



26 May 2017

Committee Secretary  
Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Canberra ACT 2600

### **Submission to Select Committee Inquiry on Strengthening Multiculturalism**

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to Government and the broader community. FECCA strives to ensure that the needs and aspirations of Australians from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds are given proper recognition in public policy.

FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism so as to build a productive and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are developed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

#### **Introduction**

It is of foremost importance to acknowledge the history of Australia contained within the story of its first peoples. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples represent the world's oldest continuing culture, a culture rich with tradition and a culture connected to the land in the most unique of ways. FECCA believes that multiculturalism begins with recognising the rights and place in society held by Australia's first peoples and the cultural heritage that their communities have long nurtured.

Australia is one of the world's most culturally diverse nations. With the exception of Indigenous Australians, it is a country of migrants. Its successes and its prosperity are the direct result of the programs of migration by which its history can be defined.

In the context of such diversity, managing peaceful and harmonious inter-existence requires a strong commitment to understanding the core of each constituent culture. It requires respectful discourse when discussing the interactions between beliefs and structures. It calls for both symbolic and practical measures to enhance cohesion. Above all, successful multiculturalism requires leaders who value the contribution diversity makes to the fabric of Australian life and who are committed to binding those cultures and communities together to form a strong and united Australia.

FECCA thanks the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to the national conversation on strengthening multiculturalism and responds to this inquiry's terms of reference with the following submission.

**The Committee is inquiring into ways of protecting and strengthening Australia's multiculturalism and social inclusion, with particular reference to:**

- a. the views and experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse, and new and emerging communities;**

It is important to recognise that there is no homogenous experience for Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse populations. There is diversity across and within communities. The experience of CALD Australians will differ vastly dependent upon their country of origin, the visibility of their difference, the extent to which family and other networks are available, the manner of arrival in Australia, the extent to which the community is represented and established in Australia, media representations and leadership approaches.

Measures must be taken to improve CALD representation in leadership roles, in politics, business, and public service. Not only will this serve Australian as a whole due to representing the diversity of the Australian society as a whole, it will also create role models for future generation of migrants and refugees.

Importantly in this regard, representatives from ethno-cultural communities should be assisted in voicing their views and in detailing their experiences at a local, state and federal level. In order for Australia to best understand how experience differs across its cultural communities, we as a nation must ensure that those communities are given opportunities to represent themselves to government and to the broader community. This requires specific funding for advocacy bodies, including FECCA, and in particular to smaller organisations on state, territory and community level. These local organisations represent CALD populations in their own areas with specific knowledge of experiences at a community level.

SBS has, for many years, provided a means for Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity to be reflected on-screen and in radio. One of the most important functions performed by the SBS generally is its role in representing the views and interests of CALD communities and of new and emerging communities and of telling the stories of migrants. The value of this is broad. It encourages links between communities of origin and communities of settlement.

Measures must be taken to ensure broad representation from CALD background people in arts in general and in particular in visual media, like film and television—both behind and in front of the camera. Australia's film and television industry should improve CALD representation to further reflect contemporary multicultural Australian communities. Despite increased diversity in recent years, the industry has acknowledged the lack of representation of diversity.<sup>1</sup> In many ways, SBS can be seen as 'leaders in the Australian screen industry for putting diversity first'.<sup>2</sup> Through the Diversity Talent Escalator, SBS aim to 'address the current lack of career development opportunities for emerging screen practitioners and freelancers from different backgrounds'.<sup>3</sup> SBS has a distinctive and unique role in supporting Australia's CALD communities and in the promotion of a vibrant and harmonious multicultural Australia. The continued relevance and importance of SBS is demonstrated by

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<sup>1</sup> Screen Australia 2016, *Seeing ourselves: Reflections on diversity in TV drama*.

