

# Multiculturalism: Australia's pathway to the future

A Submission  
to  
The Senate Select Committee  
on Strengthening Multiculturalism

by

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## Executive Summary

1. In the space of a few decades Australia has become a remarkably cosmopolitan and dynamic society, owing primarily to the large influx of both permanent migrant and temporary visitors.
2. Australia's multicultural fabric represents an asset of immense value to Australia.
3. If properly managed and resourced, Australia's cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity can contribute to six national priorities:
  - Social harmony and cohesion
  - Better educational outcomes
  - A more productive workforce
  - A more effective trading performance
  - A coherent and comprehensive security policy
  - A better focused regional and global role.
4. A serious approach to innovation will require Australian governments to actively support and at least partially fund a wide range of intercultural learning programs tailored to the needs of key constituencies, including business managers, police and security personnel, community welfare providers, prison workers, youth workers, teachers, administrators and chaplains in schools, colleges and universities, as well as lawyers and health professionals.
5. The Australian Government should proceed with some urgency to establish a National Centre for Intercultural Diversity. Its mission would be to advance knowledge and innovation as it relates to managing cultural and religious diversity – within Australia and in Australia's relations with its region and beyond. While maintaining its independence, the Centre would cultivate productive partnerships with the government, business and community, as well as with other research centres and think tanks and with international organisations.
6. The growth of 'interfaith dialogue' has been one of the most positive developments in the often tense post-September 11 environment. Government, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, should take concrete steps, including review of grant making criteria, to assist the further development in Australia of an inclusive and sustainable interfaith movement. An important initiative in this next phase will be the convening of a national conference to evaluate the achievements of the last ten years, and pave the way for innovative initiatives in the period ahead.
7. A well coordinated national strategy is needed to advance the study of languages other than English in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of Australian education. Such a strategy should be adopted as a major plank of Australia's multicultural policies and programs. Government, working closely with educational providers, industry and the professions, should provide teachers, parents and students with far greater incentives for the teaching and learning of languages.

In the space of a few decades Australia has become a remarkably cosmopolitan and dynamic society. The evidence is all around us: community language schools, ethnic media, ethnic businesses, diverse religious practices and places of worship, and the rich variety in cultural activities – in food, fashion, music, art and architecture. The impact of permanent and temporary migration.

## Permanent and temporary immigration

Australia's multicultural fabric is directly related to the growing number of migrants who have come to Australia from all parts of the world, more recently in increasing numbers from Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries.

The table below shows the radical change that has occurred over the last hundred years.

Top 10 countries of birth, 1901 and 2006 censuses							
1901 Census				2006 Census			
Country of birth		Number	%*	Country of birth		Number	%*
1	United Kingdom	495 074	13.1	1	United Kingdom	1 038 150	5.2
2	Ireland	184 085	4.9	2	New Zealand	389 460	2.0
3	Germany	38 352	1.0	3	China	206 590	1.0
4	China	29 907	0.8	4	Italy	199 120	1.0
5	New Zealand	25 788	0.7	5	Vietnam	159 850	0.8
6	Sweden & Norway	9 863	0.3	6	India	147 110	0.7
7	India	7 637	0.2	7	Philippines	120 540	0.6
8	United States	7 448	0.2	8	Greece	109 990	0.6
9	Denmark	6 281	0.2	9	Germany	106 530	0.5
10	Italy	5 678	0.2	10	South Africa	104 130	0.5
Top 10 total		810 113	21.5	Top 10 total		2 581 470	13.0
Other		47 463	1.3	Other		1 834 560	9.2
Total overseas born		857 576	22.8	Total overseas born		4 416 030	22.2
Total Australian population		3 773 801	100.0	Total Australian population		19 855 290	100.0

\* Percentage of total population

Source: DFAT, 'Australia: A Culturally Diverse Society'

[http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/culturally\\_diverse.html](http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/culturally_diverse.html)

But even these figures do not convey the extent of the diversity in terms of the countries represented in the migration intake of recent years, or how quickly this diversity has grown in the last decade. By 2016, seven of the top ten countries of birth in Australia's resident population were from Asia.

