

FECCA welcomes Labor's position on the new citizenship legislation

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) welcomes the strong position taken by the Australian Labor Party against the *Australian Citizenship Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Requirements for Australian Citizenship and Other Measures) Bill 2017* which will dramatically change the rules determining qualification for Australian citizenship. The Bill includes:

- Extension of the waiting period for permanent residents from one year to "at least four years" before eligibility for citizenship
- Increased English language requirement to qualify for Australian citizenship
- Widening of Ministerial discretion to deny citizenship in individual immigration cases.

Mr Joe Caputo, Chair of FECCA said: "These proposed changes run counter to Australia's long-standing immigration policy, which has worked to create the current successful and harmonious Australian multicultural community."

"For migrants to Australia, the granting of Australian citizenship is symbolic of acceptance into the Australian community. It is cherished by all in Australia's migrant communities," said Mr Caputo.

"Instead, this Bill will create a permanent underclass of Australian residents denied the rights and opportunities of being welcomed and included as an Australian citizen," he continued.

Mr Caputo said: "This legislation sends a terrible message to generations of migrants – like my own parents – who came to Australia with poor English, but have subsequently enriched this nation through their cultural, economic, familial and social contribution."

"It says that they should not have been accepted because they did not speak English when they became a citizen. It says that hard work and commitment to your family and nation is not enough to be Australian," he said.

This Bill also widens Ministerial discretion to reverse a decision to grant citizenship in individual cases.

"The politicisation of immigration decision-making in individual cases threatens the fundamentals – impartiality, fairness and transparency – of our internationally respected immigration system," said Mr Caputo.

FECCA is the national peak body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. FECCA's role is to advocate and promote issues on behalf of its constituency to government, business and the broader community.

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