



EG:ETH4

27 May 2011

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

### **INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA**

Monash City Council welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia.

Monash City Council is located in the south east of the CBD of Melbourne and is one of Melbourne's most culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse communities in Victoria. 39.7% of the Monash community is born overseas, with 33.9% of the total population born in non-English speaking countries and 38.6% speaking a language other than English at home.

Monash City Council welcomes and supports the Federal Government's new Multicultural Policy, *The People of Australia*, and looks forward to continuing to work with all levels of government to further multicultural policy development and promoting its benefits to the local community.

Attached is Monash City Council's submission to the Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia.

Please do not hesitate to contact Eugenia Grammatikakis on (03) 95183625 or [eugeniag@monash.vic.gov.au](mailto:eugeniag@monash.vic.gov.au) if you require any further information on any aspects of this submission.

Yours sincerely

CR STEPHEN DIMOPOULOS  
Chair Monash Multicultural Advisory Committee

Encl

# Monash City Council

## Submission

to the

### Joint Standing Committee on Migration

### 'Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia'

May 2011

---

#### Introduction

Monash City Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia. This submission has been informed by a community consultation attended by a cross section of the Monash community, held in the City of Monash on the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2011 with key note speaker Maria Vamvakinou MP, Chair of the Inquiry, by Council's Multicultural Advisory Committee and Council's existing policies and commitments.

Monash City Council welcomes and supports the Federal Government's new Multicultural Policy, *The People of Australia* and considers this to be a national Framework pivotal to setting the future direction for Multicultural policy in Australian.

Monash City Council looks forward to continue to work with all levels of government and contribute to further multicultural policy development and promoting its benefits to the local community.

#### The City of Monash

The City of Monash is one of Melbourne's most culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse community. The City of Monash is ranked as the 5<sup>th</sup> highest local government area in Victoria for population diversity with 39.7% of its population born overseas; 33.9% of the total population born in non-English speaking countries; 38.6% speak a language other than English at home; 12.5% speak English not well or not at all and 71.3% follow 30 different religions.

Monash City Council is committed to Multiculturalism and to maximising the benefits of its multicultural community by embracing, acknowledging and celebrating the contributions that people from migrant and refugee backgrounds have made and continue to make to the economic, social, cultural and political life of the City of Monash.

Council's commitment to Multiculturalism is articulated in its Multicultural Framework and Action Plan 2009-2013, the aim of which is to guide Council to respond effectively and in an appropriate manner to the needs and aspirations of people from the culturally and linguistically diverse community in the City of Monash.

Council supports the implementation of its Multicultural Framework and Action Plan through the allocation of appropriate resources including the support of a number of advisory structures such as the Monash Multicultural Advisory Committee, the Monash Interfaith Gathering and the Senior Citizens Forum and through its generous Community Grants Program.

Local Government is the closest government to the community and often the first port of call for many residents including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Being the level of government closest to the people Councils are uniquely placed to work in close partnership with the community and design services and programs that reflect the needs of local communities. It is also well placed to identify issues and needs and advocate for these at other levels of government.

Cultural diversity is very evident in the City of Monash and will only increase in the future. This diversity enriches our community but equally presents Council with challenges. The increase diversity of the community requires proactive planning and responses that will meet the multifaceted and complex needs of this diverse community. Maintaining a cohesive and harmonious community also requires capacity to engage and build relationships with the key community organisations and groups as well as develop cultural competency within the organisation.

It is important that councils are adequately resourced to ensure that they have the capacity to provide services that are inclusive and meet the diverse needs of the community in an appropriate and timely manner and also to engage in effective community relations activities and initiatives.

### **Key issues raised by participants for consideration by this Inquiry:**

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

Participants expressed concerns that whilst Australia is a Multicultural society we keep revisiting issues of migration and debating the relevance of a multicultural policy. The perception is that as a society we are still grappling with the issue of Multiculturalism which is regularly used as an excuse to vilify people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

**It is recommended that government examines the question of population as a separate issue to that of settlement and multicultural policy.**

When these policies are debated they are often played against each other and this distorts the arguments and the debate. The community needs to understand the distinct differences and what each policy serves.

It is also important to consider how to balance family migration with that of intake of refugees and skilled migrants and to present clear arguments to the community about the merit of each program.

