

Social and Cultural Links Between Australia and the Middle East

- 8.1 This Chapter examines the social and cultural links which have been established between Australia and the Middle East region, and how these links might be enhanced.
- 8.2 Social, cultural, educational and other links between Australia and the Middle East have been underpinned by the contribution made to Australia's social and cultural life by migrants from many countries of the region. For most communities from the Middle East, migration to Australia on a large scale has been a fairly recent phenomenon, influenced by major upheavals or historical events—for example, the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict, the 15-year civil war in Lebanon, the Gulf War and the emergence of fundamentalist Islamic states. Against this background, prospective migrants from the region, as from other parts of the world, have been attracted by the opportunities presented by Australia's immigration program.

Migration to Australia from the Middle East

- 8.3 According to data derived from the 1996 census,¹ the countries that represent the most significant sources of migration from the Middle East, as a percentage of the total Australian population, are Lebanon, Egypt, Iran, and Iraq. Table 8.1 overleaf shows the size of relevant populations:

1 The latest census was conducted in August 2001.

Table 8.1 Populations born in the Middle East, 1986 and 1996

Country of Birth	1986 Census	1996 Census	Percentage of Total Australian Population in 1996
Bahrain	(a)	58	(b)
Egypt	30,633	34,139	0.19
Iran	7,498	16,244	0.09
Iraq	4,518	14,027	0.08
Israel	7,004	6,234	0.03
Jordan	(a)	2,831	0.02
Kuwait	(a)	1,599	0.01
Lebanon	56,342	70,237	0.39
Oman	(a)	144	(b)
Qatar	(a)	163	(b)
Saudi Arabia	(a)	1,136	0.01
Syria	864	5,936	0.03
United Arab Emirates	(a)	887	(b)
West Bank/Gaza Strip	(a)	2,540	0.01%
Yemen	(a)	272	(b)
Middle East NFD	3,097	573	(b)
Total	137,485	186,413	1.04%

(a) Included in the Middle East NFD for 1986 (NFD = Not Further Defined) (b) Statistically insignificant

Source Census of Population and Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics

8.4 The figures show that in 1996 just over one per cent of Australia's population of 17.8 million were people born in the Middle East. If 'second generation' offspring are included, the proportion of the Australian population with very close ties to the Middle East would be at least twice that figure.

8.5 Within Australia, there is considerable diversity in the communities which trace their origins to the Middle East:

They [the communities] cannot be considered as a homogenous or discrete grouping, but are variously divided or united by history, religion, ethnicity, nationality and culture. ... While many have migrated to Australia, others have established themselves in Australia because of turmoil in their country of origin.²

8.6 In an overview assessment, DIMA concluded that the diversity of groups within what might be termed the Middle Eastern communities in

2 DIMA, Transcript, p. 548.

Australia represents a mixture of linguistic, religious, business and other social and cultural connections. They present opportunities for the advancement of Australia's strategic international interests, especially in terms of social, political and economic engagement with the nations of the Middle East:

There are many benefits from factors such as cultural diversity, improved trade opportunities and skills transfer. There are also currently some problems surrounding unauthorised arrivals, but we see that as only one part of a much broader, robust relationship that is of great benefit to Australia.³

8.7 DIMA's website contains Community Information Summaries of various overseas-born ethnic groups in Australia—for example, the Lebanon-born Community.⁴ These provide useful overviews of these communities with brief comments under the following headings:

- Historical Background
- The Community Today
 - ⇒ Geographic distribution
 - ⇒ Age and sex
 - ⇒ Qualifications
 - ⇒ Employment
 - ⇒ Citizenship
 - ⇒ Language
 - ⇒ Religion
 - ⇒ The 'second generation'

8.8 These Summaries are based on information gathered during the last (1996) census, and do not appear to be updated as new settler arrival figures are produced each year. The Committee believes that DIMA should update relevant sections in these Summaries as new data becomes available on an annual basis rather than wait five years until the next census.

3 DIMA, Submission, p. 2055. See also Transcript, p. 550.

4 See: www.immi.gov.au/statistics/infosummary

The Jewish Community

- 8.9 The size of particular communities may be much larger than suggested by the population figures shown in Table 8.1 above. For example, while the 1996 census identified 6,234 people born in Israel, such people are generally regarded as being part of the wider Jewish community. The number of people in Australia who claimed adherence to Judaism in the 1996 census was 79,805.
- 8.10 The Jewish community is well organised, with clearly defined leadership and a wide range of cultural, social, educational, sporting and fund-raising groups representing different interest groups within their community. The Jewish community can trace its origins right back to the First Fleet that contained at least eight convicts of Jewish faith.⁵ The Jewish community has long been fully integrated into Australian society with many representatives prominent in business and professional life.
- 8.11 The Jewish community in Australia has strong links with the State of Israel. As the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) explained:

The Jewish community has been part of the Australian mosaic since the First Fleet. The community is strongly attached emotionally to Israel, and there are few Jewish Australian families who do not have near relatives living in Israel. There is also a growing community of former Israelis who have made Australia their home.⁶

The Lebanese Community

- 8.12 People of Lebanese origin represent the largest single community from the Middle East. The 1996 census recorded 70,237 persons born in Lebanon, with 'second generation' of Lebanon-born parentage numbering 82,568, giving a total community size of 152,805.
- 8.13 The size of the overall Lebanese community may be much larger than these figures suggest, with the first Lebanon-born immigrant having arrived in Australia in 1876.⁷ Some Australians of Lebanese background have been here for three or four generations and are still active in the Lebanese community today.

