



**MEDIA RELEASE**

**PM Invited to Meet Maltese Children Excluded from Australian Citizenship**

The Southern Cross Group (SCG) has asked the Australian Prime Minister to explain to almost 2000 families in Malta why the Government has decided to deny their children access to Australian citizenship under the new *Citizenship Bill*. Mr Howard will be attending CHOGM in Malta from 25-27 November 2005. The SCG has requested that the PM take time out during his visit to meet with some of the affected families.

Some 2000 Australian-born people living in Malta, who were forced to renounce their Australian citizenship as teenagers in order to keep their Maltese citizenship in adulthood, will be able to apply for resumption of their own citizenship when the *Australian Citizenship Bill 2005* becomes law.

But children born to them outside Australia, after the date on which they renounced their Australian citizenship, are being denied their Australian heritage.

If their Australian-born parents had not had to renounce Australian citizenship, these overseas-born children would have been entitled to Australian citizenship by descent.

The SCG estimates that approximately 3000 children fall into this special category, their average age being eleven.

The Government's decision to exclude Maltese children has an added sting to it because the new Bill includes the overseas-born children of those who automatically forfeited Australian citizenship on the acquisition of another citizenship under the now repealed Section 17. Australian-born Maltese, on the other hand, made formal renunciations under Section 18 of the current Act.

Citizenship Minister John Cobb attempted to justify the exclusion of Maltese children in the House of Representatives on 9 November by saying: "Unlike those who lost their citizenship under Section 17, those who renounced their citizenship were well aware that they had ceased to be Australian citizens. They could have had no reasonable expectation of Australian citizenship for any children born after renunciation."

But Norman Bonello, an Australian-born Maltese citizen in Malta, and father of Kim (8) and Claire (6), said that he and his wife were heartbroken when they read the new Bill and realized their girls had been excluded. "We just don't understand the Government's logic", he said.

"Although some people lost their citizenship under Section 17 unwittingly, many people who lost their citizenship under that provision acquired other citizenships in the full knowledge that they would be giving up their Australian citizenship. If "reasonable expectation" is an appropriate and relevant criterion, they also could have had no reasonable expectation that children born after their loss would have access to Australian citizenship. And yet the Government is making sure all Section 17 children will be able to become Australian citizens. The Minister's justification for the exclusion of Section 18 children doesn't hold up, and looks very much like outright discrimination."

This issue was brought to the attention of the Government during the recent Inquiry into Australian Expatriates by the Senate's Legal and Constitutional References Committee. In its March 2005 Report, the Committee explicitly recommended that the law be amended "to ensure that children of people who renounced their citizenship under Section 18 of the Citizenship Act are eligible to apply for Australian citizenship".

Since late August 2004, over 160 Australian-born Maltese have personally written to the Government to ask that their children be given access to Australian citizenship.

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