



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

**Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade**  
**Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee**

*Chair: Mr Michael Danby MP*  
*Sub-Committee Chair: Mr Nick*  
*Champion MP*

**MEDIA RELEASE**

29 October 2012

## **Australia's overseas representation "seriously deficient" & punching below our weight**

A parliamentary inquiry has found Australia's representation overseas through the diplomatic network is seriously deficient and does not reflect Australia's true international standing. It has called for an increase of at least 20 diplomatic posts to bring Australia to a level commensurate with its position within the G20 and OECD.

Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade has tabled its report on the year-long inquiry into Australia's overseas representation recommending increased funding to redress the situation and an external review of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Foreign Affairs sub-committee chair, Mr Nick Champion MP, said the inquiry had found there to be no overall strategy for Australia's diplomatic engagement with the world or any criteria for establishing, continuing, or closing the diplomatic posts.

"To address this deficiency, the committee has recommended that the Government produce a White Paper to set the agenda for Australia's entire government overseas representation," Mr Champion said.

According to the Lowy Institute, the average number of diplomatic posts per OECD country is 133. Australia has just 95 and sits at 25th of the 34 nations of the OECD in its league table of diplomatic representation.

"Australia has the smallest diplomatic network of the G20 countries and is clearly punching below its weight," said Mr Champion, "In the longer term, funding to DFAT should be increased to a set percentage of gross domestic product sufficient to reflect Australia's standing as a middle power."

The committee has recommended that the budget priority for overseas representation should be significantly raised because of the benefits that accrue from diplomacy.

"Issues relating to the effect of recent funding cuts on overall effectiveness, resource allocation and the number and performance of locally engaged staff would benefit from further examination," said Mr Champion, "An external review would see canvassing of new ideas, community engagement, and modify inaccurate perceptions of DFAT's work."

Other recommendations of the committee include:

- funding the ever increasing demand for consular services from Australians who travel abroad, in part from revenue sources such as increased passport fees and a small tiered levy, structured to take into account those Australians who have taken out travelling insurance or who are unable to obtain travel insurance;

- that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Austrade broaden their contacts with Australian business boardrooms to deepen understanding of how the Department and Austrade can assist in facilitating their overseas activities;
- placing on the COAG agenda discussion of the location, coordination and effective use of State and Commonwealth overseas trade representatives;
- the creation within AusAID of a mediation unit to reduce the potential need for aid and rebuilding assistance by preventing conflict; and
- establishing an office of e-diplomacy within DFAT to harness the potential and deal with the challenges of e-diplomacy, particularly in light of the constantly evolving nature of this technology.

“The Committee recognises the valuable activities undertaken abroad by Australia’s representatives in promoting Australia’s interests, trade opportunities, and providing consular assistance to Australians abroad,” said Mr Champion,

“Nevertheless, the operations of our diplomatic network are being challenged by a lack of funding, the growth and development of Australia’s economy, the shift of global power towards Asia, the impact of technology, and the rising importance of public diplomacy.”

“This report along with recent reports by the Lowy Institute highlights the urgent need to rebuild Australia’s diplomatic network and enhance our international standing. Our diplomatic network must be resourced to grow if Australia is to again punch above its weight in the world,” Mr Champion concluded.

There will be a media conference in Committee Room 1R1 in Parliament House commencing at 12.15 pm.

The media conference will be webcast on: <http://webcast.aph.gov.au/live>

Copies of the report will be available online after tabling at the inquiry website at [http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/House\\_of\\_Representatives\\_Committees?url=jfadt/overseas%20representation](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=jfadt/overseas%20representation)

**For media inquiries** contact the Sub-Committee Chair, Mr Nick Champion MP on (08) 8284 2422; Mobile: 0488 556 036.

**For all other inquiries** contact the Inquiry Secretary, John Carter, on (02) 6277 2313 or visit the Committee website.