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MEDIA RELEASE

26 January 2003

LABOR'S PLAN TO FOSTER AUSTRALIAN CITIZENSHIP IN A CHANGING WORLD

Australian citizenship is a common bond that unites all Australians. It is the ultimate demonstration of our commitment to Australia and its people, while respecting our diverse beliefs and backgrounds. It is the key that opens the door to the full participation of migrants in our society.

Despite popular suggestions that new arrivals display a decreased commitment to Australia, the citizenship take up rate has steadily increased over recent decades.

Nevertheless 950,000 eligible non-citizens who meet the requirements for citizenship have not done so. The take up rate varies considerably by visa category and country of origin. Surveys also reveal misconceptions about the implications of acquiring citizenship.

That is why today, Australia Day, Labor is proposing measures to improve the system of Australian citizenship and increase the take up of citizenship by eligible migrants.

Labor was responsible for the creation of the system of Australian citizenship, beginning on Australia Day 1949, and has a proud record of advancing citizenship. As a result Australia's system for encouraging migrants to become full citizens is internationally acknowledged as welcoming and inclusive.

A Crean Labor Government will strengthen our citizenship system by:

- Encouraging increased take up of citizenship by those eligible to do so;
- Spelling out for the first time the additional privileges and responsibilities associated with citizenship by inserting a statement of purpose into the Citizenship Act;
- Reactivating the Australian Citizenship Council to monitor citizenship legislation and policy and promote the importance of citizenship;
- Improving DIMIA's citizenship data and reporting;
- Maintaining the English language requirements for citizenship and the availability of citizenship courses through the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP);
- Developing new procedures to enable those deprived of citizenship when they acquired another nationality to regain their Australian citizenship;
- Resolving the anomaly facing Maltese Australians who renounced their citizenship as a direct result of previous Maltese legal requirements;

- Undertaking bilateral discussions with other countries to advance the interests of the 800,000 Australian nationals who are overseas, particularly through the wider acceptance of dual citizenship;
- Widening the category of persons eligible to seek a partial waiver, on compassionate grounds, of the residential requirements for citizenship.

Tolerance and community harmony

Australia Day celebrates our achievements as a culturally diverse nation as much as it commemorates the beginnings of European settlement on this continent. It is an opportunity to reaffirm our core national values, such as our democratic system of government, equality of opportunity, and tolerance and respect for each other's background and beliefs.

Labor remains unequivocally committed to multiculturalism and celebrates the contribution of all Australians, regardless of their place of birth, ethnic background, religion or language spoken at home.

Recent international events have increased threats to our community harmony. This has led some of our fellow Australians to feel marginalised and at risk. There is a clear leadership role for the Federal Government in working to reduce the possibility of community discord. The objective must be to isolate extremists of whatever hue and redouble our collective efforts to live and work together in harmony.

Overseas Australians

Official data shows that more than 800,000 Australians, or around 5% of the population, live overseas at any one time. We acknowledge that these men and women are very much still part of the Australian family, even if they may feel somewhat forgotten at home.

Labor will initiate a parliamentary inquiry into the extent of the Australian diaspora, the needs and concerns of expatriate Australians, and the ways in which we could better use them to promote Australia's economic, social and cultural interests.

In the interim Labor is committed to the development of an Internet portal to better provide overseas Australians with information specific to their interests and needs. We also endorse the proposal from the Southern Cross Group for the creation of an Expatriate Australian of the Year award to recognise those overseas Australians who make an exceptional contribution to human affairs.

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