

Citizenship plan welcomes back all our expatriates

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Mr Rupert Murdoch will be able to become an Australian again if a review of citizenship law is accepted by the Federal Government.

Thousands of other expatriates, who lost Australian citizenship when they became citizens of other countries, would benefit from the change, proposed in a report released yesterday by the Australian Citizenship Council.

It is not known how many former Australians are affected by the current law. Many do not know they have lost citizenship until they reapply for a passport; other Australians choose not to take out citizenship of their new countries.

The issue attracted the greatest number of public submissions to the council, including one from a Nobel-laureate scientist and former Australian of the Year, Dr Peter Dougherty, who lives in the US. Nearly 90 per cent of these submissions favoured the change.

The report also calls for an expanded role of citizenship, suggesting it can be a unifying force. It has proposed a seven-part Australian Compact to identify a set of core, shared values.

These include strengthening Australia as a representative liberal democracy, maintaining the rule of law and the idea of equality under the law, celebrating Australia as an inclusive multicultural society and valuing the unique status of its indigenous people.

The compact, said the council's chairman, Sir Ninian Stephen, should rest on its laurels.

"It reflects the reality of what almost all Australians aspire to; you and I and everyone else would agree we don't achieve it all. It's a good deal more important to solve direct problems to the extent they are capable of being resolved but I think they can all be undertaken in the light of, and reinforced by, the seven principles that really all Australians believe in."