5 *The Australian People*, edited by J. Jupp 1983, p. 637.

6 ECAJ, Submission, p. 559. ECAJ estimated that the current size of the Jewish community in Australia would be approximately 110,000.

7 DIMA, Submission, p. 2053.

- 8.14 The 1996 census recorded that 75 per cent of the 70,237 Lebanon-born migrants in Australia live in NSW and 20 per cent in Victoria. Forty seven per cent indicated they were Christian and 39 per cent Muslim.⁸

Arab Australians

- 8.15 The term 'Arab' refers to people who have a linguistic or cultural links with the Arabian Peninsula. Twenty two countries in the Middle East and North Africa are regarded as having strong 'Arabic' heritages. However, these countries, and indeed the people within them, are not a homogenous group. They consist of people from various religions, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic and educational backgrounds but linked by a common language and culture.⁹
- 8.16 Arab Australians constitute a sizeable community in Australia. According to the Australian Arabic Communities Council (AACC), there are around 200,000 people now in Australia who were born in Arabic countries of the Middle East and North Africa, an estimated 400,000 Arabic speakers, and approximately one million Australians of Arabic heritage.¹⁰ In its submission, the AACC observed:

The Australian Arabic community, while recognisably whole, is significantly diverse. Australia has citizens from 19 Arab countries, with numerous cultural and religious groups represented. However, as evidenced by the multitude of Arabic media, both print and electronic, and the cultural life in events like Arabic Carnivale ... the many Arabic communities can be regarded as forming one diverse Arabic community within a multicultural Australia.¹¹

8 DIMA, Submission, p.2053.

9 DIMA, Submission, p. 2049.

10 AACC, Submission, p. 1112 and Transcript, p. 134. As the census did not include a question on ethnic identity (cultural background) it is not possible to quantify precisely the numbers of Australians who would describe themselves as 'Arabs' or 'Arab Australians'. The 1996 census recorded 177,598 self-identified Arabic speakers (DIMA, Supplementary Submission 80b, p. 9).

11 AACC, Submission, p. 1112.

Judaism and Islam in Australia

8.17 The 1996 census identified the following numbers of adherents of Judaism and Islam in Australia:

Table 8.2 Followers of Judaism and Islam in Australia in 1996, by State

State	Judaism	Islam
NSW	32,652	102,288
Victoria	35,963	67,047
Queensland	4,506	9,421
South Australia	1,164	4,798
Western Australia	4,702	12,583
Tasmania	167	807
Northern Territory	146	768
Australian Capital Territory	505	2,466
Total	79,805	200,885

Source 1996 Census of Population and Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics

8.18 There is a common view that all Arabs are Muslims. In fact a significant number belong to other religions. Most of the immigrants to Australia from the Middle East have been Christians, according to DIMA:

While the great majority of Arabs in the world are Muslims, most immigrants from the Middle East in Australia are Christians (most Muslim immigrants come from other parts of the world) ... many Arabic speakers in Australia who have migrated from Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria belong to various Christian denominations and may describe themselves as, for example, Copts, Maronites, Jacobites (Syrian Orthodox), Chaldeans and Nestorians.¹²

12 DIMA, Submission, p. 2049.

Community Networks

- 8.19 As immigrants have done in other countries, various ethnic and religious communities in Australia have established community networks that reflect their special interests. The networks maintained by settlers from the Middle East have considerable benefits for Australia. These networks are based mainly on personal relationships and linguistic, cultural and business ties with their homelands.
- 8.20 Table 8.3 below provides a partial listing of the organisations in Sydney and Melbourne representing communities from the Middle East. This list was compiled from the three sources shown at the foot of the table:

Table 8.3 Community Associations in Sydney & Melbourne (see 'Sources' below)

Arabic, Islamic, Lebanese and Iranian	Jewish
Sydney	
Arab Australian Action Network	Australia Israel Chamber of Commerce (all States)
Australian Arab Chamber of Commerce & Industry (all States)	Australian Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and Descendants
Australian Federation of Islamic Councils	Australian Jewish Historical Society
Australian Islamic Cultural Centre	Executive Council of Australian Jewry
Australian Lebanese Association	Jewish Burial Society
Australian Lebanese Christian Federation	Jewish Care
Federation of Australian Muslim Students and Youth	Jewish Child Support
Islamic Converts Australia	Jewish Community Information Service
Islamic Foundation for Education and Welfare	Jewish National Fund of Australia
Islamic Information Centre	JNF Environmental Association of Australia
Islamic Information Services	National Council of Jewish Women
Islamic Science Cultural and Art Association	New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies
Lebanese Community Council of NSW	Sydney Jewish Museum
Lebanese Muslim Association	United Israel Appeal
Lebanese Welfare Council	Zionist Federation of Australian
Muslim Aid Australia	
Muslim Information and Support Service	
United Arab Muslim Association	
United Australian Lebanese Assembly	

(cont.)

