

COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF NEW SOUTH WALES



**SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE AUSTRALIAN
CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT (CITIZENSHIP TESTING) BILL 2007**

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6 July 2007

Inquiry into the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Testing) Bill 2007

The Social Issues Committee of the Country Women's Association of NSW wishes to thank the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee of the Senate for the opportunity to lodge a Submission on this topic.

This Amendment Bill raises more questions than answers.

It would be wonderful to think that all residents applying for citizenship do so because of patriotism and a desire to demonstrate commitment to Australian standards. However, this is rarely true. Most realise the monetary benefits gained by citizenship, such as being able to receive a pension and to apply for an Australian passport. Citizens may also leave and re-enter Australia without applying for a return visa; seek assistance from diplomatic representatives while overseas; vote; stand for Parliament; work in the Public Service; serve in the armed forces; register children as Australian; and have the knowledge that, if they did anything illegal, they could not be removed from Australia through use of the criminal deportation power.

At present, all residents applying for citizenship must undergo an Australian police check, and an overseas police check if they had been overseas in the last ten years. Now, before applicants can receive citizenship, a Citizenship Test is being introduced testing and highlighting the common values we share, as well as something of our history and background. These questions apparently have not been drafted, and it will be interesting to see just what is thought to be the required standard. It would also be very interesting to know just how many 'dinkum Aussies' could, without 'The Little Aussie Fact Book', answer many questions on Australian history and culture.

According to the Second Reading Speech there will not be a separate English language test and English language skills will be assessed on the applicant's ability to successfully complete the test in English. However, should some people lack the necessary literacy skills required, they will have questions and possible answers read to them. One would think that, after a minimum of four years in Australia, the applicants should have obtained a reasonable command of the English language through their experience in the workforce, where they would have been required to understand rules, laws and conditions of employment, and passed Occupational Health and Safety tests, driving tests etc. They should have an understanding of English before being accepted as a citizen.

However, not all applicants for citizenship lack English speaking skills – some are very well educated people. It may be that some are lacking a desire to adapt to Australian ways, which could result in undermining our standards and values. Such people would give the answers which they know please those setting the questions.

One of the reasons being cited for the use of the test is to encourage the learning of English. While this may sound good, not every member of the family must become citizens - only the male (the 'father figure') has to pass the test. This is contra to Australia's belief that men and women should be treated equally, and one feels very sorry for the 'invisible women' in many families coming to our shores.

Identification of the applicant, his wife and family for citizenship is very important. Identification checks undertaken when an application is made for visas to come to Australia should be compared with those taken when applying for citizenship, in the way of fingerprints, handprints and iris scans. There should be no room for deception or fraud (we must not forget how easy it was for Medicare fraud to take place).

The Minister states in the Second Reading that people under the age of 18 or over the age of 60 and those with physical/mental disabilities will not be required to sit the test. Will those over 60 be granted citizenship regardless? These exemptions were not set out in the current Bill. Presumably they will be included in the written determination.

Item 13, 'Transitional', explains that if a person applies for citizenship and his application has not been dealt with before the citizenship testing comes into place, then the application will be dealt with as a pre-test case. This may be the reason we hear of residents being urged to seek citizenship at once so they will not have to sit for a test.

'The Herald Sun' (9/5/2007) states: *"The flow of migrants to Australia is to rise by 8800 a year, at a cost of \$310 million in health, housing and other expenses. Testing migrants on Australian values before they gain citizenship will cost another \$123 million. The Budget will provide an extra \$835 million to help troubled migrant communities, especially those from war-torn nations such as Sudan. Citizenship testing centres will be set up across the nation. The package will pay for a new requirement for permanent and long-stay visa holders to pledge to abide by Australia's laws and values."* This raises so many questions. Where will the testing set up? Will there be any in country Australia? Are they going to wait for enough people in one area to apply before setting up centres? Who is going to be responsible for choosing the questions, and then the specific questions apportioned at any one time? What steps will be taken to ensure objectivity, fairness and choice of questions, interpretation of such terms as 'our Australian values', and objectivity of those charged with the responsibility of administering and fairly marking these tests?

Finally, what is the point of the whole exercise in the face of the following paradoxes: 9/11 and the London Underground Bombing perpetrators included citizens, some of whom were locally born. A citizenship test would be meaningless when seen in this light, if it is supposedly designed to keep out would-be terrorists. Secondly, those involved in this week's attempted

attacks in London and Glasgow (and the Gold Coast connection with this) were on work visas. We do not need an artificial test for citizenship. We do need some real investigation of those seeking visas, who are asked if they have been involved in any activities which would represent a risk to Australian national security, and whether they have ever served in forces which would risk Australia (one would be very surprised if the answer came back yes). As this has to go hand-in-hand with supporting genuine refugees, the issues are far too complex for any government to pretend that part, or most of the problem will go away if people pass a flawed test.

It appears that there are many more questions than answers.

Social Issues Committee
Country Women's Association of NSW
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