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

### **SCoA Submission to the Joint Parliamentary Inquiry into Multiculturalism and Migration.**

#### **Summary**

SCoA commends the recent Government initiatives on Multiculturalism and is pleased to offer the following submission to the Joint Parliamentary Inquiry into Multiculturalism and Migration. The conversation about multiculturalism in Australia is important and needs to continue, given the impact issues relating to multiculturalism have on communities across the country.

SCoA's consultation with members and our research into the area have informed the preparation of this submission, which highlights the urgent need to deepen social inclusion in Australia, to create an environment in which migrants and refugees can fully participate in all aspects of life in Australia. The rapidly changing nature of settlement, globalization and economic challenges means that fostering community harmony is more important than ever. It is widely acknowledged that diversity brings a plethora of benefits to Australia, and it is important that public discourse on multiculturalism reflects this.

SCoA proposes (detail below) that the Committee recommend:

1. the Australian Multicultural Council be enhanced legislatively, in terms of its ambit, and its resources to achieve the following outcomes in the short to medium term:
  - a. the development of Cultural Diversity Policy Statements (based on NSW Multicultural Policies and Services Plan (MPSP) ) by all government agencies and departments, through compacts with the AMC;
  - b. the creation of an Australian Multiculturalism Act to give some stability to the AMC, and as a means to put comprehensively into Australian law principles and practices of human rights, cultural diversity and social inclusion covered by UN instruments;
  - c. the embedding in the National Curriculum of multicultural as well as gender and Indigenous perspectives.
2. the Government establish a 'whole of government' approach to multiculturalism, that embeds the perspective in the full range of government departments and agencies, in particular:

- a. the Social Inclusion Agenda which needs to be re-worked to ensure it fully encompasses the distinguishing factors associated with the social (economic, political and cultural) exclusion of culturally diverse populations;
  - b. health and mental health, where access to care is worse, outcomes are poorer, knowledge about health is not widespread, access to interpreters is limited, and cultural barriers to early interventions may inhibit best practice interventions;
  - c. settlement services be recognised as about 'empowering' their clientele in many different ways, ranging from leadership skills to mental health;
  - d. implements nationally a working environment familiarisation and local experience development program, through targeted EEO projects, social enterprise employment, and far better and less costly skills recognition and upgrade;
  - e. the creation of a national research and information coordination facility (perhaps through the new AMC) to ensure that Australia has evidence-driven policy, rather than creating ad hoc policy-driven evidence;
  - f. support for a sustained information and communication strategy about multiculturalism and social inclusion, addressing Australia's monocultural public culture, while also ensuring the provision in languages of all the information required for effective engagement with government and the resources it provides.
3. the Government ensures that the settlement sector is appropriately regulated so as to ensure:
    - a. charitable status, tax exemption and deductible gift recipient status is available to all not-for-profit agencies, while accepting the sector's dual roles of advocacy and service provision;
    - b. training and professional standards are regularly updated to reflect best practice, and are complemented by appropriate funding to ensure retention of qualified staff.

## Background

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCoA) represents the broad network of migrant resource centres (MRC) and settlement agencies around Australia. The MRCs were the first institutions established under the Fraser Government's Multicultural Policy initiated through the Galbally Report of 1978. For over thirty years the centres, later joined by other settlement agencies have played a pivotal role in enabling settlement, enhancing integration and ensuring equity. As advocates and service providers, the sector has a unique knowledge of the realities of the settlement experience, over time, across the country, and among hundreds of different ethno-cultural communities.

SCoA (established from the former National Council of Migrant Resource and Settlement Agencies (NCMRSA) in 2008) holds to a vision of "...an equitable, respectful and inclusive Australia where effective settlement outcomes provide every opportunity to humanitarian entrants and migrants to fully participate in society". We argue that the stakeholders in the process are not solely the immigrants nor their service providers, but the whole of Australian society. Good settlement outcomes contribute to social harmony, greater productivity, and wide social cohesion. Poor or distressed settlement processes corrode social well-being, waste human resources, and contribute to social exclusion and associated conflict.

