

Parliamentary Inquiry into Multiculturalism.

Introduction

Radio 3ZZZ is the largest ethnic community station in Australia. It is a community-based radio station, primarily financed by listener subscriptions and donations, through sponsorship, and through special fundraising events, and a modest Federal Government subsidy that has failed to keep pace with growth and operational costs. 3ZZZ has been broadcasting since 1989 across the Melbourne metropolitan region and since October 2000, it can also be heard across all Australia and the rest of the world through internet broadcasting. It is estimated that more than 400,000 people listen to 3ZZZ every week.

There are more than 5,000 financial members from nearly 63 ethnic groups affiliated to the station. All the major ethnic communities living in Melbourne are represented. Up to 400 volunteers broadcast in one of these 70 community languages for and on behalf of their own community 3ZZZ and the hundred other community radio stations which broadcast in 120 different languages, involving more than 3000 broadcasters right across Australia are in fact the Nation's largest language institution.

3ZZZ acknowledges and practices daily the four key principles set out in the Federal Government's *The People of Australia* policy and its commitment to:

- celebrating and valuing diversity;
- maintaining social cohesion;
- communicating the benefits of Australia's diversity; and
- responding to intolerance and discrimination.

It encourages the Australian Government to continue to actively and publicly promote the benefits of multiculturalism and condemn the attempts by certain sections of the community to foster division and conflict.

The history of Australia is a history of migration. Almost 169,000 migrants came to Australia in the year up to June 2010, a small decrease from the previous year, but nonetheless part of an increasing trend over the past 20 years. This migration will continue into the future as our economy expands and the demands for skilled labour increases. Furthermore immigrants now settle in regional and country Australia.

Benefits

We encourage migration for the benefits it bring to Australia primarily in terms of the skills and knowledge and expertise it brings to our economy but also for the contribution it makes to our cultural life and character.

Australia is the envy of many other nations struggling to deal with similar challenges of migration. The many benefits of multiculturalism are well documented and does not need to be restated here suffice to say it has influenced for the better every aspect of life in Australia from the economy, though politics, the law, medicine, trade unions, the arts and culture and so on.

We are the richer in every way for the migrant experience for the vibrancy, diversity and excitement that it brings.

Challenges

However multiculturalism and the subsequent harmony that comes from it faces many challenges. Multiculturalism does not happen by good luck but by hard work. It is built on the values of justice and equity and the great Australian principles of the 'fair go' but it has to be reinforced by practical economic and social policies, strategies and resources.

Migration puts stresses and strains on the Australian community. It increases demands for resources, housing, infrastructure, services and so on. It challenges established ways of living and values and practices that some find difficult.

3ZZZ and the one hundred other community radios and television stations with ethnic programming have made a significant contribution to building and promoting the harmony of multiculturalism and are at the forefront of modeling the benefits of what multiculturalism can be.

Migration is a two edged sword for the Australian community. If we wish to encourage migrants to Australia to fill the gaps in the labour market that cannot be filled by local workers then there is an obligation on the community to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to enable migrants to settle with as little trauma as possible. Australia has to continue to make substantial economic and social investment in multiculturalism and migrant settlement.

Skilled migrants come to Australia already educated and trained. They have to meet health requirements. All of this has been provided and paid for by social and education systems in their homelands. Australia is in receipt of a cheap skilled labour force, ready, able and keen to move into the labour market and into the Australian way of life. We have a responsibility to provide easier access to skills recognition, employment, housing, and social services to enable successful settlement.

Government policy needs to continuously work to promote the principles of fairness, justice and respect by treating refugees and migrants with respect and dignity, addressing attitudes that undermine harmony, and putting resources into those mechanisms such as 3ZZZ that actively work to uphold the reality and values of diversity and to build harmony

Diversity in language, culture, customs, faiths, new thinking and experiences, adds to the vibrant life of Australia. All have had a positive impact on Australian life.

At a time when Australia's unemployment rates are low there is an obvious need to maintain a focus on skilled migration and family reunion.

However there needs to increased provision of language classes to enable migrants from non-English speaking countries to develop the tools necessary to make use of their skills and knowledge without being relegated into employment that does not fully utilise their expertise.

Government needs to ensure that the systems and processes in place enable ease of recognition and accreditation of overseas qualifications.

Similar processes and resources need to be available to ensure that migrants are able to maintain the important aspects of their cultures, languages and traditions that bring such richness to the Australian community.

Organisations such as 3ZZZ that are essential to bringing communities together, of connecting people to their own communities and the broader Australian community, need to be supported and properly resourced. These media outlets value the diversity that migrants bring to the community. They are also an important mechanism for promoting the values and principle of harmony, co-operation, and inclusiveness.

Ethnic groups appreciate the role these media outlets play in keeping their communities together, of breaking down isolation, and of valuing their contribution to the community.

Recommendations:

Some of the areas of concern to the 3ZZZ community which require government consideration are documented below:

- Government needs to take the lead in constantly and consistently reinforcing the positive aspects of multiculturalism
- it needs to more effectively challenge those groups, individuals and institutions that promote division and foment racial and religious vilification. We have seen in recent times the danger of ignoring or not challenging strongly enough those attitudes that victimise certain sections of the community
- more must be done to address the levels of vilification and racism promoted in certain sections of the media. Certainly this must be balanced with the need for freedoms of expression but commentary that leads to racial and religious hatred needs to be strongly condemned and challenged at every opportunity
- Government needs to remember that refugees are not illegal immigrants who have jumped the queue. The human rights of refugees are protected under international conventions and we need to ensure that claims for refugee status are processed swiftly and fairly.
- children claiming refugee status should not be held in detention centres but released to be cared for in the community

- more resources need to go to supporting organisations that work to promote multiculturalism - particularly community radio, television and print media
- Government needs to ensure that there are more effective systems and processes in place to enable ease of recognition and accreditation of overseas qualifications so that migrants can be employed in their field of expertise
- More resources need to be provided to English language education to increase the hours for new Australians to go to class to learn English
- Australia needs to develop a long term National Policy for the teaching of Languages, including Community Languages in the Nation's education System. Australia's unique Multilingualism should be supported to flourish.
- more resources need to go towards the educational, cultural, housing and transport and social needs of international students during their periods of study in Australia. Too often we hear of international students being abused and exploited in accommodation and employment and not being able to fit in at college and not getting the educational experience that they are paying for. Greater regulation of private educational providers needs to occur to protect this important part of our economy.