



Australian Hellenic Council

A coordinating body for the Australian Hellenic community

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Committee Secretary
Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
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Re: Strengthening Multiculturalism

The Australian Hellenic Council (AHC)¹ is a peak representative group in NSW representing Greek community organisations throughout Australia. Its charter requires that it promote the positions of the Australian Hellenic community on issues that may affect that community. It seeks to make the following submissions to the Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism.

Introduction

In discussing ways of protecting and strengthening Australia's multiculturalism and social inclusion, it is useful to reflect on what multiculturalism really means.

The current debate on the principles of multiculturalism and the opposing views that it has generated is perhaps encapsulated in the following two passages:

*"(T)he capacity of Australia to integrate a vast number of cultures by any standards, and large numbers in many cases, into the fabric of Australian society in a harmonious, integrated and peaceful way has rightly been the envy of the world. Contrary to all the soothsayers who say that it cannot be done ... Australia, almost against the tide, has demonstrated a capacity and a success rate that have astonished everybody."*²

¹ The authors of this submission are the children of Greek immigrants to this country.

² Ross Tzannes, former Chairperson of the Ethnic Communities Council, in evidence to the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into Multiculturalism, Interim Report, May 2000, p. 25

“A good place to start with the immigration question is with the understanding that Australia is not a multicultural society. It is a monolingual, multiethnic and limited culturally diverse society. There is only one official language, English, and it is expected that all will speak, read and write English. Australia is multiethnic and, despite the dreams of human rights activists, is not racist. As for culture, there are limits.”³

The first passage reflects the aspirations and beliefs of a tolerant and inclusive culture that respects all-comers. The second quote blatantly encourages the playing of the so-called migration or race card.

For reasons outlined in this submission the Australian Hellenic Council is a strong supporter of multiculturalism as an expression of “unity in diversity”⁴; an “inclusive policy which values and respects diversity and promotes inclusiveness and engagement within the framework of Australian laws”.⁵

Australia is a multi-racial, multi-cultural and harmonious society. Multiculturalism defines our tolerance of cultural and racial diversity and is a marker of our democracy.

Defending Multiculturalism

Historically, Australia is often referred to as a traditional settler immigration society and has been described as “one of the few nations to be built by planned immigration”.⁶ In 2011 more than one in four of the Australian population was born overseas and 20% born in Australia with at least one overseas-born parent.

³ Gary Johns, “Time for Turnbull to play the migration card” *The Australian*, 17 May 2017 accessed at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/columnists/gary-johns/time-for-turnbull-to-play-the-migration-card/news-story/dd52752d01b6a5869146b7d85286051e> Johns adds, somewhat jingoistically, that “where multiculturalism clashes with the security of Australians it has little chance of remaining public policy”.

⁴ NSW Parliamentary Research Service Issues Backgrounder No. 1 January 2016 page 1 accessed at <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/researchpapers/Documents/multiculturalism-key-issues-and-sources/Multiculturalism.pdf>

⁵ Commonwealth Parliament’s Joint Standing Committee on Migration’s 2013 report, Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia (para 2.54) accessed at http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=mig/multiculturalism/report/fullreport.pdf

⁶ A. Markus, Mapping Social Cohesion 2009: the Scanlon Foundation Surveys quoted in J. Collins, “Multiculturalism and Immigrant Integration in Australia” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* Vol. 45 No. 3 (2013) 133 at 134.

As the Greek-Australian author and political commentator, George Megalogenis has written, the immigration narrative is central to understanding Australia's economic prosperity, particularly with post-war migration and the fact that Australia has constantly been remade through immigration.⁷ Successive Australian governments were content to encourage mass migration to sustain this economic imperative and as an almost inevitable result of the arrival of people from many and varied cultural backgrounds, the country at various stages in its history has exhibited what has been described as "white colonial paranoia" – both in its reaction to migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds and its controversial treatment of indigenous Australians - in a throwback to its British-Irish colonial origins.⁸

In 1978, the Australian Government formed a committee for the review of post arrival programs and services for migrants and it issued a report titled Migrants Services and Programs (the Galbally Report). The debate over multiculturalism is informed by the findings of this inquiry and its formulation of a series of guiding principles which are set out below:

1. All members of our society must have equal opportunity to realise their full potential must have equal access to programs and services;
2. Every person should be able to maintain his or her culture without prejudice or disadvantage and should be encouraged to understand and embrace other cultures;
3. The needs of migrants should, in general, be met by programs and services available to the whole community but special services and programs are necessary to ensure equality of access and provision; and
4. Services and programs should be designed and operated in full consultation with clients, and self-help should be encouraged as much as possible with a view to helping migrants to become self-reliant quickly.