In addition it is important that the government consider the challenges Australia faces with refugees and asylum seekers within the context of the world wide migration movement, as Australia is part of the global community, and not a case in isolation. Once the issue is debated within the global context it can become a much more reasonable problem and one that the broader Australia community can better understand.

Multiculturalism has worked successfully in Australia and this is because of successive government policies which had bipartisan political support. Participants commented that the debate about multiculturalism over the past few years has been very divisive and it does not serve the Australian community well.

It is recommended that bipartisan support on Multiculturalism is reinstated and responsible leadership on this issue be demonstrated by government and the opposition.

Participants argued that the vagueness of the term multiculturalism often gives the opportunity to critics to pull it down.

It is recommended that a definition of Multiculturalism needs to be developed that is short, coherent and understood by all.

The term needs to become broader and one that conveys a message which is about a broader Australian identity, about culture, about art and not only about economics.

In addition the definition should encompass respect for language diversity, this includes not just acceptance and promotion of languages other than English, but an acceptance that English has many varieties.

## **Settlement and participation**

Provision of settlement services is viewed as critical to the support of newly arrived migrants and refugees to successfully settle in the Australian community.

It is strongly recommended that the Government ensures that settlement programs and services are generously funded.

Migration and multiculturalism is a process and an experience for all migrants, and whilst there are immediate needs that must be met within the five year 'settlement period', there are residual issues that impact in the years ahead depending on the migration and settlement experience of each migrant. Government policy and services must respond to the needs of all ethnic communities based on these experiences in the development of access and equity policies.

Any multicultural policy must look at the future maintenance of cultures and communities and should support second and subsequent generations in continuing cultural development, such as the teaching and learning of community languages.

Whilst all levels of government have a responsibility to fund and support communities, ethno specific and multicultural organisations have played a major role in the settlement of many of the CALD communities and their expertise, resources and knowledge must be considered in the delivery of services.

It is recommended that government and funding bodies must give greater recognition to ethno-specific and multicultural organisations and their role, build on their experiences, and consider funding and partnership arrangements that will avoid duplication but rather support communities to move forward.

The role of local government has not traditionally been associated with settlement service provision. However councils have been increasingly providing services and programs to newly arrived migrants and refugees even though they are not funded or resourced to do so.

It is recommended that the Federal Government recognises the role Councils play in settlement service provision and consider ways of making local government a more coordinated partner in settlement planning and policy development.

## **National productive capacity**

### *'Employment, Education & Training'*

Concern was expressed at the continued issue of lack of recognition of overseas qualifications by skilled migrants coming into Australia. Many migrants are underemployed and there still appears to be a strong bias against those migrants who have not obtained their qualifications in western countries.

It is vital that difficulties experienced by migrants are examined from all sides and not looked upon just as 'deficits' by the migrants. Further consideration needs to be given to the role perceptions of so-called 'deficits' play by those in gate-keeping positions such as employment agencies when assessing the suitability of migrants for the Australian workplace.

It is recommended that employers and recruitment agencies become aware of factors that can lead to negative stereotyping of migrants through compulsory cultural awareness training.

Furthermore, people who come to Australia under the skilled migration program often experience additional issues to that of recognition of their qualifications which add to the stresses of their settling successfully in Australia. These issues include lack of access to financial resources such as bank loans or medical services and facilities. Having significant numbers of skilled migrants in this situation is a detriment to the Australian economy and to the health and wellbeing of these individuals and their families.

It is recommended that people entering Australia under the skilled migration program should be supported prior to their entry to Australia to minimise the difficulties experienced, particularly in relation to recognition of skills and suitability for employment.

The Australian Government, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the education institutions should be resourcing and providing information to people who have been approved to come to Australia prior to entering and then moving these into the required industries for work.

It is recommended that a HECS like scheme be introduced to support new migrants and those from refugee backgrounds once they are in Australia, with taking up training and further education for the purpose of recognising their qualifications in Australia.

It was expressed, that it is the experience of many that have to undertake further studying and training to achieve recognition of qualifications once in Australia. This places many skilled migrants and their families in a very difficult financial situation which impedes their entry into the Australian workforce and impacts on their successful settlement in Australia.

