

— **Exclusive**

Kiwis push for pathways to citizenship in Australia

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New Zealanders pushing for pathways to Australian citizenship will lobby Treasurer Jim Chalmers and Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil in Canberra this week, as more than 11,000 Kiwis remain stuck in a years-long visa processing backlog.

After [Prime Minister Anthony Albanese](#) and his New Zealand counterpart [Jacinda Ardern](#) pledged renewed co-operation between the two countries in June [<https://www.afr.com/link/follow-20180101-p5az59>] – including progress on citizenship and enhanced voting rights – campaigners say applicants for the 189 visa stream were left languishing by the former Morrison government.



NZ Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in June. **Nick Moir**

Lobby group Oz Kiwi will hold talks at Parliament House, including meeting Immigration Minister Andrew Giles. They will push Labor to end the exclusion of some New Zealanders in Australia from the National Disability Insurance Scheme [<https://www.afr.com/link/follow-20180101-p5bvp7>], despite them having to pay for disability care through the Medicare levy.

Current rules allow some New Zealanders who have lived in Australia for more than four years to become permanent residents. Special categories exist for individuals resident in Australia before February 2001, including access to the NDIS.

The federal government estimates about 670,000 New Zealand citizens live in Australia – close to 15 per cent of New Zealand's population. About 70,000 Australians living across the Tasman.

Oz Kiwi chairwoman Joanne Cox praised Dr Chalmers for his commitment to advancing the interest of New Zealanders resident in Australia, as a review of benefits and opportunities for citizens of both countries continues.

It is due to report to both governments before Anzac Day in April.

“If there's upwards of 650,000 Kiwis in Australia, maybe a third of them would be dual citizens,” she said. “Maybe half the remainder have a pathway to permanent residency. We estimate between 200,000 and 250,000 have no pathway.

“The NDIS is one of the biggest issues. New Zealanders pay the Medicare levy but are the only group in Australia who can't access the services. Children who were receiving treatment through state-based programs lost access when it all became part of the NDIS.”

The 1973 Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement allows citizens of the two countries to enter each other's country to visit, live and work indefinitely.

New Zealand is the only country that has such an arrangement with Australia. There is no cap on arrivals, and health and character grounds are the only limitations on continued residency.

Ms Cox said Oz Kiwi was not pushing for New Zealanders living in Australia to get expanded voting rights, something flagged by Mr Albanese in July. Parliament's joint standing committee on electoral matters is considering the proposal.

Constitutional experts and the Liberal Party have warned any such change would almost certainly face a High Court challenge.

“If we could get a fair and affordable pathway to citizenship for those who want it, we wouldn’t need to worry about voting,” Ms Cox said.

Former New Zealand prime minister Helen Clark [<https://www.afr.com/link/follow-20180101-p5bua3>] told *The Australian Financial Review* voting rights for New Zealanders was question for the federal government.

“It’s a question for Australia. It has the sovereign right to decide who’s going to get the vote, if you’re going to give the right to New Zealanders who aren’t citizens, then isn’t everyone else who’s a permanent resident but not a citizen going to ask?”

“It opens up a much bigger question: do you let permanent residents vote? You know, there was a time in New Zealand where voting laws were so lax that people who were overseas students could vote.

“It may be quite hard to argue that New Zealanders should be able to vote but not others who have resident status.”

Oz Kiwi members will also meet with the New Zealand High Commissioner, Dame Annette King while in Canberra.

“We’re doing this work, including pushing for the visa backlog to be quickly addressed, for the people we refer to as the ‘lost Kiwis’. They’re the ones who missed out,” Ms Cox said.

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