Table 8.3 Community Associations in Sydney & Melbourne

Arabic, Islamic, Lebanese and Iranian	Jewish
Melbourne	
Australian – Iraqi friendship Bureau	Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council
Australian Arabic Council	Australian Friends of the Hebrew University
Iranian Society of Victoria	Jewish Community Council of Victoria
Islam Muslim Women of Australia	Jewish Community Library
Islamic Coordination Halal Board	Jewish Community Services
Islamic Information and Support Centre	Jewish Labor Bund
Islamic Social Association	Kadimah Jewish Cultural Centre and Library
Islamic Society of Victoria	Montefiore Homes for the Aged
Islamic Women’s Welfare Council	National Council of Jewish Women of Australia
	United Israel Appeal
	Victorian Union for Progressive Judaism
	Zionist Federation of Australia

Sources *'Directory of Australian Associations' March 2001 edition*
Listings under 'Associations' in Sydney & Melbourne Yellow Pages, July 2001
Submission to the Middle East Inquiry

- 8.21 The list in Table 8.3 serves to illustrate the range and variety of networks that make up some of these ethnic and religious communities from the Middle East. Many more groups and sub-groups are known to exist. This Table reflects only those listed in the three sources consulted and is not meant to be a comprehensive list of all networks pertaining to the Middle East communities.
- 8.22 The various community groups in Australia raise cultural and social awareness of their particular national heritage as well as assisting newly arrived migrants settle into their new environment. The Lebanese community, for example, is broadly represented throughout Australia by the International Council of Lebanese Migrants, which has links to the World Lebanese Cultural Union, an umbrella body for Lebanese migrants worldwide.¹³

13 DIMA, Submission, pp. 2048, 2053.

- 8.23 The Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad (APHEDA) identified a further dimension to the social and cultural connections between Australia and the Middle East by highlighting the role of NGOs in maintaining long-term partnerships with their indigenous counterparts in the region:

Such people to people links have contributed substantially to our understanding of Middle Eastern societies, culture[s] and religions. As such, these links have played, and continue to play, an important role in Australian community education and understanding of [cultures] with which we have important historical ties, and which [are] well represented within the multicultural environment of Australian society.¹⁴

Diary of multicultural events

- 8.24 DIMA publishes each year a 'Diary of Multicultural Events', which is designed as a guide to dates and events which are of significance to ethnic and religious groups in Australia. It contains a description of various calendars, such as the Jewish, Islamic and Bahai calendars.¹⁵
- 8.25 The contents of the Diary are compiled from information provided by community groups around Australia. It is a very useful reference guide, as it contains in one document all of the major activities and events planned by different communities throughout the year. It is distributed to about 5,000 addressees around Australia annually.

Australian citizenship

- 8.26 Many immigrants from the Middle East take out Australian citizenship, with Lebanese and Egyptians having the highest citizenship rate. Based on the 1996 Census, 97.4 per cent of residents born in Lebanon took out Australian citizenship, and 95.7 per cent of residents born in Egypt.¹⁶ Table 8.4 shows the numbers taking citizenship in recent years:

14 APHEDA, Submission, p. 1529.

15 DIMA, Supplementary Submission 80(b), p. 14.

16 DIMA, Australian Citizenship 1996 Census– Statistical Report No.26.

Table 8.4 Nationality or Citizenship of people from the Middle East granted Certificates of Australian Citizenship

Country	1998-99	1999-00
Bahrain	5	4
Egyptian	430	311
Iranian	876	755
Iraqi	1,698	1,853
Israeli	196	173
Jordanian	217	167
Kuwaiti	1,085	90
Lebanese	1,091	859
Saudi Arabian	28	25
Syrian	183	130
United Arab Emirates	2	20
Yemeni	4	10
Total Middle East origin	5,815	4,397
Total all new citizenships conferred	76,763	70,836

Source DIMA, *Annual Reports*

An Australian Arabic Foundation

8.27 The key recommendation to the Committee in the submission made by the Australian Arabic Council was for the establishment of an Australian Arabic Foundation.¹⁷ The Council presented a strong argument that the time is right for the Government to take a proactive role in the development of much closer relations between Australia and the Arab world. The establishment of such a Foundation would provide a focal point to champion and carry forward this task:

The Foundation's purpose would be to broaden the relationship between Australia and the Arab World by encouraging and supporting increasing levels of knowledge and understanding and cooperation between Australians and Arabs.¹⁸

8.28 A number of such bodies have been established within the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio, for example the Australia China Council, the Australia Indonesia Institute, the Australia France Foundation, and the

17 Australian Arabic Council, Submission, p. 1807.

18 *ibid.*

Australia Korea Foundation. All aim to promote knowledge and understanding between Australia and the country involved, primarily through the development of media, cultural, academic, youth, sporting, and other linkages

- 8.29 Endorsing a recommendation in the Committee's report *Building Australia's Trade and Investment Relationship with South America, September 2000*, the Minister for Foreign Affairs announced in March 2001 the establishment of a Council on Australia Latin America Relations. In his announcement the Minister said:

The Council on Australia Latin America Relations will seek to advance Australia's relationship with the region at an economic, social and political level, delivering initiatives that will build the relationships and raise awareness among Australians of the opportunities the region presents.