**Estimated Resident Population, Australia  
Top 10 Countries of Birth – 30 June 2016**

Country of birth	Number of people	% of Australian population
UK	1 198 000	5.0
New Zealand	607 200	2.5
China	526 000	2.2
India	468 000	1.9
Philippines	246 400	1.0
Vietnam	236 700	1.0
Italy	194 900	0.8
South Africa	181 400	0.8
Malaysia	166 200	0.7
Germany	124 300	0.7

Source: ABS <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/3412.0>

It is worth noting, however, that despite the steady stream of arrivals from non-European countries, no single African, Middle Eastern or Asian community represents as yet a significantly large minority in Australia (as is for example the case in a country like Malaysia, where the Chinese and Indian minorities constitute 24% and 7% of the total population respectively).

As of 2016 the largest non-English speaking community in Australia were those of Italian ancestry, who made up 3.3% of Australia's total population, followed by Germans 3.2%, Indians 1.4%, Greeks 1.4%.

What this means is that no single non-English speaking minority in Australia has the demographic muscle which can challenge to the dominance of established cultural traditions and institutions.

There is, however, one religious faith, namely Islam, which has grown considerably in recent years and has captured a good deal of media and political attention. The number of Muslims in Australia has risen from 2,704 in 1947 to 22,311 in 1971, to 476,291 according to the 2011 census, and is likely to be in excess of 550,000 by now. Almost 60% of Muslim Australians are aged 29 and under. In some Melbourne and Sydney neighbourhoods, Muslim communities make up as much as 30% of the local population. Over time, Australia's Muslim population will continue to grow in absolute and relative terms – a trend that is also evident in many European countries.

This having been said, the fact remains that Muslims still make up less than 3% of Australia's total population, and that the Muslim community is rather fragmented, being the most ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse religious grouping in Australia. Although Lebanese Muslims are the largest and highest-profile Muslim group in Australia, Lebanese Christians outnumber their Muslim counterparts by a ratio of 6 to 4.

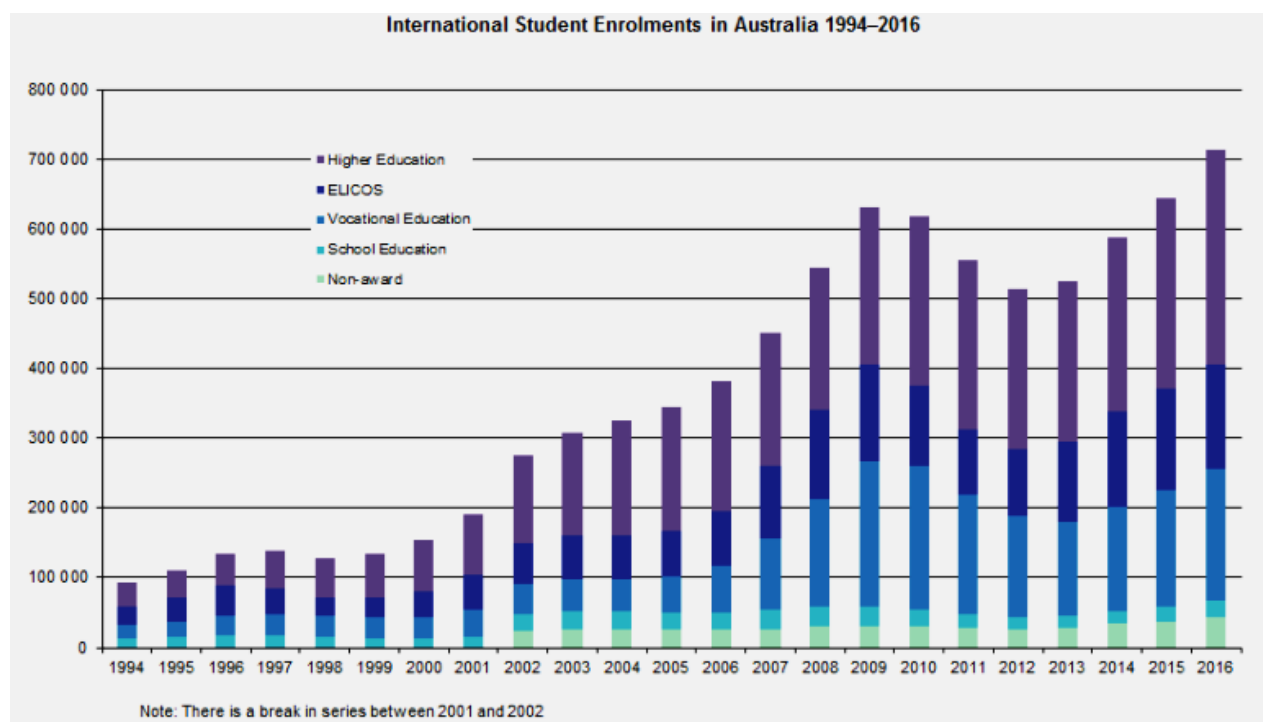
In coming to terms with the significant changes that have occurred in Australia's cultural fabric, it is also important to take account of the scale and nature of temporary (and not just permanent) migration.

