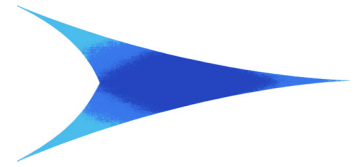


The Southern Cross Group

Promoting Mobility in the Global Community
www.southern-cross-group.org



MEDIA RELEASE

Citizenship Bill Debated in House of Representatives

Long-promised changes to Australia's citizenship law came a step closer this week with a lengthy debate in the House of Representatives in Canberra on the *Australian Citizenship Bill 2005*. The Bill, which was first introduced into Parliament in November 2005 after pre-election promises made by the Government in July 2004, will provide solutions to many of the citizenship dilemmas currently faced by those in Australia's million-strong diaspora, issues on which the Southern Cross Group (SCG) has been working for change since 2000.

The Bill still needs to clear its last stages in the House of Representatives when Parliament resumes at the end of November, and it is hoped that it will then be passed by the Senate before Parliament rises for the summer break on 7 December. If the legislation is adopted by Parliament this year, it is understood that implementation could occur on Australia Day, 26 January 2007. Applications for Australian citizenship under the new legislation will only be possible from the date of implementation.

John MacGregor, SCG Australian Co-ordinator, said "We are pleased that this legislation has at last come before Parliament for debate. But the SCG is disappointed that the Government remains opposed to including a provision in the new legislation that would provide access to Australian citizenship for the overseas-born children of those former Australian citizens who were forced to renounce their Australian citizenship in years past."

The deficit will be particularly hard felt by those in the large Maltese community in Australia, and by those Australian-born Maltese now living in Malta whose children were born after they were forced to renounce their Australian citizenship. Many Australian-born children of Maltese immigrants to Australia in the post-war years were taken back to Malta by their parents while they were youngsters. Until Maltese law was changed in 2000, when these children reached the age of 18 they were required to choose between Maltese and Australian citizenship. Failure to renounce their Australian citizenship under the Section 18 renunciation mechanism in the current *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* would have had serious social and economic implications for them. Without Maltese citizenship they would not have had access to free education, the right to own property in Malta, or to work in many jobs.

If the Bill is passed in its present form as expected, Australian-born Maltese will be able to apply to resume their Australian citizenship subject to the sole condition that they are of good character. The SCG applauds the Government on this initiative. However, some 3000 children of Australian-born Maltese will not be able to acquire Australian citizenship at the same time as their parents. If they had had an Australian citizen parent at the time of their birth in Malta, they would have been Australian citizens by descent.

This omission in the Bill contrasts adversely with the new provision that will permit the children of Australian citizens who lost their citizenship under the now repealed Section 17 of the current Act to be admitted to Australian citizenship. Until 2002, Section 17 operated automatically to strip Australian citizenship from those who voluntarily took up citizenship of another country. Children born to those people abroad after they lost Australian citizenship will have access to Australian citizenship under the changes, unlike the children whose parents lost their citizenship under Section 18. The Australian Labor Party has moved an amendment to include the latter group in the Bill, but due to the Government's majority in both the House and the Senate, this amendment seems unlikely to be adopted in the final legislation.

More Information and access to House Hansard extracts with a transcript of the debate:

<http://www.southern-cross-group.org>

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About the Southern Cross Group

The Southern Cross Group is an international non-profit volunteer-run and independently-funded advocacy and support organisation for the Australian diaspora. The SCG takes an inclusive approach in defining the Australian overseas community and works on behalf of everyone in that community, regardless of their age, educational background, occupation, professional status or income. Those who are not technically Australian citizens but who are former citizens or future citizens or otherwise have a very close family connection with Australia are also within the SCG's constituency. Since its formation in early 2000, the SCG has established a consistent track record of intelligent and timely submissions to Government on a host of Australian expatriate issues, taking the lead in establishing "the Australian diaspora" firmly in Australian domestic consciousness. The Group is best known for its work in reforming Australian citizenship law. It has also been active on the issue of expatriate disenfranchisement in the Australian electoral process, and was the driving force behind the establishment of a broad-based dedicated Federal Senate Committee Inquiry into Australian expatriates held in 2003-2005. The SCG is run by 100 volunteers in 30 countries. It has no formal members or membership fees. People interested in keeping abreast of the SCG's activities are invited to [sign up to its occasional free e-bulletins](#).

<http://www.southern-cross-group.org>

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