



Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory Inc

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MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

MCNT's response to proposed changes to Australian citizenship eligibility

The Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory (MCNT) takes pride in being the peak organisation in the Northern Territory, representing the interests of our multicultural society. We value respect for cultural diversity and unity under a common Australian identity. A positive and welcoming pathway to Australian citizenship is central to maintaining the success of our inclusive multicultural nation.

The MCNT is concerned that some of the proposed changes to the eligibility criteria for Australian Citizenship would be counter-productive to achieving a truly inclusive and united Australia. Council President Kevin Kadirgamar said that "while the MCNT acknowledges and appreciates the need for strict vetting of applicants' character and adherence to national values, the other proposed changes, by way of imposing an English language test and requiring permanent residents to wait for 4 years before applying for citizenship, are disconcerting".

Mr. Kadirgamar further explained that "Australian citizenship is a significant step that gives newcomers a new shared identity as Australians, enables them to truly feel part of the community, and maximises their social and economic contribution. It is with this recognition that the MCNT started its Citizenship Education Program, which assists aspiring citizens in their pathway towards full and formal membership of the Australian society".

The MCNT is of the view that prolonging the period of eligibility for citizenship and enforcing an English test are counter-productive to a strong and inclusive society, and may unfairly target vulnerable groups such as humanitarian entrants rather than empowering them. Mr. Kadirgamar noted that "this is inconsistent with the *spirit of egalitarianism* envisaged in the Australian Values Statement, that *embraces mutual respect, tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good*".

The MCNT calls on all political leaders to ensure that any changes to the citizenship process are based on robust empirical evidence and not political considerations.

END

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