

Submission to the Parliament of Australia, Joint Standing Committee on Migration
Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia from *Cultural Infusion Ltd.*, 21 April 2011

Cultural Infusion is a national not-for-profit organisation working across education, youth and communities and utilizing arts, culture and technology to promote harmony, diversity, inclusiveness and wellbeing for a more cohesive and culturally richer society.

With its head office in Melbourne, Cultural Infusion programs are tailored to meet community needs at local, state, national and international levels. Our goal is to promote equality and social justice and to encourage a broader understanding of cultural diversity for the benefit of all. We work with a range of program designs and delivery mechanisms to enable the greatest number of people possible to experience vibrant cultural and inter-cultural arts and social initiatives. Cultural Infusion's education programs are delivered to a student audience of more than 200,000 annually. Cultural Infusion has also produced and directed major ceremonies both here and abroad for the United Nations, United Religious Initiative, the Parliament of World Religions and countless other events with a strong intercultural focus.

Preamble:

This submission continues and extends points made in our joint submission, with the Australian Multicultural Foundation, to the Prime Minister's 2020 Summit in 2008.

Australia's future depends on making the most of our cultural identity as a democratic and pluralist society.

Since September 11, 2001 the value of multiculturalism has been questioned, particularly in some European countries. Australia's society has been founded on successive waves of immigration since the first British settlement in 1788. It has clearly benefited from multiculturalism, as have countries such as Canada. In a speech to the Sydney institute on 16 February 2011, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Bowen MP, identified three elements for the success of Australian multiculturalism: Respect for Australian values; a citizenship-centred multiculturalism and Political bipartisanship. We strongly support the Minister's position. The Chair of the Joint Parliamentary Committee, Maria Vamvakinou MP correctly pointed out in a speech to Parliament on 18 October 2010 "Multiculturalism has served Australia well. Through various acts of parliament, programs and services, multiculturalism has ensured an active commitment to human rights, and access and equity, as well as helped to shape a positive contemporary Australian identity".

Attention to multiculturalism only in the context of cultural diversity and a non-discriminatory immigration policy risks the continued marginalisation of issues that affect all Australians, with a significant and ongoing impact on Australia's international standing and the social and economic well-

being of its citizens. There is an urgent need to mainstream cultural diversity as an integral expression of Australia's national identity.

How will we get there?: issues and solutions

Article 1 of UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity 2001 states 'As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature.' The good governance of cultural diversity is also essential. Domestically and as delivered through programs of international trade and aid, current programs of support for target communities should be broadened to address the needs of a society proud to identify itself as founded in a diversity of cultural experience and expression.

An integrated whole of government policy and program framework is essential,

- a) to address issues of multiculturalism and cultural diversity across ministerial portfolios and
- b) to link policy on future population growth with explicit support for diverse avenues of cultural expression.

In recent years multiculturalism has been misrepresented, misunderstood and marginalised. We believe that good governance of cultural diversity is the only policy that can provide both a comprehensive approach to cultural citizenship, and a clear and reliable framework for access to and effective management of, our common goods and resources at all levels of government and industry. It cannot however be fully functional unless proper place is given to Indigenous Australians and long term settlers as well as recent arrivals.

The discussion below addresses issues raised for this Inquiry, using the numbering for topics listed in the Committee's published Terms of Reference.

1. Current definitions of social inclusion emphasise the redress of disadvantage, as measured by established economic and social indicators. A thoroughgoing commitment to multiculturalism implies a broader framework, where inequities can be addressed through an approach to nation-building that promotes the social and economic inclusion of groups and individuals with diverse cultural traditions, experiences and expressions.

An appreciation of cultural diversity as the engine of future creativity and innovation, together with an understanding that barriers to cultural expression are powerful drivers of exclusion across social and industry sectors, are key to effective future policy and program development. Managing the generation, use and fair distribution of cultural capital is far from a 'soft' issue: it directly affects Australia's economic wellbeing, social cohesion and national security. Future policy must build on past achievements and address existing discrepancies: in particular, the instances where institutional frameworks explicitly or implicitly privilege one civilization or cultural tradition over others.

While English will continue to add value as a global resource and as an effective tool for exchange within an active and democratic public sphere, Australians' capacity to use, understand and engage with other languages and traditions needs to be seen as essential rather than peripheral. Already, resources have been lost through a failure to retain multilingual capacity across succeeding generations. It is time to embrace our identity as a tolerant, vibrant and plural nation with a global outlook, going into the 21st century and beyond.

2. The marginalisation of multiculturalism and 'multicultural arts' as a minority interest continues to have a negative impact on Australia's capacity to appreciate, and make effective use of, its total cultural, social and economic resources. The role of Australia's immigrant and diasporic community networks should be framed as one of articulating new frameworks and models for the preservation of cultural heritage, the promotion of cross-cultural expression and support for cultural, social and economic innovation. Australia has yet to take full account of its advantages in this regard. Comprehensive research is needed into how the language and cultural skills, and the business acumen, of diaspora communities can be accessed and exchanged, on a more effective and consistent basis.