SCoA commends the Committee for its initiative in linking the issues of settlement, multiculturalism, globalization, social inclusion and community prosperity. We note that the Parliamentary Inquiry takes place in a very “busy” policy environment, including

- the AMAC Report, The People of Australia,
- the Government response to the AMAC report and its own Policy Statement of February 2011,
- the Government’s submission, the Australian Human Rights Commission submission and the criticism of Australia at the UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) Hearings in Geneva early in 2011,
- the competing and arguably contradictory reports of the Working Groups of the Government’s Population Sustainability Inquiry,
- the public debates in Australia over the desirability of multiculturalism following European backing away from policies under that name,
- the initiatives by the states and territories (in the last year NSW and Victoria),
- and the public disquiet over the asylum seekers’ experiences.

This Inquiry enables SCoA to make specific responses to the terms of reference, and to argue for clear actions by government to advance SCoA’s concerns for participation and opportunity as the catch-cry for effective policy outcomes.

### **Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalization**

#### *1. The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government’s social inclusion agenda;*

Multiculturalism and social inclusion should and could be rather more effective complementary agendas. Multiculturalism addresses the development of mutual respect, human rights, cultural expression and social participation. Social inclusion addresses the barriers to social participation. These policy areas have international recognition, some of which Australia has ratified, through human rights agendas such as:

- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- International Convention against Discrimination in Education
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (Australia not a signatory)
- Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief
- Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities
- Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity
- Declaration on the Human Rights of Individuals Who are not Nationals of the Country in which They Live.

Both Multiculturalism and Social Inclusion operate in the same terrain when they are seeking to reduce the barriers to full social participation. We welcome the fact that the Government recognises that Multiculturalism should be a “whole of government” approach. If the whole of government takes responsibility then we can better ensure the implementation of the four Multicultural principles of access and equity, human rights, social inclusion and anti-racism. However currently, the responsibility is effectively limited to the Departments of Immigration and Citizenship, Attorney General, and Community Services. We would urge it be extended at least to include education, foreign affairs and trade, defence, health, regional development, environment communities and sustainability, communication and the arts. Social inclusion is also a whole of government concern, including maternal and child health, early childhood education, education and skills acquisition, disability rights, labour market access, healthy lifestyles, secure and affordable housing, safe communities, substance abuse avoidance and recovery, and dignified ageing.

While Multiculturalism was not well-recognised in social inclusion strategies prior to its first reference early in 2010, recent agitation from civil society organizations to rectify this problem has had some results. However it is evident from the sketchiness of the policy ideas and the limited range of methods and outcome parameters, that the database remains inadequate for enabling the development, implementation, evaluation and bench-marking of social inclusion interventions that are truly inclusive of migrant and refugee communities. Nor are settlement strategies and their impact included in definitions of social inclusion policies, even though SCoA would argue that settlement is at its core a social inclusion activity. Where data exists it is fragmented and not easily accessible.

Social exclusion can occur through many different processes. The Social Inclusion policy assumes exclusion is a consequence of the interaction of many factors – inter-generational unemployment, chronic illness, chronic substance abuse, disability, family ‘dysfunction’, and locality-based deprivation. Usually it also includes the specific dynamics associated with Indigenous social exclusion – racism, cultural oppression, economic and cultural dispossession. When multiculturalism may be relevant, Social Inclusion usually only picks it up in reference to higher unemployment rates among refugee and humanitarian entrants. Yet social exclusion affects SCoA’s clientele in many more ways, especially in relation to racism in the housing and labour markets, in the need for educational support, in the failure to have qualifications recognised, in the perennial dilemma of gaining local work experience before jobs can be accessed, and the marginal and erratic funding of social agencies seeking to support ‘new settlers’.

Social Inclusion draws on the concept of social capital. Social capital refers to the capacity of individuals, families and communities to respond to their needs and engage with others. Social inclusion programs aim to build social capital through underpinning the creation of bonding social capital (within groups so that they can assist each other), and bridging social capital (between groups so that they can access a wider pool of resources). Multiculturalism draws on the settlement strategies of civil society to help create bonding social capital (community development), and through wider engagement strategies with ‘mainstream’ institutions (employment, sport and recreation, housing, charitable bodies etc) also extend and strengthen bridging social capital. In the process settlement adds to the store of social capital both within and between migrant and refugee communities and the wider society. In this sense multiculturalism is crucial to social inclusion.

