whereby people are now more able to re-acquire their Australian citizenship. I think now they have to show good character rather than having to show returning to Australia within three years of making the application, which I think is a good improvement.

CHAIR—Would you like to say anything further at this stage or would you just like to go into questions?

Mr Havenhand—My submission was relatively short and I suppose was a little bit 'big pictureish', in the sense that I did not give a lot of infinite detail, which you would have received in other submissions. The thrust of my submission basically was that, as the world is globalising, one of the things that is occurring as a result of that is in relation to the movement of labour around the world. I suppose you could look at it almost from a historical point of view: from the movement of slaves to the movement of highly qualified, skilled people, which of course is the era we are now in and presumably will be in for some time.

My point in saying that is that the public policy makers have basically got to meet those challenges with fairly flexible, forward looking pieces of legislation, which do not penalise Australians who work overseas and, on the other hand, do not penalise non-Australians who wish to work in Australia, because it is definitely a two-way process. Having said that, I am happy to go into question time.

CHAIR—I will start off with your proposal for a so-called public space at home for expats, and you refer to the Finnish expatriate parliament. What sorts of ideas would you be suggesting we look at here?

Mr Havenhand—Rather than trying to get the recipe up-front working and then bed it, if you like, in cement for a long period of time, it might be best to start with more informal arrangements which are less tied to legislative fiat than others. The two examples I give are the Finnish model, which is a little bit more open-ended and basically provides a venue for expats to have a say, versus the Italian model, which is governed by election of expats or people representing the expats to the Italian parliament. I do not have a firm proposal as being the best one, but the criteria would be in the first instance—and this inquiry is clearly an example of that—to examine the issues and work towards some informal arrangement whereby expats can have some input into policy making as it affects them, in particular, and use that as a basis to move towards a model which might prove more appropriate a bit further down the road. I am not advocating a particular model as such, but I guess the governments and public policy-making

bodies of Australia, being more aware of expats and their needs—certainly in the cases of some more than others, obviously, as is the case with the local constituency—would have some input into the decision-making process that is formally recognised. How that initially occurs, I do not know, but this inquiry is a good start in that process.

CHAIR—We have the reality of increased and increasing globalisation with a flow of capital and people. We can anticipate that that will continue to increase at a fast rate, so there will be a greater expatriate Australian community all over the world. Are we talking about a bureaucratic framework? You mentioned the Italian model of members of parliament elected from Italians living abroad and, to a lesser extent, I think the Finnish model does something like that, but I do not know whether the culture of Australia would accommodate that sort of model. Should we be looking at a space within the bureaucracy, for instance, to drive policy and to try and maximise return?

Mr Havenhand—There are a number of entry points for some model, obviously. One of the comments I do make is in relation to DFAT personnel not being terribly involved in expat activities overseas, which would seem to be one point of entry for that type of input to policy making. Obviously it is in the DFAT area rather than some other areas that have been raised by particular groups here, like taxation, superannuation, voting et cetera. It might be possible that the appropriate departments could be identified and there may be a couple of people, for example, in those appropriate departments whose responsibility it is to seek expat comment and feedback on particular issues that would be deemed appropriate in some manner.

A number of the key issues at this point have been raised. There may well be other issues which we are not particularly conscious of at present but will come about in future, as these things tend to do. That requires some degree of flexibility, which is not always possible. I am not coming here with firm and clear models.

I am not the researcher, for example, that some of the other people you have spoken to are. I have come into it in a less formal way through the Working Holiday Maker program and through my association with Anne MacGregor at the Southern Cross Group and the expats book, who have become far more conscious of the number of Australians living overseas who are working at a professional level. There will always be a percentage who do not particularly want to have much contact with Australia on an ongoing basis, but there are a lot who do. There are benefits, as has been mentioned, for Australia in terms of the network that exists over there. How you wire that network back into the public-making policy here, I have no firm ideas about. I know, for example, that AIC—I think you might have spoken to a representative this morning—took a long time to develop their web based expat network that was launched in London recently.

That may be one model that can be moved forward. The Internet is probably a good basis for allowing expats to make some comment. It may be that there is a decision within government departments that particular policies might benefit from comments by expats. That could then be posted, for example, on an Internet site and expats could be invited to make comments on that particular policy proposal. That may be one format that would work quite well. As the Internet becomes more sophisticated, then that model might well be far more responsive at both ends.

Certainly shuttling people backwards and forwards across the world for this is probably not going to work terribly well and it is too costly, and people would not be available often. It would

seem that the Internet as a policy-making portal for inputs by expats might be one direction in which to look.

CHAIR—To what extent then, given what we are talking about is, in many ways, an indefinable generation of activity that is going on, do we need to look at a coordination of it, or are we best suited to let the individual organisation spawn, develop and find their roles? Is there a greater role for a federal initiative to bring together a portal, or would it be best to leave the individual organisations that are developing now to develop in the way that they are developing and maybe just have a home page with individual links to it? Do we need a federal department to coordinate policy, or is it best to leave it to the specific areas of government which have primary interest, whether it is health care or immigration or trade or foreign affairs?

Mr Havenhand—There are a lot of organisations—government and non-government—business, et cetera, being involved in this area at present and they are all, I suppose, treading new ground and trying to come up with solutions that work for them. Everyone is going to have different criteria and goals et cetera, which means that everything is going to be a little bit different. I would see some value in having one specific point of entry, but then that would obviously have links to federal government, state governments, industry bodies et cetera who then would presumably maintain and be responsible for their own web sites and their own agendas, if you like. But a central point is, I think, very useful. That may well be established, let us say, with an input—certainly from the financial point of view—from the federal government and maybe state governments. Many state governments are interested in this as well; principally their point of view is developing industrialisation and employment opportunities within the states. But I would think that having one central portal, if you like, with all the appropriate links would be the way to go. It would certainly be easy to access and maintain some—maybe not control—awareness of what everyone is doing; what everyone has been involved in.

CHAIR—I was keen, as minister, to expand and to in many ways deregulate the Working Holiday Maker program. You mention that as part of your entry into this debate. Do you have any ideas as to whether that can now be liberalised in any way or expanded? Do you have any thoughts on how that plays into this discussion we are having this morning?

Mr Havenhand—I guess there is obviously the inbound and outbound issue. Australia now has something like 17 working holiday-maker destinations and New Zealand I think has about 18, but some of those countries are exclusive to one or the other. I think with the two put together there are about 23 countries that accept either Australian and/or New Zealanders. Unfortunately the expansion in the Working Holiday Maker program, while it is good in its own right and does provide additional opportunities to work in other countries, still has not changed the traditional model much, in the sense that I estimate 25,000 or 30,000 Australians go overseas each year, the first time on a working holiday visa. But the bulk of them still go to London. Of those 20,000-odd you are still getting about 18,000 to 20,000 going to London; 5,000 or 6,000 going to Canada; up to about 1,500 to Japan. Then other countries might get one or two or three, literally.

