

The Secretariat
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
Room S1.61, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

3rd February, 2004

Dear Sirs

Inquiry into Australian Expatriates

I moved from Sydney to London 6 years ago. I now work here as a lawyer, and am married to an Englishwoman. We had a baby here 9 months ago.

I originally left Sydney for career reasons. Although I had received what I still believe was a truly world-class law degree from UNSW, I did not feel that the economy in Australia offered me the opportunities to do the kind of work I was seeking. In the simplest terms, there are many more lawyers per business dollar in Australia than there are in the UK. The effect of this is that as a junior professional, responsibility and career advancement is harder to come by in the Australian market. Similarly, the opportunity for international work in the Australian market is very limited. Even if the Australian Government were kind enough to want to keep me at home, I'm not sure there's much the Senate Committee could do to address these issues!

Perhaps it is the distortion of local newspapers, but the more time I spend outside Australia, the harder I find it to want to share an electorate, an economy and a society with fellow citizens who vote for the Prime Minister's stated positions on matters such as asylum and reconciliation with our native people. It is all very well to accuse the people of the United States of being insular and parochial, but to do so assumes that the opinion of the outside world can be a valid criticism of one country's internal politics. The opinion of most first-world countries is firmly opposed to the Australian Federal Government's position on these matters. So is mine. Mr Howard may believe that I am in no position to comment, as I am not immediately affected by the issues in question. That is true, but as an Australian with the advantage of six years of viewing these policies from afar, I also feel I have some protection from the allure of populism. Quite simply, it is difficult enough to have to explain to my English peers why a country as rich and educated as Australia needs to take such a mean view on these issues. I would find it much more difficult to bring my daughter up in a society with these values.

May I express my thanks to the Committee for its interest in the views of expatriate Australians.

Respectfully yours

Tom Levine