



Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW Inc.

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Ms Jane Hearn
Inquiry Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Migration
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Hearn

INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA

The Ethnic Communities Council of NSW (ECC) congratulates the Joint Standing Committee on Migration for launching the Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia with respect to the economic, social and cultural impacts of migration in Australia and to make recommendations to maximise the positive effects of migration

With respect to the terms of reference of the Inquiry, the ECC is pleased to present the following submissions to the Joint Standing Committee:

Multiculturalism, social inclusion and globalisation

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

Multicultural principles are crucial to the ongoing development of Australia as a culturally inclusive society.

Multiculturalism has brought overwhelming enrichment to the cultural, social and economic life of the nation. Employment, tourism, local business, scientific research, technical innovation, the arts and education all benefit through the rich culture and colour that multiculturalism brings.

However programs that support migrants and refugees must be reciprocally matched by awareness throughout the broader Australian society of the benefits of multiculturalism to the nation.

Creating a greater and wide-spread awareness of these benefits throughout the broader Australian society is essential in order to make Australia both a harmonious and highly productive nation.

Whilst multiculturalism is rightly founded in Australia's commitment to human rights and social justice, for Australia multiculturalism goes far beyond these principles and positive benefits for both the nation and for the quality of life of individuals needs to be actively marketed. Multiculturalism now defines the way of life in Australia and many of the resulting benefits are now so integrated into broad based society that they are taken for granted. The positive engagement of the nation with multiculturalism will ensure Australia is both a harmonious and highly productive nation.

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

Teaching of Languages and Culture in Schools

The importance of the teaching of Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean in schools has been widely recognised by the Commonwealth Government and by academic and business authorities. In 2008 the Commonwealth Government commendably allocated \$62.4M over four years to help school students to become familiar with the languages and culture of China, Indonesia, Japan and Korea.

However the policies of the NSW Board of Studies of the Department of Education in relation to these four languages runs counter to the Commonwealth Government's good intentions. These four languages are specifically discriminated against at the Higher School Certificate level in comparison to all other languages being taught.

In essence, these 4 languages have eligibility restrictions on students that are not required of any European language students. If a student is or has parents from one of those four countries, they are forced to do the highest level of the language (Extension level) or not do it at all. This is regardless of the level or lack of knowledge of the language. Indeed many students are told they must do the highest level (Heritage level) not the Continuers level despite having no prior competency in the language. Other languages students can do the lower level regardless of prior efficiency or family origin. This discrimination causes many students not to study the language of their ethnic background, a negative choice for retaining their culture and counterproductive for the future of our nation's economic and cultural development.

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.

i) Equity in Access and Information

Provide equity in access and information by ensuring:

- a. that fee-free interpreters are provided to improve access to health, environmental, community and legal services for people from multicultural communities; and
- b. all government agencies make basic information about the agency available in a range of community languages (role of the agency, contact details, interpreters) across the established and newly arrived communities including audio visual media.
- c. that information provided in country of origin is consistent with information provided on arrival. Recent migrants indicate that information provided before and after arrival is very different.

ii) Engagement needed, not just one way communication.

Merely just providing one way communication via interpreted material on websites, in brochures or media releases to ethnic media is not an effective means of achieving participation and integration. The ECC's Bilingual Educators model provides for full two-way engagement with individual members of ethnic communities directly through forums and seminars, through local government, utility providers, ethnic community organisations and the ethnic media. This model includes a range of educational interventions such as events, festivals, workshops, field trips, print materials, media and social marketing.

Funding for ECC Bilingual Educators currently only provides for nine languages and only for environmental and sustainability issues. However it has been extremely effective in delivering for priority issues – recognised by receiving the highest level of the Green Globe Awards ahead of both private enterprise and government departments.

This Bilingual Educator model should be extended beyond environmental sustainability across an expanded range of languages to achieve awareness and responsiveness on:

- accommodation,
- health and medical system especially major preventable diseases,
- education,
- employment,
- Centrelink,

- Consumer rights and protection,
- multiculturalism and cross cultural awareness
- all priority areas for full participation and integration.

The bilingual educators can also be used as cultural advocates to increase cross cultural awareness throughout the broader Australian society.

iii) Fostering Australian environmental citizenship

Develop and implement a "fostering Australian environmental citizenship" program for all migrants that enhances belonging, and encourages participation in, and contributes to a healthy Australian society by:

- a) familiarising new citizens with the natural environment and its benefits
- b) introduction to Aboriginal culture and 'caring for country'
- c) understanding of basic environmental practice in an Australian context - i.e. recycling and waste systems, sustainable water and energy use, environmental regulation
- d) connection to community gardens/local bush care programs
- e) teaching about the diversity of the marine environment and its protection including the dangers of the surf and some waterways particularly eating seafood from these areas.
- f) knowledge on the rights and the support migrants can receive to deal with the rising energy and water costs, a concept they may not experienced in their country of origin, and ways to reduce these costs by embracing energy and water efficiency technologies and behaviour.