Before there is any further expansion or deregulation, that issue needs to be looked at, because I think one of the values in the globalising world is that Australians do actually go to more countries rather than all just heading off to London. It is understandable why they do. Of course, there is the other side of the coin in terms of working holiday-makers coming into Australia. The

ones coming into Australia generally have much easier work conditions than those going out. For example, Australians going to Germany, I think can only work for about 90 days.

I think there are some elements of the existing scheme that need to be sorted out with other governments. There needs to be maybe some encouragement, some direction to get students to look at going to other countries as well that provide opportunities. I suppose at some level that meshes in with the developing program now about student exchange and trying to get students to go to a whole range of different countries and generally encouraging students to go as well. That is outside the parameters of this investigation, but those sorts of issues mesh together a bit.

I would not look at any more countries or any more deregulation but perhaps making the current system work better in terms of getting people to go to more of the different countries and getting some of those other countries to loosen up their employment rules.

CHAIR—Thank you.

Senator PAYNE—One thing I would say, from reading your submission and other submissions, is that I am getting a feeling of perhaps low-grade paranoia from some of the observations that are made about apparent feelings, perceived feelings, generated towards those Australians who have chosen to live and work overseas. That strikes me as interesting in a country that is as rough and tumble as Australia. I am interested in your comments on that.

Mr Havenhand—This is low-grade paranoia from our end?

Senator PAYNE—Yes.

Mr Havenhand—In terms of Australians who live overseas being cut out of the action, if you like?

Senator PAYNE—And apparently what you refer to as a generalised undercurrent of disapproval of those who leave Australia to work overseas for lengthy periods.

Mr Havenhand—Yes. Maybe paranoia is a bit strong, but you did say low grade.

Senator PAYNE—I did say low grade, yes. I was trying to think of another word and I decided to just use an adjective instead.

Mr Havenhand—Yes, that is fair enough. This whole issue of expats from the Australian perspective is relatively new. There has always been the Germaine Greers and the Clive Jameses and what have you and there always will be presumably. At some level Australia, if you like—which encompasses a lot of different segments of society and other aspects—is still coming to terms with it: principally we are an immigrant nation. One of the things that is coming out of the research from Hugo and a few others is that we are also an emigrant nation. At some level we are still coming to terms with that two-way exchange; that Australians are going overseas as much as many other people are coming here and often for short terms. One of the things that Hugo pointed out was that there is a very high percentage of people who come here on business visas and they are only here for a few years.

In terms of the paranoia, people are still feeling their way in some senses. The issue is certainly not settled and I can think of a lot of other issues where, at the start of the debate—if you like the public debate—there have been all sorts of accusations thrown around and elements of paranoia and maybe slight distortions of the truth, or greater distortions of the truth. I think this whole thing is in the process of settling down. There will be various accusations thrown around.

I made some comments there that I picked up from people I know who live overseas. I have a cousin who has been in Italy for 30 years and is probably never likely to return. Everyone knows somebody, but they are not really sure how to place them, if you like. That maybe moves into areas of cultural and social studies which are a bit further away from the hard edge of taxation policy and superannuation policy. The paranoia perhaps belongs to that sort of social cultural area of not being quite sure how to deal with expats. One of the things expats say is there is always a lot of pressure on them from family and friends and former colleagues to come home—'When are you coming home?' There is an edgy sort of feel, I suppose, that many expats feel they live under. That issue of low-grade paranoia is part of all that.

Senator PAYNE—But isn't it just a fact of life? If you have chosen to move overseas and you have chosen to leave Australia and your family, for whatever reason, then people are going to ask—particularly from within your family—'When are you coming back?' People are going to think they have had different experiences, so not being sure how to place them strikes me as just a by-product of what happens.

Mr Havenhand—Sure. I am not saying we should wrap them in cotton wool—and I do not think anyone has suggested that—or give them special treatment. It has been driven by a few people who have really brought it into the marketplace of public ideas and discussion, where quite a number of them have felt left out. Sure, they have made the decision to go away and some of them have been away for a very long period of time, but I think they would still like to be involved in some way and I guess that is how this whole issue has come about.

I am not suggesting they should be namby-pambied or they are any more particularly important than people who have decided to stay here, or go away for a couple of years and then come back, as opposed to being away for a very long period of time. The things that people are plain about—and this is moving back into the hard edge of policy, I suppose—are the opportunities that are available to Australia and to the people over there, in terms of creating this sort of network that a number of organisations are currently looking at to see how best use can be made of what is essentially an Australian resource which has been overlooked.

Of course, there are these sorts of arty, sort of softie, less tangible feelings, I suppose, that are floating around in the air—'I've been ignored and I can't vote,' or, 'I can't do this.' Others say, 'You went away, so bad luck.' There will always be those sorts of issues, regardless of all the other things, because there are new generations coming through and new people are doing it. I am not particularly paranoid. I do not think expats should be treated any more specially to the locals, but I do not think they should be ignored either.

Senator PAYNE—Then you go on to say in your submission at another point that we are very good at claiming the successful back for ourselves—those who are successful overseas—but the truth of the matter is that the diaspora is a very mixed bag. I think it is described as that

elsewhere. There are those who choose to leave and then bag Australia witless; there are those who choose to leave, are enormously successful and their success is appropriated, if you like, by Australians here as Australian successes; and then there is the huge mass in the middle, I suppose, who just get on with it and do whatever they are choosing to do. Is that a reasonable assessment?

Mr Havenhand—Yes. There is no one particular profile of an expat. As you say, they are a very mixed bag. You go from people, for example—dare I say—Germaine Greer, who loves bagging Australia—

Senator PAYNE—I was not actually naming names.

Mr Havenhand—who does not want to know anything about it, but knows a heck of a lot about it and can quote lots of very current events about it. She always gets headlines, and I think at some level Australians still really like to know how they are being seen by other people in the world—maybe particularly Australians—and, given that we are a relatively new country that does not have a terribly strong ego, I suspect, that is all part of the process of trying to work out where we fit into things, though I think Australia as a country has grown up enormously in the last 25 or 30 years with regard to that.

Senator PAYNE—The only other issue I wanted to raise with you is one which other submissions and speakers today have raised, and that is the role of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. By way of observation, I would say that I see most posts doing as much as they possibly can with the resources that they have available to them. I think that in some cases there is very good reason for not engaging in the way you imply with long-term expats who have been working in a particular country for a very long period of time. For a start, you buy their bias, their friends, their good and their bad, and one of the roles of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is to maintain some degree of objectivity in the process of doing their own work, and I think it is important that they do that. What I see—mostly in developing nations, I must say, which is where I spend a lot of my time—dealing with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is people working extraordinarily hard, with not limited resources but certainly well-measured resources, to do as much as they can to engage locally, to form relationships and to know that politically, socially, culturally, artistically and economically they have discourse into the country in which they are posted.

