



## ETHNIC COUNCIL OF SHEPPARTON AND DISTRICT Inc.

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Monday, March 28, 2011

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

**Re: Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia**

Dear Sir

I welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee on behalf of the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District.

The Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District Inc. is a peak body whose mission is to promote and represent the social, cultural and economic well-being of ethnic communities in the Goulburn Valley Region through the provision of quality and innovative settlement, refugee brokerage, volunteer support, Ethnic landcare and information and advocacy services.

Our organisation was formed in the 1980's by the pre and post war migrant groups to be an advocacy body representing the large numbers of migrants who relocated to the Goulburn Valley. Today we still maintain a membership from the original groups and provide a diverse range of services to the more recent new arrival humanitarian or refugee communities.

***At the outset can I say that my organisation strongly supports multiculturalism being a focal point of government policy, funding and service provision.***

To understand multiculturalism in a regional context it is worthwhile studying the experience in Shepparton which is often cited at State and Federal levels as a model for successful settlement.

Shepparton today is a thriving provincial centre of nearly 60,000 servicing a regional population in Northern Victoria and Southern New South Wales in excess of 200,000. As one of the fastest growing provincial cities in Australia Shepparton has a unique

diversity of ethnic groups however Shepparton at the turn of the 20th century was a dusty country town with a population of about 600. From the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the introduction of intensive irrigated agriculture provided a strong regional economy with reliable availability of seasonal year round work which has been a significant pull factor.

As a result the Goulburn Valley began receiving migrants from countries not part of the traditional migration pattern from the United Kingdom and Ireland. Migration patterns emerged from Southern Europe such as Greeks, Italians and Albanians.

Their arrival gave the Shepparton area a cosmopolitan energy adding diversity to the area, which is also home to the largest indigenous population in Victoria outside of Melbourne. Travel 50 or 60 kilometers in any given direction from Shepparton and you will find very different communities in demographic terms.

These groups settled and established farming enterprises many of which are still in the same family holdings and have become large diversified enterprises. Many have passed into other titles having been purchased by members from later ethnic groups.

In general terms every new arrival community has got a start working in the farms; picking fruit and pruning trees or in other food related enterprises such as canneries, dairies, tomatoes and abattoirs.

The influence of water cannot be overstated as every business and political decision in the Valley is influenced by the availability and access to water.

Post the Second World War and with Federal Government support immigration from all over Europe impacted upon Australia and many of these migrants eventually settled in Shepparton.

In the 1960's a sudden and large influx of Turks settled and became heavily involved in the tomato industry and later established a mosque in Mooroopna which became the regions second mosque following the Albanians who built theirs in North Shepparton. Also in North Shepparton the Iraqi community have established a mosque making Shepparton somewhat unusual for a regional city having three operating mosques.

From the mid 1980's a significant number of Sikhs settled in the Valley escaping intolerance in India and becoming established in horticulture. Numbering about 70 families many have subsequently purchased the properties they initially worked on as seasonal labour. This community is strong and vibrant and recently opened a visually striking temple on the eastern edge of the City.

Around 1990 and again drawn by seasonal work a Pacific Islander community arrived and have established themselves in areas such as Tatura and Murchison.

During the 1990's as a result of international events there was change in Australia's intake type with large numbers of humanitarian entrants / refugees including Iraqi, Afghani, Sudanese and Congolese.

Since the mid 1990's Iraqi's have been settling in the Goulburn Valley attracted by seasonal work and the opportunity to lead a quiet and secure lifestyle. Around 2000/2001 large numbers arrived as "boat" people seeking asylum and many were granted Temporary Protection Visa with little or no access to services.

Many had personal experiences of horrific journeys in small boats, nationally significant issues such as the Tampa, drowning at sea and children "overboard" and most had been in detention centres for extended periods.

Today the Iraqi community in the Greater Shepparton region numbers approximately 3000.

In 2005 following an extensive local consultative process Shepparton was chosen as the site for a Federal Government Pilot Project to directly settle African refugees.

Thirteen Congolese families were settled over an 18 month period commencing from October 2005 and the results have been very good with a high take up on English, school and employment. Most have obtained driving licenses and some have purchased their own houses.

Remarkably three boys from the Congolese community after being in Australia less than three years were attending Melbourne Universities. The Congolese now number 16 families.

Since 2007 the region has through Secondary Migration received over 300 families predominantly Sudanese and Afghani. These people have first settled somewhere else and then relocated to Shepparton drawn by the same pull factors as previous groups.

