

INQUIRY INTO MULTICULTURALISM IN AUSTRALIA

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Joint Standing Committee on Migration shall inquire into the economic, social and cultural impacts of migration in Australia and make recommendations to maximise the positive effects of migration.

MULTICULTURALISM, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND GLOBALIZATION

1. The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's Social Inclusion Agenda

Fairfield City Council welcomes the Federal Government's Multicultural Policy, *The People of Australia*, as a vital step towards engaging with our unique multicultural society. We look forward to seeing the Australian Multicultural Policy informing, updating and strengthening the Government's social inclusion agenda and other policies across portfolios.

In the Federal Government's Social Inclusion Agenda at present, there is no significant role or mention of 'multiculturalism'. When 'Cultural Diversity' is referred to, it is subsumed by 'Access and Equity', under the subcategory of 'Supporting new arrivals and refugees' which is in turn an 'Other initiatives' (that is, not a priority area) of the Social Inclusion Agenda. This raises three separate issues:

1. That if the Social Inclusion Agenda seeks to combat disadvantage and social exclusion in Australia, and given that new arrivals and refugees do experience multiple disadvantage and have complex specific needs which are difficult to address through mainstream programs. Then these groups are at further risk of slipping through the cracks if not recognised as a priority in a Social Inclusion Agenda;
2. That 'Access and Equity' in the Social Inclusion Agenda, refers to CALD Australians and it appears to be the responsibility of DIAC. This suggests that issues of access and equity are related to Immigration and Citizenship. It is important to recognise that access and equity is an issue for all Australians, to be addressed with vision and strategic programs which link across Government departments, and not just an issue for the 'culturally and linguistically diverse population' or those who use DIAC services.
3. The issues of social cohesion that arise as a consequence of cultural differences are not addressed in the Social Inclusion Agenda. Yet the domains of social cohesion (as defined by leading

researchers in the field such as the Scanlon Foundation¹) – worth, belonging, participation, acceptance and rejection, social justice and equity – are intertwined with an individual's and a community's cultural origins, beliefs and practices. Respect and equality for all cultures is a prerequisite for belonging and participation in society. It is a human condition to need to feel valued by society in order to function effectively within it.

There is a role for multiculturalism in the Social Inclusion Agenda. The Social Inclusion Agenda must recognise that a cohesive society requires equality of cultural circumstance. In other words, within Australia's legal framework, that equality can be achieved by individuals, communities and cultures without having to assimilate and relinquish their differences. Respecting and validating cultural differences – that is, validating the multicultural make up of Australia – is a prerequisite for belonging, and full participation and contribution to society.

Recommendation:

With regard to multiculturalism, the Social Inclusion Agenda should:

- *Acknowledge that respect and equality for all cultures is a prerequisite for feeling valued, for belonging, and for full participation and contribution to society. The issue is more fundamental than one of access or opportunities – people must feel accepted by society before they can be a part of it.*
- *Address social cohesion issues that arise as a consequence of cultural differences.*
- *Work towards equality of cultural circumstance, so that within Australia's legal framework, equality can be achieved by individuals, communities and cultures without having to assimilate and relinquish their differences.*
- *Recognise the Australian Multicultural Policy as a social policy statement for all Australians and fundamental to social cohesion. It is appropriate that another Principle is added for the Social Inclusion Agenda - "Working towards equality of cultural circumstance" as a foundation to participation.*

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

Fairfield LGA is one of the most multiculturally complex cities in Australia. As Australia sought to rebuild the nation after World War II, migrants from Europe

¹ Prof. Andrew Markus, "Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation Surveys Summary Report 2010", Scanlon Foundation, Australian Multicultural Foundation and Monash University, Victoria 2010.

settled in Fairfield City. During the 1970s, Fairfield welcomed arrivals from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, South America and the Middle East.

In the current climate of global unrest and mistrust, the way that Australia is seen to manage multiculturalism and treat her ethnic communities has a bearing on our relations with other nations. Diaspora communities can assist Australia's reputation and profile with our neighbours. Such relationships can affect international trade (for example, with China and India).

Australia benefits from the cultural knowledge, skills and languages; as well as the networks and contacts of Diaspora communities in trade, negotiations and relationship development with the origin countries.

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

Australia has a good settlement program, which assists refugees and migrants to participate and integrate into Australian society. In particular the following programs are recognised to deliver real benefits to the communities of Fairfield City:

- Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)
- Complex Case Support (CCS) Services
- Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS)
- Settlement Grants Program (SGP)
- Torture and Trauma Counseling (TTC) Grants program
- Translating and Interpreter Services (TIS National)

The aim of the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) is to respond to the needs of newly arrived migrants and humanitarian entrants experiencing difficulties accessing mainstream services. By funding specific services - casework, information and referral, liaison and advocacy with service providers – the SGP seeks to help clients become self reliant and participate equitably in Australian society as soon as possible after arrival.