<sup>2</sup> Leeway, Jackie (2017), *Building Future Leaders through Career in Media*, *Australian Mosaic*, issue 45, 41.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 43.

the current social and political climate, noting the recent Scanlon Foundation report Mapping Social Cohesion which highlighted a rise in the proportion of people experiencing discrimination on the basis of skin colour, ethnicity or religion.<sup>4</sup> Appropriate resources should be provided to the SBS in its role in supporting CALD Australians through the broad range of modes used to deliver content to Australia's multicultural communities.

CALD communities' representation and consideration of their views and experiences can also be ensured through research bodies. Individual project proposals should be required to demonstrate strategies for ensuring diversity of consultation forms part of the core of any grant application.

FECCA urges the government to adopt targeted, inclusive and responsive programs—with a view to empowering CALD Australians through equity of access, experience and outcomes—across social policy and practice, and in particular, as part of the areas where priority is established, including aged care, child care, mental health care, women's safety and disability care and the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

One means of advancing the goals of multiculturalism is the establishment of a dedicated race relations institute, intended to specifically advance the goals of a socially cohesive multicultural Australia.

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

Australia has rightly been praised for the successful settlement of migrants throughout its history. Through the many waves of migration the nation has experienced, across different periods, Australia has maintained peaceful and positive ways of accommodating new arrivals. Maintaining that success will require continued commitment and evolving understandings as new circumstances of migration present unique challenges. Australia must be agile and innovative in adapting to these challenges. For this to occur, Australia must better understand the barriers that prevent CALD Australians from full participation in every part of Australian cultural, social and economic life.

In order to secure those evolved understandings, better, more directed research is needed. Evidence-based assessments of the root causes of obstacles to inclusion are essential to developing effective solutions.

The provision of more comprehensive language services is also vital to ensuring full participation and equitable access to government services and programs. Translators, interpreters and bilingual workers are essential for ensuring that CALD Australians have the greatest possible opportunities to become connected and engaged with the broader community. Because of challenges associated with language many CALD Australians experience an increased risk of isolation. Ensuring that language barriers are addressed will help Australia fully realise the potential of its CALD populations.

A complementary means of addressing language issues is the proper investment in the Community Hubs Program, the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and similar support structures. English language learning is a vital feature of successful settlement. It should be noted that, just as many speakers of English as a first language struggle with elements of the language and develop competency at individual rates, so too will those adopting English as a second, third or fourth language. Prioritising English requires an investment in the services that support learning rather than a punitive approach that fails to recognise the

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<sup>4</sup> Markus, Professor Andrew (2016) Mapping Social Cohesion The Scanlon Foundation surveys.

extraordinary contribution made by those for whom language presents a challenge. FECCA is concerned with how women, in particular those with limited literacy skills from their home countries, can find it difficult to attend and learn from the structured teaching methods through AMEP. Research has demonstrated how women may learn better through 'community-based learning program where they feel comfortable and more engaged in their own communities'.<sup>5</sup> FECCA's own community consultations have found there is a need for a more practical, practice oriented structure and AMEP content:

The contents of AMEP courses require better scrutiny as many participants would benefit from a more practice-oriented training rather than academic-oriented learning. Many participants also felt that these courses need to be trade specific as far as practically possible.<sup>6</sup>

Increased funding for community based organisations that provide different structured English classes, with child care options to encourage women's participation, is essential. Further, current AMEP system provisions for child care do not appear to meet the needs of parents attending AMEP classes, for example by not taking into account travel times. FECCA recommends increased funding provided to community organisations who can work directly with migrants and refugees to ensure participation in AMEP programs and other English learning programs.

**c. the adequacy of existing data collection and social research on racially motivated crimes;**

Racially motivated crime is under investigated as a subject in Australian research. Examples of random racial attacks in public can be seen in media on a regular basis.

Throughout the course of its consultations FECCA consistently receives reports that the experience of racially motivated aggression, both physical and verbal, is a constant feature in the lives of Australia's CALD communities.

The various legislative approaches in each of the Australian jurisdictions tend to be somewhat fragmented, with vilification and hate speech often forming a discrete offence whilst physical forms of violence may become aggravating factors in consideration at sentencing. Some jurisdictions have chosen to criminalise the possession of material intended to incite hatred.