Members of the Council will be drawn from business, government and the academic community and it is hoped that the first meeting will take place early in the second half of 2001.¹⁹

- 8.30 The Committee is delighted that the Minister for Foreign Affairs has acted decisively to establish the Council on Australia Latin America Relations. It believes that a strong case can be made for an Australia Arabic Foundation to be established along similar lines.
- 8.31 The establishment of such a Foundation appears to be warranted on the basis of two important criteria. Australia's exports to the Middle East are roughly four times as large as to Latin America and, according to the 1996 Census, there are more than twice as many people in Australia who were born in the Middle East as in South and Central America.
- 8.32 The Committee believes that such a Foundation would provide an important point of leadership and focus for the development of closer relations between Australia and the countries of the Arab world in the Middle East and North Africa.

Recommendation 32

- 8.33 **The Committee recommends that the Government establish an Australian Arabic Foundation within the Foreign Affairs and Trade Portfolio.**

19 Media release by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, 23 March 2001.

Support Services for Settlers from the Middle East

- 8.34 A range of settlement services is available to assist migrants and refugees living permanently in Australia to adjust to life in Australia and to participate equitably in Australian society. Services funded by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) include adult English classes, translation services, migrant resource centres, and subsidised community-based access programs.
- 8.35 The special additional support needs of humanitarian entrants are met through DIMA's integrated humanitarian settlement strategy. This strategy supplements the services available to other members of the Australian community such as social security benefits through Centrelink, health benefits through Medicare and certain financial support programs.²⁰
- 8.36 The specific assistance programs available to refugees and humanitarian entrants are discussed in more detail in Chapter 9, which examines Australia's response to asylum-seekers from the Middle East.

Adult Migrant English Program

- 8.37 DIMA's expenditure for the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) in 1999-2000 was \$92 million. AMEP provided English lessons to 15,181 clients. Of this total 3,827 refugee and humanitarian clients participated in a special preparatory program. The home tutor scheme catered to 3,872 people. Training was provided to volunteers representing 257 community groups that offer English language classes.²¹

Community Settlement Services Scheme

- 8.38 Under DIMA's Community Settlement Services Scheme (CSS) about \$14 million per annum is provided in grants to community organisations to assist migrants with settlement issues. In 1999-2000 funding was provided for 308 projects varying in duration from 1 to 3 years.²² The DIMA website has details on all the projects funded in 1999 and 2000.²³ The scheme gives priority to projects that focus on helping migrants and refugees access effective mainstream services.

20 DIMA, *Settlement Services Guide*, 2000.

21 DIMA, 1999-2000 Annual Report, p.62.

22 *ibid*, p. 63.

23 See www.immi.gov.au/grants

- 8.39 A number of CSS-funded projects specifically target groups from the Middle East. A list of these projects has been extracted from the full list of CSS projects on the DIMA website and compiled into tables that are shown in Appendix J. It must be added that these are the projects that can be readily identified as directly relevant to Middle East communities (excluding Kurdish and Turkish groups). However several of the other CSS projects undoubtedly also provide services to migrants from the Middle East as well as from other countries.
- 8.40 The tables in Appendix J illustrate the range of projects being undertaken by various community groups representing migrants from the Middle East. It is an impressive list and demonstrates the vigorous spirit and interest within these communities to assisting newcomers settle into Australian society. The majority of projects are in NSW reflecting the large proportion of Arabic-speaking migrants located in NSW.²⁴

'Living in harmony' initiative

- 8.41 DIMA is responsible for developing and implementing the Government's anti-racism program. The 'Living in harmony' initiative aims to promote harmony between individuals and groups of different cultural and religious backgrounds in Australia. The program is relevant to the whole population of Australia and is not aimed specifically at migrant groups.
- 8.42 One hundred grants have been awarded to different groups around Australia which applied for funding of projects to combat racism. Only a small percentage of applications for funding came from ethnic or religious groups. Three grants were awarded to Jewish groups (totalling \$130,500), and three to Islamic/Arabic/Lebanese groups (totalling \$180,000). Table 8.5 provides brief descriptions of the 'Living in Harmony' grants:

24 DIMA, Supplementary Submission 80(b), p. 18.

Table 8.5 DIMA Living in Harmony grants, 2000

Organisation	Brief Project Description
Jewish	
Jewish Museum	Remaking the Museum's Introductory Video
B'nai B'rith Anti-defamation Commission	Tolerance Training for the Corporate Sector
National Council of Jewish Woman of Australia	Women Bridging Diversity and Building Inter-Racial and Inter-faith Harmony
Arabic/Islamic/Lebanese	
Fraternal Society of Tripoli and Mena Districts	Arabic Cross-Culture Youth Interaction Project
Muslim Women's National Network of Australia	Living In Harmony with Islam and the Law
Australian Arabic Council	Production of an educational documentary on Arabic and Aboriginal Youth to raise cross-cultural awareness.

