



Submission from the Geelong Interfaith Network to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia

The Geelong Interfaith Network operates under the auspices and with the full support of the City of Greater Geelong. It is fully incorporated in its own right, and its work is greatly enhanced by the presence of an officer of the Department of Community Development of the City.

Its principal aim is to develop a spirit of mutual respect, trust and understanding between the diverse faith communities and traditions in Geelong, and within the wider community to which the faith groups belong. We seek to encourage acceptance of all faith traditions as members of the Geelong community, through understanding and education of that community about their traditions, beliefs and values.

Together we offer to the City our common and united commitment to live and work in peaceful co-operation for the well-being and progress of the whole community. Recognising the ancient spirituality of the traditional owners of this ancient land, the Wathaurong people, and acknowledging the common human dignity and equality of all in our community, we celebrate the rich traditions and cultural heritage of each faith group, as well as supporting Aboriginal Reconciliation through our links to the One Fire Reconciliation organisation.

The Network is presently finalising our Strategic Plan for the next 3 years, and there are a number of initiatives we hope to implement.

- To work closely with the City of Greater Geelong, which has a strong commitment to Multiculturalism, to develop programs of welcome and re-settlement of newly arrived migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and skilled workers.
- Through our monthly program on Community Radio "Pulse", and our website, www.geelonginterfaith.com to give a voice to marginalised faith communities.
- To develop education links with all the secondary schools in the region by offering senior students the opportunity to learn about the history and traditions of the diverse faith communities within our City. In due course we would hope to extend this project to the two tertiary institutes, especially in view of the fact that they both have a considerable number of International students.

- Community forums and special gatherings such as Interfaith Prayer Services on occasions such as the Floods, Tsunami, Earthquakes, and Nuclear disaster in Japan, in order to promote peace and harmony and support to all suffering at such times.

We strongly urge the Federal Government to work collaboratively with local government to achieve the best settlement outcomes for newly arrived communities, who come from various faith based backgrounds, in order to live a new life in Australia. Local Government and faith community initiatives are fundamental to achieve positive outcomes for multiculturalism. One cannot separate faith from cultural diversity, hence, multiculturalism. The partnership between Geelong Interfaith Network and the City of Greater Geelong is one of the best models of collaborative approach to peace and harmony in the community which embraces multiculturalism in all its forms. Hence, the Federal Government needs to ensure that proper support is given at this local level for this ongoing and successful approach as this brings its own challenges, one of them being resourcing.

Thank You

Yours Sincerely

Monsignor James Murray
Chairperson
Geelong Interfaith Network Inc.
20th April 2011