

To: Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Sir,

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to comment on the Australian Citizenship Bill 2005 (the Bill).

I am not an Australian citizen or a former Australian citizen, but I have close ties with Australia.

I believe that on the whole, this is an excellent piece of legislation. It will reform Australia's citizenship laws for the 21st century and should serve most within the Australian community well, whether they make their homes within Australia or abroad. I am pleased that almost all of the disadvantages Australian expatriates currently experience under the present Citizenship Act have been addressed in this Bill.

I welcome the fact that many overseas-born people who missed out on registration as citizens by descent for various reasons even though they had an Australian-born parent at the time of their birth, will now be given an opportunity to apply for registration as Australian citizens by descent.

I welcome the fact that provision has been made in clause 22(9) of the Bill to provide improved access to Australian citizenship for the non-Australian spouses of Australian citizens where the couple resides abroad. I note that the non-Australian spouse must be an Australian permanent resident, but that he or she need not fulfil the normal requirements for presence in Australia prior to applying for citizenship. I would like to better understand what factors will be relevant in satisfying the Minister that such non-Australian spouses have 'had a close and continuing association with Australia'.

The Government's repeal of Section 17 in 2002 was a watershed in that it signalled that Australia as a nation was finally ready to embrace dual citizenship for all its citizens. This new Bill, in a broad sense, is about putting old wrongs right. It is about inclusion into the Australian family, rather than exclusion. This legislation is important and we should take the time to get it right in every respect.

Yours faithfully,