Source DIMA Supplementary Submission 80(b) page 17

- 8.43 A multi-faith grant was awarded to the University of Western Australia Law School for a project to build respect for differing religious traditions where these impact on legal situations. Additionally, the Australian Multicultural Foundation conducted a number of multi-faith seminars in primary and secondary schools on the need for respect for different religions.
- 8.44 On 3 July 2001 the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs announced an extension of the Living in Harmony initiative, with \$2.5 million budgeted for an additional 30 grants to keep up the momentum in bringing together culturally diverse groups. The Minister noted:
- The Government believes that communities are in the best position to recognise local problems and to find locally-relevant solutions.²⁵

Social Security Payments to Middle East Recipients

- 8.45 The Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS) provided the following statistics for people born in the Middle East who receive some form of Commonwealth government payment:

25 Media release by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 3 July 2001 MPS 088/2001.

Table 8.6 Numbers of recipients as at December 2000 by major Middle East countries-of-birth and by payment type

	Age Pension	Disability Support Pension	Other Pension*	Other Payments #
Egypt	7,868	2,443	831	12,458
Iran	1,403	724	229	12,178
Iraq	978	984	381	24,154
Israel	798	341	95	2,465
Lebanon	7,862	8,104	3,517	60,847
Total all Middle East countries	19,758	13,428	5,413	122,762

* includes bereavement allowance, carer payment, mature age allowance, mature age partner allowance, wife pension, double orphan pension.

includes Austudy, child disability allowance (now carer allowance), childcare allowance, childcare benefit, rural support payments, family allowance, family tax payments, mobility allowance, newstart allowance, newstart mature age allowance, parenting payment, partner allowance, rent assistance, sickness allowance, special benefit, widow allowance, youth allowance.

Source Department of Family & Community Services, Exhibit 31

8.46 DFCS explained the residence requirements for receipt of social security benefits:

People migrating to Australia have to meet minimum residence requirements to claim a pension (for example, 10 years Australian residence for Age Pension) and must wait two years before they can claim most workforce age payments. International social security agreements provide enhanced access to some pension payments for migrants to Australia, but Australia does not have a social security agreement with any countries in the Middle East and Gulf region.²⁶

8.47 A number of government payments are 'portable', that is they can be paid overseas if the person chooses to leave Australia and live permanently overseas. DFCS provided the following statistics of payments made to people living in the Middle East in 2000 (these numbers are included in Table 8.6 above):

26 Department of Family and Community Services, Submission, p. 47.

Table 8.7 Portability statistics for the Middle East for 2000, major countries

	Number of recipients	Amount paid A\$ million
Egypt	129	\$1.129
Israel	164	\$1.401
Lebanon	758	\$6.419
Total all Middle East countries	1,155	\$9.810

Source Department of Family & Community Services Exhibit 31

- 8.48 People eligible for Age Pension can receive it overseas indefinitely, but there are restrictions on the amount of time a person can continue to receive most other payments once they leave Australia. For example, newstart allowances cease immediately when a person leaves Australia while parenting payments cease after 26 weeks.²⁷

Tourists and Visitors

- 8.49 The importance to Australia of two-way tourist and visitor traffic was discussed from a trade relationship perspective in Chapter 6. By their very nature, visits to and from the Middle East play a role also in enhancing mutual understanding and respect between the Australian and Middle Eastern cultures, although it is difficult to make realistic assessments of the actual impacts which occur.
- 8.50 Some idea of the annual in-bound visitor volumes can be gained from the number of visas issued in the Middle East for short and long stay in 1999-2000 (36,873) and the first eight months of 2000-01 (27,362). Just under half of the total visas for both financial years were issued in the Persian Gulf States.²⁸

27 *ibid.*

28 DIMA, Submission, p. 2599. The total visas issued included business and medical treatment visitors as well as tourist visas.

Media in Australia

Television and radio

- 8.51 SBS is the main broadcaster in Australia of foreign language programs on both television and radio. Over the 12 months July 2000 to June 2001 SBS Television broadcast a total of 100.81 hours of programs in Arabic, 7.64 hours in Hebrew, 0.77 hours in Yiddish, and 18.1 hours in Farsi (Persian).
- 8.52 For several years on Sunday mornings SBS Television broadcast a weekly news summary that they obtained from Tele Liban, the Lebanese State Broadcaster. That arrangement ceased in March 2001 and the Tele Liban program is now shown on TARBS, and Australian multilingual pay-TV provider. SBS is looking for an alternative source of news from the Middle East.
- 8.53 SBS Radio makes the following broadcasts each week in Arabic, Hebrew and Farsi as at July 2001:

Table 8.8 Hours per week of SBS Radio broadcasts

	Arabic	Hebrew/Yiddish	Farsi
National Network (capital cities outside Sydney and Melbourne)	3	2/1	1
Sydney	14	3/3	1
Melbourne	9	3/3	1

Source SBS, Exhibit 42, July 2001

- 8.54 SBS is not the only broadcaster in foreign languages. Other television and radio channels exist in all capital cities. Perth, for example, has one TV and two radio stations that broadcast programs directed towards the Arabic community. They are:
- Channel 31, Access TV, run by Edith Cowan University
 - Radio 6EBA FM 95.3 run by the Multicultural Radio and TV Association of WA Inc.
 - Radio Fremantle, FM 100.1 run by Creative Community Radio.
- 8.55 Programs on Channel 31 TV include 'Amwag' a weekly Arabic program covering news and entertainment, 'Breaking Barriers' and 'Visions of Islam' both produced by the Australian Islamic College of WA, and 'Jaame-iran' produced by the Iranian Arts and Dance Cultural Group of WA.

