

Executive Council of Australian Jewry

הועד הפועל של
יהודי אוסטרליה

The Representative Organisation of Australian Jewry

2nd Floor
306 Hawthorn Road
Caulfield South Victoria
Australia 3162
Tel (03) 9272 5579
Fax (03) 9272 5540
Web www.ecaj.org.au
E-mail info@ecaj.org.au

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Citizenship Task Force
Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
PO Box 25
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

17 November 2006

Dear Sirs/Madams:

Re: Citizenship Testing Discussion Paper

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission on behalf of the Australian Jewish community in connection with the citizenship testing discussion paper.

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry is the elected representative roof body of the Australian Jewish community, with affiliated organisations as set out on this letterhead. Our State affiliates are also elected roof bodies, representing their direct voters and the various Jewish organisations in their respective States.

It is our view that a foundation of Australian society must be the acceptance of multiculturalism; that is, the respect for diversity within a framework of articulated Australian values and a limitation upon exclusivism.

The Australian Jewish community supports the government's current multicultural policy statement, *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity* issued on 13 May 2003.

We understand, and indeed appreciate, that different people understand the term "multiculturalism" in different ways. For example the way in which the term is applied and understood in the policy context of United Kingdom is quite different to the way in which the term is applied understood in Australia.

We believe that Australia must have a well crafted and effective national policy that addresses both the benefits and obligations of a culturally diverse society. The term "multiculturalism" is used adequately in Australia and fairly describes the concept of reciprocal obligation and the celebration of diversity in our society. Rather than seek to replace the word "multiculturalism" to describe the Australian Government's policy position, in our view it is preferable that the policy be regularly enunciated and consistently applied.

Complete acceptance of the rule of law, respect for the dignity of others and acceptance of common democratic values help ensure a truly fair society that upholds the dignity of all who live among us. Obtaining citizenship can and should depend on acceptance of those principles.

We strongly maintain that the standard required of immigrant groups should not be set in a way that might confuse dignified, respectful differences of belief, faith or culture, with a challenge to the fabric of our society. Those migrants who peacefully espouse different beliefs, faiths or cultures must be made welcome. The same does not apply to those who seek to undermine or reject the common fabric of our society.

With the foregoing introduction, we address the questions raised in the discussion paper as follows:

Question	Answer
1. Should Australia introduce a formal citizenship test?	The proposition that Australia introduce a formal citizenship test begs the vital question of what it might test for, and how. At this stage, the case in support of a formal citizenship test has not been sufficiently made out. However, if one is to be introduced, then it must be carefully crafted so as not to discriminate unfairly against any race, ethnicity, religion, social group or national origin.
2. How important is knowledge of Australia for Australian citizenship?	Knowledge of Australia and Australian society is an important element of Australian citizenship, and if there is to be a test the threshold standard must be set at a level that reasonably reflects what could be acquired within the first three years of most immigrants' arrivals.
3. How important is a demonstrated commitment to Australia's way of life and values for those intending to settle permanently in Australia or spend a significant period of time in Australia?	Whilst complete acceptance of the rule of law, respect for the dignity of others and acceptance of common democratic values help ensure a truly fair Australian society, quite how a new immigrant is to demonstrate such commitment is not an easy matter to resolve.
4. What level of English is required to participate as an Australian citizen?	In determining what level of English is desirable to participate as an Australian citizen, the standard should be set fairly, to reflect what can be achieved by new immigrant with limited or no assistance, within the first three years of arrival in

	Australia.
5. What form should a commitment to Australian values take?	See 1 above. It is in an immigrant's interest to completely accept the rule of law, respect for the dignity of others and our common democratic values. That is large part of what makes Australia attractive to immigrants in the first place. Testing of commitment to Australian values should be as objective as possible. Removal of subjectivity reduces the risk of the test being abused either by those giving or taking the test.
6. What level of knowledge and understanding of the Australian way of life and English language skills should people have to be approved for permanent residence in Australia?	See 1 above. The level of knowledge required should be basic, as the citizenship test is (or should be) applied after only three years in Australia.
7. Should they be required to demonstrate this knowledge?	See item 5 above.
8. If so, how could they demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of Australia and their English language skills?	See item 5 above.
9. Should the same be required of people to be approved for long term temporary residence in Australia, such as for business or study?	No. A person who does not wish to have the benefits of citizenship should not bear the burdens of citizenship. However, a person wishing to conduct business or study in Australia should be required to demonstrate a commitment to acquire the necessary English language skill within a short period after arrival sufficient to undertake the business or study proposed. The standard should vary depending upon the objective.
10. How important is a commitment to Australia's way of life and values for permanent residents and long term	Very important.

temporary residents?	
11. What form should a commitment to Australian values take?	See Item 5 above. The commitment can be expressed in any language, with clear and measurable standards for compliance. Compliance with those standards should be a condition subsequent for remaining in Australia.
12. What things do you think are important for prospective citizens to have an understanding of before taking up Australian citizenship?	See item 2 above.
13. Should prospective Australian citizens be formally tested for their level of English? If so, would it be necessary to test oral, written, reading, and listening skills?	See item 5 above.
14. Should the requirement be expanded beyond needing a knowledge of the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship and an understanding of the nature of the application? Should it instead encompass a broader knowledge of Australia?	No. See items two and five above.
15. If knowledge of Australia is considered important for Australian citizenship, what elements do you think are necessary? For example, should people choosing to become Australians know something about our history; our culture and traditions; our common values; national symbols; our laws; and our Australian system of democracy? What other things do you think are important?	Complete acceptance of the rule of law, national symbols; respect for the dignity of others and acceptance of common democratic values.
16. If a formal citizenship test were to be introduced, should certain groups (for example, older people or long term	Yes. Persons who have a disability or who are aged, or who are materially disadvantaged by reason of for example,

<p>residents) be exempt?</p>	<p>their level of education achieved before coming to Australia should, where the disadvantage cannot be overcome, be exempt from the test. Educational disadvantage should be overcome, with Government support, after arrival in Australia. Where the disadvantage can be overcome then they should be given more time to pass the test (with their application for citizenship appropriately delayed). Extension should however be available only in special circumstances.</p>
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Yours sincerely



Grahame J. Leonard
President