



Settlement Council of Australia's Submission to the National Consultation on Citizenship

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) is pleased to provide this submission to the National Consultation on citizenship discussion paper *Australian Citizenship – Your Right, Your Responsibility*. SCOA is the national peak body for settlement representing over 80 agencies providing settlement support to humanitarian entrants and eligible migrants across Australia. SCOA's consultation with members and our research into the area have informed the preparation of this submission.

SCOA's submission will respond to the following areas (largely in line with the discussion paper):

- Value of Australian citizenship and understanding citizenship rights and obligations
- Citizenship eligibility, test and pledge
- Revocation of citizenship for dual nationals engaged in terrorism

Value of Australian citizenship and understanding citizenship rights and obligations

The National Consultation on citizenship discussion paper asks questions about how citizenship is valued by current and future Australian citizens and what can be done to increase their understanding of their rights and obligations as citizens.

Newly arrived refugee and migrants already highly value citizenship and Australia's rule of law. There is no evidence put forth to show otherwise. A person's country of birth does not determine how much they value citizenship. SCOA members, settlement service providers who work with new arrivals on a daily basis, have highlighted how much their clients value the opportunity to become Australian citizens. In particular humanitarian entrants value the ability to obtain citizenship and settle safely in a new country permanently. Without this option many would remain stateless living in uncertainty. They have often fled systems of government with entrenched corruption and are eager to learn about Australia's democratic system of government, take part in its processes, respect and appreciate the equality it offers and protections under the law.

People of refugee backgrounds and migrants also learn about their citizenship obligations and rights in civics classes and citizenship classes provided by settlement service providers. This type of education promotes the value of citizenship at an early stage in the settlement process. It also helps new arrivals develop connections with their new community and amongst themselves, fostering feelings of inclusion and valuing of their community. SCOA members highlighted that the purpose of citizenship should not just be to learn laws and regulations but to also feel welcomed and included. Settlement programmes' citizenship education is also an opportunity to discuss with new arrivals other more difficult issues around their rights and obligations, and expectations around new norms, for example the lack of tolerance of family violence in Australia.

Formally funding settlement programmes to provide citizenship education to new arrivals at the early stages of the settlement process would assist in creating an understanding of citizenship rights and obligations and create greater connections within the community. The earlier this is provided the more opportunities individuals will have to put their citizenship education into practice during the settlement process.

Citizenship eligibility, test and pledge

SCOA does not support extending the residency requirement for citizenship eligibility. There is no evidence to demonstrate that longer residency periods will increase people's value of citizenship. It is the opinion of SCOA members that undertaking this measure would not lead to strengthening Australia's citizenship programme.

It is well known that the uptake in citizenship is greater amongst humanitarian visas holders as they are unable to safely return to their home countries. An extension of the residency period will impact humanitarian entrants more greatly than other types of visa holders. Further, an extension of the residency period for people from refugee backgrounds would contradict the one of the key purposes of the Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) programme which assists people to participate and become a full part of their community within the first five years after arrival.

The longer an individual is in the residency period the longer they must wait to participate fully in Australia's democracy. These individuals will be contributing economically through employment, taxes and spending but unable to vote and have a say in what happens in their community. These are the privileges and activities humanitarian entrants report they find value in and extending the residency time period will reduce their ability to participate in Australian life.

The extension of the residency period may also have impacts on other visa programmes. For instance, the prospect of gaining citizenship can attract skilled migrants to fill labour shortages. The extension of the residency period may deter these migrants and reduce Australia's ability to fill labour shortages. Extending the residency period for citizenship seems to contradict the purpose of these visa programmes.

The value of citizenship can be strengthened through non-enforcement measures. Citizenship is not valued through extending processing time periods. It is valued through encouraging people to take part in civic life and undertake the privileges provided through citizenship such as the right to vote, work in the public service and run for election. As recommended above SCOA promotes policies and funding that encourages settlement service programmes to provide citizenship education.

SCOA does not support proposals to modify the citizenship test which may provide barriers to citizenship for some groups over others. Modifications to the citizenship test brings into question what the purpose of a citizenship test is and how to ensure it meets its purpose. The Australian Government asserts its citizenship test assesses whether individuals have an adequate knowledge of Australia and the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship.

Standardising the English language requirements and limiting the number of times a person can sit the test does not help to meet this purpose. It instead discriminates against people from non-English speaking backgrounds, those with a disability and humanitarian entrants who often have broken or no formal education due to their experience of fleeing their country of origin. The test should be offered in a format which does not create barriers for these newly arrived. Providing the test in a readily understandable format (such as orally) will strengthen the test's ability to assess people's knowledge of Australia and the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship.

The proposal requiring individuals to sign a pledge is also not supported. SCOA members commented that signing a pledge will not ensure value of citizenship or promote understanding of rights and responsibilities. It seems like an unnecessary measure to undertake.

Revocation of citizenship for dual nationals engaged in terrorism

SCOA is concerned about the proposal to revoke citizenship from dual nationals engaged in terrorism and its impact upon the value of citizenship and Australia's democratic process. It is important that all Australian citizens, whose right it is to have due process under the law, have this right granted equally regardless of country of birth. SCOA members questioned what might be the right tools to address terrorism and radicalism in Australia. Ensuring the evidence base for policy development in this sensitive area is vital given the legal and constitutional impacts of policy changes, and the need to maintain strong support for social and community cohesion in the face of the global challenges terrorism represents.

As a global citizen it is the Australian Government's responsibility to address the issue of its citizens conducting terrorist activities. Revoking a person's citizenship and passport, and not allowing them passage back into Australia will not de-radicalise them. The problem will only be moved elsewhere and may likely still impact Australia. This is a global issue. A de-radicalisation strategy to deal with these individuals is needed which is supported by Federal funding.

Those that radicalise are on the fringes of society and their communities. They most likely will present themselves to service providers over time for a variety of other issues well before they engage in terrorist activities. It is at these points that stop checks should be implemented to ensure issues of radicalisation are addressed early on and people are not radicalised further. These stop checks must be holistic and service providers from all disciplines educated on how to be aware of these individuals and what processes can assist.

Settlement services aim to ensure social cohesion and inclusivity for refugees and migrants within five years after they arrive. These settlement programmes are well placed to offer a holistic strategy to ensure individuals do not end up on the fringes and are welcomed into their communities. They also play a role in ensuring the existing community is a welcoming place. In particular, service providers funded under the Settlement Grants Programme (SGP) have programmes targeting youth. These can be strengthened to address radicalisation issues. Other supports such as the newly announced Youth Employment Fund also greatly assist in these efforts.

Conclusion

Australian citizenship is currently highly valued by migrants and humanitarian entrants. Settlement programmes offer citizenship education to assist new arrivals to understand their rights and obligations. Greater funding to support this education will strengthen it, focussing on understanding of citizenship. Proposed longer residency periods are not supported and will not increase the value or understanding of Australian citizenship. Modifications to the citizenship test and limiting the number of times someone can sit the test will cause barriers to for some groups over others. Humanitarian entrants will be disproportionately impacted and proposed changes may deter uptake in other visa programmes. The test should be offered in a format which doesn't create barriers for those newly arrived. Revoking citizenship of dual nationals engaged in terrorism impact upon the value of citizenship and Australia's democratic process. Policy tools to address these issues must be supported by an evidence base and be shown to be the best method to address the issue. The focus should be on strengthening early intervention efforts and engaging settlement service providers and other services to do so, particularly given the synergies with the existing focus of settlement programs on orientation, inclusion and fostering community cohesion.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cedric Manen', written in a cursive style.

Cedric Manen
Acting Chair - Settlement Council of Australia