

Dear Senators,

The amended citizenship bill introduced in parliament will require applicants to provide evidence of :

- a. Competent English
- b. 4 year as permanent resident

The bill has a central focus patriotism as loyalty to country. The idea of loyalty invokes connectedness with country, to support your fellow citizen, respect protocol and systems, to contribute, cooperate, participate in and thrive with your community.

How would requirement of higher than functional English “IELTS band 6” competency, infer “loyalty”? Interestingly, many existing natural born citizens from different communities themselves will fail this test given the level of grammar and comprehension tested.

Those born in this country, who might fail to achieve this level of competency could technically be ineligible for citizenship in the country of their birth and forefathers. This immediately exposes the proposed changes as a mechanisms to filter out the undesirables, namely refugees and migrants with low socio economic means who would struggle indefinitely to reach the required level without adequate resourcing.

Secondly, a person living lawfully and contributing to Australian values and society for years will still be required to spend another 4 years as permanent residents. As if, the years lived here as non-permanent resident were no good at all, and all their contribution to Australian value and society is neglected. The bill will create a difference between living as permanent vs non-permanent resident.

Rather than demonstrate what applicants could contribute, they are interrogated about what is not acceptable. And while there can be zero tolerance of behaviours that we agree are criminal, there are existing protocols to check these vices in the vetting process to acquire refugee and visa eligibility at pre-migration.

The language, rhetoric and policy defining the establishment is becoming increasingly exclusionary. The subtext reads – everyone is welcome, and we can all be 'mates' as long as we're the same and speak competent English. Even though English is not even first language of Indigenous Australians.

Aren't the hallmarks of a progressive democracy to ensure even the most vulnerable and marginalised are protected? One would assume that would include protection from persecution and dislocation. But it would appear that privilege only extends as far as integration does not rupture the status quo. This country was built on migration. New citizens deserve respect, not contempt.

If in the name of patriotism if we are marginalising, muting, bullying, insulting or attacking any individual because they look, speak or believe differently to others– we have failed as a citizen.

Anyone making an application for citizenship in the three years beginning on the commencement day of the Act not be subject to the amendments - this is same as giving an exemption to all existing temporary and permanent migrants. (Any new migrants would require a minimum of 4 years in the country either way, so couldn't benefit from the exemption).

And the prospective applicant should not be subjected to further English tests.

Regards