



## **SUBMISSION FROM AUSTRALIAN GREEK WELFARE SOCIETY TO THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON MIGRATION: 'INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA.'**

Australian Greek Welfare Society (AGWS) acknowledges and welcomes the opportunity to make a contribution to *The Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia*.

### **Introduction**

Australian Greek Welfare Society (AGWS) is an ethno-specific agency involved in the delivery of a range of community-based services and advocacy on behalf of the Greek Australian community since 1972. Specialised culturally relevant services are operated across the Melbourne Metropolitan area and include home, community and centre-based aged care services, CACPs, Supported Access and individual assistance through casework and counselling, advocacy, community education, training, family crisis intervention and children's services.

### **Background – Australian Greek Population**

Greek settlement in Australia dates back to the late 1820s when seven young sailors from the island of Hydra were convicted for piracy by a British naval court in Malta and were sentenced to transportation to Australia. By 1901, there were 878 Greece born people living in Australia. In the years since the turn of the last century, there was a steady flow of Greek migrants to Australia and by 1933 there were 8337 Greece born people living in Australia. However, it wasn't until the post Second World War period were there were "waves" of Greek migration which saw the Greece born population living in Australia reach its peak in 1971 with 160,200 Greece born people residing in Australia.

Migration to Australia in the post war years played a major role in the provision of a labour force to industries that were experiencing rapid growth. For Greek immigrants who arrived in Australia between 1947 and 1971. It is estimated that more than 75% were unskilled and many were employed as labourers or process workers (Kringas, 1988). As a result, according to the 1991 Census data, a total of 55% of Greece-born persons aged 15 years or older were in the occupational categories of labourers, plant and machine operators or drivers and tradespersons.

The level of English proficiency within the Greece-born population has statistically been very low. In fact, 34.4% rated their proficiency in spoken English as "Not well" or "Not at all". This is attributed primarily to the fact that many had little or no time to undertake any formal learning of the English language during their working lives with some working two or even three jobs at a time to make ends meet. As a result, the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate services for our ageing population is critical.

Today, there are 109,989 Greece-born people living in Australia of which 54,325 (49.39%) live in Victoria (2006 Census). From the Victorian Greece-born population, there are 51.1% females and 48.9% males whose demographic distribution covers all of the metropolitan

regions. The majority however reside in Melbourne's Northern Metropolitan regions with Darebin, Whittlesea and Moreland being the most populated Local Government Area's. Furthermore, it should be that of the 18,382 Cyprus-born people living in Australia, 8,399 live in Victoria. From this population group, 5,143 (61.2%) speak Greek at home.

Other population groups who speak Greek at home include the Egypt-born population and as a way of example (11,575 in Victoria) of whom 1,755 (15.2%) speak Greek at home. It is estimated that the ageing Greece-born population will peak from 2011 and beyond. During this time the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate services will reach a critical point and as such substantial measures will need to be implemented if the quality of care of this specific section of the Australian ageing population is to be maintained at appropriate levels.

## **THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA- AUSTRALIA'S MULTICULTURAL POLICY**

1. AGWS takes this opportunity to congratulate the federal government for the development and recent release of the new multicultural policy, *The People of Australia-Australia's Multicultural Policy*. We very much welcome the commitment of the government to clearly articulate the value of multiculturalism for all Australians and set in place mechanisms to ensure that Australians from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities (CALD) are given just access to all aspects of civic engagement in Australia.

## **MULTICULTURALISM AND SOCIAL INCLUSION AND GLOBALISATION**

2. AGWS is of the view that multiculturalism has been and continues to be socially and economically of benefit to Australia.
  - That government leadership is essential to drive policies and community support in this area.
  - That it is highly desirable to have a bipartisan support for a multicultural Australia. This approach as has been adopted successfully by successive governments and oppositions in the state of Victoria, with commendable outcomes.
3. We welcome the focus on anti-racism recognising that racism can seriously harm people's health and wellbeing and inhibit participation into the broader community. Appropriate resources must be allocated for:
  - Community education campaigns
  - Recognition of good practices and innovative strategies to be acknowledged and rewarded.
  - Cross- agency and cross community projects.
4. AGWS highlights its strong support, as stated in the new Multicultural Policy, for the right of "Australians of all backgrounds being entitled to celebrate, practice and maintain their cultural heritage, traditions and language within the law and free of discrimination."

5. AGWS delivers a large array of culturally and linguistically appropriate services to the Greek speaking community in Melbourne and Victoria while also advocating for access and equity in settlement services more broadly. Significantly AGWS was one of the first migrant community services that became a leading and effective advocate for the creation of a multicultural policy in Australia in the early 1970's as well as a key player in the establishment of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) and subsequently the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)
6. Therefore AGWS recognises that early and well resourced settlement leads to better and faster access and integration to all facets of life in Australia. A positively framed multicultural policy is thus an essential element that must underpin and inform all government responses to migrants and refugees.
  - We particularly welcome the government's commitment to an access and equity framework and the establishment of an independent body, the Australian Multicultural Council, to drive this framework.
7. In this regard we call on the government to ensure that the Multicultural Policy is linked to Social Inclusion Agenda. AGWS notes with concern that the Social Inclusion Agenda as well as other key government policies are not reflective of the needs of migrant and refugee communities.
  - We anticipate that the focus of the new AMC on access and equity will address this concern across all federal government departments.
  - The Social Inclusion Agenda sees locality based solutions as the way forward. While AGWS supports this model in principle, we caution that many communities do not organise at the local level and therefore may be left out of essential services and engagement.
  - The important and special role of local government is acknowledged as is the need for further collaboration of local government and CALD agencies.
8. In particular AGWS is of the view that the large number of now ageing non English speaking background migrants who came to Australia post World War II, including the Australian Greek migrants, are very vulnerable to and at risk of social isolation and exclusion due to their lack of English unequal access to services and social disconnection.
  - We recommend that the government develop a CALD Aged Care strategy as a matter of urgency.
9. Australia is a multicultural society by virtue of its population drawn from countries across the world and equally importantly for the diversity that already exists within the Indigenous communities, the first Australians. We recognise the ongoing struggle of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to gain equally in education, employment health and all aspects of their lives.
  - We welcome the recognition of the indigenous people of Australian in the multicultural policy, as both important and essential for the development of truly diverse multicultural society.

