



**MIGRANT RESOURCE CENTRE (SOUTHERN TAS) INC**

**SUBMISSION TO THE JOINT PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO  
MULTICULTURALISM AND MIGRATION**

The Board and staff of the Migrant Resource Centre (Southern Tas) Inc (MRC) welcome the opportunity to make this submission to the Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia.

The Migrant Resource Centre (Southern Tasmania) Inc (MRC) is an organisation which assists the settlement of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in Tasmania. Established in 1979, it is a non-government, non-profit organisation with 68 staff and 105 volunteers. In the 2010-2011 year the MRC provided services to approximately 1100 clients, 70% of which were from the continent of Asia and Africa. The MRC provides services and resources to promote the benefit and well-being of migrants and humanitarian entrants to the State of Tasmania particularly those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged. We promote greater awareness of migrant and settlement issues to the broader Tasmanian community by advocating for better social inclusion outcomes at a state and federal level.

**Summary**

The MRC acknowledges the government's multicultural policy and the commitment to support and develop a "...culturally diverse and socially cohesive nation". The thinking of successive governments has allowed Australia to become a success story in multiculturalism on the global stage. While some countries bemoan the negativity surrounding the diversity of culture, Australia embraces it's diverse cultural past, including our Indigenous heritage, with a long-term aim of embracing a multicultural framework.

The MRC considers that multiculturalism and social inclusion are key factors for consideration for the continued development of this nation. Media sensationalism has been of concern, being a voice of negativity in the understanding of the contributions that members of CaLD communities will and are making to Australian society – socially and economically. All Australians, regardless of their background, have the right to feel safe and comfortable in their environment. Likewise, current policies and procedures are in place that heightens the sense of anxiety felt by members of CaLD communities, established and new and emerging communities, when accessing government and community services, including such things as the delivery of information and the use of interpreters, as examples.

In this submission the MRC makes the following recommendations:

1. That multiculturalism and social inclusion be bipartisan and grounded in legislation, including implementing strategies to develop awareness of rights

and responsibilities of government departments across all tiers, as well as the rights and responsibilities of the people of Australia, within a legal framework, as per Anti-discrimination laws;

2. Cultural Awareness Training should be standard practice across all tiers of government. Development of strategies to encourage positive exposure to cultural diversity, social inclusion and multiculturalism through media outlet, and targeted funding to increase awareness of multiculturalism in Australian schools through the National Curriculum.
3. Increased investment by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to encourage regional employment opportunities in Tasmania to improve productive capacity.
4. Continued investment in agencies that have a strong and committed cross-cultural focus to support long-term innovative capacity.
5. Explore long-term industry skills gaps and address training and migration factors in order to develop strategies to reduce the gaps.
6. That federal and state governments take adequate steps to ensure the future economic viability of the country in the light of the ageing population, with due consideration given to the potential economic contribution of migrants in Australia in both business development and through employment.

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

### *1. The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's Social Inclusion Agenda*

Multicultural policy in Australia has been both embraced and disregarded as policy in the political domain. Successive governments have debated the benefits or otherwise of implementing a multicultural policy in Australia. Australia has the opportunity to embrace its multicultural heritage beyond the realms of a political landscape. It is not necessarily an aspect of Australian society that can be subject to legislative and/or policy change based on the political opinions of whoever is in leadership at the time. It should be a policy that is driven forward and that belongs to the people, not the government.

The current social inclusion policy could be extended to include specific reference to multiculturalism. Both concepts complement each other. Clients of the MRC face many barriers which have the potential to create a cascade of long-term difficulties. For example, Language, Literacy and Numeracy problems have an effect on access to employment. The barriers faced by Clients of the MRC may be addressed by a mutual understanding of the principles of social inclusion. Barriers and lack of access to equitable services impede on the rights to social participation of established and new and emerging communities in Australia.

MRC has the opportunity to assist people from CaLD backgrounds to become part of a socially inclusive society by way of a mutual understanding of the issues faced within a multicultural framework. This is through being aware of the diversity of CaLD cultures and best-practice to approach issues and needs.

Within a national framework, the MRC welcomes the notion of a whole-of-government approach to multiculturalism and envisions a future where all government departments, and indeed all tiers of government, take responsibility for and develop a policy for multiculturalism within a social inclusion framework. By working with established and emerging CaLD communities we have the opportunity to increase social participation and develop mutual understanding and respect for the diversity of the Australian culture<sup>1</sup>.