However, Multicultural policy should be viewed as distinct from social inclusion policy as it is not concerned with social 'deficits' in the way—or to the same extent— as is social inclusion. Not only does migration contribute to the cultural richness of our society through the arts, diet and cuisine, and spiritual traditions, it does so intellectually and creatively. The wealth derived from migration is self-evident (see below) and has been understood for a long time: the Keating Government established the Productive Diversity Program, which recognised and sought to expand these benefits. However, easily overlooked is the 'diversity dividend': the benefits that accrue to a wider society from living with diversity. For example, when service providers are trained in cultural competence this is a form of sensitisation to individual difference and need. A client-focused service will therefore be more oriented toward the needs of all its users, not just those who are culturally diverse, but to the established mainstream as well. In addition, because pluralism is a living resource, it can be researched and interpreted for more general application. For example, if sub-populations have greater life expectancy and lower morbidity to a particular chronic illness, researching their diet, activity levels, or social capital may yield important data that can help inform and shape better health outcomes for other population groups.

In order to enable the effective integration of Multicultural and Social Inclusion policies and approaches, SCoA argues that the following steps are required:

- ensure the Commonwealth introduces goal setting, output-linked strategies such as those operating in NSW through the Multicultural Policies and Services Plan (MPSP) framework, managed for the time being through performance contracts between the Australian Multicultural Council and the departments and agencies of the Commonwealth;
- ensure the Government undertakes a thorough though expeditious public investigation into the value and form of an Australian Multiculturalism Act, to enshrine in domestic law all those elements of international conventions and covenants to which Australia is and should become a signatory in relation to social participation, human rights and cultural diversity;
- ensure the full integration of multicultural perspectives across the national curriculum, similar to the principles established for gender and Indigenous perspectives, and the further development of resources such as Making Multicultural Australia;
- ensure that social inclusion strategies in relation to mental health issues as detailed in the submission of the Multicultural Mental Health Association (MMHA) are clearly embedded in all the relevant areas of the social inclusion policy, including competency standards, community mental health literacy, early and youth intervention initiatives, the availability training and use of specialised interpreter facilities, evidence collection for policy development and evaluation, and wider participation in planning and decision-making by culturally diverse communities;
- establish a nation-wide program of employment opportunities in social enterprises and the public sector to ensure new arrivals can gain an orientation to local work practices, generate some 'local experience', and have their qualifications recognised or updated as 'local residents'.

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

In our submission to the AMAC People of Australia Inquiry in 2009, SCoA identified the priority groups for settlement services at that time. We are sure that the Committee's identification of groups it identifies for consideration were listed by way of example, rather than to exclude all others. For SCoA the African, Burmese and Latin American communities are also important clientele, and we would suggest that the Committee change the wording of this term of reference to be inclusive of all communities who have made Australia their home.

In a globalised world, where information is communicated constantly and instantly, the way Australia manages diversity is inevitably transmitted to the rest of the world and will influence the way Australia is perceived in the same way that in Australia we are constantly informed about events and the treatment of people in other countries. There are countless positive examples accruing from the presence of diasporas. The ways in which skilled migrants, refugees, family reunion, temporary visas and many other forms of permanent or transitory settlement are managed has broad impacts. Positive settlement experiences into civil communities where elementary human functioning is met without discrimination or other barriers, will contribute to the way Australia is perceived by those settling, as well as by the vast global networks connected to those who are settling. This provides great opportunities for Australia: wealth transfer, investment, new business networks, improved international political relations and better security.

### **Settlement and participation**

1. *Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society;*

The wide and long-term experience of SCoA members has a particular importance for this term of reference. We believe that a full scoping of the current settlement program portfolio is required, to ensure quality, comparable and evaluative data about program delivery are available for policy development. While SCoA could provide many examples of innovation in settlement programs, we believe that a series of anecdotes does disservice to the depth and range of data required. Since 1979 when the first Migrant Resource Centres were launched, one of the key orientations of the network has been to empower new arrivals to gain greater control over their lives, and take pro-active control of their own futures. Community development is crucial for effective participation and successful settlement.

The community development role has waxed and waned, dependent on the ideological thrust of the government of the day (or even just the Minister for Immigration and the Treasurer or Finance Minister) and the associated approach of the public service. During periods of support for community development immigrant community organisations have been established and have flourished, contributing both to bonding and bridging social capital. During periods of reduced support and policies antagonistic to community development, communities have become more fragmented, individuals more isolated, and community capacities have declined. Community development focused on integration produces very valuable social outcomes; on the other hand, communities with poor leadership frameworks and under-developed social networks increase the likelihood of individual crises, and are much less resilient in the face of structures of discrimination.

