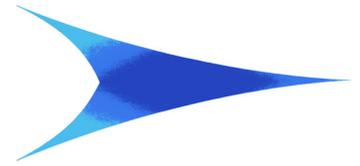


The Southern Cross Group

Promoting Mobility in the Global Community
www.southern-cross-group.org



MEDIA RELEASE

Aussie Families in Malta Tell of Citizenship Heartache

The Southern Cross Group (SCG) today released the stories of a number of families of Australian heritage in Malta whose children are being denied Australian citizenship under the *Australian Citizenship Bill 2005* tabled in Canberra on 9 November 2005.

Their stories can be read on the SCG website at:

<http://www.southern-cross-group.org/mediareleases/2005.html>

All the featured families have one or two Australian-born parents who were forced to renounce their Australian citizenship by their 19th birthdays at the Australian High Commission in Malta under Section 18 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* in order to retain Maltese citizenship as adults.

Children born outside Australia to these people after they had to renounce their Australian citizenship do not presently qualify for Australian citizenship by descent. Although their Australian-born parents will be able to apply for their lost citizenship back when the new Bill becomes law, these children are being excluded from the Australian family. The SCG estimates that there are approximately 3000 such children in Malta, with an average age of 11.

They are being excluded from Australian citizenship despite the fact that children born to individuals who lost their Australian citizenship under the now-repealed Section 17 of the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948* are being fully taken into account in the planned reforms. Section 17, repealed with effect from 4 April 2002, provided for the automatic loss of Australian citizenship by an adult on the voluntary acquisition of another citizenship. Many people who lost their Australian citizenship under Section 17 have children born overseas after their loss. Children of Section 17 victims are all being given access to Australian citizenship, but children of Section 18 renunciation victims have been left out.

The SCG has written to Australian Prime Minister John Howard requesting that he take time out to meet some of the families while he is in Malta this week for CHOGM, but had received no response from the Prime Minister's office as of Tuesday 22 November.

Melbourne-born **Sandra Portelli**, 30, wants Australian citizenship for her one-year old Maltese-born daughter **Jamie Lee**. She's glad she'll shortly be able to get her Australian citizenship back for herself, but feels snubbed by the Australian government because Jamie Lee won't be covered. And any further children Sandra has after she herself becomes Australian again will qualify for Australian citizenship by descent, leaving Jamie Lee with a different citizenship status to her future siblings.

45-year-old **Mario Schembri**, also born in Australia, is in a similar predicament with his two children, **Darryl**, 15, and **Yasmin**, 10. Darryl, who is soccer-mad, plays football several times a week with the well-known Melita club in Malta. Darryl's thrilled that Australia's just qualified for the 2006 World Cup and dreams of playing for Australia himself one day. But without Australian citizenship he knows that door may be closed to him.

Read about further families at:

<http://www.southern-cross-group.org/mediareleases/2005.html>

Contacts:

To speak to any of the profiled families in Malta, call Anne MacGregor, Maltese mobile 9912 9912 (from early Wed 23/11/05), Belgian mobile 0032 474 950 131, or Norman Bonello, Maltese mobile 79 468 329, norman@southern-cross-group.org. Photos available of all profiled families in electronic format.

www.southern-cross-group.org info@southern-cross-group.org

The Southern Cross Group is a global non-profit volunteer-run advocacy and support organisation for the Australian diaspora.

22 November 2005