



# Tung Ngo MLC

Member of State Parliament



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2 | July 2017

Committee Secretary  
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

I write in relation to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee's inquiry into the Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2017.

Please see my submission overleaf, which focusses on the proposed English test.

Yours sincerely

**Hon Tung Ngo MLC**  
**Member of Legislative Council**

**Submission: Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2017 – Hon. Tung Ngo MLC**

After considering the English test proposed in the Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for Australian Citizenship and Other Matters) Bill 2017 (the Bill) I felt compelled to write this submission on behalf of South Australian migrant communities.

I am the first Vietnamese born Member of South Australian Parliament. I came to Australia as a refugee, when I was around eleven years old. Even at that young age, I was incredibly grateful to the Australian community for its generosity.

When I later became an Australian Citizen, I was incredibly proud and have since worked hard to contribute to Australian society. Through my work as a Member of the South Australian Legislative Council, I am involved with a number of migrant communities including the South Australian Vietnamese community. Migrant communities work hard and many migrants are grateful when they become Australian citizens.

Becoming an Australian citizen is about understanding Australian values, contributing to Australian society, whilst maintaining cultural heritage. It is certainly not all about English language skills.

Standard of English required to pass the proposed English test is too high

Under the proposed changes, to take the Australian citizenship test, migrants will need to achieve a score of level six or higher on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) general stream test,<sup>1</sup> which is the equivalent of university level English.

Language academics including Professor Tim McNamara from the University of Melbourne have confirmed that despite the proposed test being the general rather than academic stream, the level of English required to achieve this score is the same standard that is required by many university courses in Australia for entry.<sup>2</sup>

This is much higher than the basic level of English that is required to pass the current citizenship test.<sup>3</sup>

Australia should not prevent a person from taking the citizenship test, because they do not have a university standard of English. People do not need this level to contribute to Australian society. I know many citizens, both Australian born and migrants, who contribute greatly to our society, without having this level of English. I

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<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister of Australia, the Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP and the Hon. Peter Dutton MP, Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Press Conference: Strengthening the Integrity of Australian Citizenship, 20 April 2017

<sup>2</sup> ABC News, 'Fact Check: Will the Government's New Citizenship Test Demand a University-level Standard of English?' 29 June 2017.

<sup>3</sup> As above, also see Australian Human Rights Commission, 7 June 2017, 'Submission on the proposed changes to the test for Australian citizenship'



note that the Australian Human Rights Commission commented in its submission to the Department of Immigration and Border Control that 'many Australia-born citizens would not possess a written or spoken command of English equivalent to this standard'.<sup>4</sup> I feel that without significant practice I would struggle to achieve the score required, even though I have two university degrees.

#### Potential unfair impact on certain communities

Requiring a level six, IELTS score could potentially disadvantage migrants from non-English speaking countries and migrants who came to Australia on humanitarian visas from becoming citizens.

A recent analysis of the potential impact of the proposed English test, showed that around 30,000 new migrants each year are unlikely to reach the level of English required within 10 years of being in Australia.<sup>5</sup> This is concerning, as it means that a number of migrants, who are permanent residents will not be able to take that final step to become Australian within a reasonable time, creating a second tier of migrants.

#### Potential negative impact on other countries' perception of Australia

Citizenship tests are a reflection of the values a country thinks people should have to become a citizen. Requiring, an aspiring citizen to have a university level of English before they can take the citizenship test sends the message that Australia is elitist. It also sends the message that Australia places a greater emphasis on English competency than European countries, which require a level four or five band on the IELTS test, including Britain (level four).<sup>6</sup>

The message we should be sending the world, is that being an Australian is about loyalty to Australia, compassion and working hard. These values are more important than having a high-level proficiency in English.

By creating such a barrier to citizenship, we would be preventing hard working migrants who possess these qualities from becoming citizens and all that comes with it, including the opportunity to stand for Parliament. Do we want all Members of Parliament to be lawyers or English teachers? Parliament should reflect Australian society and its needs.

#### Recommendation

Remove the proposed English test, requiring prospective citizens to achieve a minimum band 6 on the IELTS general test. Measure English competency, through the citizenship test, at the same level it currently does.

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 7 June 2017, 'Submission on the proposed changes to the test for Australian citizenship'

<sup>5</sup> Henry Sherrell, 'A New Class of Migrants: the Never to be Citizens', Inside Story, 27 April 2017

<sup>6</sup> ABC News, 'Fact check: Will the Government's new Citizenship Test Demand a University-level Standard of English?', 29 June 2017, also see Gov.UK, 'Prove your level of knowledge of English for Citizenship' <https://www.gov.uk/english-language/overview>