

Australia to accept dual citizenship

Benjamin Haslem

AUSTRALIANS who acquire another nationality will no longer lose their Australian citizenship under changes announced yesterday by Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock.

The changes bring Australia into line with countries frequented by an estimated 830,000 Australians working overseas, including the US, Britain, New Zealand, Ireland and Canada.

Mr Ruddock's announcement, foreshadowed by *The Australian* in May, was welcomed yesterday by Labor, the information technology industry and Australian Citizenship Council chairman and former governor-general Ninian Stephen.

However, the IT industry expressed disappointment the changes would not be retrospective.

Under Section 17 of the Citizenship Act, an Australian who takes up another citizenship is automatically stripped of Australian nationality.

The only exceptions are people who automatically become a citizen of another country through marriage or are children.

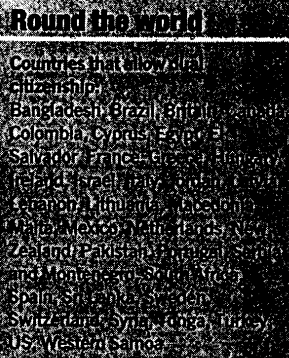
At present a person can apply to resume their Australian citizenship while maintaining their new nationality but must prove the original change of citizenship was necessary to avoid disadvantage.

People who migrate to Australia can take up dual citizenship if their country of origin permits.

Mr Ruddock said in May he was "disposed" to consider the change after calls by the Australian Citizenship Council but he sought community consultation.

Sir Ninian said yesterday he was delighted by Mr Ruddock's announcement.

"The section is no longer representative of the world trend towards dual citizenship and ... it really imposes a considerable disadvantage on native-born Australians," he said.



Australians working overseas felt compelled to adopt a new citizenship to ensure they did not miss out on benefits available to local residents, he said.

Mr Ruddock said the changes, which should be in place by the end of the year, would allow growing numbers of internationally mobile Australians to take advantage of opportunities overseas while maintaining their links with Australia.

Internet Industry Association executive director Peter Coroneos said people who took out foreign citizenship to work in the IT sector overseas would be able to return their skills and capital to Australia more easily.

"But we're disappointed that the Government is not prepared to make the ruling retrospective because the accrued base of skills and capital with former Australians currently living overseas is something the industry would dearly like back," he said.

Labor immigration spokesman Con Sciacca said he did not believe the change should be retrospective but called on Mr Ruddock to better streamline the current process allowing overseas Australians to resume their citizenship.