For detailed discussion of sub-sectoral issues, SCoA refers to submissions from our member organisations such as the Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre in Sydney, and collaborative discussions that are reflected in the Multicultural Mental health Association submission. From these and other projects in the field, SCoA argues that the following further principles should underpin the development of participation and integration strategies for new immigrants and refugees:

- new settlers have very little power to engage with the wider environment; they are often deskilled in the workforce, isolated by language, recovering from trauma, and unable in a significant way to understand or affect the world around them. The key principle here has to be empowerment. Empowerment can be enhanced through language acquisition, civics education, skills recognition, local experience opportunities, and leadership training;
- new settlers complain of the difficulty of gaining relevant local experience in the open job market, where prejudice exists and access to employment is more difficult for people without good English or with 'ethnic' names (especially from Asia, Africa and the Middle East). Initiatives that identify refugees as an EEO group for whom targets can be set and opportunities tailored (as with Brisbane City Council) should be more widespread and supported through the COAG inter-governmental process, including local government.

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

SCoA submits that the primary policies for participation and integration should enshrine principles of community development and an anti-racism perspective that enhance inter-communal understanding and respect. Settlement agencies, as a general rule, are strong and active supporters of community empowerment as the most successful pathway to independence and full participation in Australia's social, cultural and economic life. This is an approach that SCoA advocates. Social enterprise programs can maximise settlement outcomes while providing opportunities for self-sufficiency; we believe it is in this way that humanitarian entrants and migrants who are settling into Australia can best contribute to our long-term productive and intellectual capacity while minimising risks associated with alienation and disenfranchisement. For these reasons, SCoA recommends the government work with us to implement the principles of the new multicultural policy through greater recognition and increased resources for community development and empowerment (not at the expense of casework, referral and advocacy, which are the first steps in the empowerment process).

In order to bolster the Settlement sector in its dual roles of support for the building of capacity within communities, and building networks between communities, some key reforms are required. The Productivity Commission review of the NGO sector points up the anomalies that often affect MRCs and settlement agencies. It is important that the charitable criteria for NGOs fully cover the sector; furthermore the sector should have full access to Deductible Gift Recipient status enabling the development of independent sources of funding. In particular the advocacy and policy role of the sector should be recognised and protected by relevant legislative and government administrative action.

There also needs to be a set of national settlement standards established and used to ensure adequate funding and performance outcomes for funded agencies. The creation of such a set of standards

should be a priority for whole-of-government action, focusing on the quality of professional practice within the sector, the career opportunities for staff, and strategies for making an impact on wider social inclusion programs.

We strongly support the decision by the Federal Government to charge the soon-to-be-formed Australian Multicultural Council with the oversight of the Access and Equity Strategy. This strategy has to be whole-of-government, and include a clearly-articulated blueprint for each government department and agency, with key performance indicators identifying the range of stakeholders to whom they respond. We also believe that the AMC should be strengthened to undertake the oversight of MPSP type statements identified above.

In order to fully utilise the economic and social resources contained among Australia's immigrant population, SCoA argues that two significant innovations are required. These were identified in our submission to the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council in 2009, but unfortunately were not canvassed in its report nor incorporated into its recommendations.

- The first reflects our continuing concern about the poor level of evidence used in the policy and public debate over the past fifteen years or so. This evidence deficit has had many significant consequences for the quality of services; these include poor information about innovation in services and the difficulty in sharing information about successful strategies for participation and integration. SCoA strongly urges the creation of a national research capacity that does a number of important things; it links together existing research centres and groups in universities, government, community and private sector; it sponsors national and regional research and program conferences to stimulate the sharing of research; it "brokers" collaborative research projects between agencies, government and researchers; it provides the outcomes of research in accessible forms for among others the settlement sector. It could indeed be modelled on the Bureau of Immigration, Population and Multicultural Research of the 1980s and 1990s, though it should have the independent status of an Institute.
- The second reflects the proposal for a national legislative initiative identified in 1989/90, for an Australian Multiculturalism Act. While NSW, Victoria and the ACT have legislated to some extent in these areas, there is no national legislation. The imperative for such action has grown since the refusal of the Federal Government to take forward the recommendations of the Brennan Inquiry into a Human Rights Act. SCoA strongly urges the Australian Multicultural Council to develop proposals for a national Multiculturalism Act. The Act should incorporate the human rights issues identified by the ten UN Conventions and declarations we have listed in response to the first term of reference. Furthermore in order to ensure the public environment is indeed a level playing field where racism and race-hate speech cannot be allowed to prosper, Australia should withdraw as a matter of priority, its reservation to Article 4 of ICERD, namely the section that would bind Australia to take effective anti-racism and race-hate action.



