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Belgium recognises Australian driving licences

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BRUSSELS — Australian expats living in Belgium had reason to celebrate this week with the news that Belgian authorities had finally agreed to recognise their Australian driving licences.

The agreement between the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Belgian government comes after almost a decade of bilateral negotiations.

The new regulation actually came into effect on 1 September 2006. It allows Australian residents in Belgium to exchange their driving licences for Belgian licences at their local commune, without the need to take Belgian theoretical or practical driving exams.

Previously, despite the fact Australian authorities had recognised Belgian licences for some years, Belgium did not recognise Australian driving licences.

This meant Australian expats in Belgium had to pass theoretical and practical exams to obtain a Belgian driving permit to drive legally.

But since 1 September 2006, all communes in Belgium have been sent an instruction from the Belgian Federal Transport Ministry, advising them to recognise Australian licences, an Australian embassy press release said.

As a result, Australians can approach the commune where they are registered and request a Belgian licence. Expats will need to hand in their Australian licence at the commune.

The Australian licences will then be held at the commune and can be retrieved when an Australian departs Belgium permanently for Australia.

The co-founder of Australian expat advocacy group the Southern Cross Group (SCG), Anne MacGregor, said in Brussels on Tuesday the new arrangement was a significant achievement.

However, she also pointed out that a great deal of work remains to be done by DFAT in other countries on behalf of overseas Australians.

"We understand that Australians in Switzerland, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and quite a number of other continental European countries have run up against similar licence difficulties. A bilateral solution needs to be found in all those countries as well," she said.

More information can be found at the Australian embassy [website](#) or at the SCG [website](#).

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