



Friday, 27 April 2018

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment Bill 2018

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) is grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee in relation to the *Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2018* (“the Bill”).

We note the Committee’s intent to consider submissions previously made to its inquiry into the Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2017 (“the 2017 Bill”), and note that the content of our submission to that Inquiry remains unchanged.

We also take this opportunity to endorse a number of other submissions made to that Inquiry by our members as well as other peak bodies representing Australia’s dynamic and diverse multicultural communities. We suggest it is these bodies that experience firsthand the true value of the contribution made to multicultural Australia by those it welcomes as migrants, as well as the challenges those people face when attempting to settle in their new communities. For this reason, their submissions must be given due weight when considering the impact of the Bill.

Insofar as the current Bill departs from the content of the 2017 Bill, SCoA notes with concern the proposal to extend the Residence Requirement to 8 years’ permanent residence.

SCoA is deeply concerned at the suggestion that a migrant should wait such a significant period of time, on top of any time spent in Australia as a temporary resident, before accessing citizenship.

The proposal would appear to be contrary to research which demonstrates that the sooner a migrant is given access to citizenship in their new home, the sooner, and better, they are able to settle and become contributing members of community to their full potential.¹

SCoA therefore recommends that any attempt to increase the residence requirement over and above that contained in the current section 22 of the Australian Citizenship Act 2007 should be rejected.

¹ Hainmueller, J., et al., *Catalyst or Crown: Does Naturalization Promote the Long-Term Social Integration of Immigrants?* (September 2015).

Conclusion

SCoA strongly believes that the purpose of citizenship is not to exclude people; rather, it is about fostering cultural diversity so all Australians have the opportunity to celebrate and enjoy the benefits of one of the world's leading multicultural nations.

For that reason, citizenship processes should not be complex or evidentiary based applications designed to 'protect the borders' (a function already managed by our immigration and visa system). That is, citizenship should not be seen as a gatekeeper. Rather it should be seen as a reward for commitment and a celebration of people from diverse backgrounds who choose to make Australia home.

This can only be done through embracing Australia's multiculturalism, which is of irrefutable importance in a globalised world,² and raising awareness in the public consciousness so as to foster inclusion rather than exclusion.³ By accepting the diversity of its members and refraining from alienating those who do not meet a "test", a sense of unity will follow.

For these reasons, SCoA urges the Committee to reject the Bill in its totality.

If the Committee wishes to further discuss the contents of this submission, or any other matter of relevance, please do not hesitate to contact our National Office on .

Sincerely,

Dewani Bakkum, Chairperso

² Nick Dyrenfurth, "Battlers, Refugees and the Republic: John Howard's Language of Citizenship" *Journal of Australian Studies* (2005) Issue 84, p183.

³ Australian Citizenship Test Review Committee, *Moving Forward... Improving Pathways to Citizenship* (August 2008).