The Social Inclusion policy tends towards focussing on the long-term facets of social exclusion and the cyclical nature that is perpetuated through inter-generational learning. A driver for change is to improve, and make equitable, access to education, healthcare, housing and employment<sup>2</sup>. Presently, disadvantage experienced by CaLD communities is addressed only within the aspect of the impact of long-term issues without due consideration for cultural and individual circumstances. Support for new arrivals and short-term settlement outcomes should not be confined to the domain of one government department but requires an inter-departmental approach. Social exclusion created as a result of cultural background/migrant status needs to be addressed as part of a social inclusion agenda.

The MRC considers that multiculturalism and social inclusion are not mutually exclusive. We ask that the consideration be given to the place of multiculturalism within Australia's Social Inclusion strategy and that social inclusion be embedded within a multicultural framework.

The MRC supports the consolidation of the Commonwealth Anti-Discrimination Laws, a legal framework that will support tolerance and fairness. Policies and practices that heighten a sense of ownership of legal frameworks will ensure that all people are aware of their rights and obligations, an aspect that will help Australia to prosper as a multicultural nation.

The government needs to be mindful of the negative imagery created by media organisations and strive to encourage all facets of media to embrace cultural diversity and multiculturalism. Positive contributions of all members of the Australian community should be emphasised in the in the media, not ignored. The impact of negative media and media bias on Australia's reputation as a global partner needs to be considered.

The Tasmanian community experienced first-hand the negative discourse of the media in 2011 following what was termed a "murder-suicide". As a result of the disquiet perpetuated by the media, a series of forums were held throughout 2011 to discuss focus areas for positive change, culminating in a state-wide Community Voices forum in December 2011 in Hobart. The forum discussed issues, gaps and positive solutions in the areas of policing, housing, education and employment, health and media. A further forum is planned for 2012. As a state and nation we can take steps to improve awareness of CaLD communities and encourage positive relations.

Cultural Awareness addresses issues faced by CaLD communities and increases awareness of barriers and issues. It is imperative that the government implement a strategy to improve cultural understandings within the general community, with a

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<sup>1</sup> Multicultural Affairs in Victoria: A Discussion Paper for New Policy, AMES, 2008 p 9 [www.ames.net.au/media](http://www.ames.net.au/media) accessed 7 Feb 2012

<sup>2</sup> Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Foundations for a Stronger, Fairer Australia*, 2010, p 2 accessed 7 February 2012 <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/resources/aust-govt-publications>

targeted education strategy for school-aged children through to adults. As well, cultural training within all government departments (and across all tiers of government) will help to allay fears, dispel myths and generate an understanding of issues faced by new, emerging and established communities accessing government services.

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

Australia is a diverse nation, boasting a population from many backgrounds. We have taken advantage of the cultural and economic ties with many countries due to historical links and we now have the opportunity to diversify, strengthen and create links with our Asia-Pacific neighbours. Through education our children can build ties with each other in the local community and the wider world. Technology provides a tool for us to connect with the world and take advantage of the learning that can be achieved on issues such as business culture.

Tasmania has a long history of migration ties with Europe. In the post World War II development era, Tasmania was fortunate to have the services of migrants from many parts of Europe. People came to escape the devastation of the war and create new lives for their children. Without such migration, large scale projects such as the Hydro scheme would not have been a success. The migrants and their families endured much hardship but their legacy remains – in the infrastructure they helped to create and life-long participation in Australian society of the original migrants and their descendants.

However, as a result of the migration to Tasmania in the post World War II era, Tasmania now has the second largest ageing population in Australia and it is imperative that strategies continue to be developed to ensure the culturally-appropriate needs of aged-care Clients are met.

In the late 1990s, at the height of the Bosnian conflict, many Kosovo refugees found themselves in Hobart where the community, and particularly the people of Pontville, welcomed and embraced the displaced refugees.

In 2011, Hobart, and particularly Pontville, was given the opportunity to embrace displaced peoples, but within a different context. Until 2011, the Tasmanian community had not had first-hand experience of the detention centre framework. With the establishment of the Pontville Immigration Detention Centre and Community Detention scheme in Tasmania, there has been exposure to the negative and positive aspects of the detention centre concept and the impact on the detainees and the surrounding communities. The people of Hobart and Pontville have embraced the detention centre and have noted the benefits of such on the economic and social aspects to the community, and the development of cross-cultural understanding. Apart from the creation of employment and the flow-on effects to the business community, the people of Hobart have appreciated the opportunity to meet with and learn more about the people nearby fleeing violence and persecution in an effort to create a new life in Australia. The Tasmanian Asylum Seeker Support group has been at the forefront of volunteering to provide workshops and classes for detainees.