Shepparton is now the leading destination point for new arrivals in Victoria outside of Melbourne however it is disappointing that Commonwealth Funding coming to Shepparton for settlement services has declined.

Each community responds to settlement differently based on their experiences pre and post arrival.

The settlement experiences for visible communities are the subject of much research which indicates that those with different skin colour, clothing and religion often have a more difficult time.

The history of Shepparton strongly indicates that on the horizon is another new arrival community drawn to the region by the same pull factors as their predecessors. Equally

certain is they will follow the pattern of their predecessors and become an important part of our economic and cultural diversity.

Shepparton however can be challenging for people such as professionals who relocate for employment or to start a business as this can often be their first real exposure to indigenous and multicultural communities.

***We recommend that consideration be given to the further development of programs to assist in raising cultural awareness in the mainstream community.***

At the present time, funding and government policy towards settlement services focuses on an arbitrary five year period when new arrivals are eligible for services from agencies such as mine. The objective is to develop a level of independence enabling new arrivals to confidently access mainstream service provider agencies and systems. This approach fails to recognize that settlement is a lifelong experience and many of our older immigrant groups are desperately in need of support services particularly as they are now accessing Primary and Aged Care services.

The nature of funding and service provision for new arrivals has the potential to create barriers between these groups and older established communities as it will be perceived that there is an inequitable distribution of resources resulting in one group receiving an advantage over others.

***We recommend that government policy and funding be developed to reflect the lifelong needs of migrants.***

In a regional context such as Shepparton, secondary migration remains the priority issue in terms of resourcing and provision of services. Secondary migration by nature is unplanned, unstructured, inadequately resourced and the community is generally not engaged in the settlement process as opposed to direct settlement programs such as the Congolese pilot project.

Government of course cannot and nor should they impose restriction on where new arrivals can settle however Government can develop funding programs that are more flexible to respond to emerging settlement needs. Initial funding provided to agencies to support new arrivals in the first few months of settlement does not follow the client if they relocate and there is a substantial lead time for funding to catch up which places enormous strain on agencies to respond.

As an example if a hypothetical new community suddenly began arriving in Shepparton this month without any corresponding funding it would be upwards of fifteen months before that could be reflected in funding provided by the Governments Settlement Grants Program.

This scenario which occurred four times in the past ten years leads to unfavorable comparison between structured direct settlement and the ad hoc secondary migration which compromises the capacity for community and agencies to respond equitably

***We recommend that Government develop a more flexible funding model to respond to regional pressures created by population movement through secondary migration.***

In addition to normal migration patterns and refugee intake Shepparton is a leading destination point for skilled migrants who come to the region to work in an expanding economy. Many are employed in the health sector and many bring expertise in manufacturing, food processing and engineering.

Recruitment and settlement of the skilled migrant generally works well in the region however in some instances there has been a lack of support and services for the family of the skilled migrant. This can result in social isolation and health issues for the spouse and family of skilled migrants particularly for those with poor English proficiency.

***We recommend that Government develop a comprehensive range of programs to support the settlement of skilled migrants and their families.***

There is no question that each new arrival community has contributed substantially to the cultural and economic growth and development of Shepparton and the Goulburn Valley.

As an agency providing a range of services our objective is to deliver quality services and contribute to the minimization of stress and other bottlenecks new arrivals face in regional settlement.

We can perform this role more effectively if we had the capacity to resolve many of the gaps and challenges identified in the regional service system for new arrivals. A sample of these issues include the skills to support regional planning, an understanding of the migration streams, access to interpreter services, recognition of skills, learning opportunities, volunteers, mentors and community support.

For many of our new arrivals these challenges are exacerbated by language issues and poor first language literacy. Many have had little or no formal education and the provision of printed material in their first language can often be ineffectual resulting in the best method of providing services is to build the interpersonal relationships with community leaders. This approach is the most successful but relies on the ability to build trust and confidence and can be resource hungry and time consuming.

***We recommend that Government provide English language training as a priority component of settlement and make the provision of training flexible to the needs of settlers.***

Addressing the service shortfalls will assist the region to promote integration and participation so as to build new networks and the resources to achieve the recognition and sustenance of the cultural and religious glues that bind these communities.

Funding by itself will not address all of the settlement or migrant issues however a flexible funding model supported by a range of adaptive programs designed to meet the identified settlement needs and underpinned by Government commitment to the principles of multiculturalism will be a positive statement of intent.

Yours Sincerely

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Attilio Borzillo  
President  
Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District