

**The Hon. Philip Ruddock MP**

Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs  
Minister for Reconciliation and Aboriginal and  
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29 OCT 2001

Dear Mr Russell and Ms MacGregor

Thank you for your recent letter seeking information on the Government's policies on behalf of the Southern Cross Group, particularly in the area of citizenship legislation. A re-elected Coalition Government will reintroduce the Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment Bill as a priority.

As you are aware the Howard Government established the Australian Citizenship Council, to look at contemporary issues in Australian Citizenship policy and law. The Government received the Council's report very positively, and I am very grateful for the contribution Southern Cross Group members made to the deliberations of both the Council and the Government.

As you are aware, there are a wide perspective of views concerning section 17 of the Australian Citizenship Act, and given the significance of the change, the Government sought to engage in further community consultation on section 17 to ensure Australians were given every opportunity to comment.

Following these consultations and the Government's agreement to repeal section 17, every effort was made to introduce the necessary legislation to the House of Representatives as quickly as possible. I am personally very disappointed that we were unable to secure passage of the bill prior to the dissolution of Parliament.

Importantly, the Opposition would not agree to the legislation being debated in the 'Main Committee', a second chamber established to debate non-controversial legislation, designed to secure passage through the House of Representatives in a timely manner. Unfortunately, the legislation then had to await debate time being granted in the House of Representatives, along with a great number of important legislative measures from numerous portfolios. Indeed the legislation was scheduled to be debated on the final sitting day before Parliament dissolved for an election.

The Coalition remains committed to re-introducing this legislation as a priority to give affect to the very important measures outlined in our response to the Australian Citizenship Council's report, including the repeal of section 17.

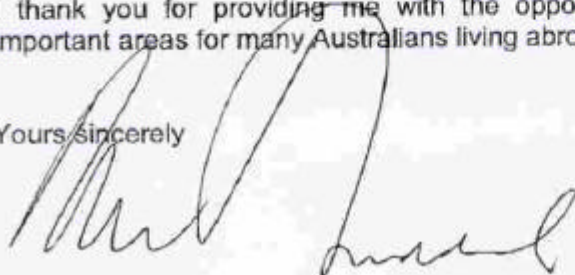
You may be aware that the Citizenship Council also looked at resumption provisions for those who have lost their Australian Citizenship. No recommendations were made by the Council to change these provisions, and indeed very few submissions were received in this area. Existing resumption provisions are designed to be reasonably flexible and decisions are reviewable by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Importantly, the Government agreed to the Council's recommendation to increase the age for registration of Citizenship by decent to 25, so that children whose parents fail to register them have an adequate period after reaching their majority to decide if they wish to apply for Citizenship by decent.

You have raised a number of other questions of interest to Southern Cross Group members, and I will ask my colleagues who have portfolio responsibility for these areas to respond to you as a priority.

I thank you for providing me with the opportunity to comment on these important areas for many Australians living abroad.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip Ruddock', written over the 'Yours sincerely' text.

Philip Ruddock