

Mrs Claudine Berrisford
Manchester
UNITED KINGDOM

The Secretariat
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee
Room S1.61, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
AUSTRALIA

Dear Sir/Madam,

This submission is in response to the invitation for public comment as part of the Committee's Inquiry into Australian Expatriates.

I am an Australian Citizen born of Maltese parents (now Australian Citizens) who immigrated to Melbourne in the early 1960's. I am now living the Manchester in the United Kingdom working for a large accounting firm. I was seconded from our Melbourne office to our London office in early 2000 however the choice was mine to relocate. I was at a point in my life where I was free from ties to a large degree and felt that I wanted to work and live abroad which was something I had wanted to do since my early 20's.

I met and married a British National during my time here. My husband is a qualified Mental Health Nurse and before he started his training, we ensured his qualifications would be recognised in Australia as our intention has always been to eventually move back to Melbourne permanently. Our issue at the moment is how we actually proceed with our return to Australia. Does my husband apply for a job in Australia and get sponsored? Does he apply as a Skilled applicant? Does he return on the back of my citizenship? If so, can we survive financially as it means he will not be able to work until his visa comes through? I know the questions are pertinent as an Australian friend of mine who lived here in the UK for 12 years recently returned to live in Australia with her British husband and son. I understand the process to acquire the husband's citizenship took some 12 months during which time they lived on her salary. This I find rather alarming!

My husbands skills are highly sought after in Australia as they are in the UK and I would therefore have thought that this would mean the process would be rather simple, straightforward and painless - considered as well that he is married to an Australian Citizen. I would hate it if the cost and time involved in this process to deter us from considering our return to Australia.

I moved from Australia because I wanted to experience life and work in another country. I was not dissatisfied at all with my land of birth. I love Australia and everything about it so my motivation to leave was not set in dissatisfaction. In the 4 years I have lived away from Australia in the UK I have had the opportunity to be a little more objective about the place. I am deeply concerned about the present Government, particularly relating to its policies regarding the detention of asylum seekers, their subsequent treatment and projected perception to the general population. Being outside Australia at this time I have the luxury of seeing how the world perceives this and this is one of the rare times I am ashamed of my country of birth.

I want to continue to vote and have a say in who runs my country. Living in the UK within a system that does not do much to encourage voting I find it frustrating to motivate those around me to do so. I believe it is an integral part of belonging to a place and I do not want to lose my right to have a say in

how Australia is run for she is my future and the future of any children I will return with to be raised there.

I still believe Australia is the 'Lucky Country'. My husband has committed himself to leaving his country of birth to live in Australia for he too sees the advantages of living there. I am a great spokesperson for Australia - my work in London involved sending British accountants to work in offices overseas and where appropriate I often asked candidates to consider working in Australia - not one was disappointed in their choice. Many people ask me why on earth I would chose to live in the UK when I could be living in Melbourne!? I answer that I do so because I know I can return if and when I chose to. I have the luxury of this choice in a climate where most people do not. I believe Australia is big, wide and fertile enough to embrace many of those people.

I am and always will be an Australian and I believe that because I do not presently live there that my 'existence' should be overlooked. Not everyone leaves Australia for a time / permanently because they are not happy there - quite the opposite in fact. From the many Aussies I meet in my travels around the UK and Europe I glean that we leave because we know we can return. And in returning we go back to one of the best places on the planet to be. Please keep us in mind and recognise us as valid, contributing and ongoing citizens of Australia.

Kind regards,
Claudine Berrisford