

Mr Richard Woolcott AC  
Chair  
Australian Citizenship Test Review Committee  
PO Box 1179  
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

Dear Mr Woolcott

**Australian Citizenship Test Review 2008**

Thank you for your invitation to make a submission to the 2008 Australian Citizenship Test Review. The Canberra Multicultural Community Forum Incorporated (CMCF) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Australian Citizenship Test.

CMCF has provided submissions to the Commonwealth on this issue since the first discussion paper on this subject was released in September 2006, including appearing before the Senate Committee considering the *Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Testing) Bill 2007*. CMCF's previous submissions can be found at: <http://www.cmcf.org.au/documents.htm>

CMCF recognises the role and importance of the conferral of citizenship, in both what it represents, and the rights and responsibilities it confers. We agree that there is a need for sound evidence-based policies, developed in consultation with the community, to support the processes of immigration and citizenship. Given the minimal community consultation and lack of empirical data underpinning the development and introduction of the Citizenship Test, CMCF has fundamental concerns about this Government continuing to use the Citizenship Test as a key tool in judging suitability for citizenship.

CMCF's concerns with the Citizenship Test involve:

- the role and aim of the test – CMCF has reservations about whether the test contributes to the goals of instilling Australian values, helping migrants to integrate and maximise the opportunities available to them, or deterring undesirable immigrants;
- the effectiveness of the test - the proposition that a short written multiple choice examination can test whether applicants will be “good citizens”, rather than testing rote learning and IT skills, appears flawed;
- the content of the Citizenship Test and the mechanism for approving test questions – while it may be appropriate to quiz applicants on their English language and Australian history skills as well as aspects of citizen responsibilities, the suggestion that Australian values can be codified and determined by a single Minister continues to present significant concerns for CMCF;
- the discriminatory character of the test – asking immigrants to accurately identify and commit to values that the average Australian is not required to identify, agree with, and/or commit to, is inequitable;

- the ethical and practical implications of placing multiple obstacles in the path to gaining citizenship, particularly for immigrants who may have already experienced trauma and distress;
- the moral implications of testing people on “common values” which implies that there is only one set of “Australian values” and one type of “Australian citizen”, undermining the vital role that multiculturalism and diversity plays in Australian society; and
- the efficient use of public resources – while there may be some merit in promoting the reciprocity of responsibilities that citizenship involves, the Citizenship Test does not achieve this, and the inherent red-tape and cost to the Australian taxpayer that the test generates far outweigh the short-term benefits.

### The Citizenship Test

The second reading speech to Parliament when the amendments to the Citizenship Act were introduced by the previous Government stated “the test will encourage prospective citizens to obtain the knowledge they need to support successful integration into Australian society”. Not only is it near impossible to draft questions that test “Australian values”, particularly concepts like “mateship”, respect for freedom or commitment to democracy, but the suggestion that the obligations of citizenship and the ability to integrate or even contribute to Australian society could be measured by multi-choice questions about Australian history and Australian ideals seems implausible.

The current Citizenship Test, an on-line multiple-choice test, merely assesses a person’s English skills, computer skills, comprehension, and memory. It does not guarantee a better citizen, despite the previous Government’s proposition that it will assure the community that migrants are able to integrate into Australian society. Individuals who disagree with any of the purported “Australian values” could still pass the citizenship test by ticking the right box even if they vehemently oppose all those values. An individual’s interaction with the Australian community, over time, particularly since the period of permanent residency was increased, is a far more accurate gauge of good citizenship than the current test. The test has resulted in individuals who have made meaningful contributions to Australia over four years missing out on citizenship because they have poor literacy or memory skills.

CMCF is not surprised to learn, as the Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Councils of Australia (FECCA) pointed out in a recent media release, that “there has been a significant drop in the number of people applying for citizenship since the test was brought in.” In providing input into the inquiry into the test in July 2007, CMCF highlighted that the test would have a negative impact on those applying to become citizens.

The current Citizenship Test was not developed in consultation with the community or based on sound evidence. A number of the questions in the Citizenship Test are so obscure that the average Australian cannot answer them. The Citizenship Test and its current questions have provided significant material for comedians across the nation, but do not appear to provide a transparent tool to assess suitability for citizenship.

The CMCF strongly advocates that Australian citizenship is much more than a ceremony. The Citizenship Test does not change this. Australian citizenship is an opportunity to embrace the Australian way of life, which is different for all of us. Giving one Minister the power to determine what is “the Australian way of life”, and what values are Australian or un-Australian is a key issue for CMCF. The design and structure of the Citizenship Test should be transparent, objective and be

open to public consultation and both public and parliamentary scrutiny. The content of the test should not be at the discretion of one Minister.

#### Ethical Issues Raised by the Citizenship Test

CMCF “strongly advocates a continuing commitment to multiculturalism” and we share the strong concerns about the Citizenship Test that many other groups, such as FECCA, highlighted in previous submissions on the citizenship testing debate. Multiculturalism has been a cornerstone to the development of our nation. It has enriched and shaped our values throughout our short history, creating the Australian way of life. The placement of another barrier in the path to gaining citizenship is an affront to the positive impact that immigration has had on this nation.

As the Citizenship Test prevents some individuals from acquiring the rights of citizens, the test should be carefully considered from a human rights perspective. People with a disability, those who have low literacy levels, individuals who have experienced torture or trauma, and those who have fundamentally different beliefs, are just some examples of the types of people who are likely be discriminated against by this test. Consistent with our attitudes of a ‘fair go for all’, Australia, as a nation, has always valued diversity, inclusiveness, and tolerance. It is this reciprocity, rather than a one-off quiz, that is more likely to lead to the social unity that this Government is seeking to achieve.

#### The Efficient Use of Public Resources

The Citizenship Test is not an efficient, effective or ethical use of public resources. There are more practical and effective ways of using the funds that are spent in administering and monitoring the Citizenship Test. Examples include: English language classes; ongoing community integration programs; employment skills programs; community support services; reciprocity programs, such as volunteer or community participation arrangements; or a range of social cohesion or education programs. The focus on any new citizenship funds should be on ensuring successful settlement and ongoing support to ensure good citizenship rather than focusing on one-off multiple choice tests.

#### Conclusion

CMCF’s role is to represent the needs and aspirations of Canberra’s multicultural community, while celebrating its achievements and fostering a spirit of cooperation and harmony. In this role, the CMCF has a key responsibility to support ethnic communities and people who have experienced the refugee and migration processes. The continuation of the previous Government’s Citizenship Test policy is a significant issue for this organisation and the community we represent. For these reasons CMCF does not support the continuation of the Citizenship Test.

For further information, please contact Sam Wong on 0411 417 666 or [chair@cmcf.org.au](mailto:chair@cmcf.org.au).



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