For a short period over 2007/08 the ECC ran 'Operation Bluetongue'. This innovative project introduced and familiarised newly arrived migrants and refugees to the Australian bushland and Aboriginal culture through workshops and field trips into the local natural environment. The participants gained an understanding of Australia's environment and indigenous culture leading to an enhanced sense of belonging. It reduced their alienation from their environment and increased their ability to participate in the wider Australia context.

iv) Mentoring and Volunteering

- a) Develop mentoring and volunteering programs through settlement programs to connect people across cultures (long term residents with recent arrivals) in local geographic areas to support involvement in a range of community programs and local activities (i.e. local orientation, council and community education programs).
- b) Develop and implement buddy systems between new migrants from existing cultural backgrounds to nurture mutual support amongst new arrivals.

c) Implement mentoring/buddy systems within education curriculums at all levels to support migrants to integrate and promote tolerance, understanding and cultural knowledge within the broader Australian community.

v) Specialised culturally responsive information

Make adjustments of the publications for new arrivals in accordance to country of origin considering the needs and preferences instead of pure translation.

vi) Traditions and identity

Develop creative programs to prevent loss of traditions, to help young people with identity and languages and to increase their cultural awareness and cultural competency through organisations such as youth centres, community centres, neighbourhood centres and ethnic communities' councils.

vii) Formal Multicultural Education

Specific multicultural education programs and specialist staff roles have been decreased, marginalised or rationalised within departments and agencies, such as TAFE.

Required:

- a) Strong and consistent Commonwealth leadership and commitment to education that recognises the need for specific and customised programs to meet the needs of migrant and refugee communities. Appropriate, specific and customised Education and Training pathways and programs are the best strategies for positive settlement outcomes for newly arrived migrants and refugees including DIAC's Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP).
- b) LLNP Advance vocational strand needs to be reinstated into the LLNP contract in order to assist all migrants and CALD communities to better meet their diverse employment skill needs (orientation to Australian workplaces and standards, professional communication skills) in order to fast track both employment in skill shortages areas and successful migrant engagement in the Australian workforce.
Skilled migrants being allowed access to LLNP advance vocational strand would be a pathway to employment and lead to enhancement of professional and communication skills.
- c) LLNP needs to reinstate its funding for TAFE Multicultural Education Programs as this has led to the withdrawal by TAFE NSW Sydney Institute of Multicultural Education courses conducted by the Institute Multicultural Education Coordinators (IMECs). These Coordinators have been providing relevant courses ever since 1988 when the ethnic communities of NSW, with the active support of the ECC, strongly encouraged their creation. The

Multicultural Education courses remain just as important today for the NSW economy, workforce and community. For example of the TAFE NSW Sydney Institute student population of 70,000 students, 41% are from a non-English speaking background.

The IMECs have made an extremely valuable contribution to the TAFE Multicultural program as they have assisted many thousands of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds by delivering and managing customised multicultural education courses in vocational, orientation, special purpose English, cross cultural and employability skills. The Institute's decision not to provide funding to IMECs for multicultural education is undermining multicultural education.

Indeed education for cross cultural awareness needs to be substantially enhanced. Without this the full potential of our workforce and the utilisation of all of the skills and experiences available within Australia will not be achieved. This is a direct and specific Commonwealth responsibility.

This matter is causing alarm within our ethnic community organisations and the ECC considers the restoration of the funding for Multicultural Education courses conducted by IMECs to be essential.

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

i) Short term funding not compatible with long term results

Short-term funding such as under the Settlement Grants program does not provide for the sustainable social and welfare support of migrants and refugees and their quality of life particularly in rural and mining areas.

ii) Efficient use of utilities

Education about the management of waste and efficient use of utilities, such as energy and water, will ensure that their introduction to life in Australia is not started with debt to utility providers or local government and community reprimands. An understanding of the issues of climate change will assist them to understand the broader concerns of the Australian community.

National productive capacity

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

Awareness and promotion

Encourage and support initiatives such as that by the Australian company Beyond International (featured on the Governments' own website: <http://aso.gov.au/titles/companies/Beyond+Productions/>), a new TV show

being developed to positively promote multiculturalism. The show intends to feature companies that are start-ups, developed and managed by immigrants to Australia.

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

i) Cultural Awareness and Cultural Competency

The capacity of Australia's skilled migrant intake is seriously undermined by the lack of cultural awareness and cultural competency within employers and the community. Too many highly skilled migrants withdraw from their specific skills and previous career employment area and work for themselves in unskilled roles. While there are cases of blatant vilification within the workforce, far more extensive is the lack of welcome, inclusivity and comfort due to poor cultural awareness and cultural competency.