Little effort appears to have been made in respect of data collection, information management, best-practice assessments and the impact of definition on outcomes. Accordingly, comprehensive analysis is rendered virtually impossible. Whilst the Australian Bureau of Statistics provides some figures related to victimisation of migrants, those figures fail to consider victimisation of people born in Australia whose religious or ethno-cultural factors make them targets of prejudice.

FECCA asserts that victimisation based on race, religion, culture, ethnicity or country of origin fundamentally conflicts with Australian values. It is a social problem as well as a legal one. In order to address the issue it is imperative that we as a nation form an accurate understanding of the extent to which racially or hate motivated crime exists in Australia. Specific funding should be granted for focussed and directed research aimed at creating that understanding.

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<sup>5</sup> El-Gack, N. (2015), Employment and Job Seeking Experiences: A case of South Sudanese Australian residing in the ACT, 18

<sup>6</sup> FECCA (2014-15) Multicultural Access and Equity Report, 23

Internationally, a number of other nations have established institutions specifically constituted for the purpose of promoting race relations and to aggregating data that informs practice regarding that mandate. These institutions are constituted in various ways and research should be conducted into the various benefits and disadvantages of each model. In whatever format Australia should consider establishing an organisation specifically constituted for the purpose for providing an accurate picture of the state of ethnic and cultural cohesion in Australia.<sup>7</sup>

Also important is the notion of a representatively diverse police force in all jurisdictions and at all levels. Not only does this increase the cultural competence of law-enforcement as a whole but it encourages identification with law enforcement by members of CALD communities. This in turn is likely to lead to increased reportage and more accurate figures in terms of the extent to which racially motivated crime exists in Australia.

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

Research by a range of organisations has indicated that racism is still prevalent, and that racial discrimination and vilification have serious harmful effects on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. Racial hatred and vilification can lead to emotional and psychological harm. Racism also reinforces other forms of discrimination and isolation. Research has found that 'discrimination can harm psychological well-being by making it hard to find a good job or apartment, undermining learning in educational settings, or depriving people of adequate health care'.<sup>8</sup> Further, research has demonstrated that 'the impact of experiencing discrimination in some settings was shown to be particularly associated with high or very high psychological stress'.<sup>9</sup> While actual racism and discrimination have severe impact on people's well-being, perceived discrimination can be equally damaging. Research has found that even perceived discrimination 'may be related to both mental and physical health outcomes'.<sup>10</sup> FECCA is especially concerned about increasingly hostile attitudes toward Muslim Australians and other specific minority groups.

The Scanlon Foundation has found that the reported experience of discrimination on the basis of 'skin colour, ethnic origin or religion' has significantly increased from 15 percent in 2015 to 20 percent in 2016. This is the highest recorded rate over the nine Scanlon Foundation surveys.<sup>11</sup>

Experience of discrimination was reported most frequently by respondents from a non-English speaking background. Of those who reported discrimination in 2016, 17 percent indicated that they experienced racial discrimination of some form 'about once a month' and 14 percent indicated that it occurred 'often – most weeks in a year'. Other recent research has highlighted particularly high levels of discrimination experienced by Indigenous Australians, Muslim women and migrants from South Sudan.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See for example The Canadian Race Relations Foundation <https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/en/>; see also the United Kingdom Race Relations Institute <http://www.irr.org.uk>

<sup>8</sup> Schmitt, Michael and Postmes, Tom The Consequence of Perceived Discrimination for Psychological Well-Being: A Meta-Analytical Review (2014) 921, Psychological Bulletin Vol. 140, No 4

<sup>9</sup> Ferdinand, Angeline S, Paredise, Yin, and Kelaher, Margaret Mental health impacts of racial discrimination in Australian culturally and linguistically diverse communities: a cross-sectional survey (2015) 401 BMC Public Health 15