Mr Havenhand—I have made that comment on the basis of discussions with a number of people. Foreign affairs personnel or staff clearly are being sent over there to do a particular job, and that is the No. 1 priority. It is presumably not to spend too much time with the local expatriate group or people. But, having said that, the department should also have its own filtering system available for filtering local comment—

Senator PAYNE—Certainly.

Mr Havenhand—as it does with all the other comment that comes into the department from a whole range of other sources. It just struck me that in a couple of instances there could have been some assistance given by the local expats which was not taken up, and they may well have their own reasons for doing that. It is not for me to judge. It just seemed to be one area that could be looked at and on which some discussions could take place in various levels in Canberra,

presumably, and maybe elsewhere, where some of the synergies that may be available could be made use of, particularly given—and maybe amongst junior officers more likely—that there is often a fairly high turnover, with postings of two, three and four years before people move on, whereas they may well be assisted by people who have been there for a longer time and know the system a bit more. One of the arguments and areas of discussion now is about how you keep knowledge in an organisation—how you pass knowledge on to people who come into the organisation. That is obviously an ongoing problem, where you are posting people relatively frequently in different parts of the world. I raise the point simply as an area where I think there would be some fairly productive discussion amongst interested parties.

Senator PAYNE—I do not suggest it would be unproductive. I suppose I am endeavouring to make a point about balance—that is, between the role that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has in its engagement with the country in which individuals are posted and dealing with Australians who are, by virtue of their experience, either self-described or well recognised as experts, and trying to find balances between building all of those relationships. When I say 'buy your bias', I mean that in inverted commas—that is to say, everyone comes to that table with a certain level of experience and perhaps perceptions, and sometimes the objective face of Foreign Affairs and Trade is a useful face to have.

Mr Havenhand—Yes. There are a lot of ratbags amongst expats, and I am not suggesting that the local expats should be involved in policy making, but they may be more able to assist in terms of contacts or processes that are required in a particular country.

Senator PAYNE—And also be useful resources. I do not deny that at all. I am just keen to make sure it is a balanced process. Thank you very much.

CHAIR—I am probably not as on top of this as Senator Payne may be, but in that context, in terms of mission statements and so on for our posts overseas, is there capacity to include in them some role or some recognition of the role that needs to be played with the expat communities? Is that but one source of policy initiative that could lead to a closer relationship, not just on the trade side but on the broader side?

Mr Havenhand—I think that would be useful. The thing is, too, from different cities where Australian consulates are placed, some expats will be very well organised, while others will not be terribly well organised at all. It is going to vary a lot from place to place. Maybe DFAT could have in their program somewhere a recognition that there may be some well-placed expats who may be useful, in terms of various processes or contacts, for DFAT staff to fulfil their role. Whether that is appropriate for mission statements is a bit beyond me.

Senator KIRK—Thank you for your submission. On page 6 of your submission you recognise that state government departments are beginning to see expatriates as a possible part of the jigsaw of business and industrial development within their state. You mention the Victorian government and the Victorian Expatriate Network, and you also make mention of New South Wales and the connections that it is looking at making. You also refer to the Australian Institute of Commercialisation, which we heard from this morning. What are your views in relation to a more federal approach to this matter? We have seen the states taking up various initiatives, but do you think there is a role at a federal level and/or for the federal government to be involved in this?

Mr Havenhand—Principally that relates first to policy areas—for example, tax, superannuation, voting et cetera; federal responsibilities. There is always going to be competition between the states in terms of tapping into expat networks. When Australians go overseas, they see themselves as Australians rather than as a Queenslander, a Victorian or a Tasmanian, so their loyalties—that is not the appropriate word—would be more to Australia rather than to a particular state. Having said that, a number of premiers have launched expat groups overseas of people from their states. Queensland has been quite strong in doing that, for example, which is where the AIC initiative originally came from. Other states have not been so strong in doing that.

I will make one comment there. I suppose one danger of this is it is seen in some ways, particularly at the state level, as being something that might work really quickly, and I do not think that that is an appropriate view. Developing these sorts of policies is really a long-term thing. It is not something that is going to create 10,000 jobs before the next election, for example. The relationships that have been established and looked at now really need to be looked at on a long-term basis, in terms of both the process and the outcome. Maybe one way of merging the activities is, as I mentioned earlier, through an Internet portal that has links to all the other various government organisations and levels of government.

Senator KIRK—When you speak of this Internet portal, are you suggesting it is something that would be government sponsored? I think one of our other witnesses, Ms Douglas, made reference to that. I am not sure if you were here when she spoke of that.

Mr Havenhand—No. I guess that one level of state government see themselves as getting more out of it than the federal government in terms of, for example, economic development activities, so that all levels of government could put funding into it. But, again, it needs to really have a long-term perspective rather than a short-term perspective.

Senator KIRK—On the final page of your submission you make the point that federation fellowships and similar schemes are a good way of enabling academics to circulate without necessarily having to repatriate permanently. Have you considered whether similar schemes could be tried in other fields of endeavour?

Mr Havenhand—I have not thought of any specific fields where that would be of benefit, but I am sure that, if that was asked in some sort of environment where you had industry representatives and what have you, a lot of hands would go up to say their sector would benefit from something like that. The academic one is a little easier to work than in other areas simply because of the nature of academia, but I am sure that there are a lot of other areas where getting people to come back to give advice in various forms could work—for example, in industry and social policy.

Senator KIRK—Why do you say that it works best within the academic environment?

Mr Havenhand—The academic environment, certainly up until recent times, is a free flow of ideas. There is no ownership of ideas. Everything is out in the open. There is a lot of cooperation between academics studying in the same area from different countries, so there is much more free flow of ideas, public conferences et cetera, unlike in private industry where, if you come up

with a good idea, you want to keep it to yourself. You do not develop the relationships that exist in academia. It is a different environment.

Senator KIRK—It is something that could possibly be tried in industries?

Mr Havenhand—I think so. I am not sure if many people have tried different sorts of models. This is one of the challenges of this Senate inquiry—to look at a whole range of new ideas as to how to approach these new developments and come up with some interesting and workable ideas that will develop over time.

CHAIR—Thank you for you submission and for the copy of the book *Australian Expats*. That has been very useful to us.

Mr Havenhand—I note also that the American Citizens Abroad expat group has now launched on their web site an invitation for stories from American expats. The criteria are almost identical to the criteria that we put up on the Southern Cross Group. It is nice to know that good ideas spread. I wish the inquiry luck with all their good ideas.

CHAIR—And with yours.

[11.13 a.m.]

MERCURIO, Mr Bryan, (Private capacity)

WILLIAMS, Professor George, (Private capacity)

CHAIR—Welcome. You have lodged submission No. 286 with the committee. Do you need to amend or alter it, or would you like to start with a statement?