Mechanisms need to be established that ensure:

- (a) the teaching of cultural awareness is compulsory throughout all years of Primary School, including exposure to cultural diversity; and
- (b) the implementation accredited cultural competence training within the workforce, to the extent that cultural competency is given similar employer status to that now granted to Occupational Health and Safety.

ii) Ability to access Government services

Skilled migrants often need orientation to Australian culture and workplace orientation and the high fees required by *Vocational Education and Training (VET)* institutes prohibit people from participating in professional development and skill enhancement.

Migrants under the 2 years waiting period should be allowed to access

- a. all government services especially to Job Service Australia (full services provision);
- b. VET programs and be exempt from fees as other migrants are under Centerlink benefits.

iii) Overseas qualification

Reassess overseas qualification and recognition systems and implement local 'on the job' accreditation programs that allow migrants to utilise and demonstrate their skills within the Australian workplace.

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

i) Multicultural Experiences Directory

National extension of the Ethnic Communities Council of NSW (ECC) current project to develop an online multicultural business directory to support and promote the wide range of culturally diverse businesses and jobs. Industry & Investment NSW is providing in kind assistance with the design, development and hosting of the website.

The format is intended to be a promotional on-line directory of all multicultural experiences, services, entertainment and products available in NSW offered by business, government and community sectors.

Businesses will benefit substantially through new and additional customers and turnover. The wider NSW economy will also benefit with increased inter-state and international tourism to NSW particularly from Asia and the Pacific Rim.

Business Events Sydney agree this will also add a selling tool to Sydney's bids to host major international events, demonstrating Sydney's cultural diversity and multicultural assets, enhancing visitors' experiences of Sydney's diverse suburbs. Regional and suburban areas of NSW that have developed a unique ethnic culture and atmosphere will be showcased.

The Directory would provide practical assistance with increased access to information for local and inter-state residents as well as potential migrants to government and community-based services such as interpreters, translators, bilingual/bicultural educators, disability, aged, family and children's services that meet diverse cultural and linguistic needs.

Fundamentally the project aims to establish wide spread community acceptance of cultural diversity as a characteristic of the NSW way of living, exposing the wider community to the rich vitality of cultural experiences available within the State.

ii) Marketing of Functioning Multicultural Hubs

Promoting the rich culture and colour of local communities feeds into tourism, stimulates local business, provides employment and encourages the wider community support for multiculturalism. Multiculturalism can then be regarded as an asset, making Australia more culturally rich and vibrant, more entertaining, and more economically successful.

NSW Tourism is not responding to this type of promotion whereas bodies such as local government and chambers of commerce are very keen. For

example Hurstville City Council would welcome wider promotion of its Chinese commercial precinct and the Australian-China Chamber of Commerce and Industry which is crusading for the World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention to be held in Sydney in 2013 rely for their bid on the basis that Sydney is a place of rich cultural diversity.

iii) Role of the Australian Taxation Office

Policy and its implementation by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) should facilitate, not impede, small business enterprises run by ethnic families.

In its cash economy campaign the ATO has been running industry benchmarking which has adversely discriminated against ethnic family run small businesses. These businesses often do not meet the benchmarks set by the ATO for the difference between the Gross Revenue and the Cost of Goods Sold. This is because their own ethnic community expects to see lower retail prices, they are keeping prices low in order to attract customers from outside their ethnic community, they are operating from a location where prices are expected to be low such as a market stall and/or are learning aspects specific to their business during the initial years of establishment.

The way the ATO has been applying the benchmarking reduces the freedom of businesses to be competitive and drives up prices. It is also selectively discriminating against ethnic communities and impacting on the diversity of products and services and international trade. Such practices by the ATO run counter to the Government's commitment to facilitating business development, cultural diversity and international trade, and also appears to be contrary to the anti-competitive requirements of the ACCC that trade or business associations should not set benchmarks for their members.

The National Tax and Accountants' Association (NTAA) is also very concerned about the ATO's use of benchmarking in this way – there is a specific article in their October 2010 NTAA 'Voice' newsletter entitled 'cash economy and benchmark update' on page 4.

While the ATO claims it only raises assessments based on benchmarks when there are inadequate or no records to substantiate declared income, the ATO does issue calls for explanations to virtually all businesses in its benchmark categories. Simply having to respond to the ATO demands for explanations is extremely stressful, requires outside assistance (including from the ECC), and takes up valuable business time. NTAA advises that great deal may end up failing the Tax Office's requirements, have the benchmarks applied, often with 50% penalties, with very many possibly being pushed out of business.

On 1 April 2011 the ATO issued a statement that it had identified inconsistencies in its benchmarks and has temporarily withdrawn them to be reinstated later this year. The approach being taken by the ATO is significantly hindering migrant communities establish business enterprises.

The services of the Ethnic Communities Council of NSW are available to further assist the Joint Standing Committee with its inquiries.

Yours sincerely,

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Chair