

Submission in response to the proposed Australian Citizenship Legislation

22 June 2017

For the attention of Parliament of Australia

Inquiry: The Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2017

I am writing to give you an insight into my family's lives over the past four years having packed up our life in the UK and relocated to Australia and how the proposed changes to citizenship requirements are causing a great deal of stress and anxiety within our family.

We arrived in Australia in July 2013 with our four daughters wanting to make Western Australia our forever home. My husband was **invited** by Kleenheat Gas, part of Wesfarmers group to fill a position they were having difficulty finding suitable Australian candidates for. He was granted a temporary four-year subclass 457 working visa so we sold our house, cars etc. and packed up our personal items to bring with us from the UK and made the move to begin our life here in Baldvis.

Almost as soon as we arrived the Government decided they would impose school fees onto ALL families holding the subclass 457 visa, families that had already been granted the visa as well as new applications. Changing the rules midway through the game resulted in financial not to mention mental stress that wasn't accounted for when considering the employment contract and the move to Australia. We had to find \$4000 from nowhere to pay the school fees on top of paying high employment taxes without being eligible for any financial assistance.

However, in August 2016 our Permanent Residency application was approved having already lived, worked, integrated and contributed to the community for three years. Feeling relieved and more secure in our future here we invested in building our first family home that is still in its construction stages. We are finally building a secure life here or so we thought. Overnight Peter Dutton and Malcom Turnbull want to change the requirements for citizenship from one year to FOUR YEARS as a permanent resident. Incredibly, it's been decided the rule change starts immediately even before the bill has been passed in parliament.

We are perplexed as to how an additional four years in addition to the years already spent here can make any difference to how we assimilate to life in Australia. We have already lived in Australia for **three years and eleven months**. We are already a part of this community. We have worked hard to try to make it better. What difference does it make what type of visa we had while living, working, paying taxes and volunteering here? We love living in Australia and Baldvis is where we chose to settle almost four years ago. My husband still works hard at the company that sponsored us to come here in 2013. Our daughters all attend the local public schools and are in years 2, 5, 11 and 12. I'm an elected board member of the local primary school, the school that our younger daughters attend. I put myself forward as I want to be proactive within the community and hope my children will see me making a positive contribution and consequently aim to do the same. I am self-employed, teaching art to children and adults within our local community. I utilise the local community centres and

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school leasing space to provide fun and educational activities. Is this not assimilating into the local community?

But its getting worse with even more hurdles being thrown in our direction stopping us being able to build a life for our children here. The Turnbull government have also announced university fee reforms for permanent residents. These reforms see permanent residents paying full international student fees instead of the reduced rate for commonwealth students. Students will pay around \$36,000 per year instead of the current \$9,000 as of January 2018.

Our eldest daughter is currently in year 12 studying hard for her ATAR exams in a couple of months with a predicted minimum score of 87% and has her heart set on attending University of Western Australia next year to study a double degree in Environment Science and Marine Biology. Both subjects are more than fitting for her to be able to contribute to the development and sustainability of Western Australia after she graduates. Under the proposed changes the commonwealth fees will be scrapped and all permanent residents will be required to pay international Student University fees. Where will we get this money? This isn't something we have planned for. As a consequence of these changes our daughter has taken it upon herself to look into other options of what she could do until we are eligible to apply for citizenship, looking into volunteering overseas but unfortunately this isn't an option as she must not reside outside of Australia for more than twelve months within the four-years prior to applying for citizenship. What should she do for the next three years? She will be eighteen years old.

I really don't understand the short sightedness of these reforms. Why should the younger generation want to better themselves, contribute to life, society and the economy here in Australia when they're not going to be able to afford to even move out of home because of extortionate university fee debts hanging over them? How are they going to move forward? Who are going to buy houses that are providing the jobs now? How are they going to be able to afford transport to go to work? Pay utility bills? What about the future Australia? Australia is going to have to change their immigration rules again in the next ten or so years because they won't have enough graduates to fill the positions from the 'Australia First' pool.

This is our story, just one family who has already contributed and assimilated into the community but there are thousands of families countrywide who are in the same situation. We've all made plans for our families as Australian citizens under the law of when we became permanent residents only to have the mat pulled out from under our feet, the door slammed in our faces. For my family, leaving Australia and returning to the UK really isn't an option, as we have nothing to return to. We will be homeless and ineligible for any form of assistance as we've been out of the country for too long. We are a family of six with a half built house in Perth, a mortgage without equity in the property and no savings as all savings we did have has been put towards the building of our home, all the fees related to applying for permanent residency, public school fees for our children's education and private health insurance.

As a permanent resident we do not have a political voice in this country. It is unfair for the Turnbull Government to implement such life changing rules to existing permanent residents, as we basically don't have a choice, we are stuck between a rock and a hard place unable to go anywhere or do anything. The Government wants to change the rules midway through

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the game, without warning and I ask you, do you really think this is fair? Put yourselves in our shoes. Would it not be suitable for these rules to apply to any new permanent residency applications from January 2018 in the same way the university reforms have been set? This would at least give prior warning and information to families and individuals considering applying rather than punishing existing permanent residents and their families. Your proposed changes are causing a great deal of stress and anxiety for a lot of innocent families already here who want to make Australia their home, want to pledge allegiance to Australia and already demonstrating Australian values. My husband and I as I'm sure the majority of other permanent residents affected by these proposed changes are happy to take a more difficult test about Australian culture; government and values because after living here and integrating into the community we know it, live it and love it.

Yours Sincerely,