



**Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia**

**Submission by Maribyrnong City Council**

**April 2011**

## Terms of Reference

### INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA

The Joint Standing Committee on Migration shall inquire into the economic, social and cultural impacts of migration in Australia and make recommendations to maximise the positive effects of migration. The inquiry shall examine and report on:  
*Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation*

1. The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda; and
2. The contribution of diaspora communities to Australia's relationships with Europe, the UK, Middle East and the immediate Asia-Pacific Region.

#### *Settlement and participation*

3. Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society; and
4. Incentives to promote long term settlement patterns that achieve greater social and economic benefits for Australian society as a whole.

#### *National productive capacity*

5. The role migration has played and contributes to building Australia's long term productive capacity;
6. The profile of skilled migration to Australia and the extent to which Australia is fully utilising the skills of all migrants; and
7. Potential government initiatives to better assist migrant communities establish business enterprises.

## ***Preface***

The City of Maribyrnong, previously the City of Footscray, has been a first port of call for successive waves of migration since the early 1950's. Council has welcomed all new arrivals and been at the forefront of providing them with a broad range of services and supports for over half a decade. As a consequence, Maribyrnong City Council is well placed to inform both policy and best practice in relation to multiculturalism and believes that multiculturalism (in its broadest spirit and intent) needs to be reaffirmed as a cornerstone of public policy.

Government public policy increasingly connects multiculturalism and immigration. In much of the public discourse these terms have become synonymous. This reflects a fundamental values shift from the idea of an inclusive multiculturalism to a more reductionist approach in which the impacts include:

- The diminishing of the public discourse around multiculturalism to a narrow instrument of integration for the primary purpose of economic growth (including in these Terms of Reference);
- Reducing universal citizenship to a simplistic notion of legal status;
- Homogenising of the term multiculturalism contributing to nation building without the commensurate awarding of political and social rights;
- Unintended negative community sentiments (and associated 'populist' politics) in an area of contested public policy by conflating multiculturalism with immigration Policy;
- An over reporting of 'diaspora nationalism' that contributes towards feelings of insecurity for the host citizens and leaves new arrivals marginalised and powerless in their settlement journey.

This response from Maribyrnong City Council (as the tier of Government closest to community) recognises the practical impacts of this increasingly fragile public policy area and strongly encourages the Federal Government to:

- pursue a high profile and courageous reaffirmation of inclusive and enabling multiculturalism;
- recognise and promote a differentiated citizenship within a common culture and
- endorse substantive equality, beyond legal status, which includes a shared political and social culture.

It is timely within Australia's growing sphere of global influence that we are recognised for an inclusive multicultural policy and practice that embraces a revitalized sense of Australian Citizenship.

## ***Profile of the City of Maribyrnong***

The City of Maribyrnong is one of the most diverse municipalities in Victoria. The total population was estimated at 71,523 persons in June 2010 (ABS estimate). 39 % of residents were born overseas with the majority of these (34%) born in non English speaking countries. One in five people born overseas do not speak English well or at all. 43% of residents speak a language other than English with the largest language

group being Vietnamese, Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), Greek, Italian, and Macedonian. In the past five years there has been a large increase in residents born in India, China and Burma. The top six countries of birth for new arrivals to Maribyrnong between 1 March 2010 and 1 March 2011 were: India, China, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Burma and Sri Lanka. (Statistics from Maribyrnong Community Profile & DIAC Settlement Data).

Maribyrnong City Council operates within a social justice framework as set out in the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Victoria). Human rights require recognition and respect for the dignity of other people. The *Charter* sets out the freedoms, rights and responsibilities of every human being, regardless of gender; age; wealth; nationality or faith. In the Council Plan 2009-2013, Maribyrnong City Council celebrates its diverse and vibrant community and outlines a *Wellbeing Commitment* to support individuals and communities to reach their full potential. The Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Policy and Action Plan 2006-2011, reinforces Council's commitment to achieving an inclusive community by working in partnership to develop strengths and capacity.

## ***Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation***

### **1. The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda;**

1.1 The Federal Government's Social Inclusion Agenda should both inform and be part of Australia's Multicultural Policy. Multiculturalism and the social policy agenda should be underpinned by identical values, principles and aspirations. Australians from diverse cultural, religious and language backgrounds have made a vast contribution to the social, economic and political life of Australia throughout its history. However, many migrants, particularly those who are newly arrived, face basic challenges that preclude them from participating fully in community life. It is important therefore that *The Social Inclusion Agenda* more strongly inform *The People of Australia, Australia's Multicultural Policy* to ensure that all Australians have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to Australian life. *The Social Inclusion Agenda's* focus on "learn, work, engage and have a voice" is important for all migrants, however many, particularly those who are newly arrived, face more basic challenges including: access to appropriate housing, limited English language skills, isolation from friends, family and support networks and access to basic services including health and transport. These issues need to be satisfactorily addressed to enable people to engage in education, training, employment and civic life.

