

Aussies rethink dual passport

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The Federal Government may relax the bar on Australians taking out foreign citizenship, opening the door for people such as media titan Rupert Murdoch to hold dual passports.

Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock said the Government was likely to support an Australian Citizenship Council recommendation last year to repeal Section 17 of the Citizenship Act. The Act requires Australians taking out foreign nationality to forfeit existing citizenship.

But the council, after taking a wide range of submissions, said the advantages of dual citizenship, including access to economic opportunities overseas, outweighed the disadvantages.

One of those forced to give up his Australian citizenship under Section 17 was Mr Murdoch, who opted for a United States passport while building his global media empire in the US.

Mr Ruddock said the Government was disposed to support the council recommendation, but would consult the community again before making changes.

"Given the significance of this change to longstanding citizenship law and practice, it is important that the community has a further opportunity to express its opinions," he said.

But Opposition welfare spokesman Con Sciacca said the Minister had squibbed on a decision for political reasons.

"How long have they got to consult for? They've dogged it. If he's disposed to repeal the rule, why doesn't he just do it?" he said.

Mr Sciacca said the Government was nervous of stirring up nationalist opposition in an election year.

He said Labor was committed to repealing Section 17, which discriminated against more than 14 million Australians who could benefit from a foreign passport but did not have parents born overseas.

"Australia is one of the very small number of Western countries that don't allow dual citizenship," he said.