

FECCA Statement to Senate Inquiry on Citizenship

24 August 2017

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(Please check against delivery)

The following is the opening statement by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia (FECCA) Director, Dr Emma Campbell, to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Inquiry into the Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for Australian citizenship and other measures) Bill 2017.

Before I begin my opening statement I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

I thank you for inviting FECCA to give evidence to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Migration is central to Australia's continuing economic, intellectual and social success. Indeed, as noted by our Prime Minister, Australia is the most successful multicultural society in the world.

But these foundations of successful settlement and multiculturalism – of a welcoming and respectful society that ensures equality of opportunity to all new Australians – are being eroded. When the concept of a multicultural Australia was introduced nearly 45 years ago in response to changing migration patterns, we could not have imagined that FECCA would still need to be:

- Fighting to maintain anti-discrimination and anti-racism laws, such as 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act;
- Speaking out against racism and intolerance in the rhetoric of Australia's political leaders and media

And now—calling for fair, inclusive and non-discriminatory immigration and citizenship processes.

FECCA and its members have conducted numerous consultations with community groups and many other stakeholders on this issue. This issue has attracted a response from the communities we represent unlike any other issue.

Over the past few months FECCA has heard from numerous distraught community members who are living productive lives contributing positively to their local communities and the Australian economy.

They feel that changes to the Citizenship Act will negate their years of contribution and place in jeopardy the opportunities of newly arrived migrants who, through no fault of their own, will not be provided the same equality of opportunity. The level of fear and distress in CALD communities is extraordinary and unprecedented.

FECCA believes that this Bill will create a permanent underclass of Australian residents who will be denied the rights and opportunities of being welcomed and included as Australian citizens. Such exclusion undermines the ideal described in the Preamble to the Australian Citizenship Act 2007, 'that citizenship is a 'common bond' that unit[es] all Australians'.^{*}

The historical Australian tradition of welcoming migrants as citizens early on in their migration journey has encouraged many migrants not just to see Australia as the place where they live, but to see themselves as Australian, regardless of their country of origin.

Australia's approach to citizenship has contributed to the successful settlement of generations of migrants and the proposed changes run counter to Australia's long-standing immigration and citizenship policy.

It is unclear what weaknesses have been identified by the Government in the current citizenship process and how this legislation will remedy such deficits. FECCA is deeply concerned about the proposed changes to our system of immigration and citizenship, as detailed in the Bill, which appear to be based on political considerations rather than empirical evidence.

And so FECCA strongly opposes the introduction of this legislation that will dramatically change the rules determining qualification for Australian citizenship.

* See UNSW's Andrew and Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law's submission on Strengthening the Test for Australian Citizenship Consultation.

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