

Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW Inc.



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**Committee Secretary
Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism
Department of the Senate
Parliament House, Canberra**

12 May 2017

Dear Committee Secretary,

ECCNSW Submission

The Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW (ECCNSW) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism Inquiry.

The ECCNSW is the state peak body for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Established in 1975, our core activities include advocacy, education and community development.

Our more than 300 members have become increasingly concerned with the prominent movements aiming to countenance Australia's long-standing pro-immigration and pro-multiculturalism policies, likewise reflected in similar nations worldwide, following the rise of extremist and far-right elements within governing institutions both in Australia and abroad.

The Australian Government must take measures to ensure that Australia's commitment to multiculturalism continues to strengthen, and not be eroded, and that the contributions to Australian society by people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, particularly those from new and emerging communities, continue to be recognised and valued. Part in parcel with this commitment is the enshrining of principles bolstering inclusivity within legislation and ensuring that existing legislative protections against discrimination, vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry are maintained.

ECCNSW has been vocal coordinating support for the retention of Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 and maintains that the retention of this and other provisions which have proven effective in combating racial hatred, as well as the consistent review of relevant legislation with the aim of strengthening, not degrading existing protections, are essential to promoting community harmony.

Of further and crucial importance is the maintenance of our robust and diverse system of immigration. Australia would not be the thriving and successful nation it is today but for our commitment to promoting immigration; a commitment our national leadership should consistently reaffirm as being in the national interest considering the growth of widespread movements seeking to undermine one of the very foundations of our country.

Promoting educational pathways to secondary and higher education for new immigrants as well as refugees and asylum seekers, most crucially for those who are of language backgrounds other than English, enables employment opportunities for those who are considered disadvantaged and disenfranchised. Recognition of prior skills and education of those settling into a new country would further benefit Australia. Increased work-based mentoring opportunities and support for furthering English language proficiency would strengthen Australia's diverse workforce.

In this regard, the strengthening of employment pathways is also paramount, most necessarily for newly arrived migrants and members of asylum seeker communities, many of whom, along with certain sectors, could benefit from a consistent review of skills accreditation within Australian industries to best place new arrivals and resources in the sectors that need them most. This would present tangible and important outcomes for both Australian businesses and culturally linguistic and diverse communities.

We believe that fairness in the Australian labour market is essential and is concerned that racial discrimination is still prevalent. This is an issue which should be readily addressed by ensuring the accountabilities of large sector employers including banks, universities and the public service are strengthened so that migrants can make a greater contribution to Australia and can aspire to achieve leadership roles that are attainable!

The very apparent benefits of multiculturalism should likewise be championed by business and political sectors at both Federal and State levels, thereby furthering our nation's commitment to fairness and inclusivity.

To this end, the ECCNSW advocates for the implementation of expanded consultation mechanisms for Government to effectively communicate with ethnic communities and properly discern at both a State and Federal level the prevailing concerns of ethnic communities, including racial discrimination, as well as potential avenues for addressing these matters.

A whole-of-government approach to policy co-ordination on these issues would certainly provide greater and more consistent results, as would the current policy framework on access and equity being amended to reflect real measures and outcomes for CALD communities and thereby a commitment to accountability.

Intrinsic to this goal is also a commitment to the greater direction of resources to research initiatives which address the concerns of CALD communities.

Multiculturalism is an investment and not a social welfare program.

Further to these outcomes and the crucial task of our political leaders furthering leadership on these matters, the ECCNSW would support a Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship Departmental structure that could sit within the Executive, and not within access and equity of the Department of Social Services.

The ECCNSW would be pleased to provide additional information or further contribute to the Inquiry if requested.

We eagerly await its outcome and thank the Committee for considering this submission.

Yours in Multiculturalism,

Mr Peter Doukas
Chair
Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW

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