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People may enter Australia on a temporary basis under the temporary residence program, whether as visitors, students or for a range of specialised purposes. Temporary entrants include:

- tourists
- students
- business people for short stays
- people with specialist skills, such as managers, academics and medical practitioners
- people who make a social or cultural contribution to the community, such as entertainers, media and film staff, sports people, religious workers, visiting academics
- people who contribute to the development of international relations, such as diplomatic personnel, participants in exchange programs and working holiday makers.

Temporary migration is significant in multicultural terms because much of it is drawn from non-English speaking countries. This feature is especially striking when it comes to international students because the countries which are providing the bulk of international students come from Asia. What makes this a highly significant trend is the rapid rise in the number of international students, and the increasingly important contribution which international education makes to Australia's export income.



Source: [https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Pages/InternationalStudentData2016.aspx#Annual\\_Series](https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Pages/InternationalStudentData2016.aspx#Annual_Series)

The eight top source countries were all from Asia: China, India, Vietnam, Nepal, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia.

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Taken together these trends point to a rapidly changing cultural landscape. They suggest that Australia's economy as well as its social, educational and professional life will be increasingly influenced by the cultures, religions, languages and traditions that are reaching Australia through its permanent and temporary migration programs.

**Multiculturalism: An invaluable asset**

Governments at Federal, State and Municipal level have all come to recognise that the large immigration program as it has evolved since the Second World War has enormously benefited Australia. Immigration policy, it is true, has at times been controversial, especially during periods of economic downturn. In 2002, a CSIRO population study entitled *Future Dilemmas*, commissioned by the then Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, outlined a number of potential dilemmas associated with immigration-driven population growth, notably in relation to Australia's trade balance, impact on the environment, and social policy.

Though all these are important considerations which must be taken into account when determining population policy, and in particular appropriate rates of population growth, there can be little doubt that Australia's multicultural fabric represents an asset of immense value to Australia. However, as with all assets, the value to be derived from our ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity depends ultimately on how the asset is managed, and the kinds of investment policies that are pursued.

The objectives of immigration and multicultural policies are many and diverse. This submission focuses on certain key tasks that are critical to the future development of Australian multiculturalism.

The fact that multiculturalism has been openly embraced by all major parties is a positive development, but there is still much that can be done to enrich and give added depth to our understanding of the concept and practice of multiculturalism.

Enhancing the safety and security of the nation and strengthening its democratic values and institutions are no doubt critically important objectives. But what we understand by these values and objectives and how we are to achieve them are the proper subject of periodic review in the light of changing circumstances. The cultural melting pot that is now Australia provides a unique space within which to consider the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Differently expressed, there is much to gain from sharing the values that unite us but also the rich insights, aspirations and know-how that come with the different cultures, traditions, faiths and languages represented in Australian society. It is by developing this dual approach that we can most creatively manage Australia's irreplaceable asset that is its cultural diversity.

Wise harnessing of this asset can deliver rich returns with respect to six key objectives:

- ***Social harmony and cohesion*** (at times threatened by local prejudice or international tensions and conflicts);
- ***Better educational outcomes*** (through more systematic nurturing of our enormous reservoir of linguistic, cultural, technical and organisational skills and competencies);
- ***A more productive workforce*** (through the careful fostering of culturally sensitive workplace conditions and practices);
- ***A more effective trading performance*** (through a range of incentives designed to help businesses develop culturally sophisticated human resource, promotional, product design, marketing and negotiating strategies);

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- **A coherent and comprehensive security policy** (that is tailored to the cultural needs and potential of Australian society and sensitive to the cultural traditions and preferences of our trading, security and diplomatic partners);
- **A better focused regional and global role** (that takes full advantage of the potential for intercultural dialogue and cooperation – a key but often neglected pillar of regional cooperation, and a crucial plank for deepening Australia's commitment to and participation in the UN system and other multilateral institutions and negotiations).

