



THE GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY OF MELBOURNE AND VICTORIA
ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΗ ΚΟΙΝΟΤΗΤΑ ΜΕΛΒΟΥΡΝΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΒΙΚΤΟΡΙΑΣ

Committee Secretary
Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Canberra ACT 2600

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**Submission by the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne & Victoria to
the Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism**

For the Committee's reference, we note the following:

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Costas Markos
Hon General Secretary

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Introduction:

The Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria was formed in 1897 and continues to serve as the peak organization that represents the interests of the Greek community in Victoria. Throughout its long history it has played a pioneering role in advocating the rights of migrants and refugees as well as a fundamental role in the development of multiculturalism. It welcomes the opportunity to participate in further dialogue over the current needs of migrant communities and the future forms of multiculturalism.

Preface:

Given the complexities of global migration patterns and the volatile nature of the challenges this country faces, we strongly believe that multiculturalism needs to be not only reinforced but also significantly expanded. Multiculturalism was defined and developed in relation to post war migration and settlement experiences. Multiculturalism has been a vital policy framework that addresses the lived reality for the majority of Australians. However, we are of the view that there needs to be a renewal of discussion and debate on what it means to live in a multicultural society in a globalizing world. The recent challenges have been diverse and far-reaching.

Response to the Terms of Reference:

- A. In the Greek community we are witness to both the advantages of an established and successful settlement program, but also the complexities that are faced by recent arrivals. We can only imagine the challenges faced by emerging migrant communities. There are both the traumas of being uprooted and the difficulties of adjusting to new social demands. In a

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networked society the demands for linguistic and technical competency have risen dramatically, the administrative hurdles and the financial barriers for survival have also all risen quite sharply. The need to communicate in standard English through computer screens has become prohibitive and exclusionary for most newly arrived migrants. They are increasingly reliant on the skills and resources of members from their own community. We therefore believe that the success of the earlier generation of Greek migrants has softened the impact on arrival for many of the recent Greek migrants. We also note that this buffer is not always available to many of the other emerging migrant communities.

We therefore also stress that the government should both seize the opportunity to work with established migrant communities to engage with newly arrived migrant groups, but also acknowledge the complexities that all migrants face. Established communities could provide a leadership and bridging role that can inform government agencies, but it also means that the government works with the accumulated experience and knowledge that has been formed throughout these communities. In general, we propose that the established migrant communities can provide leadership in three directions, first they can mentor emerging communities, second they can intervene within the national institutions, and third they can build platforms that mediate local and global interests.

- B. Over the past 50 years the Greek community has established a sophisticated network of social, cultural, welfare and educational services. This has been primarily funded by resources from the within the community, and more

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recently through support of various government agencies. Such infrastructure is the exception rather than the rule in the migrant communities. It is impossible to underestimate the vital role played by such services, and therefore we underline the necessity of learning from but also working with the established migrant communities to build a more responsive and productive society. The adequacies of current services are not fully tested, because migrant communities tend to rely on the own internal support structures.

We believe that a closer understanding of this process and more open attitude towards working in collaboration with partners in the migrant community would enhance the effectiveness of social service provisions.

- C. Data collection is problematic at best. First of all the full story of migration is not adequately captured. The complexities of global migration are not fully represented by institutional settings that are driven by a national perspective and confined to movements that occur within the national territory. These data gathering exercises focus too narrowly on entry and exits, and miss many of the other forms of mobility and the complex forms of inter-connectedness. We implore that more sophisticated tools are developed to capture the genuine flows that are already occurring around the world. On the specific matter of reporting on racially motivated crimes, there needs to be a bi-focal approach to register and understand who the real victims are, and what has driven the conflict. We are particularly concerned with the perpetuation of biased accounts and racial stereotypes that portray recent migrants as more prone to crime and violence. In the

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late 1970s the Greek community was victim to a concerted governmental and media campaign that alleged systematic fraud over medical reports. After extensive investigations the allegations were proven to be false and much exaggerated. Nevertheless the effect of these smears was hurtful and damaging. Consequently, we are both conscious that the emerging communities are vulnerable to such abuse, and urge for greater scrutiny over allegations on crimes that are framed by racial categories.

