

Five million of us dual citizens already

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Joe Mailath ("Citizenship something to be cherished" 8/8/01) has failed to grasp the fact that around five million Australians are already legally dual citizens under Australian law.

When the Government repeals Section 17 of the Citizenship Act, and allows those starting from a base of only Australian citizenship to obtain another citizenship without losing their Australian citizenship, we are unlikely to see any marked increase to this already significant number of Australian dual citizens. Only Australians who have lived overseas in a country long enough to qualify for naturalisation under that country's laws will qualify to become dual citizens when this change comes into effect.

Many Australians who live overseas do not acquire permanent residency status in their host country because they do not stay long enough.

Mr Mailath is somewhat unusual in that he was "stateless" before becoming Australian. However, if he had been a citizen of another country who migrated to Australia, he himself could have become a dual citizen on taking Australian citizenship, since Australia does not ask its migrants to renounce their first citizenship. I wonder whether, in those circumstances, he would have turned down the obvious benefits of dual citizenship. Dual citizenship simply recognises that individuals can "belong", in today's global world, to different societies for concurrent periods during their lives. As such, it is a legal expression of the reality of citizenship in a multicultural country which is part of a shrinking world.