Prof. Williams—I will start with a brief statement. I thank the committee for the invitation to appear today. We only want to talk about one aspect of this inquiry, and that is the voting rights of expatriate Australians. In our submission we address that issue, plus we have supplied to the committee a longer version of an academic article that goes into some detail about this issue and deals with some recommendations. I would like to talk especially to that latter longer piece.

The problem is essentially that there are around 900,000 Australians overseas on any particular day, including polling day, yet few of those Australian citizens vote in elections. In 2001, for example, of those approximately 900,000 people, only 63,036 people voted, and almost all of those people were short-term visitors overseas. Only 5,822 of those people could be termed as long-term expats or people who fit within the eligible overseas elector criteria under the Commonwealth Electoral Act. We think that very small number—5,822—reflects the lack of information provided to expat Australians and also the great difficulty in navigating your way through a very complex legal regime that has not been subject at any point in its history to a thoughtful and detailed policy analysis as to what the objects are and where the balances should lie.

We think the number of people voting is a problem for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is dramatically at odds with the idea of compulsory voting in Australia—the notion that Australian citizens ought to vote. Around 95 per cent of Australian citizens within Australia enrol and actually vote in our elections, yet the number of overseas Australian citizens voting is minimal. It is also inconsistent with the emerging idea of a global Australian citizenship. For example, look at the preamble to the Australian Citizenship Act. Perhaps it is important to take seriously the idea from that act:

> ... Australian citizenship is a common bond, involving reciprocal rights and obligations, uniting all Australians, while respecting their diversity ...

We do not think that aspiration is borne out in the current electoral system in the nature of the provisions as they exist in the law and in terms of the actual outcomes of how many people vote.

The Commonwealth Electoral Act is anomalous in how it deals with the disenfranchisement of different groups. It essentially says all Australian citizens aged 18 years and older can vote, with some exceptions. Those exceptions are people of an unsound mind, people serving a term of imprisonment of five years or longer, people tainted with treason and overseas Australian citizens. It seems to us an anomalous inclusion when you look at the way the act works, given the aspirations of citizenship.

Our current regime is also at odds with more liberal regimes operating in comparable countries. The law in Australia means you have a six-year threshold. If you intend to or actually do live outside of Australia for six years or longer, you can no longer vote. There are a host of other impediments to voting that go along with that. As I have suggested, that has never been subjected to any decent analysis within the *Hansard* debates or elsewhere. It simply evolved, as we set out in our article. With a six-year threshold, we think that Australia compares unfavourably to, for example, the United Kingdom, which has a 20-year threshold; New Zealand, which says that a citizen can vote if they return to the country at any point in the previous three years, and they can return for any period of time; and the United States, where there is no time limit whatsoever on expats being able to vote. One academic study looked at 63 nations and found that a majority of those—33 of the 63—did not have any time limitations on overseas citizens being able to vote. Many of the remaining 30 nations were more liberal than the Australian regime. We think there is a problem, because our regime is one of the more restrictive in the world. That seems to me, and us, inconsistent with the sort of aspirations we have for Australian citizenship.

We recognise this is a far larger problem and there are not easy and obvious solutions, but we came up with three suggestions for the committee, which are set out in the longer paper. The first and most obvious is that there needs to be improvement in the way information is given to expat Australians about the current legal regime. Information is not easily accessible other than via the Internet, if you already know to look at the Internet. It is not provided in other obvious ways that might assist. That might involve funding issues for the Australian Electoral Commission. It also might be a matter of looking at technological advances that might make it easier for overseas Australians who are eligible to actually cast a vote.

The second short-term suggestion would be to relax the criteria within the Commonwealth Electoral Act, perhaps either to the United Kingdom level of a 20-year threshold or to the New Zealand model that says if you have returned to the country physically at any time during the prior electoral or political cycle you are entitled to vote in the next election. The third recommendation is a broader one which is perhaps beyond this particular committee, given the things it would involve, but we would advocate establishing a debate that would argue for taking the concept of citizenship more seriously than it currently is within Australian law and would reflect more accurately the preamble to the Australian citizenship legislation.

That might involve measures such as a special overseas electorate, which is achieved in other nations such as France. That could have very serious implications for the Australian electoral system and campaigning within this country, but it might be one way of balancing the problems of connection of overseas Australians on the one hand with the desire to actually give them a voice within the Australian political system on the other. That final point would also involve some difficult issues such as compulsory voting, how it would factor into overseas Australians and, indeed, whether other electronic forms of voting that might facilitate this type of voting overseas should be investigated. They are the three points. We are very happy to now answer any questions or address any further issues.

CHAIR—I will start off on the last point. It seems to me when you make the point early in your submission that the US sets no restriction on overseas voters that that may in fact have something to do with the way the US constitutional system sees the concept of citizenship. You are either born with it or you acquire it and, once you are born with it or acquire it, it cannot be

taken from you. It is an inherent constitutional right unless you go to war against the US. We do not have that same entrenchment—or do we? It has been argued from time to time, I think academically, that if you were to look at the Australian Constitution, the way it was evolved and at some of the preamble—people of Australia coming together and so on—you may in fact be able to draw a constitutional right to citizenship. However, we do not have that perception. We do not have that policy underpinning our debate on citizenship in this country. Is that one of the causes of the distinction between us and the US?

Prof. Williams—Yes, it is—and, yes, the United States has very explicit reference to the points you make, and we do not. In fact, our framers in the 1890s deliberately did not put in a reference to citizenship. Of course, we did not even have the concept of Australian citizenship until the act came in about 50 years ago. On the other hand, in terms of the way the High Court is moving, as I understand it there is at least one case before the High Court at the moment which may decide exactly those issues in terms of whether citizenship can be removed from someone, and it may well be that there is an entrenched implied right to Australian citizenship. I think that may be decided sometime in the second half of the year. There is the issue about what the law says, but I think there is a broader issue of more importance, and that is what the law ought to be, and that is the policy issue that, irrespective of what the Constitution says or does not say, there is a role for parliament to set down appropriate policy criteria and legislation—something we ought to be aspiring to—that supersedes the very bare and, I think, inadequate text of our Constitution on this issue.

CHAIR—In that context, the more I listened to you, the more I came to the conclusion that we have framed our electoral law with a different definition of an expat in mind. Maybe we framed our law when expats either went away forever or they went away for a short time and lost contact with Australia, whereas at the moment you are getting a new generation of mobile younger professionals who keep in touch through family, the Net and phone. Communication is a lot easier, they are more aware of current situations in this country and they have an interest in maintaining those cultural and personal links. They do not lose touch, whereas in the past they used to lose touch and, as a consequence, maybe what we have now is inappropriate to the modern global environment. Is that what you are thinking?

