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7 April 2011

Committee Secretary  
Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
jscm@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

## **INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA**

Fairfield Migrant Interagency (FMI) is very please for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Multiculturalism Australia. FMI welcomes the Federal Government's Multicultural Policy, The People of Australia, as a vital step towards the genius of multiculturalism.

FMI brings together local workers, stakeholders, representatives from local ethnic organisations, service providers and government and non-government organisations. The membership of FMI consists of more than 100 government and non government agencies with specialist knowledge and experience with constituents of Fairfield Local Government Area. The aims of FMI are to raise issues, suggest and adopt strategies to improve client services and actively represent the needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Fairfield City is the most culturally diverse city in Australia. 72.5% of Fairfield City residents speak a language other than English at home and resident come from more than 134 countries. The people of Fairfield City represent a great diversity of cultures, languages and religions. Migration has brought enormous benefits to Fairfield Local Government Area and Australia. This is adding to the vibrancy of our community.

We look forward to seeing the Australian Multicultural Policy informing, updating and strengthening the Government's social inclusion agenda and other policies across portfolios.

Enclosed is the copy of the FMI's response to the Inquiry into multiculturalism in Australia. For further information regarding this matter or any other assistance please feel free to contact Ricci Bartels on 9727 0477.

Yours sincerely

Ricci Bartels  
FMI's CO- Convener

# **Response to Joint Standing Committee on Migration into the economic, social and cultural impacts of migration in Australia**

## **Fairfield Migrant Interagency**

**April 2011**

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

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

Fairfield Migrant Interagency welcomes the new Federal Government's Multicultural Policy. It is an important step for the Government to recognise the unique composition of Australia society.

Under the current Federal Government social inclusion agenda there is no clear role nor any mention of multiculturalism. Given the composition of diversity within the Australia society, the Social Inclusion agenda has never referred to multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is logically a subset of the total strategies serving the overall goals of the Social Inclusion agenda. The implementation history of the Social Inclusion has not however demonstrated that the agenda has sufficient systems in place to sustain the implementation of multicultural policy as described in the National policy statement. Multicultural policy will complement and enable realisation of the Social Inclusion agenda and does not contradict it. If Social Inclusion seeks to combat disadvantage, then the principles and priorities of social inclusion need to reflect on and clearly indicate how it addresses access and equity with CALD groups. Different sections of the community members do not feel they are socially included.

Recommendations:

- That multicultural policy be approached as a central policy philosophy supporting the goals of Social Inclusion and as a strategy to fully mobilise the productive capacities and energies resident in the communities of Australia.
- That clear reference to the relationship between Multicultural Policy and the Social Inclusion agenda be made in related literature to clarify their relation.
- That links between goals of inclusion and multiculturalism be made to the social goal of productivity.
- That mechanisms to monitor and report implementation against both multicultural policy goals and social inclusion goals as a whole, such as measures of access and equity, be developed as a whole of government priority coordinated through COAG.

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

The strong relationship between the presence of migrant populations and international trading and business opportunities is well established. There are also demonstrable benefits from the presence of small numbers of refugees and humanitarian entrants from developing countries: the awareness of the culture and history of such countries by Australians enhances the country's understanding, its capacity to communicate in an informed and sensitive way with developing countries and to contribute in various ways to the development of those countries. [see also comments on point 5]

### **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

a. Australia has an innovative settlement program which is internationally recognised as an example of best practice. This program enables refugees and migrants to participate and integrate into the broader Australian society. These are the following program elements:

- Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)
- Complex case Support (CCS) services
- Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS)
- Settlement Grants Program (SGP)
- Torture and Trauma Counselling(TTC) Grants program
- Translating and Interpreter Services(TIS National)

The Settlement Grants Program (SGP) has been a highly successful program providing support services for refugees, migrants and humanitarian entrants for many years.

b. The SGP has been the only program that provides funding to smaller ethnic specific community organisations, enabling them to build their capacity in the delivery of a range of services to refugees, migrants and humanitarian entrants. These organisations would like to thank the Department of Immigration and Citizenship for the valuable SGP funding that contributes to servicing our culturally and linguistically diverse group of refugees and humanitarian entrants.