Furthermore it was expressed that families living in Australia who have been on temporary visas for up to five years when applying for permanent residency their applications take over a year to be processed. It was stated that this is far too long a timeframe. More specifically it was pointed out that being left in this suspended period puts a lot of pressure and stress on families. During this time these families have no access to any government services such as Medicare and seeking employment is difficult, as employers are not keen in hiring a person who is on a 2 month visa and is awaiting confirmation of their permanent residence status.

In addition, the costs both in time and financial of having to present every two months to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship just to discover that they have to wait another two months is absurd and causes significant stress and financial hardship on the individual and their family.

It is recommended that the system of processing permanent residency applications be streamlined and become more expedient and efficient.

In Summary migrants under the skilled migration program (Visa 496) experience a number of issues including:

- Difficulties in finding a job with their existing qualifications because their qualifications are not recognised (even though the qualifications were evaluated and approved before they were approved to come to Australia)
- They have to up skill at their own expense
- They cannot obtain bank loans because they do not have full Permanent Residency

- Difficulty in getting a job because they do not have permanent residency and employers are reluctant to employ someone who does not have permanent residency.

It is recommended that employers and especially small business owners need to be educated more on this issue and perhaps even given incentives for providing jobs to migrants under the skilled migration category.

- School aged kids are required to pay school tuition fees as overseas students
- No Medicare assistance

### *'Discrimination'*

Another issue expressed was that of racial abuse and discrimination faced by migrants and refugees especially those who look different. This discrimination and abuse does not only occur on the street but can also occur in institutions such as schools with perpetrators being not necessarily children but staff. This systemic abuse and discrimination needs to be stamped out.

It was strongly expressed that the government needs to be very firm with issues of racism and discrimination at the systemic level including schools and other such institutions. Teachers in this example should demonstrate leadership especially as they teach children.

It was recommended that the Government should establish a zero tolerance on issues of racism and discrimination and implement a strong anti-racism campaign that targets schools and other institutions.

### *'Language Barriers'*

The issue of lack of competence in the English language amongst new and emerging communities such as the Burmese is a barrier for members of these communities in obtaining employment and participating in other community activities. Lack of English language skills can lead to individuals and communities becoming isolated and excluded from fully participating in community life. It is important that adequate support is provided to new migrants and refugees especially language English tuition.

It is recommended that as part of settlement services more resources be provided for the teaching of English to ensure that newly arrived migrants and refugees are able to learn English at their own pace and timeframe and not restricted to the 510 hours.

A mentoring program for new migrants and refugees be introduced.

Australian residents including those of older established migrant communities, with different professional experiences and/or retired could be matched with newly arrived migrant and/or refugee families. This program could assist and provide support and direction to newly arrived migrants and refugees in finding work experience,

meaningful employment including relationship building with older established communities and the broader Australian community.

The Australian Government consider exploring the Canadian and American models of employment that places migrants and refugees with similar experiences as those settling in Australia into the workforce, and its applicability to Australia.

It was stated that this model is working for these countries and producing positive results.

The Government needs to look at the protectionism that exists in certain professions that can make it difficult for skilled migrants with recognised qualifications to obtain employment.

It is important that there is a better process in place that is more open and accepting and one that has the capacity to acknowledge the qualifications of skilled migrants, enhance their skills and provide opportunities for local work experience.

### *'Asylum Seekers'*

Concern was expressed at the length of time asylum seekers are spending in detention centres and the distress this is causing individuals and families.

It is recommended that the Government consider developing national employment projects and placing asylum seekers to work on these projects.

This will allow asylum seekers to obtain work experience and spend their time in a more productive, meaningful and healthier way for their benefit and that of Australia.

Another issue of concern raised by participants is the 2001 Agreement between Australia and New Zealand and the impact this agreement is having on Pacific Islander communities. The impact of this legislation is causing significant hardship on families and social problems especially amongst the community's young people.

It is recommended that the Government reviews the 2001 legislation and consider making changes that will ensure members of those communities affected are not disadvantaged and marginalised.

## **Other issues presented for consideration by the Inquiry:**

### *'Commonwealth Multicultural Act'*

According to the 2006 Census, 22 per cent of all Australians were born overseas. In recent years, people from around 185 different countries, speaking over 100 languages and dialects have made Australia home. These figures greatly reflect on the growing diversity of Australia's society.