*This submission draws attention to four key areas which offer unique opportunities for innovative institutional and policy initiatives over the next five years in line with the six priorities outlined above.*

### **Intercultural training**

A number of programs run or supported by government at the Federal, State and Municipal level are helping to enhance appreciation of cultural diversity, civic values and inter-religious and intercultural harmony. Yet, relatively few programs are specifically designed to enhance levels of intercultural awareness, or what may be termed higher levels of cultural literacy. Yet, such programs would be enormously valuable, especially if they are well tailored to the needs and circumstances of particular constituencies. Several constituencies immediately suggest themselves:

- business managers
- police and security forces
- community welfare providers
- prison workers
- youth workers
- teachers, administrators and chaplains in schools, colleges and universities
- key professions, including lawyers and doctors

This is not a comprehensive list, yet it is indicative of the different contexts where those in positions of responsibility are dealing almost on a daily basis not just with products and technologies, but also with a range of cultures, languages, religions, and social and ethical preferences and traditions. To perform their tasks effectively and responsibly they need both knowledge and understanding of the culturally diverse context within which they are working both in Australia and in their dealings overseas. Within an increasingly globalised world the demand for intercultural skills will continue to grow. In Australia's case, enduring business, professional and technological partnerships have to be built on deep and respectful appreciation of the rich cultural wealth of our Asian and Pacific neighbourhood. Australia's multicultural fabric presents a unique asset for making these fruitful connections.

This knowledge and understanding does not, however, grow spontaneously, it has to be carefully nurtured through a range of intercultural training programs.

It follows therefore that a serious approach to innovation should, among other things, encourage, support and fund the research, educational and training institutions, projects and methodologies that can foster this deeper 'cultural' knowledge and understanding. Such a development would have wide-ranging application in several key areas of policy, including industry, trade, education, health, external relations, security, and, of course, indigenous affairs, immigration and multicultural affairs

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To make this possible three things are needed:

- a) Strategically selected forms of national and international networking and collaboration that effectively mobilise intercultural knowledge and understanding;
- b) Careful identification of research and training priorities around themes that give due prominence to cultural knowledge and management of cultural diversity (including diversity of languages);
- c) A more systematic attempt to identify international best practice in these areas of study, research, training and educational organisation.

*A National Centre for Intercultural Diversity*

To respond effectively to these needs the Federal Government should consider developing a few strategic instruments. A National Centre for Intercultural Diversity would be one such instrument. Its mission would be to advance knowledge and innovation as it relates to managing cultural and religious diversity – first and foremost within Australia, but also in Australia's relations with its region and beyond. Its primary focus would be on the implications of cultural diversity for social cohesion, economy and trade, environment, education (at all levels), media and communications, national security, and international relations.

The Centre would seek to use Australia's multicultural assets in developing intercultural studies and programmes with practical policy and community application. It would play a leadership role in research, education, public debate and policy development. Its underlying mission would be to explore how cultural diversity can be used to generate innovative research and training programs that support prosperity, conflict resolution and a safe national and international environment.

The Centre would also focus on intercultural relations as they impact on Australia's engagement with Asia (both East Asia and South Asia), the Pacific and the Middle East, as well as with traditional areas of interest in Europe and North America.

One of the Centre's key interests would be young people, and how cultural diversity can be mobilised to advance education and employment, and reduce alienation and extremism.

One option would be for the Centre to be hosted by either one university or a consortium of universities, selected through a competitive process open to all Australian universities. The successful university(ies) should ideally be located in a city and region noted for its cultural diversity, partnerships and international connections.

While maintaining its independence, the Centre would cultivate productive partnerships with:

- a) community organisations (both within Australia and internationally)
- b) the business community, professional bodies and unions
- c) government at all levels (Municipal, State and Federal)
- d) regional and international organisations
- e) other research institutions nationally and internationally
- f) philanthropic organisations.

The Centre would be assisted by an Advisory Board whose membership would be representative of these constituencies, and which would help guide the Centre's research, educational, community engagement and policy development programs.

The Australian Government would provide funding over a five-year period to support the establishment of such a Centre. Government funding would cover infrastructure costs and a



number of specified research and educational appointments. The successful institution(s) would provide the Centre with additional support.

### **Interfaith dialogue: The next phase**

In recent years, and especially since 11 September 2001, initiatives in dialogue generally and interfaith dialogue in particular have become commonplace. Australia is no exception. Federal and State governments have made funds available, meetings of religious leaders have been convened, booklets and guidelines produced, and school and community projects initiated.