The continuation of support and resources to ethnic specific organisations is crucial in maintaining social cohesion in the community. Ethno-specific workers provide a conduit to communities for Government to consult and from community to Government, enabling them to participate in the development of Government Policy and in shaping mainstream services that would otherwise not exist. Ethnic organisations play an important role which fosters community participation, integration, engagement and above all, one that supports the Government's social inclusion agenda. These services and this social inclusion advocacy role cannot be replaced by a simple referral of clients to mainstream government agencies on the basis of access and equity policy. The importance of the current role given to ethnic specific organisations within the SGP regime is not, however, currently reflected in the level of resources available to these groups.

c. The FMI is currently exploring means to enhance the material support available to the leadership of small and emerging community organizations. We recommend consideration be given to a program which allows paid release time for employees of government agencies who serve on executive bodies of community organisations to attend community meetings of their association, just as paid release time is given for jury service, emergency services and various other public service activities. The Department of Immi's approach to settlement process places great emphasis on the formation of community bodies of emerging communities. The barrier to the effective formation of these bodies is typically that the most able and active community members are busy, employed and financially stretched. These realities make the currently recommended model unworkable. Paid release time would effectively reward the community work which is most valued in the settlement process, allow experienced volunteers to keep giving to their community after gaining employment and assist settlement processes in many ways.

d. The current limitation on settlement service delivery is time – settlement services being targeted to populations which have arrived less than 5 years ago. We recommend, in contrast, that the delivery of services to settling populations should be by measurement of settlement outcomes in respect to particular populations. Some populations of refugees face many more barriers than others. The existence of a time limit rather than an outcome

measure or concept means that some populations are not effectively settled ever. Some form of measurement mechanism could aim to more effectively distribute settlement services according to need, and so more effectively address settlement goals in respect to Social Inclusion.

More broadly in relation to the needs of ethnic organisations, Government needs to look at programs that provide support and infrastructure of ethnic organisations to continue to facilitate integration and participation in main stream society.

In relation to the barrier facing migrants in relation to participation in the employment market, Government need to look at programs that provide work placement for refugees and migrants to gain local work experience. (Lack of local work experience is a key barrier to new migrant employment.)

e. Better scoping of pending new source countries of refugees/humanitarian entrants could enable earlier training of language interpreters for new minority language groups, leading to many beneficial effects for newly establishing communities.

f. Provision of essential information (such as fine notices) in the first language of a client could be made a mandatory aspect of service contracts for agencies.

g. Settlement services currently face constraints to service stability and consistency due to the predominately short term, project funded approach to the resourcing of these services. It is preferable, in our view, for service contracts to be longer in time frame. Moves in this direction in the recent Settlement Grants Program are therefore welcome and may be further extended.

The impact of extensions of contract period for services on the welfare and strength of services provided by small and emerging and ethnic specific organizations must be considered, and compensated for, in any extension of contract periods.

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

Any deliberate patterning of settlement by policy should be oriented to the most effective settlement outcomes and involve optimizing access to support services and employment opportunities. The development of measures of settlement outcomes (see 4) may allow monitoring of any intended patterning to help ensure short, medium and long term settlement is effective.

### **National productive capacity**

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

The benefits of the skill migration program to labour market outcomes and productive capacity are straight forward. The importance of migration to the burgeoning Australian economy over the last century demonstrates the positive effect of migration on the economy. Australia's sustained high demand for labour over this period has enabled a large migration intake and supported the development of multicultural values and attitudes distinct from those currently ascendant in Europe. Migration pathways via participation in Australian education institutions also attracts a large flow of investment into Australian education system from overseas, helping affray the cost of the country's tertiary education system.

Australia linguistic, cultural and social connections are supporting the development of trade links internationally.

The refugee and humanitarian entrant intake also plays a positive role in Australia's productivity by raising the profile of Australia as a global citizen actively engaged in humanitarian projects. The good will engendered through this program brings the country a standing which benefits its international commercial and cultural relationships in many ways.

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

During the last twelve months, the skilled occupation list has been changed to better match skills that Australia now believes they require. This has meant that a number of international students who were in the process of completing training in the hope of gaining a skilled migration entry have been unable to proceed. However, this change has meant that some people who were completing training in order to gain migration but then did not pursue the skilled occupation has been reduced. It is hoped that people will train from within the Australian workforce for those occupations that have dropped off the list.

A related and much more serious issue linked to skilled migration is the fact that migrants arrive in Australia with Degrees and Post Graduate qualifications in areas which Australia's workforce is in short supply but they are still unable to gain employment, despite their higher qualifications. This is mostly due to lack of local experience and local work knowledge and requires short courses with a work placement component to provide an entry pathway into the workforce in their local area. Specially funded short courses which offer work experience would adequately assist them to gain work and thus more fully utilize the skills that are available in Australia.

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

Migrant communities contain many experience business persons who frequently apply their skills on arrival to prosper and grow business activity. The capacity of this cohort may be extended through programs to assist the transition of migrant business persons to the Australian commercial environment .

Better government initiatives to support migrants and refugee communities to establish business in Australia, particularly in the start-up phase. There are difficulties obtaining finance, underdeveloped management and marketing skills and accessing affordable suitable business premises, lack of awareness of the full range of government services available to support them and provide professional guidance in community languages.