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**STRENGTHENING THE TEST FOR AUSTRALIAN CITIZENSHIP  
CLOSING DATE: 1 JUNE 2017**

Thank you for inviting contributions for the proposed changes to the criteria for Australian citizenship. The Challenging Racism Project (CRP) offers the following submission. We are a leading research group that examines migrant settlement, migrant services, community relations, and also the aspirations of minority groups, such as Muslims, Africans and asylum seekers. With a vast body of empirical research and an extensive body of knowledge arising from collaborations with various universities, government agencies, non-government organisations and private companies, we offer our expertise on the proposed changes to citizenship test questions.

Our concerns are twofold and relate to proposed changes to the values component of the citizenship test:

1. The rationale and lack of evidence for the changes; and
2. Consequences of the questions likely to be posed, in both misleading the general public through perpetuating stereotypes and the detrimental impact of such stereotyping on minority groups.

We note that there is consideration to supplement the national Citizenship Test with questions to test applicants' understanding and agreement with "Australian values, and the privileges and responsibilities of Australian citizenship". The specified domains to test are democratic beliefs, freedoms, equality, and integration. Our concern is that the Discussion Paper *Strengthening the Test for Australian Citizenship* provides no evidence-base for the assumption that there is a lack of understanding and agreement with the above-mentioned values among visa holders who are not citizens.

It is our view that a clear evidence base must be part of a rationale for changes to public and social policy. A demonstrated relationship is required that a problem, if it is substantiated, can be solved by specific measures such as testing of values in this particular case.

Our expert knowledge of empirical research in Australia can find no basis for the assumption that visa holders who apply for citizenship do not understand and agree with Australian values of democracy, freedom, equality, and integration. Indeed, most research has found that immigrants come to Australia in search of a home characterised by those values.

The Discussion Paper states that: “The Australian community expects that aspiring citizens demonstrate their allegiance to Australia, their commitment to live in accordance with Australian values, and their willingness and ability to integrate into and become contributing members of the Australian community” (p.5). We have found in our research that Australian Muslims, for example, not only identify as Australian but also feel a sense of belonging to Australia. A vast majority indicate the importance for their children to become fully accepted as Australians.

We are particularly concerned by media reports that suggest that the additional questions will specifically test values regarding gender relations (*The Australian* 20 April 2017, p.1). Those reported and cited as sourced from the Department of Immigration include:

- Does Australia’s principle of freedom of religion mean that it is permissible to force children to marry?
- In Australia’s multicultural society, under which circumstances is it permissible to cut female genitals?
- While it is illegal to use violence in public, under what circumstances can you strike your spouse in the privacy of your own home?
- Under what circumstances is it appropriate to prohibit girls from education?

Again, we know of no reliable research that has found that visa holders who apply for citizenship have views on gender values that are out of step with Australian norms. Our research has found that there are widely held stereotypes about the gender attitudes of minority groups, such as Australian Muslims. The potential questions above reflect such stereotypes and deeply held false views and perceptions. It is not only important to have a society informed by facts rather than prejudices, but false beliefs and stereotypes can have negative consequences for groups subjected to these stereotypes. We have seen for example in recent years, a proliferation of right wing groups and organised racism. Research has demonstrated the impact upon minorities includes physical and verbal attacks and taunts.

In concluding, we strongly recommend that any proposed changes must be substantiated with evidence-based research and that they should not incite ill-feeling.

Details of our research and activities can be found at:

[https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/challengingracism/challenging\\_racism\\_project](https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/challengingracism/challenging_racism_project)

Yours sincerely

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On behalf of the Challenging Racism Project, Western Sydney University