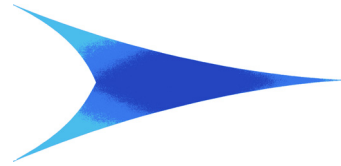


# The Southern Cross Group

Promoting Mobility in the Global Community



## Australian-born Maltese and their Children - Family Profiles

### The Schembri Family

Mario Schembri, 45, born in Melbourne, is extremely disappointed that his two Maltese-born children **Darryl**, aged 15, and **Yasmin**, aged 10, are being denied access to Australian citizenship under the *Australian Citizenship Bill 2005* tabled in Canberra by the Government on 9 November 2005.

Mario's Maltese parents migrated to Australia in the late 1950s. Mario and his sister Doreen were both born in Australia before the family moved back to Malta 1966 when Mario was only six. A further sibling was born in Malta in 1972.

Mario and his sister Doreen were Australian by birth under Australian law because they were born in Australia, and Maltese by descent under Maltese law. So they were dual citizens while growing up.

But Mario was forced to renounce his Australian citizenship when he was 18, in 1979. Maltese law, until reforms in February 2000, prohibited dual citizenship in adulthood.

Faced with having to choose one citizenship or the other by the deadline of his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, Mario felt he had no option but to remain Maltese. He was just finishing school at the time, and had plans to go to university. Although he could have kept his Australian citizenship and gone back to Australia to study, his whole family was in Malta, and he felt it would have been impossible to move back to Australia on his own at that age. In addition, without Maltese citizenship, he would have been forced to pay crippling foreign student fees at university in Malta. So he bit the bullet and renounced his Australian citizenship under Section 18 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948*, while still a teenager.

Today Mario is an environmental consultant in Malta with his own business. He married Odette in 1986, and son Darryl was born in 1990, followed by daughter Yasmin in 1994.

Despite spending most of his life in Malta, he's still Australian in everything but law and wants to be buried in Australia. "I was born there, and that's where I should be buried", he says. The family went to Australia on holidays in 2001, and plan to go again in late 2006. And Mario is planning to retire to Australia with Odette in about ten years from now. He is delighted that the *Australian Citizenship Bill 2005*, once law, will allow him to apply to resume his lost Australian citizenship. But that delight is tinged with regret that the Australian Government is excluding his two children from rightful access to Australian citizenship.

If Mario had never had to renounce his citizenship, Darryl and Yasmin would have had an Australian-born Australian-citizen parent at the time of their birth in Malta and would have been able to be registered as Australian citizens by descent. But they were born after Mario's renunciation.

**Darryl**, 15, is soccer-mad, and plays football several times a week with the well-known Melita club in Malta. He was on the edge of his chair supporting Australia in the nail-biting match against Uruguay last week which sent the Socceroos into the World Cup 2006. His dream is to play for Australia, but he's afraid that door will be closed to him unless the Government can be persuaded to amend the Bill to include himself and his sister.

**Yasmin**, 10, is a keen gymnast, and has aspirations to study drama in Australia and one day perform at the Sydney Opera House. She's recently done a school project on Australia - not difficult, since the family has many books about Australia on their bookshelf and she likes to think of herself as a little Maltese Aussie.

If Mario had lost his Australian citizenship under the now-repealed Section 17 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948*, rather than under Section 18, his children would be covered by the forthcoming legislation. "Where's the distinction?" Mario asks. "Lots of people acquired other citizenships and lost under Section 17 because they felt they had no choice at the time, and I too renounced under Section 18 because I had no choice. It's just not fair to leave Section 18 kids out in the cold when Section 17 kids are covered".

**To contact Mario, Darryl and Yasmin**, call Anne MacGregor, Maltese mobile 9912 9912 (from early Wed 23/11/05), Belgian mobile 0032 474 950 131, or Norman Bonello, Maltese mobile 79 468 329, [norman@southern-cross-group.org](mailto:norman@southern-cross-group.org). Photos available.

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