



CHIEF MINISTER
MINISTER FOR MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS



Parliament House
State Square
Darwin NT 0800
chief.minister@nt.gov.au

GPO Box 3146
Darwin NT 0801
Telephone: 08 8901 4000
Facsimile: 08 8901 4099

Mr Peter Hallahan
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Hallahan

Thank you for your letter of 8 July 2009 inviting my office to make a submission into a Parliamentary inquiry into the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Test Review and Other Measures) Bill 2009.

The Northern Territory Government supports the introduction of measures to streamline the citizenship testing process and the provisions to accommodate those affected by torture and trauma resulting in their inability to undertake the test, while maintaining the integrity of the citizenship test.

My Department has consulted with stakeholders who have provided the following comments:

Refugee and Migrant Settlement Services (RAMSS) Anglicare NT

RAMSS welcomes the Government's acknowledgement of the pre-arrival experiences of refugees in particular, in these amendments. As the process on how the applicant would be assessed as having a physical or mental incapacity is not clear, RAMSS is concerned that the assessment may hinder the individual's participation in society because of this "label" and associated stigma given in the process. It was suggested that perhaps the assessment should reflect the learning capacity rather than physical or mental incapacity of the individual.

Multicultural Services of Central Australia (MCSA)

MCSA generally supports the principles in the provisions of the Bill. In particular, MCSA proposes that there should be a provision to extend the time to complete the test for those who have learning or writing difficulties such as dyslexia. It is also suggested that the section in relation to the requirement that the applicant must sit and successfully complete a test within a certain period of time must be clarified to reflect that this timeframe commences from when an application for citizenship is made.

Multicultural Council of the NT (MCNT)

MCNT welcomes the intention in the Australian Citizenship Amendment Bill to provide exemptions for certain applicants with demonstrated physical or mental incapacity as a result of suffering torture or trauma outside Australia.

However, MCNT is concerned about how physical or mental incapacity will be assessed professionally and whether the exemption criteria will take into account other associated effects such as extreme anxiety and learning difficulties from torture and trauma experiences which can compromise performance in the Citizenship Test.

MCNT welcomes the Federal Government's commitment in the Australian Citizenship Amendment Bill to *"ensuring people who have a commitment to Australia, and who have a strong desire to become Australian Citizens, have the opportunity to do so"* through a citizenship course to provide an alternative pathway to citizenship for refugees and disadvantaged or vulnerable migrants.

The Northern Territory Government supports measures that provide for an effective and fair pathway for residents to become Australian citizens.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Henderson', followed by a horizontal line.

PAUL HENDERSON

5/12/09