## **National productive capacity**

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

As illustrated by Access Economics' modelling of the economic benefits of immigration, there are substantial, increasing gains to GDP associated with both skilled and humanitarian entry into Australia. In the case of skilled migration, the annual average increase to GDP is about \$6,700 per capita, increasing to \$12,190 after 20 years (2007–08 prices).[i] On this basis, the economic benefits of the migration program can be estimated over time; it amounts to more than \$11.5 million for every 1,000 permanent migrants (this includes both skilled migrants and humanitarian entrants) in 2007–08 prices. Given that the combined migration and humanitarian program totalled 158,960 individuals in 2006–07, this is about \$861.5 million for that financial year, rising to \$1.8 billion after 20 years.[ii] Bearing in mind these estimates are for a single year in a continuing migration and humanitarian program, the flow of economic benefits is vast (although this is off-set by a range of direct and indirect costs). While, these figures show how much migration adds to GDP, we must also remember that the human capital of migration expands national productive capacity by bringing skills (workforce) that are in short supply, insufficient, or unavailable for a variety of reasons, such as the limited size of the Australian population, and lack of interest and/or education and training infrastructure.

A more immediate concern about the effective use of skills is the extent to which skilled migrants are actually working in their areas of expertise. Sadly, it is a frequent experience that migrants are attracted to Australia on the pretext that their knowledge, experience and skills are in demand, only to find that a range of structural barriers (both formal and informal) preclude their full participation in the workforce. For example, migrants are often excluded on grounds that could be regarded as racist (even if this often unconscious or indirect racism). This exclusion may be due to concerns that an applicant's training is different or misaligned to the precise needs of a company, or that some skills (such as English as a second language, or cultural differences) may limit a potential applicant's ability to integrate into a workplace. A recent study highlighted the systemic discrimination of job applicants on the basis of their names, not their qualifications for a position.[iii] Some professions maintain barriers to overseas-trained applicants on the basis that their qualifications were not gained in Australia and are therefore not consistent with the education and training in Australia: the exclusion of professionals from the medical disciplines is particularly acute.

While this can be seen as unfinished business of the national productivity and competition reforms of the 1990s, there are legitimate concerns within some professions that overseas qualifications do not fully qualify someone to work in particular occupations in Australia. For instance, if knowledge of domestic legislation is needed to perform in a job, the successful completion of a bridging education program is a legitimate requirement before a skilled migrant could do so. This process should not be constrained by high costs, especially where the applicant is deemed to be an international student and charged commercial prices. Work that identifies which professional associations and industries continue to exclude skilled migrants on unreasonable grounds and that develops strategies to either limit this conduct or collaborate around workable bridging training programs is an important strategy for the government over coming years.

## Conclusion

SCoA welcomes this opportunity to present evidence to the Committee, and to argue the case for more effectively-resourced settlement services sector in Australia. We believe that settlement services play a major part in sustaining Australia as a generally cohesive society. Even so we note that that inter-group hostility, discrimination and disadvantage persist, requiring vigilance and constant examination of our programs, their outcomes and their wider social impact.

The opening summary contains our broad proposals for the Committee's attention and hopefully acceptance. We look forward to a long-term collaborative relationship between the civil society organisations we represent, all levels of Government and the diverse communities with whom we work.

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Chair  
Settlement Council of Australia

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[i] Estimate based on average of general skilled, business and employee sponsored migration, Access Economics, *Migrants Fiscal Impact Model: 2008 Update*, 11 April 2008, p.21

[ii] *ibid*, p.5 and p.21

[iii] A Booth, A Leigh and E Varganova, 'Does Racial and Ethnic Discrimination Vary Across Minority Groups? Evidence From Three Experiments', ANU, 2009, can be accessed through:  
[http://www.culturaldiversity.net.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=40:does-racial-and-ethnic-discrimination-vary-across-minority-groups-evidence-from-three-experiments&catid=14:human-rights-articles&Itemid=24](http://www.culturaldiversity.net.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=40:does-racial-and-ethnic-discrimination-vary-across-minority-groups-evidence-from-three-experiments&catid=14:human-rights-articles&Itemid=24)