

Senate Inquiry: Issues facing diaspora communities in Australia

Wesa Chau

On 14 October 2020, at the senate inquiry hearing I took two (2) questions on notice:

1. Addressing Senator Sheldon's question "when you're looking at that diversity views in such a peak council? What are some of the practical selection processes that you think could take place to achieve a diverse peak council of the Chinese community?"
2. Addressing Senator Rice's question "I'd really like to get your input into it. What needs to be in an antiracism strategy in order to address these types of quite complex issues? It's not just a matter of having Harmony Day, putting out some brochures and encouraging people to be more accepting of diverse communities. I'd really like your thoughts."

Below are my responses to the questions.

1. Selection processes

In order to bring people with different views together, there are a number of factors that must be present:

1. People present must have the goodwill to find solutions to a defined problem (rather than simply presenting views). The practical solution focus of discussions is vital because even if people have different views, when there is a problem that needs to be solved, the views are required to be framed and directed to the same goal (ie. the problem that requires a solution).
2. A set of rules and a code of conduct (e.g. debates should never get personal, committed to be curious, contributions to be timed)
3. A respected mediator (whose role is to enforce the rules)
4. Chatham house rules to be respected when issues are sensitive
5. Training provided to people who are involved to understand for example, what Chatham house rules mean and how to debate. It should be noted that people born in Australia or those who have studied primary and high school in Australia will know how to debate, however, people who migrated later will not and hence this is a crucial element to include.

When the environment is present, then the selection will involve ensuring people are reasonably curious, understand the issues at hand and have a genuine interest to want to contribute to finding solutions.

2. National Anti-racism Strategy

First I would like to agree with Senator Rice that having a harmony day is not enough as a National Anti-Racism Strategy.

There are a number of components that is required in order for an anti-racism strategy to succeed:

1. The obvious component would be to create a campaign to raise awareness of that racism is not tolerated in Australia. This component provides a strong message to all Australians of the values and that racism should not be tolerated. However raising awareness is not enough, it must be complemented with the next few components.
2. Support for people who have experienced racism and witnesses to racial incidents to have support services that understand mental health and cultural diversity. For example, one of the projects I have been working on is the Resilience Against Racism project to provide people with the immediate emotional support for people experiencing racism or witnesses of racial incidents (and if required refer to further mental health support), as well as help people build the skills to speak up and challenge racism. This component provides support for people directly impacted by incidents and can feel they are listened to and fully supported.
3. Community building programs to focus on increasing social harmony and inclusion and build long term cohesion in the community. It may include supporting existing initiatives like Democracy in Colour that focus on building movements and communities. Additionally it could include programs that build bridges between different cultural communities, for example Asian-Australians and Middle-Eastern-Australian communities to better understand each other and build support between the groups. The initiatives must be designed and created by people who understand and have experienced racism. This component is a longer term strategy to build a resilient and cohesive community.
4. Improve data collection to assist us in understanding Australia's diversity. Currently the Australian Census does not provide good data on cultural diversity. For example, the question country of origin includes people from New Zealand but excludes second and third generation Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds. Languages spoken at home also excludes second and third generation Australians of culturally diverse backgrounds. Ancestry is the closest data on cultural diversity, however it is difficult to combine this data with country of origin to understand (for example) a person of Indian ancestry from Malaysia and it also includes fourth generation who may not identify and/or associate with their ancestry. This component is a longer term strategy to ensure the public service reflects the population they serve (including those in senior roles) and therefore over time they can assist in addressing systemic racism. The data collection component should also include the private sector and the not-for-profit sector in the long term.
5. Strengthening legislation to ensure equality (especially within the public sector) and this include strengthening the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 to provide avenues for people who have been racially abused to be compensated. Additionally, Federal Parliament can consider exploring new options such as legislation that is similar to the Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020 where the public sector organisations are required to report on cultural

diversity (and other forms of diversity) and a plan to achieve equality if they have not met. Australia can only achieve equality when we have the data to know where the gaps are.

The five components combined I believe can address the issues holistically, including some that include immediate needs (such as support for people who just experienced racism) to medium term needs (such as building communities and movements) to longer term needs (such as using data as a way to measure our public service and have the accountability to ensure it does reflect Australian population).