We now propose to address some of the reference criteria identified in the Committee's Terms of Reference.

⁷ G. Megalogenis, *Australia's Second Chance* (Hamish Hamilton 2015)

⁸ G Hage, "Multiculturalism and White Paranoia in Australia", Journal of International Migration and Integration Vols. 3 & 4 (Summer/Fall 2002) p. 417

The view and experiences of people from culturally and linguistically diverse, and new and emerging communities.

The Greek community makes up approximately 3% of the population. The first Greek migration commenced with the arrival of the second fleet.

The Greek community is one of the most successful migration stories and has embraced the Australian way of life by expressing itself through maintaining its own cultural identity but also respecting their new country and giving back to the Australian community. The Greek community has excelled in politics, sport, arts, business and academia.

The Greek community is one of the oldest and most successful migration stories. This has not occurred without racial abuse when first entering the country. Racism unfortunately has taken decades to heal, which explains the historical stance that the Greek Australian community has taken to combat racism and to promote multiculturalism and social and cultural inclusiveness.

The adequacy and accessibility of settlement and social inclusion services and resources available to individuals and communities.

These services are not tested by new Greek migrants as nearly all of them have English as a second language. More elderly migrants do however require more assistance with social and medical services as many lack a formal education. We believe more funding in this area in terms of interpreter services would assist.

The adequacy of existing data collection and social research on racially motivated crimes.

Co-ordinating and enhancing data collection of the incidence of racially-motivated crimes would inform the legislatures and also provide a useful basis for better education and dissemination of information.

The impact of discrimination, vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of ‘race’, colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief.

The Australian Hellenic Council has taken a leading role in the campaign to prevent the watering down of the provisions of Section 18C of the *Racial Discrimination Act*.

We made a detailed submission to the recent Parliamentary Committee Inquiry into Freedom of Speech and in the course of that submission we argued that, contrary to statements by Senator Hanson of One Nation, whose party has always targeted multiculturalism as a so-called threat to our social cohesion, there was nothing dignified or endearing in being called a “wog” or a “dago”, simply because of the birthplace of one’s parents or grandparents, or to be told that you are not one of us. All people deserve respect and dignity and inclusion, irrespective of their racial or ethnic background or the colour of their skin. That is a precious freedom and right that needs to be defended against racial abuse and stereotyping.⁹

Racial discrimination cannot be tolerated. In our submission we also noted whilst most of the insults that many Australians of Greek background had to endure would not constitute offending behaviour under the Racial Discrimination Act, the same cannot be said of some odious verbal or written bigoted assaults upon persons whose ‘misfortune’ is that their race, colour or national origin does conform to a white Christian stereotype or, as Professor Geoffrey Levey has put it, a perceived “duality paradigm” in which the prevalent culture is regarded as foundational and therefore to be preferred, followed by the rest.¹⁰

Multiculturalism indeed reflects the essence of cultural pluralism.

⁹ Senator Hanson in a speech to the Senate, 24 November 2016 (Hansard, p. 12) declared:

“People say, ‘Why are we standing up here and speaking out against the words “to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate”?’ Today times have changed greatly. People have come to our country. I remember most, years ago when they came, there were the Greeks, the Italians and different ones. They were called wogs. They keep telling me, ‘My god, we actually had everything thrown at us. We were abused, but we said no. We got on with it.’ Because when the Aussies had a go at them in that Aussie way they became part of the community - they assimilated. I remember all the guys at the fish markets - the Greeks and the Italians. We all had jokes together and it was taken in a good sense of humour. I think we have lost that in Australia. I think people have become so precious that you cannot say or do anything anymore.”

¹⁰ G. B. Levey, “Why the campaign to reform the Racial Discrimination Act failed” Perspectives on the Racial Discrimination Act (AHRC August 2015), p. 102

There is therefore no place for the stereotyped, racist and simplistic mono-cultural views of Hansonism and her supporters who obviously yearn for a return to the White Australia Policy in their calls for restrictions in certain types of migration and for the 'reversal' of multicultural policies.

The impact of political leadership and media representation on the prevalence of vilification and other forms of exclusion and bigotry on the basis of 'race', colour, national or ethnic origin, culture or religious belief.

