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**Aussies take first step in gaining right to dual citizenship
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On Friday 3 August 2001, Australian Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock announced that the Government will repeal Section 17 of the Australian Citizenship Act 1948.

This means that those starting from a base of only Australian citizenship will no longer lose their citizenship when they take on a second citizenship. Effectively, all Australians will then have the right to dual citizenship.

While organisers say this is very good news for Australian citizens, they stress that they are not "past the post" yet. In order to remove Section 17 from the Citizenship Act, the Government must introduce legislation to amend the Act, and this legislation must be passed by both Houses, and then it must come into effect. The next step in getting the right to dual citizenship will be to urge the Government to prioritize the legislation so that it is in force before the Parliament rises for the Federal Election.

However even when Section 17 is finally gone, those former Australians who have lost their citizenship in the past under the provision WILL NOT automatically suddenly have their Australian citizenship restored. The change will help those who wish to acquire a second nationality in the future, but Section 17 is not being repealed retrospectively.

The only way for past victims of Section 17 to regain their lost citizenship is to use the current resumption provision in the Citizenship Act (Section 23AA). This provision unfortunately is of little use to former Australians who are living overseas indefinitely and do not feel able to make a declaration that they intend to return to live in Australia within 3 years.

Over 800 submissions were received by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs by the 6 July consultation deadline. The vast majority of these came from Australians overseas. Cabinet Members in Canberra also received over 1000 letters, faxes and e-mails.

For more information read the Southern Cross Group's media release on this at <http://www.southern-cross-group.org> The Minister's media release of the same date can be accessed at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/>

Note - if you are an Australian overseas contemplating taking on another citizenship, you should wait until Section 17 is actually repealed BEFORE you apply for the citizenship of another country. This may take several months. We will post updates on the progress of the amending legislation to our site as they become available.