10. Given the debate over the use and relevancy of the term “multiculturalism” in the last few years and the absence of a policy since June 2006, AGWS notes that in launching the policy, Minister Bowen has openly celebrated what he called the ‘genius of Australian multiculturalism’.

- AGWS strongly believes that multiculturalism is an asset for the economic and social interests of Australia, nationally and internationally, as Australia competes globally for skilled migrants, international students and in trade generally.

## SETTLEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

11. AGWS is of the view that settlement is a long process and often a life-long process, exacerbated by lack of or low levels of English language competence.

- We therefore recommend that resources continue to be made available and increased for new arrivals to gain levels of English required for employment and participation into the wider society.
- In addition we recommend that resources are made available for older more established communities who have missed out in learning English as result of employment demands at the early migration stage and different government policy at the time of arrival.

12. We recommend that additional resources and a renewed focus be placed on the Interpreting and Translation sector by governments. Interpreting and Translation services are a crucially important access and equity tool for CALD communities.

- We note the significant challenges in this sector, key amongst these the challenge to meet the language needs for new and emerging and rare languages.
- We also note the ageing of interpreters and translators in the Greek Italian and other older established communities.
- We recommend that the government invest resources to recruit younger people into to the profession of Interpreter/ translator and ensure that these languages continue to be taught in primary, high school and University level in order to meet the demand in this sector.
- Possibility of recruiting trained interpreters in particular under the skilled migration category.

13. AGWS strongly supports funding allocation for newly arrived migrants and refugees through funding to Migrant Resource Centres and other Multicultural agencies and ethno-specific organisation in recognition of the early and effective settlement.

Similarly we urge the government to ensure that the needs of the older established ageing CALD non English speaking background ageing communities are given due consideration as they form part of a vulnerable and numerically significant group of people.

14. The Productivity Commission's report ( The Report) on Caring For Older Australians acknowledged the significantly growing numbers of non English Speaking Background (NESB) elders, noting that by 2026 one in four Australians over the age of 80 will be from a NES background.

- The report has signalled increases and investment in language services as the way forward. AGWS supports this recommendation noting that it is only part of the solution.
- We recommend that adequate resources are made available for the important role that ethno-specific and multicultural agencies play in service provision for NESB elders.
- That resources are made available for cultural competency training and benchmarking within the broader aged care sector
- That innovative training and employment programs are introduced to attract and keep bilingual workers into the aged care sector.
- That language and cultural competence be recognised and build into remuneration and employment contracts.
- That skilled migration quotas and criteria as set by the Department of Immigration take into consideration the language and cultural needs of the aged care sector as the NESB population increases.

15. Volunteerism is an integral element for community engagement and contributes to cohesion in our society. In addition volunteerism has benefits both for the volunteer and recipient and adds much needed human resources in the community services sector.

- We encourage the federal government to introduce programs that encourages, rewards and recognises volunteers particularly CALD volunteers.
- Volunteers have become an integral part of the aged care sector in delivering social support to isolated and vulnerable to exclusion elders and people with disabilities. Government policy must consider subsidisation of out of pocket expenses by volunteers in the form of petrol especially as this becomes a considerably high expense.
- The formation of CALD Volunteer awards in aged care to be considered as part of the Volunteer Week.

16. In recognition of the importance of languages in service provision and also for cultural maintenance, AGWS supports the implementation of a National Language Policy.

## NATIONAL PRODUCTIVE CAPACITY

17. AGWS is of the view that migration has contributed significantly to the development of Australia both economically and socially helping to create a society that is vibrant and cosmopolitan able to engage effectively in an increasingly globalised and complex world.
18. It is of concern however that many skilled migrants entering Australia have difficulty in finding suitable work reflective of their skills and education and that often overseas qualifications are not recognised in Australia.
  - Mentoring programs to be put in place for newly arrived skilled migrants and their families
  - National co-ordination to ensure that the Overseas Qualifications Recognition processes are streamlined and equitable.
19. Regional migration to be encouraged as a way of revitalising key hub areas and meet skill shortages in areas such as health care.
  - Due attention and funding to be provided for effective settlement for skilled migrants and their families
  - Host communities to be ready to receive migrants with funding and co-ordination across relevant departments.
  - The proposed National Anti-Racism Strategy to reflect regional context and seek relevant partners such as the regional Local Councils, Chambers of Commerce and others.

Finally, we value the opportunity to make comment to this important Joint Standing Committee and reiterate our support for the importance of multiculturalism in Australia for the development of a strong, cohesive and productive nation.

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