<sup>10</sup> Pascoe, Elizabeth A. and Richman, Laura Smart Perceived Discrimination and Health: A Meta-Analytical Review (2009) 547, Psychological Bulletin, Vol. 135, No. 4

<sup>11</sup> Markus, A. (2016) Mapping Social Cohesion The Scanlon Foundation surveys.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Mission Australia's Annual Youth Survey found that just over one quarter of young people had experienced unfair treatment or discrimination in the past twelve months. Race or cultural background was reported by over 30 percent of these respondents as the reason that they were unfairly treated or discriminated against. About half of the young people surveyed had witnessed someone else suffering unfair treatment or discrimination in the last twelve months, and the discrimination that they witnessed was most commonly on the basis of race or cultural background (58 percent).<sup>13</sup>

Racism and discrimination - both the overt and the less visible forms— erode social cohesion. Vilification creates a feeling of isolation. Racism excludes people from employment, from education, from cultural, social, economic and political participation. It creates discord. It imposes a sense of other.

The many faces of exclusionary conduct make it both difficult to directly identify and insidious in its effect. In many cases it is the most overt forms upon which policy makers and advocates tend to focus, but the more subtle forms are those with effects that can be most damaging. It may be, for example, an unwillingness to employ applicants with foreign-sounding surnames. There may be presumptions about a person's affiliations or political, philosophical or social views based on accent or perceived ethnicity.

Too many of the people FECCA represents face the daily fear of being offended, insulted, or humiliated because of their race. Implicitly, culturally and linguistically diverse Australians understand this as a message that one is tolerated but not accepted. For this reason, FECCA strongly opposed the proposed changes to the Racial Discrimination Act noting how this would send a strong signal that racism is acceptable: that it is acceptable to offend, insult or humiliate someone on the basis of their race, colour or their national or ethnic origin.<sup>14</sup>

**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;**

The role of political leadership in race relations is crucial. Leaders who are committed to an inclusive and harmonious relationship between all Australians are uniquely placed to build upon and strengthen the foundations of Australian multiculturalism. Further, the manner in which the media represents an issue shapes community understandings and creates public views about issues of ethnicity and culture. FECCA submits that Australia's media and Australia's political leadership have both failed to meet their obligations in relation to the challenges of multiculturalism. There is also a challenge for ethnic communities across the country; all ethnic communities need to speak out on behalf of their members. Ethnic communities must be supported to inform and educate the Australian population on their challenges and on their strengths and abilities. Historically, ethnic communities in Australia have pursued common community interests with the Commonwealth Government and departments through speaking out through a strong unified voice. Continuous funding is needed to encourage and assist new and emerging community groups to better organise to make their voices heard, and the changing nature of Australia's political landscape and its implications for CALD advocates.

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<sup>13</sup> Mission Australia (2016) Youth Survey Report

<sup>14</sup> Campbell, E. (2017) FECCA's statement to the Senate Inquiry into the Human Rights Legislation Amendment Bill 2017 (18C)

It is axiomatic that tension will occasionally arise in any society where the full global spectrum of cultures and languages and faiths and beliefs are represented. On those occasions Australians look to the media for information and to their leadership for guidance. How their leaders respond is crucial to how the country resolves its tensions. Good leadership quells unrest; it provides means of understanding for those between whom division exists. It facilitates dialogue when relations become strained; it corrects misinformation and guides debate. Good leaders appeal to Australians' sense of fairness and to the inherent sense of decency that has created the successful multicultural society that is Australia. When and if leadership fails in this regard, it is the media who is best placed to provide accountability. Similarly, when the media fails to report events accurately, or frames events in a disingenuous manner, it is political leadership that is best placed to correct the record and to ensure the media is accountable.

FECCA applauds SBS initiatives where diversity is celebrated and normalised. In a new development, SBS has announced a new Australian drama series, *Sunshine*, including an 'outstanding South Sudanese Australian cast being seen for the very first time on Australian TV'.<sup>15</sup> *Face Up to Racism (FU2 Racism)*, also on SBS, explored racism in Australia during a week of programs on race and prejudice.