1.2 At the heart of both multiculturalism and social justice is the idea of citizenship. The concept of 'citizenship' should also be considered within these Terms of Reference. Local Government is committed to actively bestowing rights and responsibilities by engaging the community and involving them in decision-making particularly when these decisions impact on their lives. Citizen engagement and involvement in local governance contributes to community life and the wellbeing and liveability of the locality. However, this is becoming more difficult to achieve as basic language and support services for new arrivals continues to diminish.

1.3 Community wellbeing is a key priority for Local Government and is linked to the 'liveability' of local areas. Migrants, refugees and new arrivals from diverse cultural and language backgrounds have much to contribute and can improve the liveability of neighbourhoods and harmony among diverse local communities through civic engagement. One point of access for migrants and new arrivals is through events that celebrate arts, culture and heritage. These can both make people feel welcome and enable them to contribute to their community and this can in turn encourage others to participate. Such events can also contribute to community understanding and harmony.

1.4 Investment in multiculturalism is an investment in social justice and the associated universal benefits. This investment should be reflected in intensive and targeted support for new arrivals as well as cultural programs and community facilities, all contributing to the overall community infrastructure. Providing services to multicultural communities involves additional costs. These costs are not restricted to translation and interpretation services, but include the extra time and resources (such as specialist staff) to deliver standard services e.g. aged care, health and welfare; family services; libraries; and community development.

1.5 Engaging with multicultural communities, and in particular with new arrivals, involves relationship building and this is more time and resource intensive than working with mainstream communities.

## **2. The contribution of diaspora communities to Australia's relationships with Europe, the UK, Middle East and the immediate Asia-Pacific Region.**

2.1 The lessons from Australia's immigration history seem to strongly suggest that the contribution of diaspora communities to Australia's global relationships is directly related to and dependent upon the level of understanding, tolerance and support provided to the diaspora groups. A useful analogy is the diminished relationship between Australia and India as a result of the poor support services offered to Indian students.

2.2 The ongoing cost for Australia is the need for constant vigilance against emerging climates of fear and marginalisation that are often associated with diaspora communities (and in particular stateless persons and 'queue jumpers').

## ***Settlement and Participation***

### **3. Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society;**

3.1 Innovative ideas for settlement programs are no substitute for meeting peoples' basic needs including: secure housing, appropriate health care, adequate English language skills and pathways into education, training and employment. If these needs are met, new arrivals are more likely to be able to successfully

contribute to the social and economic life of Australia. Meeting these needs requires significant financial commitment.

3.2 All three levels of government and service providers need to work collaboratively to assist the settlement of new migrants, including refugees, into the community. Currently there is a lack of coordination and information sharing for the settlement planning process including new arrivals, service requirements and settlement need. Clarification is also needed around roles and responsibilities, and issues around competition for funding need to be addressed.

3.3 Local Councils provide Community Grants to assist community groups with social, cultural and economic projects. These grant programs are often small and generally short term. CALD and refugee communities, often with the support of auspicing agencies, make up a significant proportion of applicants. This system of granting enables low level development and one-off projects and is a powerful method of developing engagement. However, improving governance and building capacity requires additional funding and support over a longer period of time.

3.4 Long term community development projects that assist families to build relationships in the community encourage participation. These require significant skills to deliver, particularly when working with diverse communities. *Building Bridges: Cultural Games*, a VicHealth funded initiative implemented by Maribyrnong City Council, had an unintended but positive outcome for eight women from refugee backgrounds. The project engaged parents from diverse backgrounds to facilitate an anti-racism program working with primary school children and teachers. Pathways for the participants included: skills development, training, certificates and jobs. The women also learned to navigate systems and importantly established relationships beyond their cultural group and neighbourhood. These outcomes required a significant commitment of time spent training, supporting and assisting the women involved.

3.5 Entry points and pathways to education and employment can be difficult to access, especially for women. Social enterprise may provide pathways, particularly for harder to reach groups, because it can act as an employment opportunity with social benefits. However, it does require significant funding over longer periods of time. Hard to reach communities require greater resourcing and support and are likely to achieve reduced profit margins. The African Women's Sewing Enterprise in Melbourne's West had some initial funding through a Council grant as well as significant funding from the applicant agency. This enterprise has enabled its members to generate an income from their work and has also had a range of other consequences for the Sudanese women involved. They have developed English language skills, made connections with the wider community and are building their business skills. Having come from a patriarchal background, this enterprise has also had a significant impact both on family relationships and dynamics. However, caution needs to be exercised in using social enterprise as the only formula for developing

pathways into employment. Each community has specific needs and each Social enterprise will be unique.

