

Annex 8

Suggested Electoral Education Outreach Strategies for Eligible Voters Leaving Australia and Already Abroad

1. Early Warnings in the Pre-Departure Weeks/Months

Develop an AEC brochure entitled "Going Overseas?" which essentially contains the information on the existing AEC "Going Overseas" A4-size Fact Sheet, but in brochure format and with some enhancements. For those going overseas longer-term, the fact that Eligible Overseas Elector (EOE) status can only be applied for the in three months prior to departure or within three years of ceasing to reside in Australia should be made very clear. The material should contain a strong warning that unless the eligible voter takes the time to properly consider the electoral options available to Australians going overseas, and acts appropriately, he or she may have their name removed from the roll, and that this in turn could lead to a loss of the right to vote for the rest of the period they remain abroad. Individuals should be referred to the AEC website for the latest versions of relevant forms and related instructions.

1.1 Brochure Dissemination

The "Going Overseas?" AEC brochure should be made available at:

- The AEC website
- All Australian Post Offices alongside passport application forms
- Counters where International Driving Permits are issued (NRMA, RAASA, RACV, RACQ, RACWA, RACT, AANT)
- Public libraries
- Government shopfronts
- Student Union areas at all Australian universities and other higher education institutions
- Youth and other community centres and clubs
- Travel fairs and international job expos

1.2 Liaison with and Dissemination of Brochure via Pre-Departure Service Providers

In addition, the AEC should liaise with:

- the consular authorities in Australia from the main countries to which Australians travel, with a view to having the brochure provided to any adult Australian who is issued a visa or passport by those authorities
- the Australian Federation of Travel Agents (AFTA) with a view to having the brochure included by all travel agents with international airline tickets that are issued to adult Australian citizens, and links to the brochure on the AEC website displayed on the major online travel retail sites
- the Australian International Movers Association (AIMA) and the Australian Furniture Removers Association (AFRA) with a view to having all removal companies include the AEC brochure in the documentation they provide to Australian clients moving abroad
- the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI), with a view to having HR professionals in the private sector provide the brochure to Australians going abroad on intra-company transfers
- the Recruitment and Consulting Services Association Ltd (RSCA) with a view to recruitment agents distributing the brochure to Australians for whom they provide international job placement services
- Youth Hostel Association of Australia (YHA), with a view to having the brochure distributed to Australians joining YHA or renewing their membership
- STA Travel, as the major issuer of International Student Identity Cards (ISIC), International Teacher Identity Cards (ITIC) and International Youth Identity Cards (IYIC) in Australia, to the extent not already covered through AFTA
- The Board of Airline Representatives of Australia (BARA) with a view to having international airlines operating to and from Australia provide the brochure in hard copy or electronic form when they issue paper tickets or e-tickets to Australian citizens in Australia without travel agent intermediaries

Many of the abovementioned trade associations will have newsletters or magazines in which articles/advertisements could be placed to alert the providers of pre-departure services to Australians of important information they should be passing on to their clients. The AEC may also be able to place website advertising on the websites of these trade associations and many of their member companies.

1.3 AEC/DFAT Co-operation

The AEC "Going Overseas?" brochure should be available wherever passport application forms are available, both in Australia and abroad. DFAT or Post Office staff conducting the initial passport interview should be trained to check that the applicant has a copy of the AEC brochure and to stress its importance. The brochure should be included with all passports issued by DFAT.

Liaison should occur between the AEC and DFAT to amend the section on voting in the DFAT brochure entitled *Living and Working Overseas*¹ to emphasise:

- The three-year EOE registration limitation
- The "Use it or lose it" conditions of EOE registration, despite the fact voting is technically voluntary as an EOE
- The fact that conscious removal from the electoral roll at the time of departure for tax status or other reasons will mean that the person cannot re-enrol from abroad after three years from the date of departure
- That it is essential to consult the AEC website on the electoral options available to overseas Australians at the earliest possible stage to avoid the possibility of disenfranchisement or fines

Similarly, the information in the current version of the DFAT booklet *Hints for Australian Travellers*² issued with all passports presently has only a few lines on voting overseas:

Contact your local office of the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) about voting overseas. Further information is available on the AEC website at www.aec.gov.au

This could be expanded to transmit the basic message that voting is voluntary while abroad, but that people are nevertheless encouraged to vote, although this may not be necessary if a separate, more comprehensive AEC brochure is indeed provided with all new passports.

¹ www.smartraveller.gov.au/tips/working_os.html
² www.smartraveller.gov.au/hints/hints4aust-travellers0106.pdf

2. Electoral Education at the Point of Departure

It will probably be appropriate to develop a slightly different AEC brochure to that used during the pre-departure weeks and months described above. The brochure for distribution solely at international departure terminals could address the fact that the person is about to leave the country, and could include a short message from a non-political but respected figure, such as the Governor-General, wishing the person an enjoyable and safe trip, and stressing that voting from abroad is an important way of contributing to Australia's future even while away.

This brochure should be handed to departing Australians at check-in and briefly explained when they receive their boarding pass and Outgoing Passenger Card.