The campaign from Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Racism. It Stops With Me*, is also a positive development. TV and sport personalities like Adam Liaw and Adam Goode together with organisations play an important role in publically emphasising anti-racism. FECCA urges the continuous support for this campaign and similar initiatives in the future. Anti-racism education should form a core part of primary and secondary school curricula. Australia should ensure that the history of migration in Australia is celebrated in education programs and that the positive contribution to Australia made by migrant communities is promoted to its young people.

Positive leadership was recently demonstrated by many senior Australian politicians in their strong opposition to the proposed changes to 18C. Further, recent calls for a dramatic increase in Australia's sponsored refugee settlement program are an example of senior public figures from across the political spectrum taking the opportunity to publically promote the value of Australia's humanitarian intake program.<sup>16</sup> FECCA applauds these developments and urges the media to report widely all other initiatives promoting positively multiculturalism.

Amidst rapidly changing global circumstances there are challenges for any population and there is a tendency to seek simple answers and instant solutions. It is when a population faces these kinds of challenges that racial and cultural relations are likely to experience the greatest levels of unease. Such situations have occurred in the past and Australia as a nation has adopted various approaches. Governments of both persuasions have at times used those situations as an opportunity to build a sense of nationhood that is inclusive and adaptive; they have stewarded the country through to a position of strength and unity. There are also times when both government and media have exacerbated those tensions through polemic and divisive rhetoric. The associated policies and reportage have made it more difficult for Australians to access dependable, accurate information and to work through the related issues rationally. The effects of this can be devastating to social cohesion. It can undo years, even decades, of community commitment to harmonious inter-existence.

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<sup>15</sup> SBS Media Release Monday 27 March (2017) Anthony LaPaglia and Melanie Lynskey set to shine in new SBS crime drama.

<sup>16</sup> ABC News 23 May (2017) Federal Government MP Andrew Broad wants tenfold increase in sponsored refugee resettlement program

It can, however, be relatively small and symbolic gestures that promote an atmosphere of acceptance. These efforts demonstrate to diverse communities how valued they are by the nation. Examples of this might be senior politicians attending mosques and temples for important faith-based events. It might include attending, even hosting, fora intended to promote inter-community dialogue. It may simply be denouncing bad faith public commentary when it appears. For media outlets it may be a matter of omitting an alleged offender's ethnicity in reportage, unless ethnicity is central to the offence. It may be actively choosing to balance representations of a particular ethno-cultural community. In most cases it will simply require cognisance of the impact the actions and rhetoric of those with a public voice can have on the prevalence of cross cultural tensions. Those tensions form the basis of vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry.

FECCA urges all political and public figures to resist the use of inflammatory language when discussing issues of immigration. Ensuring that debate is balanced, reasonable and informed and does not marginalise particular groups is vital to cohesion.

FECCA also urges leaders from both the public and private sector to engage with communities in more meaningful ways. Enhancing their ability to advocate on their own behalf and develop the capacity to negotiate Australia's complex system of political, social, bureaucratic and communication arrangements must form part of any strategy to combat disadvantage within communities. Supporting communities in developing this capacity is a necessary element of this enhancement.

**f. how to improve the expected standards of public discourse about matters of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief;**

The standard of public discourse will be dependent upon those who lead the conversation, and upon which elements they choose to focus when framing the relevant issues.

It is important that there is acknowledgement and full recognition by all leaders that multiculturalism is central to the present and future social, economic and cultural wellbeing of Australia. It is difficult to expect the populace to conduct rational and respectful discourse if neither public officials nor journalists are committed to doing so. Public figures and media professionals must meet expected standards and refrain from disparaging particular, and often vulnerable, communities.

