



Submission

**Inquiry into Australian Citizenship Bill 2005
and related matters.**

We are pleased that we have been asked again to submit our views about the Australian Citizenship Bill. We feel passionate about matters relating to citizenship. They tend to shape the future of our lives and create a strong bond with the nation of Australia, now our county, our place of abode.

We must congratulate the Government of Australia as this bill, as presented will go a long way for expatriates Australian to embrace Australia as their home and to recognize that our expatriates are an important and integral part of Australian society.

There are two very important aspects of this bill of concern to the Maltese community: We have stated in our last submission on the 24 January 2004 that Australian-born Maltese who were forced to renounce their Australian citizenship by their 19th birthdays in order to keep the Maltese citizenship in adulthood, due to requirements which existed in the Maltese laws until 2000, should have their citizenship re-instated. This bill as amended will hopefully see this become a reality.

However the situation concerning their children born in Malta during the period 1969-2000 while these Australian-born Maltese were without their citizenship for reasons explained above is still not clear at all.

If Australian-born Maltese citizens had not been forced to renounce their citizenship as teenagers, their children born in Malta would have been able to have them registered as Australian citizens by descent.

The 8th March 2005 Report into the Inquiry of Australian Expatriates unequivocally recommended that these children be given access to Australian citizenship by descent.

We again request the Inquiry to examine this issue very carefully. As it is, the Bill discriminates between children born elsewhere in the world and about 3,000 Maltese children as mentioned above. In this context the number of children in the rest of the world who will be granted citizenship could well be more than 100,000, yet the small number by comparison of children born in Malta are being targeted for exclusion. This is neither fair nor just.

It would be a better preposition for Australian to have back people that in some way or another already have affinity with this nation especially those persons that are of Australian heritage.

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Our association, the Maltese Welfare (NSW) Inc. would like to raise another issue regarding the residential requirement for Australian citizenship. It is being proposed that the residency requirements will be increased from two to three years in the five years before making the application.

We are of the opinion that, residential qualifications in the past became rather a political football aimed mostly to attract votes. The requirements for residential qualification were amended three times since the inception of the Act in 1949.

We do agree with the increase but the emphasis should be more on commitment to Australian laws and traditions, rather than residential qualifications.

Applicants should be examined thoroughly regarding their work ethics, observation of the laws, contribution to the general community, their efforts to learn English and whether they have established real and permanent roots in this country.

From personal experience we observe that some permanent residents make the transition in less than three years, for others it takes much longer. Permanent residency gives the new comer most of the benefits in this country but Australian citizenship should not be given as easily as it has been done in the past. Then, once Australian citizenship is given, it should only be taken away in exceptional circumstances.

Our association recommends to your Inquiry to give heed to our recommendation.

Lawrence Dimech OAM JP
President,
For and on behalf of
Maltese Welfare (NSW) Inc
December 2005