Mr Mercurio—That is exactly what we are saying. If you look back on the development of the electoral laws here, two things are clear: first, they were initially set up for temporary residents and, second—although it is not explicit—what underlines that is exactly what you have said, that longer term residents will lose touch; the longer you are overseas, the more you lose touch. In these times, of course, with the Internet, satellite, television and cheap telecommunications, that is no longer the case. I think citizens living overseas have the ability, if they want, to stay in contact with Australian society.

Prof. Williams—Perhaps I can give an example of that. You can no longer draw easy assumptions about who can stay in touch more easily than others. It may indeed be that a young Australian who has gone overseas—say, to New York—to study for a period of time is more aware and more able to be aware of current Australian events through a good Internet connection than someone who is in a remote Australian community, who does not have a decent broadband connection, who does not get the newspapers and who cannot check the Internet. Isolation can sometimes be greater internally than externally. The law does not engage with any of those things. Indeed, we can make assumptions about why it was drafted, but the fact is, when you

look at the *Hansard*, it was not thought of. There was no adequate policy analysis of what the law ought to be for these types of issues. In fact, what I think was the most recent debate gave examples primarily about diplomats and those types of issues. They did not engage at all at the idea of an Australian diaspora and did not have any recognition of its size or its significance for Australia, economically or otherwise.

CHAIR—You have a situation where the US in this environment does not require any physical connection, whereas New Zealand does. Would you be recommending to us that one or the other or a combination of both would be the appropriate model for Australia?

Mr Mercurio—In looking back at the *Hansard* in Australia, it seems quite clear that what parliamentarians were worried about was that connection—that someone must have a connection with Australia in order to keep the right to vote. In the US they clearly do not have that. In fact, yesterday I saw an article in the *New York Times* speaking of people who had moved to Mexico 50 or 60 years ago and had never been back to the US since and now were requesting for the first time a right to vote. Obviously, because of current events, they have taken an interest. I personally do not believe that is the best model. That person has clearly lost touch with the rights and privileges of citizenship. I think, again personally—and George will speak for himself on this—that the New Zealand model is probably a better model: showing close ties, one of which is returning to the country within a set period of time. I am not necessarily saying that three years, as in New Zealand, is the correct model. Maybe it should be five years, six years or longer, but that model clearly shows you still have an interest—you are going to visit at some point. That would be what I would recommend at this stage, although I do have the caveat that it should be studied in further detail and another model might end up being a better one later on.

CHAIR—In the case of the US, people vote in their electorate of birth or electorate of last registration.

Mr Mercurio—It is the electorate where they last resided and, if in fact they have not resided there, it would be the one they have the closest connection to—so where a relative would be. They will find one eventually.

Prof. Williams—Other nations go for the idea of a whole overseas electorate as a different way of dealing with that. They do not require any form of connection. They actually recognise being overseas is sufficient. But to add one thing to what Bryan has said: I also do not think the United States model is the right model for us at the moment. It is too liberal. Personally, I think that there ought to be some level of connection with Australia required, beyond mere citizenship. It may be that that will change over a generation and we will go towards an even more liberal model. For me, the question is what connection there ought to be and, in thinking about it, it ought to be something that is easy to administer. One of the problems with the current law is it is complex, bureaucratic and difficult.

Of course, we should not be unrealistic about what sort of connection is required. It should not require evaluations of connection. It should be easy to satisfy or not. In analysing those, for me that makes the New Zealand model attractive, in that someone can sign off whether they have actually visited the country during the prior electoral cycle or over a longer period of time. It is not something you would expect the electoral commissions to be verifying or not. You would sign off as a matter of course as to whether you have done it. If you have not, you are not entitled

to vote; if you have, you are. To me, that is preferable to the United Kingdom model, which has a 20-year period, which I think is too long for someone to be outside of the country without any form of return and still be able to vote. New Zealand is a good compromise for me.

Senator KIRK—Thank you both very much for your submission. I should perhaps know this, but is the six-year threshold that is currently in the act the original period of time that was specified in 1918, or has it been changed since then?

Mr Mercurio—There was no time specified, and it developed slowly, first giving the right to soldiers who were overseas. I believe that was 1953, but I need to check that. In 1983 it was a three-year right, and it was extended to six years quite recently—in 1998. The debate that Professor Williams mentioned earlier regarding diplomats was the reason for the change. A diplomat and his family had been out of the country for longer than three years and he was then struck off the roll, and the thought was that he was clearly serving his country and should not have been struck off the roll for being away for longer than three years. I can find nothing in the debates on why the six-year term was chosen.

Prof. Williams—If you look back at the act in 1918, one of the interesting things is that there has never been an explicit disqualification of overseas citizens. There has just been an assumption they could not vote, so it has never been deliberated upon. In the same way, these three- and six-year periods are still not listed as disqualifications. They do not say, 'You can't vote unless—'. What they actually say is, 'You can vote if you can fit into this special eligible overseas elector category.' That is one of the reasons it is so awkward. It is sitting there as a positive entitlement, yet underlying it is the assumption that you cannot vote otherwise. The whole law does not operate very effectively because it has never been structured to reflect a coherent policy position on behalf of the parliament.

Mr Mercurio—I think it is worth reiterating the fact that, when the law changed in 1953—which I checked and it is correct—1983, 1998 and just this year, the changes were made in response to one particular issue or problem, but there has been really no debate on the effect of that change upon other issues. The changes were made for one thing, but what effect that is going to have on other voters has not been discussed. As Professor Williams just mentioned, there is no really coherent process to determine on how one act affects the electorate as a whole.

Senator KIRK—I am not sure if you mentioned this earlier, but in the New Zealand system where does the onus lie to show that a person has returned to New Zealand within the three-year period? Does a person have to provide some documentary evidence of that? How is that policed?

Mr Mercurio—It is not specified in the act itself. Offhand, I am not entirely sure about that. I cannot answer that. I know a close friend of mine, who is a New Zealander and lives in Sydney, voted in the last New Zealand election and certainly did not have to provide evidence of returning.

Senator KIRK—I note that Professor Williams said that whatever system we have in place it should be easy to administer. That was the reason for my question. Perhaps, Professor Williams, you might be able to suggest how—assuming we do not know what happens in New Zealand, which it seems we do not at the moment—it could possibly work in Australia. Would the onus be on a person to provide the evidence? How do you see that working administratively?

Prof. Williams—I think administratively the way it would work is that someone would simply tick a box indicating that they have actually done so. The Electoral Commission may audit some of those or, if it has particular reasons to do so, it may require evidence. But otherwise I do not think there should be a requirement for evidence. I do not think you should provide an itinerary or any of those sorts of things, because in the main it is simpler just to require a declaration of someone and it would be too expensive and, in many cases, unnecessary to actually go to that level. That reflects how other areas often work. For example, if you do not vote and you are sent a letter about it, you can tick a box and indicate a particular reason. That may be checked in particular circumstances but usually it is not, because this is an area where we are talking about the rights and obligations of citizenship, and the normal assumption is that you make a statement and that is taken at face value unless there is a particular reason not to.