Of further significance is the role of a properly informed commentariat. Countless examples exist of misinformed reference to particular events or practices which have had resounding impact on the course of ensuing debate. At times this inaccuracy has originated in media reportage. At other times the media has simply failed to acknowledge and draw attention to false representations, even when minimal research would have revealed them to be so, or when the media was in possession of more accurate facts. Notable examples of this are found in coverage of crime purported to be attributable to African communities, which in some cases was grossly exaggerated and in others was the result of a failure to make reasonable enquiries. Further misinformed debate regarding halal food certification and attempts to establish Sharia law have been propagated by ostensibly credible media outlets and public figures. Conspicuously absent is denunciation by public figures and media professionals of either failure to meet expected standards or deliberate attempts to disparage particular, often vulnerable, communities.

We must vigorously protect and consider strengthening existing Federal and State legislation protecting CALD Australians against racial discrimination. FECCA urges the government to increase resources to and vocally support the Australian Human Rights Commission *Racism. It Stops With Me* campaign.

SBS is a critical partner in promoting multiculturalism to the broader Australian community as well as key to supporting, informing and including CALD Australian communities. With increased competition from news and entertainment outlets broadcast into Australia directly from overseas, SBS holds growing importance for inclusion by ensuring CALD Australians have access to local news and information in language.

Undeniably, social media has created opportunities for the dissemination of information and opinion that are either patently false or manifestly intended to be harmful. Because of this it is incumbent upon Australia's leaders to be vigilant about ensuring that the content of their speech and the language they use enhances the relationship between Australia's ethno-cultural and faith based communities. Important in this regard is the absence of legislative protection on the basis of faith at a Commonwealth level. There are both practical and symbolic implications for this and careful consideration should be given to addressing this anomaly.

**g. how to better recognise and value the contribution that diverse communities bring to Australian social and community life;**

Recognition of the contribution made by Australia's diverse communities should include, in addition to social and community life, the enormous contribution made to Australia's economic life. CALD Australians continue to display an ingenuity and entrepreneurship vital to the health of Australia's economy.

Initiatives are required in the public and private sector to actively promote the benefits of multiculturalism and, in particular, the benefits of employing diverse Australians.

FECCA calls for Australia to commit to action on harnessing productivity through diversity by facilitating recognition and effective management of cultural diversity, enhancing self-employment support, streamlining overseas qualifications recognition, and promoting economic security and industry leadership representation for women from CALD backgrounds.

A strong role must be taken by leaders in the public and private sector in recognising Australia's migration history and the importance of migration for Australia's past and continuing economic, social and cultural success. Through celebrating multiculturalism and years of migration to Australia, Australia's leadership must recognise and promote the many positive contributions from our migrant communities.

Funding must be provided to initiatives that celebrate and acknowledge migration and multiculturalism as a positive contribution to Australia's society. FECCA suggests an initiative similar to the 150 stories initiative developed by the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF). Through telling the stories of 150 migrants over 150 weeks, the CRRF wishes to pay 'tribute to Canada's diversity, democratic principles and multiculturalism'.<sup>17</sup> FECCA would be ideal body for such an initiative with its connections to all CALD communities in Australia. FECCA is in the ideal position to find migrant stories to publish research the background of each participant and publish the stories each week through its extensive networks of members, including Multicultural and Ethnic Community Councils across Australia.

A holistic language policy would provide a comprehensive approach to fostering Australia's communication resources, including English as a common and shared language, a second language for all, and support for endangered languages.

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<sup>17</sup> Canadian Race Relations Foundation (2017) <http://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/en/our-canada/150-stories>

National debate about language policy is typically very narrow and mostly overlooks the multiculturalism and multilingualism of our community, and occasionally, overlooks community languages as a remarkable resource that immigrant and Indigenous communities 'gift' to the nation.

A holistic language policy would provide a comprehensive approach to fostering Australia's communication resources, including English as a common and shared language, a second language for all, and support for endangered languages.

It would provide a framework for implementing mandatory second language education, supporting community language schools, and facilitating quality and responsive language services encompassing community interpreting and a strong bi-lingual bi-cultural workforce. The framework would provide for a balanced rationale for bilingualism—covering the trade and economic dividend, as well as its importance in fostering individual, cultural, and intellectual development in our population. A comprehensive approach would include language rights, language maintenance and language study for enrichment, identity and cultural exploration.