The SGP has been the only program to fund small ethno-specific community organisations, enabling them to build their capacity to deliver a range of services to refugees, migrants and humanitarian entrants. These ethno-specific organisations also function as community hubs, forging the social

bonds which give people meaning to their lives and creates a sense of belonging for new arrivals.

The Settlement Grants Program (SGP) supports new arrivals for the first five years; with the expectation that clients can access mainstream services after five years of arrival.

The problem is that we have witnessed many situations in Fairfield where people are not equipped to be mainstreamed after five years, and so become isolated and excluded from society. This is due to many complex factors including low levels of English and dealing with ongoing trauma responses. Compounded on these personal factors is the difficulty of navigating the various systems and institutions in Australia² – the legal system, rental markets, workplace rights, health, childcare and aged care.

We argue that the continuation of support and resources to ethnic specific organisations is crucial in maintaining social cohesion in the community.

Recommendation:

With regards to supporting the full participation and integration of new migrants, including refugees into the broader Australian society, the Federal Government should:

- *Implement programs that support the infrastructure of ethnic organisations to build on their social bonding role, to build social bridges which facilitate their community's integration and participation in society. That is, recognising that the social inclusion of migrant communities can take longer than the five year settlement period, and structures need to be in place to assist that transition. For example:*
 - *Extended access to English Language Services (beyond the 5 year settlement period).*
 - *Develop and resource programs that provide work placement for refugee and migrants to gain local work experience.*
 - *More rigorous training for mainstream services to develop organisational cultures which are genuinely sensitive, patient and accommodating of the complex needs of refugees, migrants and humanitarian entrants. While there are set procedures in these mainstream services, there also needs to be some flexibility to accommodate for unusual cultural circumstances. Borrowing from the SGP model, this may involve casework and greater availability of bilingual and bicultural workers.*
 - *Resource programs and/or workers to assist people to navigate the various systems and institutions in Australia, to enable them to participate with confidence. Workers would function as mentors, with specific bicultural skills and lived experience.*

² As highlighted by the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia in their report: Different but Equal, FECCA, Curtin, November 2010.

National Productive Capacity

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

In Fairfield City, 14% of all current business operators were born overseas³. Each of these businesses are noted as being small businesses that employ less than 20 employees. Based on this information, and weighted to the Australian Business Register data (2011) for industry dispersion⁴, the total economic contribution of businesses currently operated by people born overseas is approximately \$7bn in terms of output or 18,406 jobs⁵ to the Fairfield economy.

It should be noted that this data does not include those businesses that have been passed onto the first generation of Australian born children who now own and operate the family business – thus it is argued that the 14% is an under representation of the economic contribution of migrants who operate a business in the Fairfield Local Government Area.

Additionally, those people born overseas and who are employed also make an economic contribution through the goods and services they produce, as well as the incomes they earn and therefore spend. Thus the total economic contribution of overseas born employees is approximately \$12.4bn in terms of output or 36,197 jobs⁶.

This information represents the productive capacity of business owners and workers who were born overseas and are undertaking economic activity within Fairfield LGA. Whilst the figures stated above sound impressive, they represent less than half of the total economic activity within the Fairfield LGA, whilst people born overseas represent more than half of the Fairfield LGA population. Fairfield City Council believes that migrants would make better and larger contributions to their own economic wellbeing, as well as Australia's long term productive capacity, if there was more assistance provided for the purposes of making this contribution.

It is supported through the ABS Census data that there is a prevalence of overseas born migrants holding lower skilled and lower paid employment positions. Again, supported by ABS Census data, this is due to low levels of English language proficiency, low levels of educational attainment, nil or low levels of qualifications and holding lower order occupations.

Some industries will benefit immensely from having a well educated bilingual work force with excellent proficiency in English. The health industry is a prime example. Increasingly, our health workers will be assisting NESB patients that are likely to revert to their first language when in pain or suffering diminished

³ ABS 2006 Census Special Data Order Region of Birth of Person and Local Government Area by Sex and Labour Force Status.

⁴ Fairfield City Council inhouse modelling using ABS and ABR data

⁵ REMPLAN modelling Fairfield LGA based on 2010 Input-Output tables

⁶ REMPLAN modelling Fairfield LGA based on 2010 Input-Output tables

capacity. Obviously a high level of English language proficiency is required in this industry to ensure patient care and medical standards are met, however having a first language ability raises patient care and responsiveness to the patient needs.

After extensive investigations into the provision of business set up, growth and management assistance in first language by State or Federal Governments, Fairfield City Council developed a pilot program to address the significant deficit in provision of assistance. Fairfield City Council has recently delivered a series of four business seminars in first language. Topics covered included:

- the upcoming changes to the food safety supervisor laws,
- business planning and marketing
- managing finances and insurances post GFC, and
- how to employ an apprentice or trainee

Attendance, feedback and appreciation by the Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic and Turkish business communities were excellent. Many attendees commented that whilst they knew the English words, hearing an explanation in their first language was immensely useful and that they had left the seminar with a greater understanding that will benefit their business.