3. Australia has established a solid record of achievement in evidence-based assessment of existing settlement programs for new migrants. There is however a vast, unmet and largely unrecognised demand for 'post-arrival' services. There is also a lack of effective support for people who may experience significant and long term barriers to full social and cultural participation discrimination based on their appearance, adherence to culturally distinct modes of dress or behaviour, and/or lack of access to appropriate skill-building programs. Expectations of how new migrants, including refugees, and longer term residents integrate into the broader Australian society should not be framed through a lack of respect for their cultures of origin, or through explicit or implicit demands that they relinquish valued avenues of cultural expression as the cost of becoming fully Australian. Where cultural diversity may result in a clash of values, open and reciprocal exchange is far more effective than suppression or exclusion, as a catalyst of change. It is vital to ensure that people of recent immigrant backgrounds, indigenous Australians and native English speakers alike, have access to opportunities to improve both social and economic standing and mutual understanding. This in turn is likely to affect rates of social participation on a long term basis.

4. In the past twenty years, previous world-leading activity by Australian institutions in the area of multicultural research and program delivery has been crippled with the abolition of key research and support organisations at Federal level. In our troubled world, Australia has the opportunity to reposition itself as a leading nation in initiatives to promote cultural diversity and intercultural understanding at home and at a global level, by acting now to retain and build on existing expertise. New institutional frameworks will be required, to capture the full potential contribution of Australia's

culturally diverse population to the domestic economy and to improve Australia's position internationally, including the promotion of beneficial long term settlement patterns. This must include bodies capable both of overview and research: without them, new initiatives or incentives cannot effectively be established, delivered or evaluated.

5. The role of migration in building Australia's long term productive capacity is self-evident, but is still poorly documented and understood. In the absence of a thorough understanding of the contribution cultural diversity can make to nation-building and innovation, migrant recruitment and accompanying skills assessment has persisted in fitting migrants to the existing economy rather than forecasting their potential to seed new sectors of activity. Australians' economic and social choices and their patterns of production, consumption and communication have comprehensively changed in the half century since World War II. Attention to the resources boom and the impact of technological and other change in a globalised world economy should not obscure the fact that, with 44% of Australians now of first or second-generation immigrant backgrounds, demand for new products and services will continue to rise: not only that, but the demographic makeup of the population itself now constitutes a significant 'natural' resource with long term economic potential. It would compound previous mistakes to evaluate this resource or, rather, mosaic of resources, without taking into account the potential of new arts and cultural industries.

6. It is unfortunately the case that to date, Australia has not fully appreciated the value, or utilised the expertise, of its culturally diverse population and its status as a natural laboratory of cultural exchange. We call on the Federal government to include artistic and cultural expertise in skilled migration profiles and assessments: it is an insult to dignity and a waste of resources when highly skilled artists with established reputations in their countries of origin end up in menial jobs, in unrelated industries or must wait decades before receiving due recognition.

7. New government initiatives to support business enterprise on the part of migrant communities must be framed to capture the potential of emerging as well as existing activity sectors, to contribute to Australia's future economic growth. Cultural Infusion and likeminded organisations have opened the way to new avenues of cultural exchange and trade both in Australia and, increasingly, on an international level. These new cultural industries, not dependent on outdated perceptions of a divide between 'art' and 'culture', promote the interrelationship of diasporic communities and encourage mutual understanding and tolerance of diverse cultural expression within the broader Australian community. They help restore a sense of dignity and pride in their cultural achievements, to recently arrived immigrants, among more established cultural groups and as an example to those in other cultural contexts. The value of these activities and programs has gained increasing recognition amongst educators, government and non-government organisations and policy makers. They demonstrate the ongoing potential contribution of migration, when accompanied by a global outlook on cultural

expression and cultural exchange. These activities have begun to attract international interest, but currently receive only piecemeal support from individual agencies at local, state and federal level.

Conclusion:

We strongly endorse the acceptance by the Australian Government of ‘The People of Australia’ report by the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council 2010, and commend the moves made by this Committee to reopen debate on the value of multiculturalism to Australia’s future growth and productivity as a nation. We encourage the Government in a spirit of political bipartisanship to give priority to the implementation of the Report’s recommendations.

Furthermore, we need to work to obtain a clearer understanding of how we can develop a comprehensive policy and program framework to:

- a) encourage and support Australia’s skilled and culturally diverse artists to achieve their full potential and
- b) promote more effectively and disseminate models of cultural exchange and understanding within Australia and internationally.

What are we asking of government now?

1. Build on Australia’s membership of the Group of Friends of the United Nations’ Alliance of Civilizations, by undertaking a high level, direct assessment of how cultural diversity can most effectively be promoted and managed across civil society, industry activity sectors, ministerial portfolios and at Federal, state and local levels in the key areas of education, youth and media, as well as migration.
2. Create a Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage, to bring Australia into line with international best practice in the public administration of arts and culture; co-ordinate activities and organisations across departments and agencies in the arts and cultural sector; and promote Australia’s vibrant culture more effectively to the world.
3. Reconstitute a nationally accredited cross-disciplinary research body to co-ordinate and conduct research into issues of cultural diversity in Australia, including its social value and economic potential.
4. Institute a national ‘zero racism’ campaign with a focus on youth, using mainstream and social media as well as face to face cultural exchange and cultural immersion experiences, to promote social cohesion and social inclusion through intercultural understanding.

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