All this is a timely antidote to the politics of fear and mistrust. There is no disputing the value of much that has been attempted. The time, energy and resources spent on the dialogue of cultures and religions are an indispensable investment in Australia's future. There are nevertheless considerable possibilities for improvement. Three are especially worthy of attention. Dialogue initiatives are needed that are pro-active, sustainable and mutually reinforcing.

### *Avoiding the pitfalls of 'reaction'*

Though interfaith dialogue is not new in Australia, it is the attacks of September 2001 and the Bali bombings of October 2002 which triggered the recent proliferation of interfaith activities. A study by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 2003 listed over 101 projects, many of which were interfaith in nature. It would be fair to say that many of these projects were motivated by a desire to moderate Islamic radicalism or to defuse actual or potential tensions of the kind that erupted in the 2005 Cronulla riots.

Muslim organisations have been asked to enter into dialogue with their Christian and Jewish counterparts in the hope that such dialogue would be a useful antidote to militant radicalism or 'violent extremism', with the implication that this undesirable phenomenon would be found primarily within Muslim communities. This is far too narrow an understanding of social cohesion on which to base the development of interfaith activity.

While the limitations of such a 'reactive' approach are now more widely understood, there is a clearly discernible tendency in some policy-making circles, in the wider society, and even among some dialogue practitioners to view interfaith activity in purely instrumental terms. Simply put, there is still too much emphasis on responding to perceived security threats or tensions, and too little on nurturing the creative possibilities of interfaith relations. Though dialogue can help to put out, or at least contain bushfires, this is not its primary function. Its long-term value to the community lies mainly in its capacity to nurture cultural literacy and intercultural cooperation.

### *Building more solid foundations*

In most states, religious organisations have been involved in interfaith relations, either through high-level meetings involving religious leaders or participation in peak bodies. Here, the initiative usually lies with those in positions of authority. At lower levels initiatives have also been taken, sometimes with and at other times without the formal approval of the religious leadership. Official initiatives generally have been guarded when it comes to substance, and often confined to polite exchanges.

A second major cluster comprises organisations whose primary purpose is to promote interfaith contact and cooperation, for example Religions for Peace, the Faith Communities Council of Victoria (FCCV) the Multifaith Association of South Australia, the Jewish-Christian-Muslim Association, and the Council of Christians and Jews. Other organisations that do not have an explicitly religious profile, but have played a significant intellectual and organisational role in promoting interfaith dialogue include the Australian Multicultural Foundation and the Centre for

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Dialogue at La Trobe University (2006-2014). Mention here must also be made of two Muslim-Turkish based organisations associated with the Gülen movement, Affinity Intercultural Foundation in Sydney and Australian Intercultural Society in Melbourne, which, have sponsored a wide range of high profile dialogue activities. In Victoria, a good number of organisations have strongly supported closer inter-faith relations, including the Victorian Council of Churches, the Islamic Council of Victoria, the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, the Uniting Church Synod Victoria & Tasmania: Uniting Through Faiths, and Pax Christi Victoria.

Perhaps the most positive trend thus far, in which the State of Victoria appears to have made considerably more headway, has been the growth of local interfaith groups and networks. Many of these have operated with varying degrees of municipal support. Since the inception of the Dandenong Interfaith Network in 1989, close to 40 locally based networks have seen the light of day in Victoria, most of them located in Melbourne, but with a smaller number dotted across regional Victoria. A significant development has been the establishment in 2010 of the Northern Interfaith and Intercultural Network (which covers the municipalities of Banyule, Darebin, Hume, Moreland, and Whittlesea) – this was the first regional interfaith network in Australia. The Eastern Metropolitan Region of Interfaith Networks (Boroondara, Knox, Manningham, Maroondah, Monash, Whitehorse) held an inaugural forum in March 2011.

Yet, the progress of many of these organisations and the projects they have sponsored has been uneven. Many of the projects, for which they have received government grants have had relatively short lives. In several instances completion of funded projects has not yielded any visible ongoing activity. Experience suggests that interfaith projects are more likely to prove sustainable if they are:

- a) sponsored or supported by organisations that have a long-term commitment to interfaith dialogue and are themselves prepared to invest resources in the projects in question,
- b) informed by, or seek to develop, a firm grasp of the philosophy, method and practice of dialogue; and
- c) have, regardless of their specific objectives and mode of operation, a clearly articulated educational and training component that widens the human resource pool needed to sustain the dialogical process over the longer term.

Government programs (Federal and State) that seek to support interfaith activity should as a matter of urgency integrate these principles into their brief, funding guidelines and evaluation processes.