Senator KIRK—It may be something in the form of a statutory declaration when you make your application for the right to vote.

Prof. Williams—That may be a good way. It may be good, for example, to require a witness to that, because it adds a level of formality and makes it clear to someone that this is a document of some importance. I think it would also be a good idea to make sure that any such document is accompanied by a statement in very clear language stating the consequences of a false declaration, and penalties should be associated with that. Obviously it is a very serious offence if you cast a vote when you are not entitled to, and there may be significant fines or potentially, in the most significant cases, a criminal penalty attached. But, again, that would be as far as I would go. I think once you attach that and require a witness then you are indicating the level of severity. Of course, when you compare that type of declaration to how you enrol to vote in the first place, it is not markedly different. It is not as if you have to go through any more significant hoops to enrol in the first place, so I cannot see why you would add an extra limitation to it in terms of that sort of declaration. I think that would be very straightforward to administer. There may be funding implications as part of setting up a particular group which would look after that, but I think the biggest funding implication would be that, if you increase the number of overseas voters from 63,000 to some hundreds of thousands, taking those people seriously in ensuring their vote is counted will have a big impact in terms of the total number of votes counted at any one election. That is where the funding would need to be directed.

Senator KIRK—Yes. You mentioned a country—I cannot recall where you said this occurs—where there is the concept of an overseas electorate. Could you elaborate on that for me? Could you also inform the committee as to whether this overseas electorate actually votes for specific candidates in the parliament and whether they are in the upper or lower house?

Mr Mercurio—It depends on country. There are quite a few. Professor Williams mentioned France. Italy has one, and the Cook Islands has an electorate. It really depends upon the country. For the Cook Islands, for instance, the representative is based overseas as well. Of course, due to historical ties, it has quite a few citizens in New Zealand, so the representative is based in New Zealand. In our longer paper we go over some other countries which have that, such as Croatia. In terms of Australia, due to some provisions in the Constitution, this would have to be quite carefully scrutinised before adopting it. Professor Williams can go into more detail on the exact provisions as far as voting for senators et cetera goes.

Prof. Williams—The main answer is that there is incredible diversity.

Mr Mercurio—Yes.

Prof. Williams—In Australia, you could imagine it might amount to Senate seats, for example. You might not want any representation in the lower house, which has a particular geographic representation, whereas Senate seats have a far larger area. We have already had the territories added to the states, so there is already a constitutional decision which enables Senate seats outside of the original states. It may be that thought could be given to one senator representing overseas Australians. That might be a possible way of doing it. Other countries have a number of representatives. Other countries deal with the issue differently. New Zealand is quite a good model because the number of their voters outside New Zealand is staggeringly high. Roughly one in five of all New Zealanders live outside of the country, which is one reason they have had to deal with this issue. For us, that number is about five per cent. Still, five per cent of the electorate and how that might affect the politics of this country is a very difficult issue that needs to be worked through in detail.

I do not have a fixed view on an overseas electorate, but I do not think this is the inquiry that can address the issue. It is a much larger issue. But we wanted to float it because we felt it might be something the committee might reflect in its report. It is something which might need to be looked at in more detail, whether by this committee or the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters. It is done overseas. It works overseas. They could be looked at in detail. It is not so much the implementation of it, it is whether it is a good idea and whether in Australia we see citizenship as embodying that type of concept and whether we want to go in that direction.

Senator KIRK—That is very interesting.

Mr Mercurio—If I may add to that: the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters has discussed this issue before with regard to some specific countries, Italy being the prime example, where you do not need a continuing connection. I think that is why the committee at that stage dismissed the idea—it wanted the strong connection to Australia. Of course, those issues would have to be looked at in detail.

Senator KIRK—You made reference to a longer paper that you have. I do not seem to have it amongst my materials. I do not think that has been made available to committee members, so I ask if that can be circulated. Thank you very much for your submission.

Prof. Williams—If we can make it as part of our submission, that would make sense.

CHAIR—Yes, that is good. We might have more questions after that. I do have one before you go. There is one characteristic of our system that differentiates us from probably most other countries of the world, if not all, and that is compulsory voting. How would you propose we handle that issue in the context of the overseas constituency? Would you look at a voluntary registration but a compulsory vote after you register, or a voluntary vote, or either?

Prof. Williams—That is a tough one, because I am certainly a very strong supporter of compulsory voting. I think it is a very important part of our political system, but I recognise the great difficulties. I do not think you could apply compulsory voting in its current form to overseas electors. The impediments to doing so are too high, technologically and administratively, and also I think there are reasons why certain overseas Australian citizens

ought not be required to vote. The balance I would go for is the sort of balance you are suggesting—that is, you make a particular election for which you want to be considered as an Australian overseas elector and, if you do, you must vote. That might be a way of balancing it out. If you did not go to that level, then you might recognise this as a special exception to the rule, but I am wary about recognising exceptions that could amount to a significant percentage of the overall electorate.

CHAIR—I suppose if you went to the trouble of registering yourself, knowing that if you do not vote there is a penalty, then you are serious about maintaining the link.

Prof. Williams—It would be a pretty dumb thing, in any event, to register and then not vote. It is a technical way, but it does enable you to maintain some of the integrity of the compulsory voting system without running into the problems of trying to track down 900,000 Australians living overseas and saying, 'Why didn't you vote?' when it would never have been possible in many circumstances to do so.

CHAIR—Once again, thanks very much for your very useful submission and comments and for the time you have taken to be with us.

[11.50 a.m.]

FIELD, Professor Leslie, Professor of Organic Chemistry, University of Sydney

CHAIR—Welcome to the committee, Professor Field. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Prof. Field—Thanks very much. I am Professor of Organic Chemistry at the University of Sydney but I am representing today the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney, Professor Gavin Brown.

CHAIR—Thank you. You have lodged submission No. 468 with the committee. Do you need to amend or alter that in any way?

Prof. Field—No, it stands, thank you.

CHAIR—Would you like to start with an opening statement?

Prof. Field—Just to give an outline, the University of Sydney has been very interested in expatriate researchers now for many years and over the last two to three years now we have been running what we consider to be a relatively successful program to engage with expatriate researchers, people who are resident overseas, and tap into some of their expertise. We have regarded it very much as a pilot program, exploring whether this would be successful. Over the years that it has been running I think it has been quite successful and we have refined it in a number of different ways, which are outlined in the documents. You also have in the documents as an appendix a rather complete outcomes report of the last round of return fellowships, as we call them.

CHAIR—Going to that appraisal of the program so far, for the *Hansard* record, could you give us some of the major outcomes that you identify?

