



Submission On The Changes To Australian Citizenship

Introduction

The Chinese Australian Services Society Limited (commonly known as “CASS” in the community) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the Changes to Australian Citizenship to the Department Immigration and Border Protection.

As a long standing community organisation, CASS has been dedicated to assisting disadvantaged people from local communities and advocating on their behalf. We would like to share our views and experience with the Department on migrant’s citizenship experience.

Our submission is a reflection of the viewpoints and concerns that we received from our service users and people in our community, as well as observation and conclusions we made while delivering services to our clients, who are users of Settlement Services Program. This submission does not represent in any way the position of CASS as the organisation.

About Our Organisation

CASS was founded in 1981. Its main service objective is to provide a wide range of welfare services to the community, and assist migrants to settle and integrate into the Australian society. The comprehensive range of community services and activities provided by CASS includes residential aged care, home ageing services, disability services, vocational training, settlement and health, volunteering, and family and children services. Most of the services we provide cover the whole of Metropolitan Sydney, with some covering areas down to Wollongong. We serve Chinese, Koreans, Indonesians, Vietnamese, people from other CALD communities, as well as mainstream Australians. More than 2,400 families access our services and activities weekly.

CASS has been providing settlement services to the Chinese speaking community for over 25 years and has helped over 5,500 people to become Australian citizens. The Settlement Services Program (SSP) of CASS assists newly arrived Chinese-speaking migrants with settlement concerns including housing, employment, education, family and children as well as health & welfare issues. We are currently providing services to approximately 1,000 clients every year. The services provided are welcomed and highly complimented by the local government and the community.

We have developed strong community links between newly arrived migrants and service providers in the community. In 2016, we have delivered more than 40 information sessions in various locations throughout Sydney, including housing, personal safety, education as well as many health and welfare issues. Moreover, our volunteer program, which provides form filling and JP Services, has supported new migrants to improve their engagement with related services.

In considering the current changes to Australian Citizenship, we would like to present the following issues with reference to the Discussion Paper:

(1) Increasing the general residency requirement

It is understood that with longer residency in Australia, people can learn more about Australian values, culture and be integrated into the local community better. However, the increase of the length of minimum permanent residency in Australia from 1 year to 4 years is disadvantaging people who hold a legal visa, such as spouse visa, student visa and working visa, before they get the permanent resident visa. These people may have already resided in Australia for many years for study and work. With the increase in the residency requirement to 4 years, they then have to wait for a relatively long period to become citizens. As such, it is recommended that the increase in the minimum length of permanent residency for Australian citizenship be set at 2 years, which is more equitable.

(2) Introducing an English language test

Many migrants might be able to speak English and know their community well. However, sitting for a test and achieving a minimum level of ‘competency’ is completely different from what they encounter in real-life situation. It is usually difficult for people from non-English speaking background to prove their ‘competency’ in English especially under an examination situation. Thus, it is recommended that when considering the English competency of a candidate, the emphasis should be on listening and speaking rather than a general grasp on all four areas (reading, writing, listening and speaking).

(3) Introducing a requirement for applicants to demonstrate their integration into the Australian community

Introducing the concept of integration prior to being approved citizenship is a positive move. However, it should be noted that different aspects have to be considered in the implementation rather than just focusing on some domains (like ‘income’, ‘employment’ and ‘paying tax’, etc as listed in the Discussion Paper). The contribution of new migrants as volunteers in the community, such as caring for seniors/disabled people and involving in environmental care,

should be taken as an element that they are integrating into the Australian society. Flexibility on individual cases should be exercised.

Conclusion

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the the changes to Australian Citizenship. In this submission, we have included the feedback that we received from people in our community, including our clients, volunteers and staff members. We would appreciate if the Department of Social Services takes into account the viewpoints and concerns raised in this submission. We are happy to have a further discussion to elaborate these viewpoints and concerns.

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