

Position Paper on citizenship reforms

January 2018

1. The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) expresses its gratitude to previous Australian governments that implemented policies which welcomed migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and international students. They have, in turn, established meaningful lives for themselves and their families and contributed with their rich experiences, cultural knowledge and traditions to establishing today's multicultural Australia.
2. ECCV affirms that Australian citizenship provides a common bond that gives Australians a sense of belonging and pride in our achievements as a nation, and unites all Australians, regardless of whether we were born in Australia or have decided to make Australia our home.
3. ECCV supports the celebration of Australian Citizenship Day on 17 September that was introduced as a result of a recommendation by the Australian Citizenship Council, and that this date was chosen because it is the anniversary of the renaming of the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948* to the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948*.
4. ECCV applauds the recognition on Australian Citizenship Day of the contributions of inspiring Australian citizens in our community.
5. This Position Paper sets out ECCV's position on two issues:
 - a) Recent moves by local councils to cease holding citizenship ceremonies on Australia Day, in sympathy with the sentiments of Indigenous Australians.
 - b) Proposals to toughen laws on citizenship eligibility.
6. ECCV is aware that the motivation for several local councils to move their Australia Day citizenship ceremonies from 26 January is "acknowledging the extreme hurt" felt by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at celebrating a national day on the date of the First Fleet's arrival in Sydney Cove, which is recognised by some Indigenous people as Invasion Day.
7. ECCV believes that those local government councils avoiding Australia Day celebrations are committed to supporting their local residents in gaining citizenship and should be allowed to hold citizenship ceremonies throughout the year to avoid a backlog of applications.
8. ECCV encourages respectful public debate on the intersection of citizenship ceremonies on Australia Day on 26 January and the sentiments of the First Peoples of Australia.

9. ECCV is aware that the new law, *'The Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2017'*, was introduced in the lower house of Federal Parliament on 15 June 2017 and proposes a broad array of changes.
10. ECCV expresses its strong concern about the potential implications of the new proposed policy which could potentially create a two-tiered system of those who are able to gain citizenship and those who will be excluded and required to remain "permanent residents" or "guest workers" without the rights that citizenship guarantees, including voting rights.
11. ECCV expresses in particular its strong concern that the proposed citizenship laws changes may unfairly target some of the most vulnerable members of our community, including refugees and new arrivals who want to make a new home in this country.
12. ECCV highlights that Australian citizenship is considered a privilege and celebration by successive waves of migrants who have brought new skills, economic benefits, and a range of other positives contributing to the success of multiculturalism.
13. ECCV believes that it is unreasonable to expect hardworking, nation-building migrants to pass a higher English competence level such as the English test at IELTS (International English Language Testing System) Band 6.
14. ECCV believes that Australian citizenship eligibility with an over-focus on high levels of English language competence could exclude vulnerable people such as refugees who have experienced disrupted education.
15. ECCV supports additional funding being allocated to English language classes provision to all Australian community members, including recent citizens, who seek to improve their language skills and require further assistance to do so.
16. ECCV believes that extending the residency requirement for Australian citizenship eligibility to four years would have a negative impact on our communities' social cohesion as it could diminish the sense of belonging that migrants and refugees should develop for effective settlement.
17. ECCV believes that dual citizenship reflects the multicultural society that is Australia.

For further information, please see the [ECCV Position Paper on Dual Citizenship](#).