*Developing more effective communication*

While the number of interfaith groups, networks, initiatives and projects has grown markedly over the last ten years, effective communication between them has been slower to develop. The result is often inadequate sharing of knowledge. To cite one example, in both Victoria and New South Wales a number of separately constructed schools projects have been initiated, with only the most limited sharing of information and experiences.

Closer liaison between organisations and initiatives would alleviate these problems. It would probably be useful if a highly respected and relatively well resourced organisation in each state could be invited to maintain an extensive database of interfaith organisations, projects, events and resources, and circulate these widely across that state. Government funding for this purpose for an initial three-year period would be an important step forward. Once effective clearing houses have been established, at least in Victoria and New south Wales, it should be possible to establish a national network allowing for exchange of information and views across states, and in time the design, delivery and evaluation of national projects.

### *The 'next phase'*

Most interfaith projects to date have concentrated on increasing knowledge and understanding of different faiths, that is, of their respective beliefs, texts and religious practices, including fasting and prayers. Visits have been organised to each other's places of worship and even homes. Many Mosques in Victoria and elsewhere have organised Open Days (17 Mosques participated in this project in 2017). Less frequently, joint prayer services and discussions have been organised. Much of this activity has served primarily a 'getting to know you' function, which is crucial and needs to continue.

However, interfaith relations have developed sufficiently for more ambitious goals to be considered. A number of organisations and networks now have the capacity, contacts and interest to go beyond the 'getting to know you' stage.

Building upon past experience, interfaith activity can foster a deeper and wide-ranging dialogue, in which participants

- Respect each other as persons;
- Celebrate the value and contribution of each other's faiths and cultures;
- Acknowledge that they do not hold a monopoly on wisdom and truth;
- Understand the importance of listening as well as speaking;
- Affirm the important ethical (and spiritual) values they share in common;
- Accept that there are differences, and that such differences are an invaluable source of mutual enrichment;
- Recognise that relations between different faiths, cultures and communities have at times given rise to mistrust, suspicion, hostility, even violence;
- Understand that empathising with and acknowledging the pain and suffering of others is often a precondition to healing and reconciliation.

*Such dialogue is most likely to flourish when interfaith relations are placed in the context of intercultural awareness. Interfaith dialogue is most likely to flourish and prove durable when it is able to negotiate across both religious and cultural differences.*

Much needs to be taken into account – not just the way we pray or fast, what we eat and how we dress, but also attitudes to authority, to personal relationships within and outside the family, to work and leisure. Dialogue needs to explore the deeper social, economic, physical and psychological insecurities that people experience – including the insecurities that arise from migration, whether voluntary or forced. The purpose of dialogue is to identify the sources of insecurity, and to find agreement on constructive ways of dealing with such insecurities.

*In interfaith dialogue words need to be complemented by cooperative practical action to promote the common good.*

In local settings, cooperation can take place around any number of issues: education, health, domestic violence, employment, environment, transport, assistance for new arrivals to the country, to name a few. A high priority should be to harness the energies and creativity of young people. Dialogue processes should speak to the needs and aspirations of young people, especially those who are Australian born and of non-English-speaking background, and who therefore face the difficult challenge of negotiating life across two cultures.

Where conditions are right, dialogue can also encourage discussion of complex social issues, be they local, national or international, including immigration policies, rights of migrant communities,

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women's rights, environmental concerns, the appropriate relationship between religion and the state, and Australia's relations with the outside world.

The importance of the international dimension cannot be overstated. Here we can do no more than refer to it. Religions and cultures involve a web of international connections, exchanges and attachments which can inform and enrich the dialogue in Australia.

Given the importance of immigration, refugee flows, trade, security relations, international education, and tourism, we have much to gain from developing our capacity to negotiate cultural and religious differences not just at home but abroad. Professional, school, religious, municipal and other exchange programs can play a key role in nurturing new patterns of understanding and cooperation. They can strengthen the intercultural fabric of Australian society, and add an important new pillar to Australia's engagement with Asia.

How might this next phase be given the impetus it needs? How might the energies and ideas of different groups, networks and projects attracted to this next phase of the journey reach a critical mass. One useful tool would be to stage a significant national interfaith conference which brings together all relevant stakeholders. The Conference would seek to evaluate the achievements of the last ten years, set broad priorities for the period ahead. It would seek to engage not just members of existing interfaith organisations, but people across the different faith traditions represented in Australia, and importantly community organisations which do not subscribe to a religious faith, but whose secular, humanist, rationalist worldview would make them excellent contributors to an 'inter-belief' dialogue centred on principles of social cohesion, responsible citizenship, and the dignity of the human person.

