



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

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Citizenship must be taken seriously, but not placed out of reach – Catholic Bishop

Citizenship is the making of a commitment to Australia, and it is important to take it seriously, but without making it impossible to acquire, particularly because of language or age, Bishop Joseph Grech said today.

Bishop Grech, the Bishops' Delegate for Immigration Issues was responding to the federal government's plans to introduce a citizenship test.

Prime Minister John Howard announced this week that under the proposed formal citizenship test, future migrants would need to demonstrate a basic level of English language skills, as well as knowledge of the Australian way of life and values.

"While we do not support the introduction of a formal citizenship test, we are open to the introduction of a compulsory untested citizenship course," Bishop Grech said.

"We believe that a formal test would be an impossible burden on many migrants, especially on many humanitarian entrants and elderly people."

However, Bishop Grech said every effort should be made to make the citizenship ceremony as significant as possible.

"Sometimes, in areas where considerable numbers of people regularly become Australian citizens, large impersonal ceremonies are held only once or twice a year," he said.

"We suggest that there be small numbers of new citizens at each ceremony and that every effort be made to make the ceremony one that befits the importance of the occasion."

Bishop Grech said members of the Australian community should also be encouraged to attend to welcome and establish links with the new citizens.

For more information contact Bishop Joseph Grech on 03 5441 2544 or Monsignor John Murphy on 0418 224 524.