

# Australians gain right to dual citizenship

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in Canberra

An Australian can now become an American or even a Pom in new citizenship laws expected to boost our profile in the global business community.

Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock yesterday gave the green light to change laws to allow Australians to reside in two countries.

Mr Ruddock said the changes would allow internationally mobile Australians to access overseas opportunities while maintaining links with Australia.

The new laws will also bring us into line with the citizenship laws of comparable countries including the United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand.

"They will ensure Australia remains one of the world leaders in the information economy — and provide the largest transformation of internal and external government services ever," Mr Ruddock said.

Executive director of the Internet Industry Association Peter Coroneos has been a keen advocate for dual citizenship.

Mr Coroneos said it was vitally important to leave the door open for professional Australians who, for business reasons, take out overseas citizenship.

With dual citizenship, the door was always open for talented Australians to come home.

A recent Accenture report, "Rhetoric versus Reality: Closing the Gap," and assessments by the Economic Intelligence Unit, both reveal Australia in the top-tier of nations as far as e-government is concerned.

The third "Government Online" survey also shows Commonwealth online services are becoming more sophisticated in offering downloadable and interactive information.

"We have deliberately set the bar very high in Australia to achieve this vital transformation," Mr Ruddock said.

"Just as the private sector is responding to the challenge of e-commerce and ICT developments and the changing environment — so is the Commonwealth."

A Federal Government spokesman said the new laws could possibly be in force early next year.

They will probably be introduced during the next session of Parliament starting next week.

Under current laws Australians over 18 automatically lose their citizenship once another citizenship has been granted.

But older people who migrate to Australia often retain their citizenship because their country of origin allows it.

The new laws will not be retrospective, ensuring News Corporation chairman Rupert Murdoch — who became an American citizen — will not automatically have his Australian passport returned.

But Florida resident Greg Norman, who married an American, could now become a US citizen and remain an Australian along with Californian-based actor, Paul Hogan.

Feminist Germaine Greer, who has lived in England for several decades but pledged never to renounce her Australian citizenship, could now also become a British citizen.