



MEDIA RELEASE

Citizenship Odyssey Ends for Matthew

35-year-old Matthew Little in Toronto is counting the days until Sunday 1 July 2007. From Sunday, the date of commencement of the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007*, Matthew will be eligible to apply to resume his Australian citizenship.

Born several weeks premature in Sutherland District Hospital in Sydney in October 1971, Matthew spent the first few weeks of his life as a little Aussie battler fighting to stay alive in an incubator. After surviving that ordeal, his British-born parents took him to live in Scotland in February 1972. At aged four, the family migrated to Canada.

Growing up in Canada, Matthew considered himself Australian through and through. He recalls: "I used to sit in the primary school library for hours reading everything I possibly could about my native country. I even did a school project on Australia while in primary school. And I used to cheer for Australian athletes at the Olympic Games and was enormously proud when they won medals. I always dreamed of moving back to Australia when I was old enough."

When he was about 18 in the late 1980s, Matthew wanted to apply for an Australian passport, believing himself to be an Australian citizen. But he was discouraged from doing so by his parents, who mistakenly believed that he was not an Australian citizen, because "Australia did not allow dual citizenship". Matthew had British citizenship through his British-born parents. Consequently, he did not apply for an Australian passport at that time, and simply assumed that since receiving his British passport he was not an Australian citizen. "At the time, this meant the abandonment of my fondest dream of moving back home to Australia", he says.



Matthew Little on holidays in Sydney in 2004.

The saga took a further twist in 1992, when Matthew, his parents and his brother decided to become naturalised Canadian citizens. Matthew, believing at that point that he wasn't an Australian citizen (although in fact he was), agreed to becoming Canadian.

It is a common misconception that being issued with a passport for the first time is the same thing as acquiring citizenship. Often people obtain citizenships at birth that they are initially unaware of, and do not have their first passport issued until years later. The issuing of a non-Australian passport, when the non-Australian citizenship was acquired at birth years before, did not lead to loss of Australian citizenship under Section 17 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* before its repeal on 4 April 2002. Merely obtaining a passport was not an act acquiring citizenship.

Matthew made this mistake, believing that the act of having a British passport issued to him in the late 1980s had triggered loss of his Australian citizenship. It was only more than a decade later, in 2002, that Matthew found out that until the point of taking Canadian citizenship, since birth, he had legally held two citizenships, due to his birth in Australia and his parent's British ancestry. In fact, his acquisition of Canadian citizenship in 1992 triggered the loss of his Australian citizenship under Section 17 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948*.

He was heartbroken and deeply regretted not checking on the true legal situation for himself when he was 18 or before becoming a Canadian.

Although resumption of Australian citizenship lost under Section 17 has been possible since the mid 1980s, Matthew does not satisfy the present legal requirements under the 1948 Act, because he has not spent a total of two years in Australia during his life. He looked into migrating to Australia, but although he has an Arts Degree with Honours from the University of Toronto and speaks fluent French and German, his point score was too low. He presently works with the Government of Ontario.

"I felt so frustrated about it all for years," Matthew says. "It was all just such a huge mistake. Since the day I heard from the Southern Cross Group in July 2004 that the Australian government had said they would change the law, I've been grinning like a Cheshire cat! The last three years have been a long wait though while the legislation went through. I can't believe the big day is almost here at long last. My citizenship application should be ready to file with the Australian High Commission in Ottawa next week."

"After having visited Australia twice in the last three years and loving it, I'm seriously considering moving to Australia in the future. I just can't thank the Southern Cross Group enough for all the lobbying they've put in over so many years for people like me in the Australian diaspora to make these changes a reality. They've made a wonderful difference to the lives of many thousands of people".

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About the Southern Cross Group

The Southern Cross Group is an international non-profit volunteer-run advocacy and support organisation for the Australian diaspora. 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. 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 Australian Senate Committee Inquiry into Australian expatriates held in 2003-2005.

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25 June 2007