

Dual citizenship benefits trade

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AS Australians in charge of global brands, Jac Nasser at Ford and Douglas Daft at Coca-Cola might not be so unusual if changes to citizenship laws encourage more local talent to pursue international opportunity.

“Having an Australian overseas in a position of influence can be of benefit to Australia in business and export dealings -- they're at least aware of this market,” Steve Ingram, spokesman for Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock, said yesterday.

Mr Ruddock last week announced the Government would act on long-standing advice that those who take up an overseas citizenship should not be stripped of their Australian citizenship.

Bringing Australia into line with countries such as the US, Ireland, Britain and New Zealand was chiefly a question of fairness to Australian citizens, Mr Ingram said.

He said it would also allow Australians to pursue opportunities in an increasingly interconnected world and Australia could benefit, even if not all expatriates returned.

“If they're taking out citizenship of another country to further business interests, in many respects that's probably in Australia's interests, in that it gives a linkage with major companies overseas or ideas overseas,” Mr Ingram said.

For Sydneysider Peter O'Hara, recently returned after working in Paris for an international company, the lack of French citizenship made for a complicated life.

“The French did invent the word bureaucracy -- I had to go along to special offices for foreigners and get a residency permit, I had to get a work permit, which meant interminable hours in little Kafka-esque corridors -- and those permits had to be renewed,” he said. He was conscious of the fact that if he applied for a foreign citizenship he would lose his Australian citizenship.

“It always struck me as infantile,” he said. “What possible damage to Australia was one doing by being entitled to be a citizen of another country?”

Science commentator Peter Pockley, who recently interviewed 13 Australian scientists working in Arizona and Tennessee in the US, including the Nobel laureate Peter Doherty, said: “There's no doubt that the whole question of citizenship or residency status bears heavily on expatriates and causes them great angst.”

Although the change will not be retrospective, about 90 per cent of those who applied to “resume” lost Australian citizenships last year succeeded, Mr Ingram said.