The Commonwealth Government's recent policy on multiculturalism in Australia recognises, accepts, respects and celebrates the existence and practice of cultural



diversity in Australia. The policy sets the Federal Government's aim to build on Australia's success as a culturally diverse, accepting and open society, united through a shared future and commitment to Australia, its democratic institutions and values, and the rule of law. The principles underpinning this policy need to be enshrined in legislation under a proposed Commonwealth Multicultural Act. Given the similarly diverse jurisdictions such as Canada, Victoria and New South Wales have multicultural legislations, it is appropriate that the Commonwealth Government do the same.

It is recommended that the Commonwealth Government should introduce a Commonwealth Multicultural Act to enshrine the core principles of Australian multiculturalism and to reflect the Commonwealth's commitment to Australia's cultural diversity and enhance participation of all members of the community.

The Act should:

- Recognise the diversity of the people in Australia and promote mutual respect and understanding regardless of background, culture and faith
- Recognise the responsibility for all Australians to abide by Australia's laws and democratic processes, promote community harmony and social cohesion and equality of opportunity, regardless of one's race, religious belief, gender, language or cultural practices.
- Ensure that the relevant Minister and all federal government departments should report annually to the Parliament on their compliance with the principles of the Act.

As part of the new Act, it is also recommended that each government department/department head to produce, consult and develop a four year cultural diversity engagement strategy.

This will provide emphasis for departments to respond to long term issues and requesting for them to be more innovative and strategic in their approach when working with migrant and refugee communities. There is a real need for departments to take up responsibility to ensure that all programs and policies they produce to include and reflect the needs of CALD communities in Australia.

## Summary of Recommendations:

Monash City Council recommends that:

1. The government examines the question of population as a separate issue to that of settlement and multicultural policy.
2. Bipartisan support is reinstated with respect to Multiculturalism and responsible leadership on this issue be demonstrated by government and the opposition.
3. A definition of Multiculturalism needs to be developed that is short, coherent and understood by all.
4. The Government ensures that settlement programs and services are generously funded.
5. Government and funding bodies must give greater recognition to ethno-specific and multicultural organisations and their role; build on their experiences and consider funding and partnership arrangements that will avoid duplication but rather support communities to move forward.
6. The Federal Government recognises the role Councils play in settlement service provision and consider ways of making local government a more coordinated partner in settlement planning and policy development.
7. Employers and recruitment agencies become aware of factors that can lead to negative stereotyping of migrants through compulsory cultural awareness training.
8. People entering Australia under the skilled migration program should be supported prior to their entry to Australia to minimise the difficulties experienced once here particularly as it relates to recognition of skills and suitability for employment.
9. A HECS like scheme be introduced to support new migrants and those from refugee backgrounds, once they are in Australia, with taking up training and further education for the purpose of recognising their qualifications in Australia.
10. The system of processing permanent residency applications be streamlined and become more expedient and efficient.
11. Employers and especially small business owners need to be educated more on this issue and given incentives for providing jobs to migrants under the skilled migration category.
12. The Government should establish a zero tolerance on issues of racism and discrimination and implement a strong anti-racism campaign that targets schools and other institutions.

13. As part of settlement services more resources be provided for the teaching of English to ensure that newly arrived migrants and refugees are able to learn English at their own pace and timeframe and not restricted to the 510 hours.
14. A mentoring program for new migrants and refugees be introduced.
15. The Australian Government consider exploring the Canadian and American models of employment that get migrants and refugees with similar experiences as those settling in Australia into the workforce, and its applicability to Australia.
16. The Government needs to look at the protectionism that exists in certain professions that makes it difficult for skilled migrants with recognised qualifications to obtain employment.
17. The Government consider developing national employment projects and placing asylum seekers to work on these projects.
18. The Government reviews the 2001 Legislation and consider making changes that will ensure members of the Pacific Island communities affected are not disadvantaged and marginalised.
19. The Commonwealth Government should introduce a Commonwealth Multicultural Act to enshrine the core principles of Australian multiculturalism and to reflect the Commonwealth's commitment to Australia's cultural diversity and enhance participation of all members of the community.
20. As part of the new Act, it is further recommended that each government department/department head to produce, consult and develop a four year cultural diversity engagement strategy.

**Contact Officer:**

Eugenia Grammatikakis  
Community Development Officer, Monash City Council,  
293 Springvale Road, Glen Waverley, VIC 3150  
Ph: (03) 9518 3625 – Email: [eugeniag@monash.vic.gov.au](mailto:eugeniag@monash.vic.gov.au)