- 8.56 Radio Fremantle has a weekly 2 hour program called 'Voice of the Nile' which features Egyptian music and news, and a 30 minute program in Farsi. Radio 6EBA has about 6 hours of Arabic programming per week, and 1 hour in Farsi.

Printed media

- 8.57 The major newspapers and magazines directed towards the Middle East communities are shown in Table 8.9 below:

Table 8.9 Major Middle East media in Australia

Name	Location Published	Frequency	Circulation
Australian Jewish News	Melbourne	Weekly (Friday)	12,000
Australian Jewish News	Sydney	Weekly (Friday)	10,000
The Review (Jewish)	Melbourne	Monthly	6,000
Ad-Diyar (Arab)	Sydney	Daily	35,000
An-Nahar (Arab)	Sydney	Tuesday and Thursday	34,000
Bamdad Weekly (Persian)	Sydney	Weekly (Thursday)	5,000
El telegraph (Lebanese Christian)	Sydney	Monday, Wednesday and Friday	33,000

Source *Margaret Gee's Media Guide, 2001 edition*

- 8.58 Apart from the major media listed in the Media Guide, community groups often have their own newsletters, such as 'Shalom Adelaide', the monthly newsletter of the Hebrew Congregation of Adelaide, which has a circulation of about one thousand.
- 8.59 Given the relatively high penetration rate of personal computers in Australia, the Internet has become an important means of communication and various newspapers and newsletters are now available electronically. For example, in Adelaide the Arab community has access to the following newspapers on the Internet: An-Nahar, Al-Saffir, and Sharq re-Awsat.

Education in Australia

Primary and secondary schools

- 8.60 The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) provided a list of government-funded Jewish, Islamic and Christian

schools as at December 2000, as shown in Appendix J. Enrolments in all the schools listed in Appendix J in 2000 totalled 21,475 students, an increase of 48 per cent over the total number enrolled in 1996.

- 8.61 The Jewish community in Australia has had schools for many years but Islamic schools are a more recent phenomenon, reflecting the increase in immigration from the Middle East as well as from countries such as Bosnia, Turkey and Afghanistan in the last few years. Some Christian groups, such as the Copts, have also established their own schools.
- 8.62 In common with other migrant groups the various communities from the Middle East often have special weekend schools set up on an informal basis. Such schools usually focus on teaching specific languages and dialects.
- 8.63 A relatively small number of students sit for Year 12 examinations in languages of the Middle East. Table 8.10 shows the number of Year 12 students studying Hebrew, Arabic and Farsi in NSW and Victoria. Student numbers are very small in other States. The equivalent figures for French and Japanese are provided for comparison:

Table 8.10 Year 12 tertiary-accredited enrolments in selected languages

	1992	2000
New South Wales		
Arabic	349	384
Hebrew	86	57
Farsi	0	35
French	1704	1293
Japanese	1275	1335
Victoria		
Arabic	71	157
Hebrew	90	127
Farsi	0	52
French	890	1306
Japanese	394	1236

Source DETYA, compiled from data provided by State/Territory education authorities.

- 8.64 These figures suggest that the study of foreign languages is encouraged more in Victoria than in NSW, with good results. Numbers studying French and Hebrew were static between 1992 and 2000, while numbers studying Japanese and Arabic have shown good growth, mainly in Victoria.

8.65 Given the number of Jewish and Islamic schools in Australia, it is surprising that not more Year 12 students have registered to take final examinations in the Hebrew and Arabic languages. Hebrew is a mandatory subject in most Jewish schools, at least up to Year 10. Although many students may still be taking Hebrew classes in Year 12, the statistics indicate that most students prefer to focus on mainstream subjects for the actual Year 12 examinations which determine scores for university entry.

University courses

8.66 A number of universities in Australia offer courses related to the Middle East, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, while others have subjects on Middle East issues as part of other degrees (for example, the University of NSW has subjects on Judaism and Islam as part of its Sociology course). Table 8.11 below has the details:

Table 8.11 University Courses in Australia 2001

Undergraduate Courses	Postgraduate Courses
Arabic	
Australian National University (Canberra)	Australian National University (Canberra)
Deakin University (Burwood)	Melbourne University (Parkville)
Flinders University (Bedford Park)	University of Western Sydney (Bankstown)
Melbourne University (Parkville)	
Sydney University (Camperdown and Darlington)	
University of Western Sydney (Bankstown)	
Middle East Studies	
Macquarie University (North Ryde)	Australian National University (Canberra)
Melbourne University (Parkville)	
Sydney University (Camperdown and Darlington)	
University of NSW (Kensington)	
Hebrew	
Monash University (Caulfield and Clayton)	
Melbourne University (Parkville)	Melbourne University (Parkville)
Sydney University (Camperdown and Darlington)	University of Western Sydney (Bankstown)
Jewish Studies	
Deakin University (Caulfield and Clayton)	
Monash University (Caulfield, Clayton and Gippsland)	
Open Learning Australia (Monash)	
Melbourne University (Parkville)	Melbourne University (Parkville)
Sydney University (Camperdown and Darlington)	Sydney University (Camperdown and Darlington)

Source *The Directory of Higher Education Courses 2001*

- 8.67 While the above listing of university courses available in 2001 in Australia looks quite impressive, the reality is that there are only two or three dozen academics in Australia who specialise full time in Middle Eastern studies.

