

Citizenship — a leap of faith

Expats who take on citizenship demonstrate their long-term commitment to the Netherlands and solidify their ties to the Dutch nation.

This month Australian expats were granted the right to secure dual citizenship when a bill passed the nation's House of Representatives on 12 March and the Senate on 14 March.

Governor-General Dr Peter Hollingworth is expected to approve the legislation - which repealed Section 17 of the Australian Citizenship Act 1948 — in the coming weeks.

The new legislation removes the legal impediment to dual citizenship that was drafted post-World War II, when the international community considered dual nationalities undesirable.

With the US, Canada and Britain allowing dual citizenship, and many migrant Australians already holding Australian citizenship plus that of their country of origin, it was time to remove a relic from the past.

Lobby groups the Southern Cross Group (SCG) and Australians Abroad waged campaigns to enable Aussie expats to obtain alternative citizenships, a contribution Citizenship Minister Gary Hardgrave acknowledged in announcing the legislation.

He thanked "the many thousands of Australians who sent their views and made contributions to the debate".

But Hardgrave warned Australians who took citizenship of another country, before the governor-general approved the bill, would continue to lose their citizenship.

He also said the new law would not apply retrospectively, but would "continue to provide for people who lost Australian citizenship under Section 17 to apply to resume their Australian citizenship".

The SCG said at least 600 people forfeited their Australian citizenship every year, making the new legislation a positive step.

An Australian embassy official in The Hague once said many expats who took citizenship in the land of their partner quite often wished to return home if their partner died. Maintaining Australian citizenship made that homeward journey easier.

The dual citizenship legislation removed these dilemmas, but it is not suited to everyone. The Dutch Justice Ministry only offers the privilege of dual citizenship to husbands or wives of Dutch citizens or second-generation migrants.

For these Aussies, who are looking to make a long-term commitment to the Netherlands, the new legislation allows the possibility of solidifying ties to the Dutch nation.

It is a leap of faith. And it is a privilege.

Making the transition from expat to Dutch citizen is a way of honouring a loved one and a new home country.

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