

Social Security (International Agreements) Act 1999 Amendment Regulations 2004 (No. 2) 2004 No. 109

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Statutory Rules 2004 No. 109

Issued by the Authority of the Minister for Family and Community Services

Social Security (International Agreements) Act 1999

Social Security (International Agreements) Act 1999 Amendment Regulations 2004 (No. 2)

Subsection 8(1) of the *Social Security (International Agreements) Act 1999* (the Act) provides that a Schedule setting out the terms of an agreement between Australia and another country may be added to the Act by regulations, if the agreement relates to reciprocity in social security or superannuation matters.

Subsection 8(2) of the Act provides that regulations made by virtue of subsection 8(1) must not come into operation on a day earlier than the day on which the agreement concerned comes into operation for Australia.

Section 25 of the Act provides that the Governor-General may make regulations prescribing matters required or permitted by the Act to be prescribed, or necessary or convenient for carrying out or giving effect to the Act.

The purpose of the Regulations is to insert the Agreement on Social Security between Australia and the Kingdom of Belgium (the Agreement), as new Schedule 18 to the Act, to have effect from 1 July 2005.

The Belgian Government has confirmed that the Agreement could enter into force on 1 July 2005. The Agreement would coordinate the social security schemes of the countries to give better welfare protection for people who move between Australia and Belgium.

When people live in more than one country during their working lives, they often find that when they claim a pension or benefit they do not have enough residence or contributions under a social security system to qualify for payment. A network of social security agreements has been set up within the international community to help alleviate this problem. A key element in these agreements is the undertaking by the partners to share the responsibility for providing adequate social security coverage and, as a consequence, the associated costs. Australia is a country with a large foreign-born population and a growing internationally mobile Australian-born population, and it is appropriate for it to participate in this network of agreements.

When it comes into operation, the Agreement will enable people with contribution records in Belgium and living in Australia, to claim and qualify for part pensions from the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium. Similarly, many former Australian residents living in Belgium will be able to claim and qualify for a part Australian pension. The Agreement also includes provisions modifying Australia's Superannuation Guarantee arrangements to avoid double coverage of Belgian employees seconded to work temporarily in Australia. Reciprocal exemptions are provided for Australian workers seconded to work temporarily in Belgium.

All agreements specify 'entry into force' requirements, which stipulate that each party notify the other party by an exchange of diplomatic notes that all constitutional, legislative and any other matters that are necessary to be done have been done. An agreement will then come into operation on a date specified by reference to the exchange of diplomatic notes.

Regulations adding agreements to the Act need to be made and tabled in both Houses of the Parliament, and the period for disallowance of the Regulations needs to have elapsed, before the parties can exchange diplomatic notes as required under the entry into force provision.

In the Agreement with Belgium, the entry into force provision is expressed so that, provided the exchange of diplomatic notes is completed (expected to take place in May 2005) the Agreement will enter into force on 1 July 2005.

The Act specifies no conditions that need to be met before the power to make the Regulations may be exercised.

The new Agreement on Social Security with the Kingdom of Belgium complements similar Agreements with Austria, Canada, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and the United States of America.

The Regulations will commence on 1 July 2005.

Commencement on 1 July 2005 satisfies the requirement of subsection 8(2) of the Act that Regulations not come into operation on a day earlier than the day the relevant agreement comes into effect for Australia.