

# LAWYERS

Weekly

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## Brake on brain drain

The Law Council of Australia has added weight to the pressure on the government to act quickly in relaxing the dual citizenship laws.

According to president of the council Anne Trimmer, the current restrictions on dual citizenship could work against policies aimed at attracting skilled workers. She says the government should be easing the path for ambitious professionals to return to their homeland.

Although the government admitted it was "disposed to support" changes to the law to allow Australians to hold dual citizenship it has delayed action saying further consultation is required.

But Trimmer says a decision is needed soon if Australia is to remain internationally competitive. "Large numbers of skilled Australians, from the legal and technology sectors in

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## Brake on brain drain *(cont from p1)*

particular, are being drawn overseas to work. The skills and experience they gain overseas are a resource the nation cannot afford to abandon."

According to Trimmer the law forces Australians abroad to make a difficult choice – to retain their Australian citizenship and be treated as a foreign alien in the country in which they live and work, or accept foreign citizenship and be treated as a foreign alien in their country of birth.

She says Australia is alone among major immigration countries to inflict this dilemma on its citizens.

"Dual nationality encourages Australian professionals working overseas to return, bringing valuable international experience back into the Australian workforce, in effect reversing the brain drain," says

Trimmer.

"Conversely, losing their Australian nationality is an active discouragement to repatriate. Dual nationality also encourages international business, travel and creates work opportunities."

However, Jonathan Walmsley of search and recruitment firm Garfield Robbins International believes the current restrictions would have limited impact on the ebb and flow of lawyers to Australian shores.

He says Australians living in the UK undergo a two-step process. With residency comes full working rights, and the second step, citizenship, confers voting rights.

"I don't think that voting rights are enough of an incentive for Australians to relinquish their citizenship," says Walmsley.