

# The Southern Cross Group

*Promoting Mobility in the Global Community*



## **Game, Set and Match to Jelena: Other Australians are not so Lucky**

Recent stories in the Australian media on Jelena Dokic and the fact that she has been seeking a Yugoslav passport in addition to her Australian passport highlight the glaring discrimination which currently exists in the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948*.

Jelena is one of the several million lucky Australians who can hold two citizenships throughout their lives. People who acquire their first citizenship (i.e. their non-Australian citizenship) due to birth in an overseas country or descent, can legally, under Australian law as it presently stands, hold more than one nationality.

But compare the situation of those of us who are born in Australia, are Australian citizens by birth and hold **only** Australian citizenship. If, at some point during our lives, we live overseas in a particular country for long enough to qualify to apply for the citizenship of that country, we will, by operation of law, automatically lose our Australian citizenship on the acquisition of a second citizenship. This is due to Section 17 of the *Australian Citizenship Act*.

Many, including the Australian Citizenship Council, have argued recently that Section 17 should be repealed to reflect the fact that we live in an age of globalisation when many Australians will want to work overseas for some periods in their lives. Only a few days ago, the federal Cabinet discussed dual nationality, but the Howard Government has made no firm move to repeal Section 17 as yet.

Last year some 40,000 talented Australians left to work overseas. Every Australian abroad is an unofficial and important ambassador for their country and a crucial part of Australia's role in globalisation. Being able to take on a second nationality would remove many hurdles and burdens for Australians living abroad, but most of them are reluctant to take steps to take on the nationality of the countries they live in, because they "still call Australia home" and simply cannot imagine no longer being legally Australian.

Ultimately, Australia should be working to make sure that Aussies abroad do not lose the incentive to come back. It's time to repeal Section 17, so that Australia does not have a double standard on dual citizenship which discriminates against Australian-born Australians, and so that our citizenship laws reflect the realities of a global community.

The Southern Cross Group's recent press release on dual nationality and other information on this issue can be found at:

**<http://www.southern-cross-group.org>**

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*The Southern Cross Group is a non-profit organization founded in Brussels, Belgium, in January 2000, primarily by Australians and New Zealanders. The Group is working to remove the legal, practical and financial barriers which individuals of any nationality face when they work and live outside of their country of citizenship.*