

Aussies abandoned in India: The Australian citizenship lie

By Tarric Brooker

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The Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, being the representative in Australia of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, requests all those whom it may concern to allow the bearer to pass freely without let or hindrance and to afford him or her every assistance and protection of which he or she may stand in need.

By enacting the travel ban against Australian citizens returning from India, the Morrison Government has managed to unite [Matt Canavan](#), [Andrew Bolt](#), the [Greens](#) and [Labor](#), writes Tarric Brooker.

IN THE political drama series, [The West Wing](#), [Martin Sheen](#) plays President Josiah Bartlett in a fictional account of what life is like inside the White House for the president and his staff.

In one particularly [memorable episode](#), President Bartlett speaks to his Chief of Staff on the rights conferred on an individual through their citizenship:

“Did you know that 2,000 years ago a Roman

citizen could walk across the face of the known world free of the fear of molestation? He could walk across the earth unharmed, cloaked only in the words "Civis Romanus" — I am a Roman citizen. So great was the retribution of Rome, universally understood as certain, should any harm befall even one of its citizens.”

Now almost 2,000 years later, with the pandemic continuing to ravage much of the world, citizenship has seemingly taken on a very different meaning.

As the pandemic continues to rip through India, Australian citizens stranded there have been banned from returning home. Coming home from India is now a criminal offence, punishable by [up to five years gaol or a \\$66,000 fine](#).

The “double mutant” Indian strain of COVID-19 may present an enormous threat to Australia’s relatively virus-free shores. However, it’s equally true that no Australian citizen should ever be abandoned in their time of need.

Yet despite this sacred responsibility to all our nations’ citizens, in the 14 months since Australia officially closed its borders, no framework has been put into place by the Morrison Government to ensure the safe return of all stranded Australians.

In enacting the travel ban stopping Australian citizens returning from India, the Morrison Government has managed a feat few have ever achieved. It has united [Matt Canavan](#), [Andrew Bolt](#), the [Greens](#) and [Labor](#), along with a long list of others, in opposition to the ban.

None pulled any punches in their criticism of the ban, with all providing a hard-hitting commentary on the Government's treatment of Australian citizens.

Nationals Senator Matt Canavan was particularly scathing in his criticism, [comparing Prime Minister Scott Morrison with the ancient Roman Governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate](#) and his reported "washing his hands" of responsibility in the crucifixion of Jesus.

Canavan said:

"We sent planes to Wuhan to get Australians out and now, 15 months down the track, we are taking a leaf from Pontius Pilate and washing our hands of the circumstances of our fellow Australians."

There are a number of different precautions that Morrison could take in order to keep Australians safe, while also facilitating the return of citizens stranded in India and around the world.

Australians returning from India could be quarantined on Christmas Island, like passengers from China returning home at the beginning of the pandemic last year.

Quarantine facilities in isolated areas could be built or activated, in order to ensure that any outbreak that may escape quarantine could be more easily contained, compared with if it occurred within existing hotel quarantine locations, which are generally in highly populated urban areas.

While proposed solutions to the quarantine issue have been a matter of great debate since the pandemic began, after spending an average of around [\\$6 billion a week on stimulus](#) (calculated from Alan Kohler's figures of \$300 billion spread over 52 weeks), it's clear the financial resources exist to address this issue.

For the cost of just a few days of stimulus funding, a truly world-class solution could have been easily implemented.

The cover page of the Australian passport provides us with a clear view of the expectations placed on foreign governments and border officials in their treatment of Australian citizens.

As tens of thousands of Australians remain stranded all over the world waiting to return home, the plea on our nation's passport cover appears to be some kind of twisted joke:

"...afford him or her every assistance and protection of which he or she may need."

Once upon a time, Australian citizenship meant something. It was a shield with which our government protected our fellow citizens and ensured that those in need got the help they required.

There was nothing political about it, nor was there any consideration paid to the politics of fulfilling the obligations of the federal government to Australians abroad.

We may be a long way from the days of Roman citizens walking the Earth with no fear of harm, but as the pandemic continues to unfold, we should expect more from our government than behaving akin to what Matt Canavan described as a modern-day "Pontius Pilate".

As of today, Aussie citizens who try to defy the India travel ban face fines up to \$66,000 and jail sentences up to five years. While it's harsh, and unprecedented, the federal government believes the ends justify the means. But that hasn't stopped the backlash. [#TheProjectTV pic.twitter.com/R4UUx7d4Yk](#)

— The Project (@theprojecttv) [May 3, 2021](#)

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