

## **Pitfall of dual citizenship application close to end**

Megan Saunders

Expatriates should within weeks be able to obtain citizenship of another country without losing their Australian passports.

Much-anticipated legislation repealing Section 17 of the 1948 Australian Citizenship Act is scheduled to be introduced into the House of Representatives in Canberra tomorrow.

Section 17 automatically cancels Australian citizenship if they even merely apply for another passport. At least 600 Australians lose their status each year.

Many are unaware the law even exists until it is too late.

Citizenship Minister Gary Hardgrave said the new legislation took out the "quite horrific step" of people having to forfeit their citizenship.

The bill, which follows intense lobbying from Australians living overseas, is expected to pass through the Senate with the support of Labor, the Democrats and the Australian Greens next month. But the lobbying effort will continue with the Greens pushing for further allowances to be made, including permitting dual citizens to stand for parliament.

The Southern Cross Group, which represents expatriate Australians, also wants the Government to address the problem for people who have already lost citizenship, but are not covered by the new amendments. Group co-founder Anne McGregor said the citizenship "resumption" provisions needed to be more lenient.

The law presently requires people to sign a statement of intent that they will return to live in Australia within three years to have their citizenship reinstated.

Further changes within the bill include preventing those sentenced to prison for at least a year for people-smuggling to be banned from taking up citizenship.

The amendments lift the cut-off from 18 to 25 years for those children born to an Australian parent overseas to apply for citizenship.