

## Citizenship in Australia

### History of Australian citizenship

At Federation in 1901, 'British subject' was the sole civic status noted in the Australian Constitution. The Australasian Federal Convention of 1897–98 was unable to agree on a definition of the term 'citizen' and wanted to preserve British nationality in Australia. An administrative concept of citizenship arose from the need to distinguish between British subjects who were permanent residents and those who were merely visitors. This was necessary for the Commonwealth to exercise its powers over immigration and deportation. Motivated by the nationalism of Arthur Calwell, the Minister for Immigration 1945–49, this administrative concept was formalised in the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948*. In 1958 the Act was amended so that naturalisation could only be revoked if obtained by fraud. This prevented a naturalised person being stripped of citizenship and deported.

Throughout the 1960s, Australian citizens were still required to declare their nationality as British. The term 'Australian nationality' had no official recognition or meaning until the Act was amended in 1969 and renamed the Citizenship Act. This followed a growing sense of Australian nationalism and the declining importance for Australians of the British Empire. In 1973 the Act was renamed the Australian Citizenship Act. It was not until 1984 that Australian citizens ceased to be British subjects.

### The records

The relationship between citizens and government is blurred by the absence of a clear definition of Australian citizenship, its rights and obligations. Relevant records are spread widely across government agencies covering activities such as immigration, passports, franchise, jury service, public service employment and social security.

Reflecting this, the records held by the National Archives cover a range of issues such as: the legal and constitutional meaning of citizenship; naturalisation; ceremonies; promotional activities; civic identity of migrants, aliens, Aboriginal people, non-Europeans and women; rights and obligations of citizenship; travel and passports; and international human rights.

Most records take the form of case files or policy files and include correspondence, reports, newspaper clippings, and bills introduced into Parliament.

## Record series documenting the history of citizenship in Australia

### Attorney-General's Department, 1901– (CA 5)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<a href="#">Bill files</a>	1901–ongoing	A2863
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1929–ongoing	A432
<a href="#">Special files</a>	1952–ongoing	A467

### Department of Immigration, 1945– (CA 51)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<a href="#">Correspondence files, class 1 (general, passports)</a>	1939–50	A659
<a href="#">Correspondence files, class 6 (aliens registration)</a>	1946–50	A437
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1951–55	A445
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1953–ongoing	A446
<a href="#">Secret correspondence files</a>	1972–ongoing	A6980

See also the main series of the State offices of the Department of Immigration, held in State offices of the National Archives: [C3939](#) (held in Sydney); [J25](#) (Brisbane); [K403](#) (Perth); [D399](#) and [D400](#) (Adelaide – held in Sydney and Adelaide)

### Department of External Affairs (I), 1901–16 (CA 7)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1903–38	A1

### Department of External Affairs (II), 1921–70 (CA 18)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1927–42	A981
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1947	A1068
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1948–89	A1838

### Prime Minister's Department, 1911–71 (CA 12)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1915–23	A457
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1923–34	A458
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1934–50	A461
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1951–55	A462
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1956–ongoing	A463

## Commonwealth Investigation Service, 1946–60 (CA 650)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1927–53	A367
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1940–49	A373

See also series of the State offices of the CIS, held in State offices of the National Archives: [SP1714/1](#) (held in Sydney); [B741](#) (Melbourne); [BP242/1](#) (Brisbane); [D1915](#) (Adelaide);

## Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, 1949– (CA 1297)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<a href="#">Subject files</a>	1949–ongoing	A6122

## House of Representatives Select Committee on Voting Rights of Aborigines (CA 3195)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<a href="#">Papers of the Committee</a>	1961	AA1982/247

## Good Neighbour Council of the ACT, 1950–80 (CA 2980)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
<a href="#">Minutes, agenda, reports, papers of meetings</a>	1950–79	AA1980/254
<a href="#">Correspondence files</a>	1950–80	AA1980/255

See also series of the Good Neighbour Council of Victoria (CA 3491) [M653](#) and [M690](#) (held in Melbourne) and the Good Neighbour Council of Western Australia (CA 7268) [K1225](#) (held in Perth)

## For more information

Citizenship was just one of a diverse range of matters dealt with by some of the large departments listed in the table above. In using RecordSearch to identify record items from the correspondence series of departments such as External Affairs or the Prime Minister's Department you will need to conduct searches using the series number and keywords that reflect your area of interest (such as 'citizen', 'nationality' or 'alien').

### Fact Sheets:

- *Fact sheet 68 - Naturalisation records held in Canberra*

### Research guide:

- [Citizenship in Australia: A Guide to Commonwealth Government Records](#)