It should include a detachable (and improved) version of the AEC's "Overseas Notification Form" that can be filled in on the spot and deposited in appropriately placed collection boxes, e.g. in the immigration area, and at gate lounges and Customs GST refund counters. It should also be franked with an international reply paid freepost stamp so that if people do not put it in a collection box, it can be posted back without complication from overseas.

Collection boxes should be placed in front of large AEC posters and be readily visible.

This strategy is more fully described at pages 36-38 of the Southern Cross Group's Primary Submission document.

3. Ongoing Outreach Efforts into the Diaspora

3.1 Reaching Expatriate Australians Through Australians at Home

Overseas Australians can at least in part be reached through their parents, siblings, other relatives and friends in Australia. As a matter of policy, any AEC campaigns directed at the resident Australian population should always include a message along the lines:

If you have an Australian-citizen family-member or friend currently living overseas, you should alert them to check the AEC website about their electoral rights and responsibilities as an expatriate Australian.

This message should in particular be part of all domestic campaigns that the AEC intends to conduct from early 2007 to alert people to the changes in date of roll closure flowing from the passage of the *Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Bill 2005*.

3.2 Welcoming Overseas Australians on the AEC's Home Page

As suggested on page 50 of the SCG's Primary Submission document, the home page of the AEC website should carry a prominent link directed at those abroad or about to go abroad to take them directly to the information they need.

3.3 Permanent Provision of Information in Public Areas of all Australian Missions Overseas

As a matter of policy, the public areas/foyers/reading rooms of all Australian diplomatic posts abroad should permanently display a poster aimed at overseas eligible voters, placed close to a stock of AEC brochures. These would then be available for any Australians who went to the post for any reason: e.g. to obtain a new passport, to register a child born abroad, to have documents witnessed, to attend social drinks nights or other local functions held at the post.

3.4 Advertisements in Foreign Newspapers, In-Flight Magazines and Expatriate Publications

At an appropriate interval before an expected election, sufficiently in advance of the date of roll closure, the AEC should place advertisements in major national newspapers and expatriate publications in those countries where there is a large number of Australian citizens

in residence. The advertisement should carry advice on enrolment and postal vote arrangements. They would need to cover both EOE's, and short term travellers and tourists.

The AEC should also place material, either in the form of advertisements or inlays, in the in-flight magazines of the airlines that carry the greatest numbers of Australians abroad, e.g. Qantas, British Airways, etc.

3.5 E-mail Bulletins to Expatriate Australians

The AEC should use the e-mail addresses provided by overseas Australians on EOE forms and Overseas Notification Forms to provide timely information at low cost. Although not all applicants provide an e-mail address, many do. Perhaps AEC forms could encourage the giving of web-based addresses, such as hotmail, yahoo and gmail.

As noted on page 50 of the SCG's Primary Submission document, overseas Australians could be encouraged to sign up to a special mailing list for expatriates on the AEC website.

At the time that the AEC places advertisements in overseas newspapers, an e-mail bulletin could be sent out to this subscriber list setting out the matters covered in the newspaper advertisements.

DFAT's register of overseas Australians should also be used to e-mail people during the pre-election phase but before an election is called, so as to allow time for enrolment updates, as it was before the 2004 election (see page 47 of the SCG's Primary Submission document).

Spam blockers applied by many internet service providers (ISPs) and/or organizations within which overseas Australians are employed or studying may block messages transmitted to many addressees at the same time. Recipients will need to be aware that they should take action to ensure that AEC messages are not classified as spam.

3.6 Enhanced and Constant Co-operation with Australian Expatriate Organisations

The AEC should adopt a policy of maintaining a current list of e-mail addresses for Australian expatriate organisations around the world in order to send those organisations e-mails on legislative changes, forthcoming elections, postal voting procedures, etc, or at least directing the attention of the organisation, and through them their members, to the location of the information on the AEC website.

These organisations should be provided with copies of AEC material to put out at all their local functions, and asked to include updates in their electronic and hard-copy newsletters and on their websites.

Australian university alumni organisations should also be liaised with in view of the fact that many of their former Australian-citizen students are part of alumni organisations. Various Australian professional organisations such as CPA Australia also have substantial expatriate alumni numbers.

3.7 AEC Presence at Major Overseas Events with High Expatriate Interest

In overseas locations where the density of resident Australians is significant (e.g. London, New York, Hong Kong, New Zealand), the AEC should aim to be present at major events where large number of Australians, particularly Australian youth are going to be in attendance. Similar to the "Rock Enrol" initiative in conjunction with Triple J in 2004, it would be possible to encourage enrolment and registration as an EOE at such events. They would include:

- Sporting events abroad where Australia is playing (the Ashes, the World Cup, Rugby, etc)
- Cultural events where Australia is showcased (e.g. the Toast event in London)
- ANZAC Day and Australia Day events abroad in major centres
- Rock concerts and other performances abroad by leading Australian artists

3.8 AEC Telephone Information Line Accessible from Overseas

From some countries, the AEC's 13 23 26 information line may not be accessible simply by putting the international +61 code in front of the number. From those countries where there are the greatest numbers of expatriate Australians, it should be possible to call the AEC for the cost of a local call, and this help line should be open not just during Australian business hours but 24 hours.