Prof. Field—Sure. As I said, we have only been running for a couple of years and we have managed to bring back two researchers in 2003 and two researchers in 2004, who are currently on the ground. The 2003 program brought back two science based people, one working in molecular electronics, which is computer memory and computer electronics, and one working in the area of astrophysics and astronomy. Both of these people we brought back to Australia for a period of three months each, and they spent a period of three months working here.

Our program works very closely with the New South Wales government Department of Education and Training, which provides a very significant outreach component for our fellows and, when they come back to Australia, part of the program involves them interacting with high school students and primary school students. That is organised through the DET in New South Wales. We consider that, having now run this for a couple of years, this has actually been one of the most important aspects of the program.

Apart from what I would call the science and technology or the research component in which the researchers actually interact with research teams in Australia, these people who have come back have been very good role models for high school and primary school students, particularly to see successful Australians in the areas of science and technology. They provide real role models for people at this early stage of their careers. That has been a very successful part of the program as well. You will see in that output report some responses from both the students and the teachers and a summary report from the DET.

From the research point of view, the researchers have led to real outcomes in Australia. The group that was involved with molecular electronics and computing has managed already to forge new links to companies in the US as a result of the visit that turned up last year. That has led to significant research grants and the potential for quite large research developments in the area of electronics and computer memory in the future. Even the couple that we have run already successfully to completion have shown benefits to the school student population and also real benefits to the research population.

CHAIR—I would like to take you back one step and look at the broader dynamics about what is happening in the research area and, I suppose, in the context of a greater capacity and interest in short-term migration and short-term business migration, research migration and so on. Do you have any idea of how this area of Australian researchers going overseas to work or to study has grown over recent years? Do we get any real idea of the magnitude of the flow? Is it one-way; is it two-way?

Prof. Field—I cannot give you a concrete answer of the magnitude of the flow. I do not have those numbers. It has always been that for people who are at a high level of research activity there has been pressure, if not a necessity, for them to gain experience outside the Australian context. It is more or less a rite of passage, as it were, for people to develop from the stage of being high-level postgraduates in an Australian university context to gain some experience overseas. Whether they want to return to Australia or not, it is valuable experience which in perhaps a European or a US or other context is much more experience than they may have access to within Australia. It has always been that there has been a flow of people to gain additional experience overseas.

I suspect that there has been an increase in the number of people who have opted to stay overseas rather than to return. If you look back 20 years, the logical thing would have been to spend three or four years overseas and then return to Australia. That is still probably the norm but you will find that there is a greater proportion of people opting to work overseas now. That is a combination of what I will call opportunity—there are opportunities particularity in some discipline areas which are just not available in Australia to further their research career and their research curriculum. Also, we are now a much more international society means that where one opts to do one's work and research does not restrict you in terms of travelling, whether you call Australia a base or whether you call the base the UK or Europe or the USA. It really is a base, and from a technological point of view or a research point of view, it is very international. I think the pressures to come back to Australia are perhaps lessened because of that internationalisation.

CHAIR—I suppose we do have a very competitive international market where, if someone does show some talent in a particular location, there are greater incentives for them now to stay

there, and fewer problems with migration requirements in many of the countries, particularly in our region.

Prof. Field—Correct, yes. I agree with that.

CHAIR—We have talked about one program, your program. I have mentioned earlier an initiative jointly from the Cheung Kong group in Hong Kong with the Australian government, which was basically a short-term placement of something like 50 researchers—25 from Australia into the Asian region, and 25 from the Asian region into Australia. Is there scope for greater private sector engagement in research scholarship programs like this, given that they probably are the major beneficiaries at the end of the day?

Prof. Field—Yes, I think that is quite true. There is a difference between what I would call short-term placements—sending somebody overseas for a number of years and accepting people from overseas for a number of years—to the sort of program that we have been involved in, which is really trying to engage actively with people who are real Australians and wish to be identified as real Australians but, for one reason or another, opt to live overseas, whether it is for professional reasons or personal reasons or because the salary that they get is better, and being able to tap into their expertise and bring it back into Australia or at least engage with it, so that we can draw on it.

I think the private sector would have just as much interest in that as we do as a university sector or research sector. In fact, I believe that they probably are engaging in this all the time, in terms of both placing their people overseas for extended periods of experience and then bringing them back again.

CHAIR—Is there a threshold issue: the question of identifying the researchers, where they are, communicating with them? Is there any way that an awareness can be increased or identification can be enhanced by any role government can play, for instance, or any other mechanism that is not currently in place?

Prof. Field—The communication—maintaining or establishing contact—is a very important issue. Over the couple of years that we have been running this particular initiative and other initiatives that we have in the pipeline at the moment, you will see in our submission we mention the fact that we have proposed a network called the Network of Expatriate Australian Researchers, NEAR. Having put that proposal together, it is very evident that there are many expatriate Australian researchers who are literally desperate to maintain contact, both with researchers in Australia and with each other while they are overseas.

The second point I made—that is, maintaining contact with each other overseas—impacts primarily on what I will call a mentoring or introduction role particularly. One finds that people who have established themselves overseas act as very good points of contact for people who wish to establish themselves overseas or even just to find out what it is like to undertake research in another environment. As well as the flow to Australia, there is a big benefit in establishing a mechanism by which our expatriates can communicate and be aware of each other.

Senator KIRK—Thank you for your submission, Professor Field. I have a few questions in relation to the New South Wales expatriate return award scheme. According to your submission, so far four researchers have returned to Australia for short terms.

Prof. Field—Yes.

Senator KIRK—How many applicants do you have for the various positions and do those numbers reflect the sorts of numbers that you expected to receive?

Prof. Field—We had of the order of 40 or 50 applicants for each of those rounds and we made two offers each round. I believe the numbers reflect the fact that it was run at rather short notice and we did not have the time to establish this in terms of disseminating the information. Nevertheless, we had 40 to 50 applicants of exceptional quality from all over the world for these two rounds. If we were to continue the program—and we are expecting to do so—such that it was established and it became known that it was running, rather than being a one-off set of scholarships, then I think our penetration would be a lot more.

As I said, at the moment we are only in a situation to offer a couple of these fellowships, so the fact that we have 40 or 50 applicants is more than enough for us to deal with. But I think the demand is a lot higher than that.

Senator KIRK—At present is the category of research limited to science or has it been expanded to all disciplines?

Prof. Field—We have now expanded it to all disciplines. The first round that we had was definitely limited to the science and technology arena. The second round that we ran, we expanded it so we would take researchers from any discipline. That meant that we could engage with people in the humanities, the social sciences, the arts or the medical disciplines. As it turns out, the two we awarded this year were still in what I will call the science and technology area. One of them was in robotics and one of them was in diseases of livestock, so it is an agricultural thing.

Senator KIRK—Presently the term of the placement is for three months. Is that correct?

