

The Times of Malta

Tuesday, September 18, 2007

Australia starts reinstating former citizens

By Vanessa Macdonald

A total of 31 people were yesterday formally given certificates reinstating them as Australian citizens by Australian High Commissioner Jurek Juszczyk.

They are the first batch of 90 approved so far out of 2,000 people who had had to renounce Australian citizenship to become Maltese. Of those eligible, over 350 have so far applied.

Until 2000, Malta required dual citizens to renounce other citizenships by the age of 19 if they wanted to retain their Maltese one. Most of these were children of Maltese migrants born in Australia while others became naturalised citizens after migrating to Australia.

This changed in 2000 when the Maltese government allowed people to hold dual nationality. However, at that time, Australian law did not allow those who had renounced citizenship to get it back. In 2002, the law was changed to allow resumption for those under 25 and in July 2007, the age limit was removed.

The opening of this option generated considerable interest in Malta and the Australian High Commission received 1,300 enquiries in July alone.

"We had a symbolic reason for choosing this particular day to award citizenship certificates to the first group of successful resumption applicants. September 17 is celebrated every year in Australia and around the world as Australian Citizenship Day.

"Australian Citizenship Day is an opportunity to take pride in our citizenship and to reflect on the meaning and importance of being Australian. It is a chance for all of us to think about the changes that shaped our nation. We also reflect on the role we play in building Australia and in shaping our future. We think about what unites us as Australians. It is a time to celebrate our democratic values and commitment to equality and respect for each other," Mr Juszczyk said.

It is estimated that there are 150,000 people of Maltese ancestry in Australia. Over 70 per cent of the Malta-born population there have taken up Australian citizenship.