



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

**Australian Citizenship Amendment
(Special Residence Requirements) Bill 2013**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 5 June 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 5 June 2013
Page 5493
Questioner
Speaker Bird, Sharon, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms BIRD (Cunningham—Minister for Higher Education and Skills) (13:12): I thank members for their contributions—the member for Hindmarsh and other members who have participated in the second reading debate on this bill. I remind the House that the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Special Residence Requirements) Bill 2013 amends the Australian Citizenship Act 2007 to give the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship a discretion to provide a pathway to citizenship to a very small number of people in very exceptional circumstances where it would be of benefit to Australia for them to be Australian citizens and to represent Australia in their field of expertise, be that medicine, research, the performing arts or sport.

The bill builds upon the existing special residence requirements in sections 22A and 22B of the act. It allows the minister to substitute alternative residence requirements on a case by case basis for certain people who need to become an Australian citizen to engage in an activity of benefit to Australia, or for people whose work requires them to regularly travel outside of Australia. These categories of people are defined by a legislative instrument made under section 22C of the act. The bill maintains the integrity of the citizenship program by requiring the minister to be satisfied that the applicant meets all the other requirements for citizenship by conferral, including their age, their identity, that they are of good character and, where relevant, that they have passed the citizenship test.

Although applicants for whom the discretion is exercised will acquire citizenship after a reduced period of residence in Australia, the bill ensures that those applicants develop a good understanding of the Australian way of life and the commitment made through the citizenship pledge by requiring them to commit to being present in Australia for a certain period of time after becoming a citizen. If they do not honour this undertaking, their citizenship can be revoked by the minister.

The bill ensures transparency by requiring the minister to table a statement in each house of the parliament if the discretion is exercised and a person becomes an Australian citizen as a result. The minister's discretion cannot be delegated nor can the minister be compelled to use this power whether or not a person or an organisation has requested it. The bill acknowledges the benefits that certain people bring to Australia and provides them with a way to become Australian citizens. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that this bill be reported to the House without amendment.