3.6 International Students require greater supports and pastoral care. There are particular issues for this group in relation to racism, safety, affordable housing and employment. Maribyrnong City Council is leading the *International Student Emergency Awareness Project* which aims to improve the safety of students in private rental accommodation and improve options for building resilience among this identified vulnerable group. International Students also require better access to information about living in Australia including housing costs and consumer rights, particularly relating to loans and bill payments. Otherwise, low paid employment, unsafe temporary housing and poverty can be an unintended consequence of their studies in Australia.

#### **4. Incentives to promote long term settlement patterns that achieve greater social and economic benefits for Australian society as a whole.**

4.1 In the City of Maribyrnong one in five residents born overseas do not speak English well or at all. Inadequate English language training is a major barrier to pathways into continued learning and employment and also has social implications. English language hours and classes need to be targeted and tailored for individuals to achieve proficiency in a level of language competency that supports success in employment, training and business. Low level English language skills have a flow on effect for the whole community and for the migrants and new arrivals themselves when they are unable to successfully participate in the social and economic life of the community.

### ***National Productive Capacity***

#### **5. The role migration has played and contributes to building Australia's long term productive capacity;**

5.1 These Terms of Reference are heavily weighted towards measuring the economic contribution of migration to Australia. While migrants and refugees have historically played a vital role in Australia's productive capacity, contributing to every sector and industry in the country, their impact has been far greater than this. They have also made, and continue to make, significant contributions to the social, cultural and political life of this country. It is essential not to reduce migration to purely economic terms.

5.2 Using data to measure the success of migration based on contribution to the GDP or the labour market generates tension for our multicultural policy. People migrate to, and seek refuge, in this country for many reasons other than to fill labour market shortages and this needs to be reflected broadly in public policy and to underpin Australia's Multicultural Policy.

#### **6. The profile of skilled migration to Australia and the extent to which Australia is fully utilising the skills of all migrants;**

6.1 There are currently migrants and refugees living in the community with skills that are under utilized. Priority needs to be given to providing adequate training to up-skill these people for existing work opportunities rather than relying on skilled migration to fill gaps in the labour market.

6.2 Maribyrnong City Council recommends training local people for local work opportunities in the municipality. This includes local businesses as well as State and national infrastructure projects such as the Regional Rail Link and the National Broadband Network.

6.3 Skilled migrants generally assume they will find work on arrival in Australia. Even for those with good English language skills this does not necessarily happen. Local service providers report many inquiries from skilled migrants requiring work experience to enhance their employability. Local work experience is important to many employers. Organisations such as AMES run programs for skilled migrants that include work experience.

6.4 Some employers and workplaces require encouragement and support to employ people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

6.5 Skilled migration can create a strain on countries that cannot afford to lose skilled professionals.

## **7. Potential government initiatives to better assist migrant communities establish business enterprises.**

7.1 Meeting people's basic needs (see 1.1, 3.1 and 4.1 above) is an essential first step.

7.2 English classes need to target and be tailored for individuals in order to achieve a level of language proficiency that can support success in training and employment pathways.

7.3 There is a need for business development information and training that specifically targets individual migrant and refugee communities. Existing information often presumes an understanding of particular rules and legislation, for example in relation to planning and building.

7.4 Staff and organisations working to establish business enterprises with migrant communities require specific cultural understanding / training in order to deliver successful outcomes.

7.5 Supported and targeted pathways need to be provided into vocational training that builds on the existing skill set of individuals.

7.6 Social Enterprise can provide both employment and social benefits but needs significant funding (see 3.5 above).



7.7 Culturally specific business mentoring could assist individuals with business development. Providing a pool of mentors with business acumen, from a range of cultural backgrounds, would provide choice for those requiring assistance.

## ***Conclusion***

In summary, Maribyrnong City Council recommends:

- The Federal Government pursue a high profile and courageous reaffirmation of inclusive and enabling multiculturalism;
- Improved coordination between all three levels of government and service providers to assist the settlement of new migrants, including refugees, into the community.
- Significant and long term investment to meet the basic needs of migrants and new arrivals including: secure housing, adequate English language skills and pathways into education, training and employment.
- English language hours and classes be targeted and tailored for individuals to achieve proficiency in a level of language competency that supports involvement in the social life of the community as well as participation in education, training, employment and business.
- Investment in long term community development projects that assist families to build relationships in the community and encourage participation.