FECCA calls for all parties to commit to policy action on harnessing productivity through diversity by facilitating recognition and effective management of cultural diversity, enhancing self-employment support, streamlining overseas qualifications recognition, and promoting economic security and industry leadership representation for women from CALD backgrounds.

#### **h. the potential benefits and disadvantages of enshrining principles of multiculturalism in legislation**

A national legislative framework would ensure systemic change by achieving both recognition of diverse cultures coexisting in Australia, and promotion of close interaction between diverse cultures based on the principles of reciprocal respect and equality.

The fundamental principle of multiculturalism needs to be embedded not just in government policy, but also in the political system, through a whole-of-government approach to multicultural affairs, which recognises and values cultural, religious, racial and linguistic diversity.

In addition to these initiatives, a national legislative framework would ensure systemic change by achieving both recognition of diverse cultures coexisting in Australia, and promotion of close interaction between diverse cultures based on principles of reciprocal respect and equality. The development of the legislative framework should be underpinned by a national stakeholder consultation, including the establishment of a joint select committee to inquire into, and report on, the steps to be taken and the scope for developing a national multicultural legislative framework.

The framework must be developed on the basis of key objectives. The objectives include strategies, like an awareness campaign, to target the public and private sectors in understanding of the benefits of employing people from CALD backgrounds to productivity, innovation and growth, as well as supporting the sectors in creating welcoming, inclusive and culturally appropriate and aware workplace environments; it must also include enhancing the participation of CALD women in the workforce and in leadership positions, including improved data collection methods that capture gender, cultural heritage and international experience, a review of the current recruitment processes, and monitoring and evaluation processes to measure progress. Finally the establishment of 'one-stop shop' information hubs to provide face-to-face information and advice on overseas qualifications recognition, as well as through the provision of education and training, such as bridging

courses, to help migrants make the most of their previous experience and up-skill is essential.

Legislative enactments also serve as a symbolic acknowledgement of a nation's commitment to a multicultural future. It provides a set of principles to which the public and their representatives can refer and be referred. In this respect, the Canadian example is instructive.

A united Australian people, bound by a commitment to democracy's institutions and to the values they represent, must be free to identify with and express culture without fear. They must be safe in the knowledge that their diversity is valued; viewed as an asset rather than a threat. Legislation is, and cannot be, a complete answer to that. It can however, form a key part of any approach to unity through recognised diversity.

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

The benefits of a Multicultural Commission include the promotion of a deeper understanding of other cultures and the ability to ensure persistent efforts to change a prevailing social attitude that often reinforces cultural stereotypes.

FECCA applauds the Australian Multicultural Council for the positive work it has done for Australia's CALD communities to date. The specific provisions of a legislative basis for either the Multicultural Advisory Council or a Multicultural Commission require greater consideration. There are clear benefits to a Commission style body, including the statutory prescription of powers for the Commission and its Commissioner. Whatever the structure of the body, paramount is independence. Consideration should be given to funding FECCA, or another like body, to partner with an academic institution to conduct a comprehensive examination of models currently in place in jurisdictions similar to Australia. The resulting report can be used to provide a series of recommendation based on global best practice.

FECCA also advocates for the re-establishment an Office for Multicultural Affairs (OMA) in the Department of Social Services or Prime Minister and Cabinet, with a mandate which includes language services and services to promote and support Australia's multiculturalism.

**Conclusion**

FECCA believes that better understanding of multiculturalism is the key to strengthening it. Research is needed on best practice internationally and of the unique challenges faced by Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Australia must acknowledge and embrace the contribution multiculturalism has made to the social and economic fabric of the nation. This requires strong leadership from Government and a media committed to fair and accurate coverage. Australia's historical success as a multicultural nation requires constant vigilance if it is to continue.