Hebrew and Jewish Studies

- 8.68 Sydney University has 12 lecturers in Hebrew and Jewish Studies, eight full-time and four part-time. Ten positions are in the School of Semitic Studies in the Faculty of Arts, while there is a professorship in Middle East government in the Political Science Department and a lectureship in the teaching of Jewish Studies in the Faculty of Education.
- 8.69 The School of Semitic Studies teaches courses in modern and classical Hebrew, Yiddish, Jewish history, and biblical studies. The School of Semitic Studies is unusual in that it also has on its staff a full time professor of Arabic/Middle East Studies.²⁹
- 8.70 The University of NSW and Macquarie University both offer courses in Jewish studies and history, but on a much more limited scale.
- 8.71 In Melbourne, Monash University has the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, with staffing of two full-time lecturers and four part-time lecturers.³⁰ It offers courses in Hebrew and Jewish history. Melbourne University offers similar courses to Monash, with two full time and three part time lecturers.
- 8.72 The Jewish community in Australia provides strong financial support for tertiary education. It wholly funds the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation at Monash University, and provides much of the funding for the School of Semitic Studies at Sydney University.

The Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies

- 8.73 The Australian National University in Canberra appears to have the strongest program and facilities in Australia related to Arabic and Islamic studies. In 1994 the ANU established the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies (CAIS) within the Faculty of Arts.³¹ The Director of CAIS is Professor Amin Saikal who, apart from running the Centre, also lectures in Middle East politics and Islamic history. From small beginnings, the Centre has shown impressive growth. Other teaching staff now within CAIS are a professor of Arabic language, a lecturer in Middle East politics

29 See: <http://arts.usyd.edu.au/arts/departs/semitic>

30 See: http://arts.monash.edu.au/jewish_civilisation

31 See: <http://arts.anu.edu.au/cais/>

and political economy, a lecturer in Persian language and Iranian history, a Visiting Fellow, a research assistant, and a full time administrator.

- 8.74 CAIS has advertised for two more teaching staff, one in Arabic and Islamic Studies and the other in Turkish language and culture. With these additions the Centre will have a total of six full time teaching staff.
- 8.75 Although CAIS was established as a graduate centre, lecturers also teach subjects in undergraduate courses. It currently has 18 PhD students and 11 students doing Masters and graduate diploma courses.
- 8.76 CAIS has been able to attract funding support from outside sources which has enabled it to build its resources. It has received a contribution of \$2.5 million from the United Arab Emirates, \$650,000 from Iran, and \$400,000 from Turkey. The ANU has matched these endowments, which has given the Centre a solid financial foundation to work on. Professor Saikal told the Committee that personal relationships and contacts, together with the reputation of the institution, were the keys to obtaining extra funding:
- You have to have the sort of national and international standing that could attract them [potential donors] and make them feel that it is worthwhile investing in this area in Australia.³²
- 8.77 Several other universities offer Arabic/Islamic/Middle East Studies courses as shown in Table 8.9 above, but their specialist teaching resources are much smaller than those of CAIS in Canberra.

Student exchanges

- 8.78 Student exchanges represent an important potential field of contact between universities in Australia and the Middle East, but relatively few Australian students take the opportunity to spend time at universities in the Middle East as part of their undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. There is more movement the other way, with students from the Middle East spending a part of their degree course in Australia. However the overall numbers are small compared with student exchanges with other parts of the world.³³
- 8.79 The University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney has one of the largest formal student-exchange programs in Australia. It has signed 'partner agreements' with over 100 universities around the world under which students can attend one or two semesters at the partner institution

32 Prof. Saikal, Transcript, p. 615.

33 AMESA, Submission, p. 281.

but pay normal Australian tuition fees. Subjects taken overseas are considered part of their Australian degree. The majority of students choose to attend American universities, followed by European universities. A small proportion chooses to go to Asian universities.