The Conference would be preceded by a carefully planned process of discussion and consultation, and pave the way for both new projects and new mechanisms of communication and coordination, which will be vital to the success of the next phase. With an appropriate lead-up and a creative follow up, the Conference would become a major milestone in the growth of the Australian interfaith movement.

Government would need to play a useful supporting role for the staging of such a conference. It should provide funding at different stages of the process, and assist where appropriate with building the necessary infrastructure. But care should be taken to ensure that government support in no way restricts the creativity of the Conference or the independence of the interfaith movement.

## **Teaching and learning of languages**

Language policy is too large and complex an issue to do justice to it in this submission. Here the focus is on the connection between multiculturalism and linguistic diversity. The consolidation of this diversity is integral to Australia's cultural heritage, in two important and complementary ways:

- a) Languages offer an indispensable window on the cultures that make up Australian society – languages are reflected in the literature, films, performing arts, music, print and electronic media, popular culture (shops, markets, bars, cafes and restaurants) of different cultures;
- b) Linguistic diversity is part of the rich mosaic that is our Australian multiculturalism – it is a living mirror of our ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. The learning of languages is a powerful tool that can facilitate intercultural awareness and help to heal tensions.

The learning of languages must therefore be seen as central to the preparation of students for multicultural citizenship.

Which languages? In principle all languages, both international and community languages can play a significant role. The distinction is in any case artificial. By virtue of its extraordinary migration history, Australia is now a microcosm of the world's languages – some 60 to 80 languages are

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widely spoken, and among these we find many of the world's most important languages. The major European languages (French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian), Asian languages (Chinese, Hindi, and Bahasa Indonesia) and Arabic are all well represented in Australia.

Learning of languages is critical to the development of intercultural literacy, hence to greater social cohesion, and to more effective relationships with our trading and investment partners (many of our current partners understand us much better than we understand them). Entrepreneurs, bankers, merchants, diplomats, scientists, journalists, peacekeepers, who don't know the language of their counterparts are often considered by them intellectually and culturally deficient, though they are usually too polite to say so.

Despite our extraordinary linguistic diversity, the survival of community languages is by no means assured – either quantitatively or qualitatively. The 2011 census revealed that some 18% of the population spoke a language other than English at home (a much higher percentage in Sydney and Melbourne). But transmission is proving difficult – the first generation of community languages (European) is experiencing considerable difficulty in transmission. Over a 10-year period (1991-2001), the use of European languages in Australian homes declined markedly: Italian declined by 15.6%; German 32.6%; Polish 11.8%; Maltese 21.9%; and French 12.9%. Asian languages and Arabic are generally doing better, but only because they have recently benefited from higher levels of migration. On past trends, we should expect the same outcome.

Unless the communities that have settled in Australia are able to retain proficiency in their respective languages, they will find it increasingly difficult to connect with their culture of birth – especially if the objective is to connect with a living culture that is constantly evolving in its social, intellectual, artistic and political forms (not just the language and culture of 20, 50 or 100 years ago, but the language that is spoken and lived today in the countries where that language is the principal medium of communication). Here it should be stressed that community languages are not just for each of the migrant communities. Italian or Chinese is not just for those of Italian or Chinese descent but for all other Australians, both for Anglo-Australians and the other more recent migrant communities.

How to give effect to these aspirations is a daunting task, particularly in a society that has complacently accepted the simplistic proposition that ultimately one needs only command of English to get on in the world. Needless to say, mainstream schools (government, religious and independent schools), but also community languages schools (or ethnic schools), as well as colleges and universities (which teach students and train future teachers) have an important part to play – but their respective contributions must be integrated into a more coherent whole than we have so far achieved.

All teaching institutions must provide both students and parents with greater incentives for the learning of languages. A more effective system of rewards must be introduced for the learning of languages at each level of education – primary, secondary and tertiary. Some of these rewards can be made available by the educational institution itself. Students that have satisfactorily completed language proficiency at any level must be given certain entitlements once they proceed to a higher level. This is especially important in the transition from secondary to tertiary education. Universities, in particular, must be strongly encouraged (by a mixed strategy of rewards and penalties) to facilitate the admission of students who have satisfactorily completed language study at Year 12 level. Similarly, the business and government sectors must reward applicants to jobs, who have completed three years of language study at university level.

