

(1981)

(McPhee, I., 1981)

News release by Mr I McPhee, Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs on 24 April 1981.

All people entering Australia will be required to carry a passport as from 1 July 1981 the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Mr Ian McPhee announced in Canberra today.

This measure is intended to curb abuses of the existing Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement. Under this arrangement Australian and New Zealand citizens and certain other people with resident status in the two countries have been able to cross the Tasman without passports.

The Australian Royal Commission of Inquiry into Drugs and Australian police, security and immigration authorities have drawn attention to the ease with which the existing arrangement can be exploited.

People involved in terrorism, drug trafficking or other illegal activities, can too easily pass themselves off as Australian or New Zealand citizens under the existing arrangement. This represents a significant threat to society.

The existing arrangement has also been exploited by people who have abducted children from Australia. They will no longer be able to freely adopt false identities for themselves and the abducted children for purposes of leaving Australia.

The new measures will also prevent people from other countries circumventing Australia's normal migration requirements. It will significantly curb the ability of people to falsely represent themselves as Australian or New Zealand citizens.

"The new measures will preserve a uniquely privileged position for New Zealanders in Australia's immigration policies in allowing them to enter Australia without visas", the Minister said.

"The passport requirement represents the option involving least delay and inconvenience to travellers among the various approaches which might have been taken to close off this loophole in Australian entry controls", the Minister said.

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The Government considered and rejected the alternative of instituting intensive interrogation and baggage search or people crossing the Tasman. The passport will ensure that genuine trans-Tasman travellers are immediately recognised as such and are cleared quickly and without suspicion through customs and immigration controls.

We will be developing arrangements for special lines at major airports exclusively for Australian and New Zealand citizens, further facilitating the traditional right of Australians and New Zealanders to travel freely between the two countries.

Recent surveys have shown that a substantial proportion of Australians travelling to New Zealand already have passports.

The Minister urged all residents of Australia planning a holiday in New Zealand to ensure that they have a passport for their return journey. Residents who did not hold Australian or New Zealand citizenship should also ensure that they held return endorsements, available at any office of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs in Australia. In this respect the procedures were precisely the same as those for holidays in other countries.

Mr McPhee emphasised that the decision, which has been under examination for a long time, has been taken purely on the above grounds. There was no foundation whatever for reports which had reached Australia about allegations in the New Zealand press that the travel documents decision was in some way related to other issues.

24 April 1981.