

Australia's honorary consuls

To cope with the pressures of increasing consular demands from Australian citizens in cities overseas where Australia does not have foreign missions, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Senator Gareth Evans, has initiated the development of an honorary consuls pilot program

The past decade has seen a steady increase in the number of Australians travelling overseas, an increase in the cost of providing consular services in centres distant from Australia's established missions and a lack of resources in friendly missions to handle Australian consular cases in cities where Australia is not represented.

The pilot program began in July 1989 with the appointment of the Honorary Consul in Lae, Papua New Guinea. Barcelona, Bogota, Kuching, Managua, Papeete, and Sao Paolo were other locations chosen for the program.

The choice of locations was designed to expose the system to a range of consular scenarios and was in no way intended to ascribe a hierarchy of importance to Australia's interests in various parts of the world. Lae, for example, is a post with a large concentration of expatriates; Barcelona is a post with a large seasonal, transient population; Managua is a location which staff from the accredited mission in Mexico City, have difficulty reaching and in which there is no consular support available from traditional friendly missions.

Trade opportunities were a further factor in selecting locations.

The functions of an honorary consul are:

(a) to provide assistance and protection to Australian citizens in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Australian Consular Instructions and in consultation with the supervising Australian post. This involves among other things:

- providing consular assistance on behalf of the supervising mission as requested in relation to the arrest, imprisonment, extradition, repatriation, evacuation or death of Australian citizens;
- providing passport and visitor visa application forms to the public on behalf of the supervising mission. Performing certain identity checks in relation to visitor visa or passport applicants as requested by the supervising missions. Forwarding completed documentation to the supervising mission and returning passports to applicants (but not issuing passports or visas);
- disseminating information on migration to Australia including the preliminary enquiry form. And receiving and passing on to the supervising post, requests for the migration visa application package;
- maintaining in some instances a register of Australian citizens resident in, or visiting, the consular district;
- making relief advances to distressed Australians;
- in some areas providing consular assistance of the type described above to citizens of other Commonwealth countries, including the UK and Canada, which provide consular assistance to Australian citizens in other parts of the world;

(b) to assist in furthering Australian commercial interests in their consular district;

(c) to assist in furthering Australian cultural, educational, scientific and technological interests in their consular district;

(d) to assist in furthering general public awareness of Australia in their consular district through, for example, the dissemination of information on Australia;

(e) to engage in ceremonial and public affairs activities as a representative of Australia as requested or authorised by the supervising mission;

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- (f) to assist in making administrative arrangements for visiting Australian officials;
- (g) to maintain contact with the resident Australian community;
- (h) to maintain good relations with the host government and local authorities, in particular those branches of the host government most relevant to Australia's consular and other interests.

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Consulates headed by honorary consuls have similar status in international law to those staffed by career consuls. Article 5 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations (VCCR) lists a number of specific functions which all consuls (honorary or career) may perform. However, it is not intended that Australia's honorary consuls should issue passports and visas (Article 5(d)) or extend legal representation to Australian citizens (Article 5(i)).

Australia's honorary consuls are chosen from people of good standing and reputation in the local community, with demonstrated access to local authorities or a known ability to maintain good relations with government officials. They are preferably Australian citizens, but non-Australians who have strong personal or commercial links with Australia are considered.

Honorary consuls are people of independent means whose normal employment leaves them sufficient time to perform the work envisaged in a manner consistent with Departmental standards and the reasonable expectations of Australians who might seek consular assistance.

Honorary consuls can serve Australia's interests in the field of trade as well as in helping Australian travellers and appointees are normally people with business skills and contacts.

Honorary consuls work under the supervision of the nearest career service mission; for example the Honorary Consul in Lae works to the mission in Port Moresby.

Honorary consuls receive an honorarium plus reimbursement for reasonable and appropriate expenditure on consular business conducted on behalf of their supervising mission.

Many countries, including the UK, Canada and the Nordic and EEC Countries, have a long established practice of appointing honorary consuls, whom they find to be a useful and inexpensive addition to their representation in areas where the criteria for a mission staffed by home-based officers cannot be met.

The appointment of honorary consuls under the pilot scheme has enlarged the Australian consular service and enhanced prospects for trade promotion at minimal cost. The scheme will be reviewed in December 1990.

The following list shows honorary consuls appointed at present:

Location	Name	Address	Tel No./Fax	Super- vising Post
Barcelona Spain	Mr Jose Maria Figueras	9th Floor Gran Via Carlos 111 No 98 Barcelona 08028	Tel 330-9496 Fax 411-0904	Madrid
Bogota Colombia	Dr Dario Cardenas	Edificio Seguros Aurora Carrera 7, No 74-21 Bogota, Colombia	Tel 212-5300 Telex 44-461 Fax 211-44423	Caracas