

**NEWSFEED**

## Thousands respond to child support survey

Almost 10,000 people have responded to a parliamentary inquiry's call for feedback by participating in a questionnaire about Australia's child support system.

The House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee is examining how the scheme works and whether it could be improved, especially for high-conflict families.

Around 40 per cent of respondents are aged between 36 and 45, and roughly the same numbers of women and men have participated so far.

The committee is publishing on its website a 'snapshot' of some of the themes arising from the survey responses, the first of which is 'negotiation'.



Committee chair George Christensen (Dawson, Qld) said responses related to negotiation show a broad range of experiences with the Child Support Program.

"We want to give people an idea of the stories and experiences that people are telling us, and as time goes on, we will publish more summaries with other themes," he said.

Examples published in the snapshot include, "Money is a battlefield. It is a source of tension and anxiety for both parties," and, "We have been lucky we can be amicable and do it with a private treaty."

The committee will hold public hearings around the country which will also allow for 'community statement sessions'.


To read the full snapshot or to complete the questionnaire visit:

[www.aph.gov.au/childsupport](http://www.aph.gov.au/childsupport) ■

**LINKS**

 [www.aph.gov.au/childsupport](http://www.aph.gov.au/childsupport)

 [childsupport.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:childsupport.reps@aph.gov.au)

 (02) 6277 2223

## Middle East markets beckon

### Trade and investment opportunities explored

More than \$348 million worth of Australian sheep and goat's meat was served on the dinner plates of the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Iran last year.

According to the Sheepmeat Council of Australia, in 2013 Australia exported 59,777 tonnes of lamb and 40,911 tonnes of mutton to the Middle East.

In the same year, Middle Eastern countries also imported more than \$1.4 billion of Australian wheat.

Now, federal parliament's Trade Sub-Committee is exploring whether these figures represent a small fraction of an as yet untapped potential in trade and investment between Australia and the Middle East.

Sub-committee chair Brue Scott (Maranoa, Qld) said Australia is starting on the right foot.

"We've always had good relations but they need to be built on, and this inquiry will identify some of the areas that we need to work harder at," he said.

Mr Scott said the sub-committee's decision to leave undefined which countries constitute 'the Middle East' for the purpose of the inquiry was a deliberate one.

"We think that the countries in the Middle East region with a great interest in Australia will identify themselves," he said.

The private sector in Australia will target where they are looking to operate and extend business opportunities.

"We felt that if we described which countries we may leave one out that was important."

Mr Scott said this approach was already paying dividends. It has allowed the inquiry to consider evidence on the expanding automotive and textile industries in Morocco, not always considered part of the Middle East.

The inquiry will also consider the impact of new air links with the Middle East.



 HIGH EXPECTATIONS: Growth pursued in trade with Middle East

"The much improved aviation links with this region are helping to bring the Middle East much closer to many exporters and also bolstering the potential of our inbound tourism and higher education sectors," Mr Scott said.

It is clear that both regions would benefit economically from closer trade and economic ties.

Already, Australia imported nearly \$4.2 billion of crude petroleum from the Middle East last year.

In total, there was nearly \$15 billion in merchandise trade between Australia and the countries of the Middle East in 2013.

## NEWSFEED



Saudis invested over \$4 billion in Australia in 2012, and Kuwaitis invested \$1 billion dollars.

However Mr Scott hopes the inquiry will also consider cultural links.

“Anything that builds an understanding between the Middle East and Australia is to our advantage and their advantage,” he said.

Professor Fethi Mansouri of Alfred Deakin University has told the sub-committee these cultural links should not be overlooked in favour of a traditional focus on trade alone.

“Australia is ideally placed to strengthen its current relationships with the Middle East to even higher levels. The existence of a vibrant Australia-Arab community is a significant asset that is not often tapped into in the most optimal manner,” he said.

The inquiry is especially keen to hear from Australian and Middle Eastern businesses with existing links to the region, or those seeking to break into the Middle Eastern or Australian markets.

“The sub-committee wants to find out from business what are the barriers and impediments to future trade and investment with Middle Eastern countries,” Mr Scott said.

They also want to hear about areas of potential growth, such as the market for higher quality food in the region because of the growth in the wealth of the middle class.

Deakin University has already made a submission to the inquiry suggesting that establishing more centres at Australian universities which specialise in Middle East studies would fuel education exchange with the region. ■

## LINKS

[www.aph.gov.au/jfadt](http://www.aph.gov.au/jfadt)

[jscfadt@aph.gov.au](mailto:jscfadt@aph.gov.au)

(02) 6277 2313

## Land corridors vital for future growth



Concerns have been raised over whether enough is being done to protect land corridors needed for future infrastructure projects such as high speed rail.

The House of Representatives Infrastructure and Communications Committee is examining how infrastructure planning and procurement can be improved to meet the demands of a growing population, particularly in large cities.

In its submission to the inquiry, the Australasian Railway Association said a number of transport corridors, including land needed for east coast high speed rail, are not sufficiently protected.

It cited examples in states such as Queensland, where corridors are being designated for future rail lines which will provide access to key mining regions.

“All projects are designed to protect the land that is needed to deliver future infrastructure projects,” the submission said.

According to the association, Australia’s rail network is the sixth largest in the world, with 45,000 km of track.

Late last year the opposition introduced a private member’s bill to federal parliament which would preserve a corridor for the future construction of a high-speed rail link between Brisbane and Melbourne.

At the time Minister for Transport Warren Truss said he planned to consult with various states over how to move forward with the preservation of land.

The association has also called for a greater focus on improving the capacity of passenger rail networks in cities to combat urban congestion and pollution.

It said a recent report into public transport showed that in Brisbane and in Perth rail requires 57 per cent and 38 per cent less investment funds than road to achieve the same reduction in congestion.

“If no action is taken to invest in public transport, by 2031 the annual cost of congestion is expected to reach \$5.5 billion per annum in Brisbane (currently \$2 billion) and \$3.8 billion per annum in Perth (currently \$1.4 billion),” it said.

“Most important, congestion will retard productivity, which is fundamental to the economic health of not only our cities but also the nation.” ■

## LINKS

[www.aph.gov.au/ic](http://www.aph.gov.au/ic)

[ic.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:ic.reps@aph.gov.au)

(02) 6277 2352

FOLLOW HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES NEWS ON TWITTER



@AboutTheHouse