Prof. Field—Up to three months. Three months is the norm. To get a commitment from somebody who is a relatively high-profile person—which is what we are attracting—three months seems to be the period that they are comfortable with. If we manage to expand the program significantly, which is what we would like to do, one of the things we definitely want to do is to enable multiple visits so that people could come back in two or three successive years for a period of three months, or maybe every second year for a couple of years. This is really to consolidate the research effort or the research contacts that people have made.

With the limited number of fellowships that we can afford to offer at the present time, that will not happen, but one of the things that is definitely on the cards is to expand it so that we can get multiple visits, because we think the benefit will be there.

Senator KIRK—You mentioned about collaborative research. Has there been any evidence of collaborative research out of the four you have so far funded? How is this monitored and what sorts of standards or guidelines are in place?

Prof. Field—The only evidence that I can point to at the moment is the fact that we do have from the first round of visits, which were two people, a collaborative grant with the US involving researchers from Australia, with a US based company, directly coming out of that period where the US researcher was in Australia. In monetary terms it has probably paid for the investment that we have made as the University of Sydney already. The potential returns are that we are looking at a three to five-year grant, three to five-year research program, which is quite a large research program spinning out of that original research program.

We believe establishing contacts for Australian researchers, either with overseas companies or with overseas research groups in an ongoing way, is the sort of real multiplier that we are likely to get out of the three months that these researchers spend here. At least up until now, with our fellowships program, we have used that as one of the criteria for making the awards. In other words, we are looking at people who have the potential to establish a strong collaborative link.

That also means that we are screening, scrutinising, the researchers here in Australia as well, to make sure that the groups to which the overseas researchers come are established; they have the capacity to interact with somebody of the calibre that is coming in and likely to produce good results. I think both the researchers that we have this year—one in robotics and one in the veterinary sciences—have that potential.

Senator KIRK—Were the successful applicants for your scheme also applicants for the federation fellowships or are you tapping into a different market there?

Prof. Field—I think it is a different market. I do not know the answer. I do not know whether they were applicants for federation fellowships, but they are not, to my knowledge. I believe it is a different market. The Federation Fellowship scheme is looking for a long-term commitment; for somebody to come back to Australia for five years and beyond. The federation fellowships are for five years and usually people who have taken them up, to my knowledge, have been people who have a long-term commitment. They will come here for five years initially and then stay on. They are intending to establish themselves in Australia and stay and establish a research program here.

I will not say that the people we have attracted so far have no intention of coming back to Australia, but that is definitely not on their immediate horizon. They are established in very high-profile, good positions overseas and looking for the opportunity to come back, collaborate and establish links with Australians back here. I think it is a different market.

Senator KIRK—You mention the submission you have made to the ARC for funds to set up the NEAR project, as it is called.

Prof. Field—Yes.

Senator KIRK—Has that ARC funding been determined yet?

Prof. Field—No, it has not been announced.

Senator KIRK—Is the NEAR network a different scheme to the pilot program that you have been running?

Prof. Field—Yes, it is a different program, but it builds on what I will call the successful principles, the ones we have really talked about so far. It still has as one of its main planks a return fellowship program. The return fellowship program would be Australia-wide rather than just the University of Sydney. The idea is that it would engage across the country, rather than just here. Our proposal was to bring back between 20 and 40 fellows a year for periods of three months to manage that.

The NEAR proposal has a significant outreach component, because of the success that has had. The NEAR proposal also has the infrastructure in place to make contact with expatriate researchers. It will build up things like databases and communication networks, so that we can identify and put people in contact with each other. Those are the three main platforms of the NEAR proposal. It is at least in order of magnitude larger, maybe small, or maybe more than that, than the pilot program we have been running.

It will engage a lot of the expatriate networks which are already out there and working in different arenas, not necessarily in the research arena. It will give an umbrella under which those various networks which are already active can engage with each other and also with the expatriate researchers.

Senator KIRK—Of the four successful applicants you have had so far, do you have a breakdown of their gender?

Prof. Field—They have all been male. For one reason or another, the applications we have had have been overwhelmingly male. There would have been about 10 per cent, I would say, of female applicants. I cannot give you an explanation for that.

Senator KIRK—Does that reflect the fact that more males than females are likely to travel overseas to take up these high-profile jobs or does it just reflect the structure of the research community?

Prof. Field—It could reflect either of those two and it may also reflect the desire or ability of the female applicants to take up a three-month appointment, although our appointments do support the family to come with the applicant. Our fellowships provide travel and accommodation for the researcher, plus his or her family, to come here. It could also reflect the science and technology base that we had in the first instance, where the research community may well be more male dominated. There is no logical reason yet.

I would like to think that, if we can establish this as something which will continue so that we are able to set a timetable where people will know ahead of time that we will be running a round in 2005 or 2006, that will allow people more time to plan. At the moment the two rounds that we have run have all had relatively short saturation periods, as I mentioned before; a matter of a month or two. A couple of months may not have been the appropriate length of time for people

to think about things, but if they knew it was coming next year or the year after, that may also be more able to accommodate people.

Senator KIRK—Thank you.

CHAIR—You have told us that guidelines of the ARC Linkages International program have been changed to better accommodate your program.

Prof. Field—Yes.

CHAIR—Is there any ongoing work that needs to be done there or are there any other programs that you are also trying to access that need changes in their guidelines or would you like to take that on notice?

Prof. Field—I can take it on notice. But I can tell you that the Queensland government have actually taken up what I will call the important aspects of the fellowship scheme that we have been running. They have literally just announced a fellowship scheme which they will run in Queensland, which will run along similar lines to the ones that we have run here. The New South Wales state government have also indicated that they are very interested in continuing the program perhaps as part of one of their existing programs. That is still being worked through.

From the federal point of view, the ARC does have the international linkages program, but that did have some structural problems with it which did not really allow you to do the three-month stint that we are talking about. It did not allow you to bring with you the family and pay an allowance for somebody to be here. The linkages program definitely is one that does have the possibility of some change to better accommodate the sort of expatriate cohort that we are focusing on. I am not aware of any other federal programs or state programs.

CHAIR—You mentioned CSIRO has dropped out.

Prof. Field—Yes. 'Dropped out' is probably wrong. They were active participants at the inception of this program. They were active participants at the table. There is no reason whatsoever that they should not be active participants because they, just like a university research establishment, should gain the same sorts of benefits out of having strong links to expatriates.

The CSIRO at a high level have signed on to being a supporter of the NEAR proposal. Should it go ahead, they will be an active supporter at that stage. But at least in the early stages when it came to putting together a budget, CSIRO were not in a position to support us for the first couple of rounds. The University of Sydney ran by itself with the DET—the New South Wales Department of Education and Training—providing some support and very much logistical support for the outreach program to the schools, which I think has had a remarkable impact.

CHAIR—Thank you and good luck with the program. Thanks very much for your shared experience this morning.

Prof. Field—Thank you very much.

CHAIR—I thank all the other witnesses and close today's hearing.

Committee adjourned at 12.17 p.m.