

I heard an ABC interview this morning about priority “significant foreign investor visas” leading to Australian permanent residency or eventually citizenship. During this interview the Productivity Commission report on such visas was mentioned. Please find below a copied and pasted E-mail I sent to Hon. Mr. Chris Bowen on 15/10/2012 when I first became aware of the rich foreigner investment visas. I appreciate that the \$ figure for such visas has since increased and the threshold for FIRB approval for the sale of Australian agricultural land has significantly and appropriately reduced but my sentiment remains the same.

The lax legislation associated with such visas and paths to Australian permanent residency or citizenship has obviously been taken advantage of by a significant number of rich foreign “investors” who simply bought, for example, bonds with no appreciable benefit for Australia. While I suspect the relevant legislation may have been amended, I believe that the principals behind such visas were flawed and short sighted and should never have been introduced. I have written to several politicians since the E-mail to Mr. Bowen and my concern on this subject has only been magnified.

Thanking you for considering the above.

Yours sincerely,

Peter K. Thorn

From: Peter & Carmen
Sent: Monday, October 15, 2012 3:53 PM
To: Chris.Bowen.MP@aph.gov.au
Subject: Sale of Australian citizenship for foreign investors with \$5 million

Hon Mr. Chris Bowen,

This E-mail concerns reports in the media that the government is considering legislation to fast track Australian citizenship for foreign nationals with \$5 million to invest in Australia. My comments are as follows:

1. Selling Australian citizenship to wealthy foreigners is preposterous and should be condemned. I am not convinced of the difference in principal, paying \$15,000 to a people smuggler vs. the government tax windfall from the wealthy foreigner with \$5 million to invest. I remain unconvinced that the wealthy foreign investor will make a more worthwhile citizen than an asylum seeker who has been determined to be a genuine refugee. Having millions of \$s does not necessarily equate with good character deserving of Australian citizenship.
2. How would the government determine how wealthy foreign nationals “earned” their millions to be invested in Australia? Did they exploit others? Was it the laundered money of crime? Did the money to be invested come from drugs, arms dealing, prostitution or people trafficking etc?.
3. Are Australian business people so stupid that they are unable to attract foreign investment without the need to resort to bribe wealthy foreign nationals to bring some of their wealth to Australia for “the reward” of citizenship. Watching the recent “Great Southern Land” TV documentary gave me confidence that as Australians we can.
4. Consider, for example, what such a policy might do to real estate prices if it were taken up on a large scale. China alone is reported to have 560,000 millionaires. How many of these “millionaires” will Australia accept as citizens? What effect would such a policy have on competition for school and university entry for current Australian citizens? Take a look at the enrolments of some selective public schools in Sydney. Consider the potential lifestyle of many Australian children having to forsake already limited family and leisure time to spend more time in “competitive” study. Consider the financial disadvantage for current Australian families.

5. Consider a wealthy foreign national who gains Australian citizenship as a consequence of having \$5 million to invest in Australia. Such "Australian citizen investors" would then be able to attract foreign capital (and not necessarily "clean" capital) and buy whatever they wanted in Australia, including Australian resources and agricultural land without attracting the scrutiny of the FIRB (not that it would matter to politicians who already condone the sale of Australian agricultural land provided it is worth less than \$240 or so million!
6. The bias and conflict of interest of those groups lobbying for such changes to Australian citizenship based on investment wealth should be seen for what it is worth.

It is about time that Australian politicians consulted their constituents and the Australian population more broadly, before considering and making such important decisions. It increasingly disturbs me that some politician's or political advisor's not so bright idea can overshadow the commonsense and will of the Australian population. Selling Australian citizenship is a dangerous precedent and unwelcome. Wake up, listen to the voice of everyday Australians, use commonsense and think of future generations of Australians for a change rather than your political futures!!!

After Wayne Swan's approval of the selloff of Cubbie Station to the Peoples Republic of China and Japan consortium, why not streamline the great Australian selloff (or sell out) and have an Australia in its entirety auction and invite China, India, Russia or anyone else with the money to bid! Don't play the xenophobic card on the selloff of Australia's assets unless you truly believe that Australia is not a multicultural nation. Learn from the mistakes of other countries whose politicians have allowed and encouraged the selloff of their assets to foreign interests for short term gain. Consider also, reciprocity of the sale of citizenship and resources by foreign countries most of which aren't that stupid.

Yours sincerely,

Peter K. Thorn