

Dual citizenship back on agenda

Brendan Pearson

Australians living and working abroad may soon be permitted to take host-country citizenship without surrendering their Australian nationality, under proposals being considered by the Federal Government.

The Minister for Immigration, Mr Phillip Ruddock, released a discussion paper last week canvassing the repeal of section 17 of the Australian Citizenship Act, which forces Australians abroad to give up Australian citizenship if they take up local citizenship.

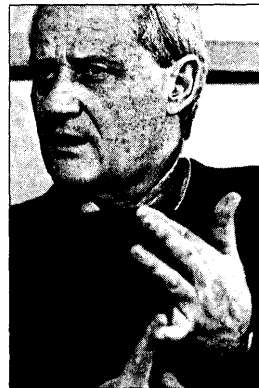
The move has been welcomed by groups representing expatriates, although some doubt the need for further consultation on an issue which was recently the subject of a comprehensive inquiry by the Australian Citizenship Council.

More than 830,000 Australians reside and work abroad, and according to expatriate groups they suffer considerable financial disadvantage and discrimination as a result of existing nationality provisions.

These groups point out that the ban on dual nationality is applied selectively, as foreign-born Australian citizens are allowed to have dual citizenship.

A Brussels-based executive, Mr John Russell, who heads the Southern Cross Group, which has been lobbying for the change, said the restrictions were not helping Australia engage with the global economy.

"In an increasingly global



Mr Phillip Ruddock

economy, it is important that Australians are able to come and go to positions around the world," Mr Russell said.

The Labor Party and the Australian Democrats have indicated they would support a repeal of section 17, and Mr Ruddock is also understood to favour the change.

But sections of the Coalition Cabinet and elements in the National Party are more cautious, concerned that One Nation may seize on the issue in the lead-up to the federal election.

The discussion paper points to wide support for the change in the Australian Citizenship Council report.

Only 14 per cent of submissions to its inquiry opposed the change.