The issue is not just language policy, but education and employment policy. We need to cultivate a mindset that acknowledges the importance of a multilingual Australia, and nurtures and rewards linguistic proficiency.

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Key features of this mindset are worth noting:

- Communities retain a vibrant connection with their ancestral languages and cultures;
- Australians of all backgrounds are actively encouraged through all our institutions (educational, media, business, professional, governmental) to develop multi-lingual skills and the intercultural sensitivities that go with them;
- Educational institutions (pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary and continuing) and educators are materially and intellectually equipped to foster the intermingling of languages (and cultures);
- The study/teaching of language is regarded as a high status activity [by students, teachers, parents, governments and society at large];
- Federal and State governments are prepared to invest heavily on language development at every level of education;
- Language policy outgrows the shallow polarisation between:
  - Community and international languages
  - Asian and European languages
  - The so-called 'economic' and 'cultural' benefits of language learning.

According to some estimates, 36% of primary teachers and 70% of secondary teachers of languages are not adequately qualified. An effective language strategy is one which aims to produce teachers of the highest quality – highly trained, highly skilled, well-respected and remunerated language teachers.

This requires a whole-of-government strategy that mobilises to the full Australia's rich cultural resources at home and abroad. Importantly, it would be a strategy which identifies all the key stakeholders and establishes firm and enduring connections between them.

The obvious stakeholders are teachers, students, and administrators, and the various organisations which represent their interests. Less obvious but no less important are:

- The university sector (which is responsible for the training and professional development of teachers, for admission of students with language skills and interest in language study, and for public advocacy of the benefits of linguistic diversity. Governments at all levels, and especially the Federal Government should use all levers at their disposal to coax universities to fulfill these responsibilities);
- The business, professional and government sectors (through their respective recruitment and human resource policies);
- The media (through their use own use of languages other than English and their advocacy of linguistic diversity);
- Ethnic and religious organisations (that have a strong commitment to linguistic diversity and the necessary outreach to give voice to that commitment);
- Diplomatic missions (that represent countries whose languages we wish to learn).

What is needed is a national strategy supported by an appropriate institutional framework, facilitated by the Federal government (in consultation with State governments), and capable of enlisting the active and sustained engagement of all these stakeholders.

## Emeritus Professor Joseph A. Camilleri OAM

### *Short Curriculum Vitae*

Academic Qualifications: BA (Melb), MA (Monash), PhD (Lond).

Joseph A Camilleri is executive director of Alexandria Agenda, Emeritus Professor at La Trobe University (Melbourne), and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Social Sciences.

He has taught some thirty-five subjects at undergraduate or postgraduate level; established the highly sought after Bachelor of International Relations Degree, and a few years later the Master of International Policy Studies (now Master of International Relations). He has supervised some forty PhD candidates and mentored more than 30 international relations scholars who now hold senior academic positions at leading universities and research centres around the world.

In 2005 he founded the La Trobe Centre for Dialogue. Under his leadership, the Centre quickly established a national and international reputation for research, training, policy development, and community engagement. The Centre focused on the management of political, cultural and religious diversity within and between countries, especially in the context of tension and conflict.

Joseph Camilleri has authored or edited over 25 books and written some 100 book chapters and journal articles. His research has centred on six key areas: the contemporary role of culture and religion, the Middle East, international politics of the Asia-Pacific region, regional and global governance, and the theory and practice of dialogue, reconciliation and conflict resolution.

Over the past ten years Camilleri has convened some 20 major international dialogues and conferences, and appeared before several parliamentary and government inquiries, including the parliamentary inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia in 2013.

He has provided regular advice and intellectual support (through guest lectures, forums, workshops, briefing papers and board membership) to a range of governmental and community organisations, including the Victorian Government, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations in the Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, local government bodies, Focus on the Global South, the Toda Institute for Peace and Global Policy Research, as well as public affairs and educational media programs. He is a frequent media commentator, and a member of several national and international advisory boards.

He has given lectures and keynote addresses around Australia and internationally, including in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden, Norway, France, Italy, China, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia and India.

Since Alexandria Agenda was established two years ago, Professor Camilleri has led a number of cultural diversity related assignments for the Carlton Football Club, the Islamic Council of Victoria, the Shia community in Victoria, and the Darebin City Council, La Trobe Melbourne and La Trobe University.

### **Languages**

Fluent in English and French, with a good working knowledge of Italian and some knowledge of Spanish, Greek, Russian and Arabic