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

***Re: Senate Inquiry into the Australian Citizenship Amendment  
(Citizenship Testing) Bill 2007***

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry.

The Australian Christian Lobby supports the proposed citizenship test in principle. It is right and appropriate that immigrants who wish to become Australian citizens should be expected to learn something about our history and culture before citizenship is conferred upon them. Such a process should assist immigrants to understand their new country and therefore help them to play their part in its future.

ACL strongly supports the Minister's comments<sup>1</sup> that applicants should be required to acknowledge Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage. This does not require prospective citizens to share the Judeo-Christian faith, but it would make clear that their new country's historical context is Judeo-Christian, rather than of any other faith or ideology.

Beyond this in-principle support for the test and the view that it should require applicants to acknowledge Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage, it is hard to comment in detail because the Bill does not really provide any further information. ACL's thoughts are that:

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<sup>1</sup> Address to the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia, 17 May 2007

- o The fees charged for the citizenship test should be set carefully so that the cost does not deter applicants. It would be unfair for citizenship to be available to those who can afford to pay for the test, but denied to those with lower incomes.
- o If multiple-choice questions are used, there needs to be one clearly correct answer. If a reasonable adult could argue that more than one of the proposed answers could be correct, there is a risk of unfairly penalising those who have carefully thought-out reasons for their 'incorrect' answer. The sample list of questions which was either provided to or invented by the Herald Sun earlier this year contained a number of questions where it could be argued that more than one of the proposed answers was correct (e.g. giving Christian and Catholic as two separate choices, giving monarchy and democracy as two ways of describing Australia's political system).
- o The Bill requires that applicants for citizenship have a 'basic' understanding of English. However, to successfully complete the test will probably require a higher level of English competence and, indeed, a reasonably high level of education, particularly if applicants are expected to understand details of Australia's history and political system.
- o Natural justice should be observed in the processes and procedures relating to the test. For example, there should be a right of appeal for anyone who fails the test. This should include the right to see their marked papers so that they can understand their mistakes and be better prepared to re-sit the test.
- o The test questions should be approved by the Minister, as the representative of the people. Any questions on social norms should aim to reflect mainstream Australia, which identified itself as 68% Christian in the 2001 Census, rather than of minority activist agendas.

I hope this information is useful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

***Jim Wallace AM***  
***Managing Director***  
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