

The Southern Cross Group

Promoting Mobility in the Global Community



Senator the Hon Andrew Bartlett
Democrats Spokesman
Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

15 October 2001

Dear Senator Bartlett,

The Southern Cross Group (SCG) is an international non-profit advocacy organisation working with the some 820,000 members of the Australian diaspora world-wide. Our members are expatriate Australians who maintain close links with Australia and wish to make a continuing contribution to Australian society despite their geographical presence outside Australia's territorial boundaries.

Since our formation, we have been primarily concerned with four areas: dual citizenship under Australian law; lack of bilateral social security agreements between Australia and many key countries; regulatory discrimination against Australians in a number of other jurisdictions; and the current restrictions on overseas voting in the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*.

Dual citizenship has undoubtedly been the issue which has been of most pressing interest to our members. You will be aware that over the last two years we have made many representations to Government on the issue of Section 17 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948*, prior to the Government's decision announced on 3 August to allow dual citizenship for all Australians. The SCG, along with its membership, is disappointed that the *Citizenship Legislation Amendment Bill 2001* introduced into Parliament on 23 August has now lapsed.

Many overseas Australians are contacting us in the lead up to the Federal Election and asking for information as to the positions of the major Australian political parties on matters which impact the Australian expatriate community. The SCG therefore would welcome from your Party a pre-election statement of your views on the following issues:

- The introduction of a new bill to amend the *Citizenship Act* following the Election;
- The timing of the legislative passage of such a bill;
- Any plans to negotiate and conclude bilateral social agreements between Australia and countries with which an agreement is not currently in place;
- Any plans to re-examine the current limitations on overseas voting in the Electoral Act.

Following the Government's announcement on 3 August that it would repeal Section 17 of the *Citizenship Act*, many of our members have expressed their disappointment that no remedial measures were deemed appropriate in addition to the repeal of Section 17. While the SCG welcomes the decision to repeal Section 17, at this time we wish to stress again that the Government's proposed amendments do not address the plight of many former Australian citizens and their children. The existing resumption of citizenship provision in the *Citizenship Act* (Section 23AA) does not allow former Australians who still live overseas to resume their citizenship unless they have an intention to return to live in Australia within three years.

We are writing in similar terms to other parties and will post all the responses on our website. Many overseas Australians who will be voting in the forthcoming election, and their many friends and relations in Australia, will be giving the responses we receive serious consideration as they decide how to cast their votes on 10 November.

The Southern Cross Groups looks forward to a continuing dialogue with your party on these and other expatriate issues.

Yours sincerely,

John Russell / Anne MacGregor
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cc: Mr. Russel Trebilcock, National Policy Coordinator.