

With an eye on Australia, Papandreou seeks talents of 'the other Greece'

ALL his life, George Papandreou, the son and grandson of Greek prime ministers, thought of himself as being part of a world that was not confined to the borders of his homeland. Born in the US and educated in Sweden, Canada and Britain, he identified more with the diaspora, "the other Greece" that flourished out of the sight and the minds of most of his compatriots. Days after his socialist Pasok party's resounding electoral victory, Mr Papandreou is determined that the diaspora - 7 million strong and often highly skilled - should play a role in rescuing Greece from the problems it faces after five years of conservative rule. Australia - partly because of the strength and size of its ethnic Greek community, partly because a Greek-Australian is among the new leader's senior advisers - will be at the centre of that drive.

"I have spent my life in a number of educational systems and countries ... so part of my identity is being a Greek of Greece and

a Greek of the diaspora," the 57-year-old Prime Minister said. "I think in many ways being Greek is being ecumenical, open to the world."

Before he even won the election, the Harvard-trained politician announced he would approach international experts for advice on how to "fix" Greece's shattered finances, cumbersome bureaucracy and corrupt state system - ills that in the past year have sparked violence, riots and social unrest. With the economy poised to go into recession, the new government is unlikely to have a honeymoon period.

"The diaspora also has a wealth of untapped talent and that is what we need to move the country forward," said Dimitris Dollis, a former deputy leader of the Victorian ALP and one of Mr Papandreou's closest aides. "There is a lot of talent here, but whether it be the economy, arts or reorganisation of the bureaucracy, we want the diaspora to contribute too."

Australia stood out because of the role it played during the 1967-74 military dictatorship, when Mr Papandreou's father, Andreas, headed the left-wing resistance movement abroad.

"It is possibly the only country in the world that impounded Greek ships when they reached its ports," Mr Dollis said. "The reception Andreas Papandreou got when he visited Sydney in 1972 was unbelievable. That, and the special place that both George and his father have in the hearts of Greeks in Melbourne, have not been forgotten."

To lure experts and people with specialist knowledge, the Papandreou Government plans to recognise foreign university degrees, facilitate residence permits and abolish compulsory military service.

"For too long, successive Greek governments have got it wrong," said Theodore Kassimis, the outgoing deputy foreign minister in charge of diaspora affairs.

"The diaspora is very dynamic, a great source of strength, but it has been under-utilised because it has never been properly approached. Instead, we gave money to communities to hold events in tavernas."

Only recently, he said, had Athens created a network of prominent Greek professionals in the diaspora.

"In the case of Australia, I discussed the idea of annual graduate exchange programs with the former government and state governors of Victoria, Perth and New South Wales," Mr Kassimis said. "Papandreou, I know, will want to take things further."

Mr Dollis said Mr Papandreou would soon act on his pledge to visit Australia.

"In the international world in which we live, it doesn't matter if they are not fully able to speak and understand [Greek]. The most important thing is that they are skilled, want to contribute, and love Greece."

Article from *The Age*

Marine life the treasure of the Greek sea

The Greek seas are a home to several protected species of large marine animals that are threatened with extinction, such as sharks, dolphins, seals and turtles - including some large whales, according to the environmental organization "Archipelago".

The more than 18-meter-long sperm whale, which weighs roughly 50 tons, is the most common whale species found in the Greek seas with a current population that numbers less than 2,500 adult members and dropping. A smaller whale species that forms small groups is also common in sea regions with large depths.

Most of the 47 different species of sharks found in the Mediterranean live in the Greek seas and face an increased risk of extinction due to the rising demand for their fins. Sharks are being captured alive and their dorsal fin is cut off before they are thrown back into the sea, with minimal chances of survival.

The dolphins, sea turtles and seals found in the Greek seas are also threatened with extinction. Sea turtles, with the "Caretta-caretta" loggerhead being the most widely known species, are faced with great risks - especially during the summer months when many of them are killed by speedboats, or drown after being caught in fishing nets.

Another endangered species is the *Monachus monachus* monk seal, whose global population numbers approximately 450 members, with over half of them living in Greek seas.

Equally important but lesser known to the general public are the 'meadows' of *Posidonia oceanica*, a species of seagrass, and various types of corals.

Both are threatened because their regions have not been mapped and no one knows exactly which areas need protection.

The seagrass meadows are home to more than 300 species of flora and 1,000 species of fauna. Equally high in biodiversity are the coral reefs that need more than 7,000 years to form and, if destroyed, take centuries to be restored.



Alex Perry calls St George home

A FEW people may know that one of Australia's most popular and talented fashion designers lives in St George.

He may style high profile celebrities, models and It-girls on Sydney's social circuit, but suburban Kingsgrove is where Alex Perry

calls home.

Best known for his extravagant and embellished couture gowns, Mr Perry made a his name in the industry before other new-generation designers emerged, and is still regarded as one of the nation's best frock creators.

Mr Perry, 46, is a former student of South Sydney Boys High and went on to graduate from East Sydney Technical College.

Before he started designing, he ran June Dally-Watkins's deportment school and was a booker at several modelling agencies for six years.

But it was a passion for fashion, including strong influences from his icon international designers, Christian Dior and Balenciaga, that pushed him into establishing his own label 17 years ago.

It was not long before he began dressing stars including Jennifer Lopez, Rihanna, Megan Gale, Elle Macpherson and Miranda Kerr, plus gracing the glossy front cover of *Vogue*.

Mr Perry has featured at Australian Fashion Week every year since 1997. He has become a red carpet guest for his ready-to-wear gowns, and a bridal party favourite for his custom-made dresses. His latest gig was a judge on Fox 8's *Australia's Next Top Model*.

PHOTO:

Couture king: Australian fashion designer Alex Perry (above). Model Sahlan Hayes (right) wears one of his extravagant gowns that was featured on the catwalk at the Rosemount Fashion Week earlier this year.

Age a state of mind for these World Masters Games tough guys

GEORGE Capsis is many things to many people. A reverend, Sutherland Shire councillor and widely acknowledged good guy.

He is also proof that at 62, ageing gracefully is simply not an option.

Together with fellow weightlifters Chris Pitsis, 78, from Lilli Pilli, and Professor Barry Allen, 69, from Yowie Bay, the trio live up to the motto "age shall not weary them" by continuing an exercise regime that would leave people half their age struggling to keep up.

All three men are World Masters Games participants, beefing up for the battle of the biceps that starts in Sydney on Saturday.

For Professor Allen, a former Masters silver medallist, there's good science behind all the exercise.

"As people grow older they suffer from sarcopenia, the loss of body mass," he said.



PHOTO: He ain't heavy: Barry Allen, Chris Pitsis and George Capsis. Picture: Lisa McMahon