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Australian Citizenship Act

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Cat Dare grew up dreaming about Australia. Her father had moved from Australia to England before she was born, but he told her many stories about his home. 'I grew up dreaming of this place I was one day going to visit,' she says. 'I've always been very proud of my Australian roots.'

At 19, Dare applied for Australian citizenship, only to find she was ineligible as the law required her to register by the age of 18. Undeterred, she applied for a one-year working visa and headed out to Brisbane to meet her relatives. Over the past 10 years she has been back and forth numerous times.



It's a long road home for some disinherited Australians
Photo: Corbis

In 2000 the Australian government announced plans to significantly overhaul citizenship laws, and part of the reforms included provisions for people like Dare to regain the right to citizenship. On July 1 the long-awaited Australian Citizenship Act 2007 will finally come into force – not a moment too soon for Dare. Now 30, she plans to travel from her home in Leeds to be among a small group who've arranged to file their citizenship applications at Australia House in London on July 2, the first day applications can be lodged under the new rules. The event has been organised by the Southern Cross Group (SCG), an expatriate advocacy group that has been campaigning for these changes for many years.

SCG co-founder Anne MacGregor says their research indicates that up to 100,000 people globally may gain access to Australian citizenship via the changed legislation. Some will be resuming citizenship, having lost it after being naturalised in another country, and many more will be children of current or former citizens. Until 2002, Australians were not allowed to hold dual nationality, so if they applied to become a citizen of another country, they automatically lost their Australian citizenship, often unknowingly. In 2002 the government changed this and made provisions for people to resume citizenship; however, they had to declare an intention to return to Australia within three years. 'It was very off-putting for a lot of people because they didn't want to make that declaration,' says MacGregor.

Under the new rules, applicants do not need to affirm any plans to go to Australia. Heba Fatma Morayef is among those planning to resume citizenship come July. Morayef, who was born to an Australian mother in Egypt, lost her citizenship at the age of 12, when her mother became an Egyptian citizen.

'My mother was quite traumatised by losing her citizenship, but she had to apply for Egyptian citizenship because otherwise she had very little rights to her children,' she explains. 'It is important to me to get my Australian citizenship back as it is part of my identity, but before, I didn't want to commit to moving to Australia within three years.'

For those without Australian ancestry, the key changes for people applying to become naturalised Australian citizens include an increase in the qualifying residency period from two to four years, as well as enhanced security checks. The Australian government has also recently announced plans to introduce a multiple choice citizenship test for all applicants; however, this has not yet been passed by parliament.

Links

www.citizenship.gov.au

www.southern-cross-group.org