- 8.80 UNSW has only one 'partner agreement' with a university in the Middle East—with the Israel Institute of Technology. That agreement was signed in March 1997 and renewed in March 2000. The last five years has seen ten incoming and four outgoing student exchanges between UNSW and the Israel Institute of Technology under this agreement.
- 8.81 The Australian Arab Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AACCI) has established a program, now in its eleventh year, whereby it provides some financial support to Australian students wishing to spend time studying overseas.³⁴ Under this program, six students undertaking the Arabic Business Course at Deakin University are assisted to spend a semester at Damascus University in their final year. The Chamber contributes \$8,000 towards expenses and also arranges other sponsorships, such as Gulf Air.
- 8.82 AACCI is extending this program by adding the option of undertaking some work experience before the students return to Australia. Those students who are interested have the opportunity of working for a few weeks with companies in Dubai or Saudi Arabia following the completion of their formal studies at Damascus University.
- 8.83 AACCI also contributes \$3,000 per annum towards assisting a postgraduate student from Macquarie University to spend between three and six months undertaking fieldwork in the region.
- 8.84 If the Government accepts the Committee's recommendation regarding the establishment of an Australian Arabic Foundation (Recommendation 30) it is hoped that much of the Foundation's focus will be on the promotion of student and youth exchanges.

Research materials

- 8.85 Mr Robert Barnes, Senior Lecturer in the History Department of the ANU, urged the Committee to encourage the National Library of Australia to source a greater number and range of research materials from the Middle East.
- 8.86 In response, the National Library of Australia explained that its main priority is collecting Australian material, although it also has a collection development policy in relation to collecting material from overseas. The

34 AACCI, Transcript, p. 607.

current policy is to concentrate on countries in Australia's immediate region—East Asia, South East Asia and the Pacific.³⁵ Regarding the Middle East, the Library made the following additional comment:

The National Library attempts to obtain a small selection of works on the Middle East and the Gulf States, sufficient to inform a general enquirer, allow some study of a specific topic, and direct them to further resources in the field.

The National Library does not actively collect the more specialised research materials about or from the Middle East and the Gulf States. Instead it relies on the university libraries, particularly those like the Australian National Library offering courses in Middle East studies and related disciplines, to collect materials supporting courses and research in the languages and topics they offer for tertiary study.³⁶

- 8.87 After careful consideration, the Committee endorses the current collection policy of the National Library of Australia. The Library has a relatively small budget of \$3.4 million per annum for overseas purchases. Obviously it must prioritise, and the Committee believes its primary focus must be on Australia's neighbouring countries. The countries of South East Asia and the Pacific are of vital importance to Australia's national interest.
- 8.88 Nevertheless, the Committee urges the National Library to consider joining the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) network which is an international database for bibliographic sources. Regarding membership of OCLC, Mr. Barnes commented:

It would give us access to resources on the Middle East and everything else in many countries of the world. We would be able to search what American libraries and British libraries hold ... This is the kind of system we should be part of. If we had access to that sort of information the world would be at our disposal.³⁷

Professional Association

- 8.89 The Australasian Middle East Studies Association (AMESA) was formed twenty years ago to provide a platform for scholars and students to

35 National Library of Australia, Submission, p. 438.

36 *ibid.*

37 R Barnes, Transcript, 20 March 2001, p. 627.

interact. Activities of AMESA have included hosting an annual conference and publishing a newsletter.³⁸

- 8.90 Unfortunately, interest in AMESA seems to have waned in recent years. The newsletter has ceased and no conference has been held since 1999.

Alexandria Library in Egypt

- 8.91 The Committee was interested to learn of the work of the 'Australian Friends of the Alexandria Library, Egypt'. The original Bibliotheca Alexandrina was established in the fourth century BC and was one of the great centres of learning and scholarship for a period spanning six hundred years. In 1987, UNESCO funded a report on reviving this ancient institution, and subsequently decided to sponsor the project. An international design competition was held, and construction commenced in 1994. It is expected that the building will be fully completed and operational in 2001.³⁹

- 8.92 Voluntary 'Friends of the Alexandria Library' committees sprang up around the world to support the project. The Australian committee was founded in 1995 and is supported by an Advisory Council. The Chairman of the Australian Friends, Mr L Montesini, outlined the following priorities of the Committee:

We decided to set ourselves three tasks. The first task is to send everything that is the finest from this country, meaning mainly literature and Australiana – in other words, what this country is about. The second task is to send scientific works. The terrain and geography of Egypt are very similar to Australia's. The third task is to let the work of the library be known.⁴⁰

- 8.93 A large quantity of printed material has already been dispatched to the Library, as well as a number of locally-produced works of art. Eventually, the Alexandria Library will provide scholars from the Middle East and other countries with a very good reference section on the best in literature, art and science that modern Australia has to offer.
- 8.94 The Committee noted that the Egyptian community in Australia, and various business organisations, have provided strong support to the work of the Australian Friends, which is headquartered in Sydney. The project

38 AMESA, Submission, p. 280.

39 Australian Friends of the Alexandria Library, Submission, pp. 244-246.

40 Transcript, pp. 584-585.

therefore provides a significant cultural and social link between Australia and Egypt.⁴¹

- 8.95 Although the Alexandria Library project has established links with the Mitchell Library in Sydney, contacts with other libraries in Australia have been limited to date.⁴² The Committee believes that the National Library of Australia should also become associated with the new Alexandria Library, to the mutual benefit of both organisations.

Recommendation 33

- 8.96 **The Committee recommends that the National Library of Australia establish formal links with the new Alexandria Library in Egypt, to the mutual benefit of both organisations.**

41 Friends of the Alexandria Library, Submission, p. 249.

42 Montesini, Transcript, p. 587.