The Australian Hellenic Council is concerned that the recent dialogue over the proposed amendments to the *Racial Discrimination Act* highlighted the extremes of race hate speech and the disingenuous claims made under the guise of the defence of the right to freedom of speech, particularly on the far right of the political spectrum and pseudo think tanks, aided and abetted by sections of the media.

The potential benefits and disadvantages of enshrining principles of multiculturalism in legislation

There are a number of examples of statutory commitment to the ideals of multiculturalism.

The NSW Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act was enacted in 2000 and at Section 3(1) it is declared that multiculturalism is founded on the following principles:

- (a) the people of New South Wales are of different linguistic, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds who, either individually or in community with other members of their respective groups, are free to profess, practise and maintain their own linguistic, religious, racial and ethnic heritage;
- (b) all individuals in New South Wales, irrespective of their linguistic, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds, should demonstrate a unified commitment to Australia, its interests and future and should recognise the importance of shared values governed by the rule of law within a democratic framework;
- (c) all individuals in New South Wales should have the greatest possible opportunity to contribute to, and participate in, all aspects of public life in which they may legally participate;

- (d) all individuals and institutions should respect and make provision for the culture, language and religion of others within an Australian legal and institutional framework where English is the common language;
- (e) all individuals should have the greatest possible opportunity to make use of and participate in relevant activities and programmes provided or administered by the Government of New South Wales, and
- (f) all institutions of New South Wales should recognise the linguistic and cultural assets in the population of New South Wales as a valuable resource and promote this resource to maximise the development of the State.

The recently-enacted Multicultural Recognition Act 2016 (Qld) provides at Section 19(2) that the government's multicultural policy must:

- (a) promote the principles of the multicultural charter; and
- (b) state outcomes for services provided by government entities to people from diverse backgrounds in the Queensland community; and
- (c) provide for a consistent approach across government for collecting statistical information about the diversity of people who use services provided by government entities.

The Act establishes a *Multicultural Queensland Charter* which enunciates the following core principles:

- 1 A shared commitment to Queensland and Australia, and a free and democratic society governed by the rule of law, fosters a strong and unified community.
- 2 The people of Queensland come from many diverse backgrounds and have worked, and continue to work, together to build a prosperous, fair and harmonious Queensland.
- 3 The people of Queensland should be able to express and celebrate, in a lawful way, their cultural, linguistic and religious diversity.
- 4 Equal rights and responsibilities under the law and equitable access to the services provided or funded by the Government for all people of Queensland helps build a fair community.
- 5 A shared commitment, among members of the Queensland community, to mutual respect, fair treatment and valuing the diversity of peoples in the community fosters a caring, safe and inclusive community.

- 6 The creation of opportunities that encourage the full participation of people from diverse backgrounds in the cultural, economic, political and social life of Queensland helps build a prosperous State.
- 7 Sustained, respectful and inclusive engagements between all individuals, groups and the Government are a basis for mutual understanding.
- 8 A unified and harmonious community promotes a sense of belonging among its people and builds community confidence and resilience.

The potential benefits and disadvantages of establishing a legislative basis for the multicultural commission

A model that is often cited in support for legislating for multiculturalism is the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act 1985* which promotes the preservation of cultural freedom of all individuals and recognises the cultural contributions of all ethnic groups in Canadian society.

The principles of equality, participation and inclusion as well as the benefits of cultural diversity that are enshrined in the Canadian legislation are worthy of closer scrutiny.¹¹

Conclusion

As we are reminded by David Marr in his penetrating essay, *White Queen: One Nation and the Politics of Race*,¹² multiculturalism allows many cultures to survive – or even flourish – in a single country. Australia is a paradigm for this diversity of culture and tolerance.

Legislating for multiculturalism would help enshrine our commitment to a truly vibrant and diverse cultural society and would, in our submission, enhance our Australian national identity and cohesion.

Yours faithfully,

George Vellis
Coordinator

George Vardas
Secretary

¹¹ A useful historical analysis of the Canadian legislation is contained in the Canadian Multiculturalism Background Paper 2009 (revised 2013), published by the Library of Parliament and accessed at <https://lop.parl.ca/content/lop/ResearchPublications/2009-20-e.pdf>

¹² D. Marr, “White Queen: One Nation and the Politics of Race” Quarterly Essay Vol. 65 (2017)