- D. The Greek community was also deeply disturbed by the debates on the proposal to shift the criteria of bigotry in the 18c provisions. We were of the view that the changes appeared to be legally unsound, morally wrong and a backward political step. We argued that the proposed changes did not reflect the broader interests of Australia and were a product of sectarian obsessions by a vicious minority. The political leadership of this country needs to take a far more proactive role in defending and extending the values of multiculturalism. Just because a vocal minority is hanging on to an outdated image of national identity that fits into a version of Cinderella's slipper, it does not mean that the majority has to disfigure itself in order for it to step out into the real world. We are living in a time when cultures are not just co-existing side by side, but are increasingly mixing together. The mixture of cultures and ethnic identities now requires more subtle methods for appreciating the vitality of cultural difference. Mixed marriages are now the new norm in the Greek community and we embrace the hybrid forms of Greek-Australian cultures. Hence, this growing form of mixture is already having substantial impact on the demand and form through which Greek language and culture is being taught through the community. Such efforts to

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address our hybrid world should be embraced rather than scorn being thrust upon it.

- E. There is a lot of debate in the media these days about the need to defend Western values. The Greek community is well poised to speak about the origins and the content of Western values. We are particularly proud that Ancient Greece played such a seminal role in the gestation of rational thinking, democratic political systems and cosmopolitan values. If all Australian institutions had to demonstrate their adherence to such great Western values we believe that our society would be enriched. In particular, we would like to see consistency on all cultural tests. How would some of the entrenched cultural institutions account for themselves if they also have to be subject to levels of scrutiny that we now tend to only direct towards emerging communities? We note that if the first generation of Greek migrants were expected to pass the current citizenship test that many would probably fail. Would Australia really benefit if the parents of the filmmaker George Miller and ARL legend Dr George Peponis were rejected? Citizenship should not be determined by tests but demonstrated by the levels of engagement. Recent research has shown that migrants have contributed more to charities and are more likely to volunteer in community work than average citizens, they do not live in isolated culturally specific ghettos, and strive harder to adhere to community values. Such efforts are rarely profiled in the mass media, and the government fails to give due credit to such forms of social and cultural engagement.

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F. In the past, multiculturalism has been defined as a policy framework for supporting minority groups. This definition needs to be widened to address the vital role of difference in the whole of Australian culture. We are all living in a more complex and entangled world and we need to see our connections and relations in a more vivid and robust manner. This story is occasionally presented in promotional terms - what we are suggesting is a new approach, one that takes the leadership role and collaborative capacities of the established communities more seriously. The established migrant communities must address the challenges that confront the emerging communities, but also look outwardly and insert themselves into the mainstream institutions, as well as being bridge builders in the global community. If this leadership and mediating role is accepted by people who have been at the interface of racial and cultural challenges, then there is good reason to believe that they will be at the forefront of producing the necessary innovations for our society.

We firmly believe that enshrining the principles of multiculturalism in legislation is a vital next step. This will clarify the status of multiculturalism and facilitate in embedding it into the institutions of everyday life. It will deepen the self-awareness of the migration stories in our national heritage. However, even more important is the building of networks that can link together the diverse communities and deepen the trust and optimism that is crucial for the prosperity and well being of our society.

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Conclusion:

In its submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration for the Inquiry into Multiculturalism dated the 8th April 2011, the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne & Victoria proposed *“that the federal Government should adopt a new approach to define the future policies of multiculturalism. This new policy approach needs to reflect the shifts in migration patterns, the aspirations of migrants and the communication practices in a globalized world. In this context, there will also need to be a closer examination of how multicultural principles of inclusion, recognition and justice are best defined in contemporary society.”*

Furthermore, the submission included a series of observations and recommendations highlighting that *“at present, multicultural policies are formulated at all levels of government; local, state and federal. We believe that it would be beneficial to have a more coordinated approach and a wider perspective on multiculturalism. This would require a closer integration of approaches across the nation, and also a clearer strategy for regional and global engagement”* and calling upon the Federal Government for *“a systematic review of governmental support for services and programs in education, welfare and cultural programming and the inclusion of representatives from the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria in the Australian Multicultural Council.”*

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Despite the passage of six years these points are still outstanding and even more relevant today. The parameters of multiculturalism need to not only be strengthened in light of new patterns of migration, but in a globalizing world the paradigm requires expansion. We call on the government to adopt a collaborative approach with ethnic communities, to be more open in the cultural evaluation of national institutions, and seize the opportunity to build on the existing diasporic networks as platforms that can mediate between the local and the global.