Recommendation:

With regards to ensuring that migrants can effectively and efficiently contribute to building Australia's long term productive capacity, the Federal Government should:

- *Ensure that settlement assistance includes the provision of well delivered and structured English language acquisition for the purposes of training and employment. This language assistance needs to continue throughout the work related training period.*
- *Embark on a bilingual workforce strategy that identifies those industries that will benefit and commence deliberate action to capitalise on the advantages.*
- *Work with State and Local Governments to provide business start up, growth and management information in first language that is accessible. For these communities, this means running workshops and seminars with respect to each culture and within the community that is being addressed. It does not mean uploading translated material into a cumbersome English language website when most NESB business operators do not own a computer.*

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

Australia's business community holds many misconceptions about skilled migration, however so do the migrants themselves. Fairfield City Council works closely with migrant settlement services as well as Job Services

Australia providers. Many migrants who arrive under the Skilled Migration Program are unaware of the need for training in Australian standards or industry specific training, and many of them are either unaware or unable to meet the cost of such training. Australian employers often discriminate against newly arrived skilled migrants because they do not hold "*recent, Australian work experience*". Employers often create the "catch 22" that skilled migrants suffer – that is, they cannot gain employment because they have no work experience. However employers will not provide work experience because the person does not have Australian standards training or has not held employment in Australia. The employer is myopic in stating that they are suffering a skills shortage but will not participate in a process that ensures the sustainability of their future workforce.

The other issue faced by skilled migrants and the business community is that skilled migrants will arrive in Australia, but then do not settle in the geographic areas that are experiencing the skills shortage.

Fairfield City Council has long recognised the significant disconnect between acceptable skills for migration and the acceptable skills for employment. There are numerous case studies that show the mismatch between the skills that DIAC will accept for migration and the skills that employers or industry accreditation bodies will accept for employment. Fairfield City Council has successfully advocated to the Keep Australia Working Taskforce for Canterbury – Bankstown and South West Sydney to commence dialogue with DIAC and representative industry bodies. The purpose of which is to eradicate the mismatch between skills for migration and skills for employment ultimately ensuring that skilled migrants have fair and equitable opportunity to participate in the labour force.

Recommendation:

With regard to the profile of skilled migration to Australia and the extent to which Australia is fully utilising the skills of all migrants, the Federal Government should:

- *Ensure DIAC continues to work with Industry Accreditation and Industry Standards bodies to ensure that the skills for migration match the skills required for employment in skills shortage areas.*
- *Ensure that the skills required for employment as well as Industry Standards, Industry Accreditation and/or professional accreditation requirements are well articulated to potential skilled migrants. Further, that provision of this training or accreditation is made available either before or immediately after arrival.*
- *Provide a structured work experience program through Local, State and Federal Government Departments where possible, or in partnership with large organisations.*
- *Address the issues created by skills for migration not matching skills for employment in the past. This includes the skilled migrants who have previously migrated under the program but who have not met industry*

or accreditation body expectations to obtain employment in the industry that they migrated for. The Federal Government should provide income support for these skilled migrants whilst undertaking the training that will eradicate the gap between the skills they migrated with and the skills they require to obtain employment.

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

Refugees and migrants bring with them business experience, languages, life skills and resilience, therefore government has a role in facilitating and utilising those skills for social and economic self sufficiency.

Recent research across a wide sample of South Western Sydney business highlights a need to access information for business in a range of community languages. Fairfield LGA has approximately 70% of residents (including business owners) speaking languages other than English. Research conducted by Fairfield City Council indicates that the availability of business management growth and compliance information available in community languages is not adequate for the needs of our business communities.⁷ It is therefore imperative for the success of migrant communities in establishing business enterprises that information is delivered in a range of community languages and delivered in a culturally sensitive manner. Many NESB households and businesses do not own or operate a computer; therefore building websites with translated material will not be effective.

Fairfield City Council is more than happy to share the methodology of our recent Bilingual Business Education projects mentioned in Section 5.

Recommendation:

With regard to government initiatives to better assist migrant communities establish business enterprises, the Federal Government should:

- *Consider replicating the successful pilot project lead by Fairfield City Council that delivered practical business assistance in first language to existing business operators.*
- *Adapt the successful Bilingual Business Education Project to include Bilingual Business Start Up workshops that mentor participants through the entire process of establishing a business.*
- *Consider offering rent subsidies to migrant start up businesses to assist them with federally run business incubators or shared resource office and commercial spaces.*
- *Work with existing culturally specific business chambers to provide information and assistance.*

⁷ Fairfield City Council, Business Information availability in Community Languages project, 2009.