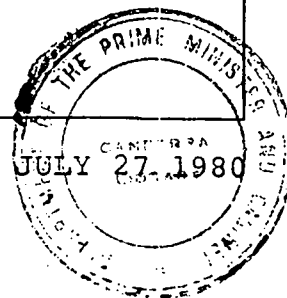




PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

SUNDAY JULY 27, 1980



ELECTORATE TALK

Tonight I would like to mention some of the important initiatives the Government has taken recently in Immigration and Ethnic Affairs.

On the one hand, there is a need to maintain a strong and viable Immigration programme which meet Australia's needs for skilled manpower and satisfies the desires of existing residents to be re-united with members of their families.

But we also need to ensure that this inflow of migrants is controlled in fairness, both to those seeking entry to Australia and to our residents. Our recent initiatives have sought to reconcile both these objectives.

We are making it easier for relatives and friends of Australia to migrate if they are assured of support here; this is being done through a relaxation of our migrant entry requirements announced by the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Ian Macphee in May this year.

At the same time, we are taking action to curb future illegal immigration by removing its principal incentive - the possibility of later obtaining the right of legal permanent residence here.

In deciding on these initiatives the Government had to face the fact that Australia already has many thousands of illegal immigrants.

Their numbers have been building up over a period of years but particularly since the "easy visa system" for tourists was introduced in 1973.

This system was widely abused and was later abandoned.

But, for course, by then many illegal migrants were already here.

No-one could realistically suggest that we should seek out, detain and deport every illegal immigrant in Australia.

Many have been here for some years and have established themselves successfully.

Others have close family ties which cannot be ignored.

At the same time the Government believes that people who were here legally, but temporarily should not be treated less favourably than those who were here illegally.

Anyone who arrived in Australia before 1 January 1980, whether legally or illegally, is eligible to apply under what is called the "regularisation of status programme" and will be approved unless he or she has serious health or character problems.

I am pleased to say that the English language and ethnic media - press, radio and television - have given strong editorial and other support to the programme.

Ethnic community leaders have also lent their weight.

By last week, just over a month since the date that the programme was announced, more than 11,500 enquiries and 5,000 applications had already been made to the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs.

This is an excellent response and, as the opportunity to apply remains open until 31 December this year, it gives every indication of being a most successful initiative.

Reaching people who are eligible to apply is a very complex task and it requires the fullest possible support from other sections of the community.

Even when they learn about the opportunity to become legal permanent residents, many of these people are afraid to come forward because they fear that, in some way, it may be a trap to lure them into the open so that they can be seized, gaoled and deported.

For these people I have a simple, direct message: this is not a trap.

The Government is not engaged on some sort of massive deportation exercise.

This would be neither effective nor just.

Indeed, the Australian community would be outraged if any government attempted deception of that kind.

The first person illegally living in Australia to come forward was a young Greek girl living in Goulburn, New South Wales, Jenny Giannopoulos.

You may have seen television interviews with her on the day when she was told she was approved.

Her relief and happiness were apparent as was her concern to encourage others, by her example, to come forward.

Many have already done so and I hope that many more will follow.

The programme is not just something of benefit to persons illegally in Australia.

People who were here legally can also benefit from it.

I am particularly pleased, therefore, that one of the greatest sportsmen of all time, a man whose name is a household word in this country as it is in his homeland, the West Indies, has agreed to place his own considerable personal prestige behind the programme.

I refer to Sir Garfield Sobers who has become the first person legally in this country approved under the new arrangements.

Between the young Greek girl illegally here and the distinguished international sportsman, there are many thousands of other cases each of which would be a story in itself.

The Government is determined to legalise their status as quickly and as simply as possible unless there are very grave reasons indeed for not doing so.

In fact, no case will be rejected until my colleague, the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, has personally considered all the circumstances of the case.

I also want particularly to stress that from the moment they are granted permanent residence under the programme, people have the same rights as any other resident of Australia.

They will have the same right to sponsor relatives and friends.

They will have the same right, after three years' legal residence here, to apply for Australian citizenship.

They will have the same rights and access to the post-arrival settlement services which we have been developing and extending to assist newcomers.

The task of settling people in this country is not complete when a migrant arrives or when someone is granted change of status; this is only the beginning.

We have introduced, extended and improved a wide range of settlement services for migrants in order to help resolve the problems inevitable in making one's way in a new country and to reinforce their prospects of success - economically, socially and culturally.

This action flows from the Galbally Report which we commissioned, accepted in full and implemented promptly and effectively.

But I turn again, as one must, from these broader national purposes to the individuals who have lived and are living among us in unnecessary apprehension because they have entered here illegally or failed to leave when their visas expired.

I urge them to come forward.

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