



OneWorld Communications, Inc.

The Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

February 25, 2004

Submission to Inquiry into Australian Expatriates

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am an Aussie born in Melbourne. After working as a photographer for *The Age* newspaper for nine years, I took leave of absence for one year to gain more experience in color and magazine work in Europe. Well, 5 years later I was still living and working in Rome having had some great assignments traveling to many countries for the UN agency FAO, Food and Agricultural Organization, among other clients (my story is up on the Southern Cross website: <http://www.southern-cross-group.org>).

I met my American husband to be at an Italian class and in 1989 with twin babies, we arrived in Nairobi for an assignment for the UN. Eight years later we were still in Africa, both of us having traveled to far flung places, gaining much appreciation for different lifestyles and cultures. As a photojournalist, this period in my life is very important to me. The bottom line is if I hadn't made that leap, scary as it was, into an unknown country way back in '89 – I would never have had the experiences I've had.

But all of this has come at a price. For instance, I had no idea when I left Australia that being away for more than 2 years, would mean I lost the right to vote. In the USA, you never lose the right to vote. I tried very hard to get back on the electoral roll, but was never back in Australia long enough. I have followed closely the political scene in Australia and feel at loss that I have lost this birthright. There should be more information available at the ports of departure.

Before settling into San Francisco, I tried hard to convince my American husband that Australia was the place to settle and build a business after we left Africa in 1998 – but unfortunately he felt Australia would not offer the opportunities to do business with state and federal government agencies and the non profit sectors which is what our marketing and advertising agency depends on.

I hope that one day, we may be able to settle into Australia – I would love my sons to attend University there. Of course after all this time away, it will be hard to settle in to what I perceive as a very different culture to America (I just hope it hasn't changed!)

Beyond this, I think expats need access to more information on the social security and taxation issues between Australia and other countries. And finally, it is vital that Australians understand and appreciate the benefits those who have left its shores can bring; in reality we still hold deep connections to this wonderful country.

Fiona McDougall (Villet)

P.S. Thank god for www.southern-cross-group.org!