On another sphere, however, the MRC urges the Federal Government to reconsider its policies regarding the detention of asylum seekers, and the impact that forced detention has on the short and long-term mental health of the detainees.

## 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.*

The MRC has taken advantage of the opportunity to assist new Tasmanians to be welcomed and valued members of the community. As a regional centre, many barriers exist that impede on people becoming socially-inclusive members of society. Such barriers include access to meaningful employment, housing and a lack of public transport. The MRC has federal government funding for settlement services, Aged Care and HACC services, employment and counselling for survivors of torture and trauma, providing assistance, advice and advocacy services to over a thousand Clients.

Paid employment gives rise to a sense of dignity and belonging. Positive environments created by employment can assist with the learning and development for all members of a particular community and diffuses the prospect of inter-generational disadvantage, and the impact of education and employability of the children. The Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania (2008) notes that there are intergenerational cycles of disadvantage "...where continuing socio-economic factors often determine life outcomes."<sup>3</sup>

In the report *Equity of Access to Employment for Southern Tasmanians with Refugee Background* (2012), it is noted that according to job seekers "...the JSA system is perceived by many former refugees as confusing and inconsistent..."<sup>4</sup>. There is no JSA provider in Tasmania that specialises in the needs of the CaLD communities. The MRC employment program, Connect, established in 2010, assists new and emerging community members to become job-ready, assisting with skills development in résumé and application writing, as examples. Connect also establishes relationships with employers with the aim of assisting Clients to gain work experience and ultimately paid employment. While not a JSA, the work of the Connect program complements and promotes links with JSA providers.

The MRC sees the potential for partnerships with state and federal governments to promote regional employment opportunities. For example, it has been noted that there is a need for increased employment opportunities within the Dairy industry. The MRC actively partners with the University of Tasmania to evaluate projects with particular emphasis on innovation and sustainability for future generations of migrants and refugees. The MRC also looks to peak bodies such as the Settlement Council of Australia to showcase innovation in a regional context to organisations working within CaLD communities.

However, the MRC is aware of the impact of a lack of employment opportunities for new and emerging communities, and the resultant secondary migration of family following family to areas with greater employment opportunities in other parts of Australia. One such example is the Hmong people, once a thriving community group in Hobart, now largely dispersed away from Tasmania.

It would be recommended that the government takes steps to better understand the needs of all communities in regard to employment. The MRC acknowledges the

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<sup>3</sup> Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Social Inclusion Strategy for Tasmania: Consultation Paper*, 2008 p12

<sup>4</sup> MRC and Skills Tasmania, *Equity of Access to Employment for Southern Tasmanians with Refugee Background*, 2012, p. 7

support of the Federal and Tasmanian governments to attract the migration to regional areas of Australia of English-speaking skilled migrants, but note that emphasis also needs to be placed on the social needs of family members.

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

Employment in regional areas is welcome and has many benefits for the greater community. The short and long-term contribution by people from CaLD backgrounds is acknowledged, including social and cultural benefits and the viability of future employability of the descendents of people from migrant CaLD backgrounds. Tasmania has an established record of regional employment opportunities. The Department of Economic Development Tasmania and the Industry Skills Council of Tasmania continue to explore regional employment opportunities for skilled migrants.

However, isolation and disadvantage experienced by members of CaLD communities is exacerbated by a lack of employment opportunities in regional areas. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that people from CaLD backgrounds have experienced barriers to employment based on such things as lack of what is considered “employability” skills and understandings of the Australian recruitment system, language and literacy, and discrimination. It was noted by Hugo (2011) that humanitarian entrants have low workforce participation rates as compared to other visa category entrants to Australia.

The MRC understands that the Department of Immigration and Citizenship has reduced its funding allocation for regional settlement. MRC believes that such funding is essential in order that regional employment opportunities with industry in Tasmania can be explored.

The Settlement Council of Australia, on behalf of its members, made a submission to the Hon Kate Ellis MP, Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare, regarding recommendations on employment service improvements within Job Services Australia (JSA) and the Disability Employment Service (DES) for recent humanitarian entrant arrivals to Australia. The submission was seeking particular feedback on the applicability of the services of JSA system. The MRC is interested to hear of the outcomes of this report and looks forward to working with the government to ensure that applicable and adequate services are provided to new and emerging communities in Tasmania. As mentioned previously, there is no CaLD specific JSA provider in Tasmania.

