

Race against time as dual citizenship bill is drafted

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The bill to amend the Citizenship Act to repeal Section 17, which forbids Australian citizens taking on dual citizenship, is currently being drafted in Canberra.

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and Parliamentary Counsel, which specialises in drafting legislation for different government departments, is drafting the bill.

Parliament sits in Canberra again the week of 20 August and the week of 27 August. Supporters of the amendment bill are hoping the legislation will be introduced into Parliament by Immigration Minister Ruddock in the week of 20 August or very shortly afterwards, and that it will then will enjoy brisk passage through both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

“Since the [opposition] Australian Labor Party and the Democrats support the change, we don’t expect any real hitches,” said Anne McGregor of US-based Shearman and Sterling, representative of pressure group Southern Cross.

“Although the Southern Cross Group would also like to see legislation which takes care of past victims of Section 17,” she said, “we have decided that in view of the tight time frame, and the great difficulty in getting agreement just to repeal Section 17, we will leave those issues for a later date. We do not want to jeopardise the repeal of Section 17 at this time, so we will not be campaigning to have amendments to the bill introduced in the Senate - this could send the bill off track.

“In the July 6 submission to DIMA, Southern Cross had 11 recommendations but only the first has been achieved. It seems to the group that from news this week [Prime Minister John] Howard may call an election for Nov 17, and that this may be announced around Oct 13 (when the Queen leaves after the CHOGM Conference).

“If this is the case, then there are only four more sitting weeks of Parliament between now and the time they rise to start campaigning for the election. So fingers crossed that the legislation can get through Parliament in the time we have left.”

Author/Source: TNT Staff Writer