



Simon Corbell MLA

ATTORNEY GENERAL
MINISTER FOR POLICE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

MEMBER FOR MOLONGLO

Senator Guy Barnett
Chair
Senate Legal & Constitutional Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator

Thank you for your email of 14 June 2007 addressed to the Chief Minister John Stanhope inviting a submission on the Inquiry into the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Testing) Bill 2007 (the Bill), the Chief Minister has asked me to reply as responsibility for this matter falls within my portfolio. I apologise for the delay in my response.

The Australian Government has indicated that the purpose of the citizenship test is to ensure that prospective citizens have knowledge of our system of government, society and values. In particular, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship made it clear that the citizenship test is in part concerned with promoting our common values.

The ACT Government supports the promotion of common values and has worked hard to recognise the common values of the ACT community through the enactment and implementation of the *Human Rights Act 2004*.

In turn the ACT community values and celebrates its diversity and inclusive multiculturalism which enriches the lives of all Canberrans.

The ACT Government also supports the idea of promoting knowledge of our system of government, society and values, but we do not believe that a citizenship test will successfully promote community knowledge or common values

On the contrary the ACT Government is concerned that the citizenship test proposed by the Bill will have a significant negative impact on Australia's inclusiveness and multiculturalism.

We believe it may alienate culturally diverse individuals and may deter them from taking up citizenship.

ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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More specifically we are alarmed by the fact that the Bill allows for ministerial determination of the test, without sufficient transparency or judicial review.

The ACT Government advocates the enactment of human rights legislation at the federal level as an appropriate and effective way to achieve the goal of promoting our common values in a way that supports harmony rather than division and is inclusive rather than exclusionary.

As an alternative to a citizenship test the ACT Government suggests that the \$123.6 million set aside for this initiative could be better spent on education programs to support new migrants integration into Australian society. The current Adult Migrant English Program could be extended to include courses with a greater focus on our system of government, society and values and made accessible to those currently unable to access the program, such as those with functional English language skills.

I reiterate the ACT Government's support for the promotion of knowledge of our system of government, society and values, but urge the Australian Government to rethink its proposal for a citizenship test. Instead the Australian Government encouraging we look forward to all current and future Australians to engage successfully in our community through the recognition of human rights and effective education initiatives which promote inclusiveness and multiculturalism.

Yours sincerely

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Attorney general

12.2.07