The government needs to adequately identify the barriers to employment experienced by humanitarian entrants and indeed other members of CaLD communities and the consequences of the lack of opportunity to employment related services experienced by new and emerging CaLD communities. Australia embraced the participation in the workforce in the Post-World War II era of the migrant population and should be placed to consider the contributions of more recent migrant arrivals. However, there is an obligation to factor the pre-arrival experiences of the new community members, for example, the lack of life-skills, budgeting issues, under-skilling etc. Continued emphasis on early-intervention may assist new and emerging community members to develop life-skills and assist them to become job-ready.

## National Productivity Capacity

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

As mentioned, in the post-WWII era, Australia relied heavily on the migration scheme that allowed for the success of large-scale infrastructure projects such as the hydro schemes in Tasmania and other parts of Australia. At the conclusion of the projects, many migrants and their families established businesses and created employment opportunities for future generations. Post WWII migrants established businesses in the fields of manufacturing, agriculture and retail. Historically, even, we can see the contribution the Chinese miners made to the business community during and after the gold-rush in the 1800s.

Moving forward, Graeme Hugo, in the report *Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants* (2011) notes that:

*...the social contributions of refugee-humanitarian settlers are substantial despite the fact that as a group they experience greater difficulty in adjusting to life in Australia than other migrant groups.<sup>5</sup>*

Presently, migrant communities can continue to make a contribution to society. We need to give consideration to the fact that we have an ageing population and that budgetary priorities must be given to supporting an aged-care and health industry that will give a dignified service to members of the aged community. As such, the government should take adequate steps to ensure the future economic viability of the country. The Department of Treasury's Intergenerational Report, 2010, as noted by Professor Hugo (2011), states that Australia's economic prosperity will be influenced by population, participation and productivity.<sup>6</sup>

With access to services and resources, migrant communities have a valuable contribution to make to Australia's economic future. Business development and the potential for the employability of people will be of benefit to all Australians. Improved taxation revenue, market development and a decrease of welfare dependence are necessary factors to ensure that Australia's ageing population is catered for in future generations.

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

Many migrants arrive in Australia, some from displaced backgrounds, either void of evidence of education and skill-development or a lack of recognition of qualifications and skills. As an important step in assisting new arrivals in gaining employment there needs to be a consistent one-tiered approach to recognising overseas qualifications, including a structural alignment with the equivalent Australian qualifications. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many people fail to have vocational and tertiary qualifications recognised and as such are exempt from employment opportunities that complement their skills, instead trapped in the cycle of low-income employment.

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<sup>5</sup> Hugo, Graeme, Economic, Social and Civic Contributions of First and Second Generation Humanitarian Entrants, 2011, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, p 248, accessed from <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/research/pdf/economic-social-civic-contributions-about-the-research2011.pdf> on 7 February 2011

<sup>6</sup> Hugo, Graeme, 2011, p xxii

The government also needs to consider a funding model consistent with the needs of migration to regional Australia. For example, services and support for family members of skilled migrants and secondary humanitarian family arrivals, such as access to services, language and numeracy and practical life-skills training.

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

Business knowledge and social support would assist members of the migrant communities to utilise the business acumen they have brought with them to Australia to establish enterprises that will ultimately contribute to their individual economic future as well as that of the nation as a whole. This may require support in understanding the Australian business sector, taxation requirements, employment law, etc. Funding to assist with the establishment of Social enterprise initiatives would also be of benefit to people of regional areas.

The No Interest Loan Scheme Network of Tasmania provided interest-free micro-business loans with the aim of assisting with the establishment of new businesses in Tasmania. The scheme is funded by the Department of Economic Development. The MRC endorses and promotes the services of NILS (for potential businesses and individuals) and is aware of the benefits of such schemes for new and emerging communities in Tasmania.

The promotion of small business within the Tasmania assists with creating employment opportunities and encourages members of the community to become self-sufficient and sustaining for the future. Our aim is that new and emerging community members establish themselves and remain in Tasmania for future generations, as was the case largely with the post WWII migrants.

## **Conclusion**

The MRC welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Parliamentary inquiry into Multiculturalism and Migration. We maintain that access to services in a socially inclusive framework is an essential aspect to the future of the diverse and multicultural nation of Australia.

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