

# The Southern Cross Group

*Promoting Mobility in the Global Community*



## MEDIA RELEASE

### On Citizenship Day, Spare a Thought for Those Who Are No Longer Australian Citizens

As thousands of Australian citizens affirm their loyalty to Australia on Tuesday 17 September in ceremonies around the country, many former Australian citizens overseas will not be celebrating. They lost their Australian citizenship automatically by operation of law by acquiring another citizenship before 4 April 2002, when Section 17 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* was finally repealed. Many did not realise they would lose their Australian citizenship at the time. Getting their lost citizenship back is presently impossible.

The Southern Cross Group (SCG), an international non-profit advocacy organisation active on matters of concern to the Australian diaspora, is calling on the Government to broaden the existing rules for the resumption of lost citizenship. John MacGregor, the SCG's Australian Coordinator in Canberra, said that the current provision in the *Citizenship Act* is inequitable for a significant number of former Australian citizens still overseas.

Those applying to resume their lost citizenship must make a declaration in good faith that they intend to reside in Australia again within three years. MacGregor said that the SCG is continually hearing from former Australians who cannot make this declaration. "For many varied and valid reasons, their careers or family commitments currently prevent them from returning to Australia to live", he said. "But these individuals nevertheless still carry a great loyalty to Australia, having been either born Australian or naturalised as an Australian earlier in their lives. Their connection with Australia and their sense of Australianness remains strong, despite their formal loss of citizenship. It is a matter of heartache that they have been stripped of their Australian citizenship and cannot resume it. The blow is particularly bitter now that Section 17 has been repealed and dual citizenship is becoming a fact of life for so many of their Australian compatriots overseas."

"We urge the Government to rethink this issue," he said. "There are many ways in which a former Australian citizen who wishes to resume their citizenship can demonstrate their continuing commitment to the country. An intention to return is just one of those ways. It should be possible to apply for resumption without having a definite intention to return within three years, but by presenting evidence of a continuing association with the country in other ways, as an alternative. Typically former Australian citizens return home at regular intervals to visit family and friends. Many have substantial financial interests in Australia and an unwavering desire to continue to belong to the Australian community, indivisible from their Australian heritage. It seems incongruous to require only two years permanent residency for migrants to become Australian citizens, and for the Government to so vigorously campaign for increased numbers of migrants to take Australian citizenship, while at the same time turning its back on these former citizens who so dearly wish to regain their Australian citizenship."

One former Australian recently had to fly back to Melbourne from London at a moment's notice to visit her ailing elderly mother, who passed away only a few days after she arrived home. That she needed a visa to enter the country at such a time, although she was born Australian and lived most of her life in Australia, was an added distressing factor.

The Government's Australian Citizenship Day campaign is entitled "Australians All Let Us Rejoice". Speaking from Michigan, Robyn Stephenson, the SCG's North American Coordinator, said: "On Australian Citizenship Day this year, the Australian community overseas has a great deal to rejoice in. The Government's repeal of Section 17 of the *Citizenship Act* earlier this year means that many of the 860,000 Australians currently living overseas are free to take on the citizenship of their country of residence if they wish, and remain Australian at the same time. Minister Hardgrave is to be congratulated for this significant reform. Australians overseas often tell us that they never feel more Australian than when they are outside Australia. But the repeal of Section 17 by itself was not a total fix. Now it's time to finish these important reforms and provide a fair solution for those former Australians who want to be formally Australian again."

For Australian citizens and former citizens overseas and in remote areas of Australia who cannot physically attend an affirmation ceremony, the SCG has made an online citizenship affirmation facility available on its website: [www.southern-cross-group.org](http://www.southern-cross-group.org)

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