



## Chinese Community Council of Australia Inc 澳華社區議會

**A Submission for the Senate Select Committee on**

**Strengthening Multiculturalism**

**By the Chinese Community Council of Australia Inc**

**(11 May 2017)**

### **An Important Prerequisite to the Strengthening of Multiculturalism in Australia.**

Our First Australians, the Indigenous people of the land, should be recognized in the Australian Constitution. This recognition is a prerequisite or the first foundation stone for Australia as successful Multicultural society both domestically and internationally.

Our submission follows the terms of reference indicated below:

**(a) The views and experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse, and new and emerging communities;**

Multiculturalism, since its inception in the Whitlam government in the 1970s, through the Fraser government and all Federal governments on both sides of politics till today, has proved to be a national asset. The dividends paid by diversity is greatly underestimated and not properly recognized by all Australians. It is a fact that the immigrants have contributed to the nation in many ways, bringing wealth & prosperity, enriching social lifestyle, etc. for the betterment of all Australians.

Through Multiculturalism, it has provided a set of anti-discrimination law that protects the minorities in the community against racial discrimination, racial hatred, racially vilification and harassment. It also prevents harmful effects of racism and hate speech falling on the minorities.

Examples of institution created on Multicultural principles include the SBS and State departments responsible for Multiculturalism. It also introduced the inclusion of Multicultural principles in other government departments. Indeed, it has propelled Australia globally as one of the leading nations in Multiculturalism and neck-to-neck with Canada.

The emergence of Pauline Hanson and the abolishment of the Office of Multiculturalism by the Howard government signaled the first “crack” in the foundation of Multiculturalism. From this period to the present era where we now see the return of Paul Hanson to the public area (a dormant 20 year period), we have further witnessed the decay of Multiculturalism where institutions or departments were created for this purpose have lost its way. With the government paying lip service to Multiculturalism, these institutions have forgotten about the “Charter of Multiculturalism” which they were created from. The lack of government funding for

multicultural NGOs which advocate on public issues has resulted in the “loss of a voice” in speaking out for the diverse communities.

The current rise of “populism” if not curbed would erase most of the benefits accrued from Multiculturalism in the last 40 years. Populism can give short term gains to political parties which rely on it for holding on to power but it would be a long term loss for Australia.

Multiculturalism has stagnated and some would go further and say it is now going backwards. We would appeal to any government in the States and Territories, and the Federal government to restart Multiculturalism and move forward for the betterment of our nation.

**b) The adequacy and accessibility of settlement and social inclusion services and resources available to individuals and communities;**

Generally, the funding for government services is fairly accessible to all Australians irrespective of their cultural background. However the funding for settlement and social inclusion services for the new and emerging communities is deficient. This lack of funding also applies to NGOs advocating for Multiculturalism.

**c) The adequacy of existing data collection and social research on racially motivated crimes;**

Collecting data is an expensive affair. Funding on social research on racially motivated crimes is not well known or publicized in the community. Hence, one can perceive that there is not much funding in this area. The “ethnic” descriptor is a controversial issue and it should not be misused to vilify the whole community because of a few rotten eggs. Community consultation in this area is essential to promote community cohesion and harmony.

**d) The impact of discrimination, vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of race, colour, national or ethnic origins, culture or religious belief;**

We have witnessed “Populism” at its best with political developments in the US and Europe. Our TV screens (Fox, CNN, Skynews, ABC, RT, CGTN etc) are filled with daily reports of the ugliness and terror in US & Europe brought about by discrimination, vilification, exclusion and bigotry on the basis of ethnic origins, culture or religious belief. Populism enhances the creation of an “ethnic underclass” and is a good catalyst for unemployment, social dissatisfaction and criminal intentions. In the extreme, they play right into the hands of ISIS (terrorists).

Fortunately, the last election in France showed a bit of sanity in our troubled world. Australia should take a lesson from the moderates in Europe to avoid the politics of “Populism” and stop giving credibility to Paul Hanson. Our brand of Multiculturalism has international standing and we wish to preserve this concept for peace, cohesion and harmony among Australians.

e) The impact of political leadership and media representation on the prevalence of vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of race colour national or ethnic origin culture or religious belief;

Political leadership: Political leadership is important factor in advocating Multiculturalism. There is one lingering perception however, that politicians pay lip service to Multiculturalism and nothing else. Political leadership in this area must be restored in order to propel Multicultural forward again.

Most Multicultural committees/board are ineffective not because they don't have talented and dedicated people on it, but somehow, their advice could have been filtered by someone in the middle or the advice fell on deaf ears as it may run contrary to political agendas.

Multiculturalism should be above politics and it is an important tool for the development of Australia as an immigrant country.

Media: Access to general media and media representation on issues of Multiculturalism are limited as media has no commitment to the promotion and maintenance of Multiculturalism in Australia. To cite an extreme example, even the SBS pay lip service to Multiculturalism and the community has yet to see a real promotion and positive action in supporting Multiculturalism. Sad to say that most ethnic media are not very actively involved in it either.

f) How to improve the expected standard of public discourse about matters of race colour national or ethnic culture or religious belief;

Genuine consultations with the community and a mechanism that show transparency of decision making. Appointments to think tanks, committees and board should have an independent and transparent selection process and appointments be made on a broad-based composition from different political persuasion and cultural backgrounds.

h) The potential benefits and disadvantages of enshrining principles of multiculturalism in legislation;

Enshrining principles of multiculturalism in legislation has little or no downside and should have a mandatory statement for the inclusive of First Australians, particularly in our Australian Constitution. When such rights are embedded in laws, it would give Multiculturalism a stage two foundation ensuring future benefits from a diverse society is assured and maintained.

i) The potential benefits and disadvantages of establishing a legislative basis for the Multicultural Advisory Council, or for an ongoing Multicultural Commission;

There is always a benefit for establishing a legislative basis for these bodies provided the process of appointment is perceived to be independent and transparent. The decision making process of these bodies should be independent from political interference. However, the power of the

Minister of the Crown in the Westminster system should be upheld, ie. the Minister retains the power to accept or reject the advice.

j) Any related matters.

No comment

Submission made by: Dr Anthony Pun, OAM, National President

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