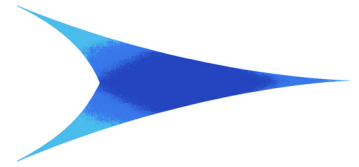


# The Southern Cross Group

Promoting Mobility in the Global Community  
[www.southern-cross-group.org](http://www.southern-cross-group.org)



## MEDIA RELEASE

### Changes Needed in Electoral Education for Expats

The Southern Cross Group (SCG) today called on all Australian citizens abroad to contribute their views and experiences to a federal parliamentary inquiry into civics and electoral education. The deadline for submissions is **Friday 2 June 2006**.

The full terms of reference for the inquiry, which is being conducted by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (JSCEM), can be viewed at:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/em/education/tor.htm>

They include "the current status of young people's knowledge of, and responsibilities under, the Australian electoral system" and the "adequacy of electoral education".

The SCG's Australian Co-ordinator John MacGregor made the point that Australians about to move overseas, and those who recently moved overseas, do not in general understand that it is very easy for them to lose their right to vote in Australian elections. Voting is not compulsory for overseas Australians, but many expatriates do want to participate in Australia's democratic processes from abroad and some find that they are legally prevented from doing so.

"A much clearer message needs to be communicated by government agencies", Mr MacGregor said. "People leaving Australia need to be told in no uncertain terms: if you don't fill out and send in the right AEC form within three years of moving to live overseas, it is extremely likely that you will become disenfranchised for the entire period that you live abroad."

Once an Australian citizen living abroad has been deleted from the electoral roll, the law presently states that they can only re-enrol from abroad if they do so within three years of their move overseas.

Mr MacGregor said that thousands of overseas Australians had been erased from the electoral roll at some stage by the AEC as part of its regular checks since their departure and were now legally prevented from re-enrolling while they remained overseas.

The SCG has been advocating amendments to the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* for some years to remedy this situation. However, it is of the view that even within the framework of the law as it stands today, federal government agencies could be doing a great deal more by way of electoral education to assist overseas Australians and those about to move abroad to stay enfranchised while abroad. The SCG has recently had preliminary discussions with the AEC in Canberra as to the avenues that might be usefully pursued to increase awareness. For a number of years the SCG has been widely circulating its own explanatory "*What you need to know*" brochure, available on its website:

[http://www.southern-cross-group.org/archives/Overseas%20Voting/2006/Brochure\\_Expats\\_Voting\\_April\\_2006.pdf](http://www.southern-cross-group.org/archives/Overseas%20Voting/2006/Brochure_Expats_Voting_April_2006.pdf)

"This timely JSCEM inquiry into electoral education provides an important opportunity for those in the Australian diaspora to provide individual feedback as to their experiences on the availability of information on enrolment and voting and their interactions with the Australian electoral system from abroad," Mr MacGregor said.

Submissions to the JSCEM inquiry by the **deadline of Friday 2 June 2006** can be made by e-mail, fax or post:

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters  
Department of House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

Phone: 61 2 6277 2374  
Fax: 61 2 6277 4710  
e-mail: [jscem@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscem@aph.gov.au)

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The Southern Cross Group is a global non-profit volunteer-run advocacy and support organisation for the Australian diaspora.

17 May 2006