



Tasmania

PREMIER

11 JUL 2007

Senator Guy Barnett
Chair
Legal and Constitutional Committee
Email Address: LegCon.Sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Barnett

Thank you for your email of 14 June 2007 seeking submissions to the inquiry into the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Testing) Bill 2007. This Bill raises issues for many Australians, not just prospective Australian citizens.

The proposed Bill is, in a sense, 'shell legislation', with no detail provided as to what will constitute the citizenship test. Instead it is the Commonwealth Minister for Immigration and Citizenship who will make this decision. This creates a potential risk, as to whether the test that is produced will be a reasonable one, as well as a risk that it will create barriers to migrants obtaining Australian citizenship. The very lack of detail in the Bill also limits the scope for comment that the Tasmanian Government can make.

A test of Australian citizenship, of itself, is not sufficient to build a socially cohesive, tolerant and democratic Australian community. All Australians, including new arrivals, must be given a stake in Australia's future. All must have access to government services, opportunities for education, training and employment, a share in the benefits from increasing prosperity and their voices represented by governments.

It is these factors that will build a commitment to Australia and Australian values rather than a person's ability to pass an, as yet, undefined citizenship test.

Without services and programs at all levels of government dedicated to promoting social cohesion and breaking down barriers to integration that many new arrivals face in a new country then a citizenship test is likely to be:

- Divisive - creating cultural divisions within society, rather than encouraging cohesion and integration.
- Unfair - a test of a person's functional capacity in English is not a test of their integration into society. Introducing a citizenship test will also disadvantage many migrants unless extra resources are made available to learn English and Australian culture and values.

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- Create barriers – a test will create unwarranted difficulties for vulnerable migrant groups such as refugees and humanitarian entrants, many of whom may have difficulty in ever passing a test due to their capacity to learn functional English. This could exclude potentially valuable members of the Australian community.

The citizenship test, therefore, may promote division and undermine Australia's success as a multicultural, socially cohesive and united society.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.

Yours sincerely

Paul Lennon
Premier