

Laurie Ferguson MP
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Federal Member for Reid

MEDIA RELEASE

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GOVERNMENT MUST DELIVER ON PROMISED CITIZENSHIP BILL

The Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Laurie Ferguson MP, has today urged the Government to give priority to promised legislation allowing Australians who acquire another citizenship to retain their Australian citizenship.

'Under Section 17 of the Australian Citizenship Act 1948 adult Australians who acquire citizenship of another country automatically lose their Australian citizenship,' Mr Ferguson said.

'On the other hand people born overseas who acquire Australian citizenship have long been able to retain any existing citizenship that they hold.

'The existing arrangements disadvantage those Australians who go abroad to live and work and then realise that their prospects are prejudiced if they do not acquire citizenship of the new country of residence. They are often distressed to discover that doing so entails the loss of their Australian citizenship.

'The desirability of repealing Section 17 has been the subject of protracted debate and community consultation. The Government announced on 3 August 2001 that it would legislate to do so but did not manage to secure passage of the necessary legislation before the Parliament was dissolved for the November 10 election.

'During the election campaign Minister Ruddock promised that a re-elected Coalition Government would reintroduce the necessary legislation "as a priority". He made no commitment to address the position of those who have already lost their Australian citizenship as a result of Section 17.

'With the new Parliament finally convening on 12 February, but only 3 sitting weeks planned before the Budget, it is important that the Government clarifies what priority it has accorded the matter in its legislative program.

'The longer the Government delays the more talented Australians living and working overseas will lose out.'

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