



LHMU (VICTORIAN BRANCH)

SENATE SUBMISSION

ON

AUSTRALIAN CITIZENSHIP

(CITIZENSHIP TESTING) BILL 2007

Victorian Branch
ABN 19 845 840 893
117-131 Capel Street
North Melbourne Vic 3051

PO Box 327
North Melbourne Vic 3051

Telephone 03 9235 7777
Facsimile 03 9235 7770
Email: lhmuvic@lhmu.org.au

Brian Daley
Branch Secretary

Jane Farrell
Veronica Ilias
Jess Walsh
Assistant Branch Secretaries

Steve McGhie
Deputy President
AEAV Secretary

**Liquor, Hospitality
& Miscellaneous
Union**



6 July 2007

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

The Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union, Victorian Branch, is pleased to comment on the Australian Citizenship (Citizen Testing) Bill 2007 and welcomes the Senate Inquiry into these matters.

LHMU represents 130,000 members nationally, many of whom are migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds and increasingly, refugees from areas such as the Horn of Africa.

LHMU members work in industries like cleaning, which has historically been a place where migrants have found an entry point into the Australian workforce and Australian life. Even with few recognized skills and limited English, new migrants have been able to provide for their families and educate their children. It appears that this may no longer be the case in future for refugees from non-English speaking areas.

Our members are of the opinion that the new legislation may impact on family reunions and cause additional hardship for refugees with little understanding of computers or testing requirements.

LHMU supports the views expressed by the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria that this test “would present serious difficulties for refugee and family reunion migrants” and that “such people may well fail a computerized test”, and we ask the Inquiry to consider granting exemptions from the test in these circumstances.

Former Somali refugee, now an Australian citizen, 20 year old Ahmed Dini understands the problems facing many new arrivals.

“Many people from my community have spent years in refugee camps and have not had any formal education. They don't have literacy skills in English or in their own language. I'm worried that they may not pass a computer test. Perhaps the government could fund more English language programs during the waiting period”.

It has been our experience that while having effective English skills in the workplace and in the community is important; many immigrants are too busy working to support their families to attend English classes. Subsidized English language training in the workplace may be appropriate in these circumstances. The reintroduction of this scheme would allow greater participation in Australian society for our new and emerging communities, as well as our older migrants who have limited English skills.

LHMU acknowledges the enormous contribution made by the many hundreds of thousands of people that have been accepted as citizens, despite having only basic English proficiency. We agree with the sentiments expressed by Petro Georgiou, Federal MP for Kooyong, “They have made enormous and universally acknowledged contributions to their new nation. Indeed, Australian society is arguably the most successful, unified and harmonious multicultural nation in the world”.

LHMU is also concerned that denying citizenship for those people whose English is limited will breach Australia's obligations under Article 15 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Denying citizenship, on the basis of language may also contravene Article 27 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, and prevent a person from participating in democratic and civic activities and responsibilities.

LHMU understands that key details of the Citizenship Test will be determined by the Minister, and that this will not be reviewable by Parliament. LHMU is concerned that accountability and scrutiny may not be transparent and that too much power is left in Ministerial hands instead of the Australian Parliament.

LHMU calls on the Senate to recommend an exemption, or lessened requirements under the Act for refugees and family reunion migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Jess Walsh
Assistant Secretary
LHMU (Victorian Branch)
