



Submission to Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Lord Mayor, Kon Vatskalis

Thank you for the opportunity to present a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration. As a proud Greek Australian, who came to Australia as a young adult, this is a matter very close to my heart.

Darwin has a long history of not only supporting, but also welcoming refugees and migrants from across the world and as a result our city is more multicultural than Australia as a whole, with nearly a third of our population born overseas. As a capital city with such a strong multicultural identity City of Darwin is the natural choice to be the regional city of choice for migrant and refugee settlement.

Our rich cultural diversity is at the heart of our community. As the capital of the Northern Territory and the only capital city located north of the Tropic of Capricorn, the city of Darwin is home to more than 84,000 people who live in 31 suburbs over 112 square kilometres across our municipality.

As one of Australia's most culturally diverse places, Darwin comprises a varied and vibrant mix of residents of over 60 nationalities and 70 different ethnic backgrounds.

The local Aboriginal people of the Darwin region are the Larrakia; who have strong ties to the beaches, land and creeks in and around Darwin. The Larrakia had a vibrant traditional society based on our close relationship with the sea and trade with neighbouring groups such as the Tiwi, Wagait and Wulna. These groups shared ceremonies, songlines and intermarried.

Many nationalities first started arriving in Darwin more than 100 years ago. The Chinese first arrived in Darwin in 1874 to work as labourers at the gold mines; Greek migrants came to Darwin in the 1950s to work as sponge and pearl divers; Italians established a community in Darwin following World War II and the Vietnamese came to Darwin in the late 1970s, fleeing the Vietnam War. The 1970s also saw the establishment of large Portugese-Timorese and Filipino communities. The Indian population had been steadily growing in Darwin at this time and became well established by the 1980s; with more arrivals of Indian descent coming from Fiji, Malaysia and Singapore.

In 2019, Darwin has joined with our Portugese-Timorese community to celebrate 20 years of independence for Timor-Leste with our local community, acknowledging that during the 1999 referendum Darwin played a critical role for refugees from Timor-Leste.



Today 32% of our population was born overseas and 27% speak a language other than English at home. In Darwin the dominant language spoken at home, other than English, is Filipino/Tagalog; followed by Greek and Mandarin. Our city is home to Islamic mosques, Buddhist and Chinese temples and a range of Christian churches; colourful and vibrant cultural festivals and events throughout the year; and a nationally renowned food scene.

As these diverse communities grow in Darwin they maintain strong cultural and family ties to their countries of origin. They bring diversity of life experience and economic development; much needed job skills and a cultural richness that enhances our community. Our city values the contribution migrant communities make and there are around 50 social, cultural and religious organisations supporting these communities.

Darwin is a very liveable city; having the smallest population of any Australian capital city translates to less traffic and our warm weather supports an outdoor lifestyle and a relaxed way of life. Darwin has the infrastructure to support a larger population.

For recently arrived migrants and refugees our rich multicultural heritage means we are experienced and well placed to welcome and support different cultures and there are many opportunities to find employment or establish a business, develop friendships, and become part of a community.

Being located at the top of Australia, Darwin is often described as Australia's gateway to South East Asia. It is also the main service centre for a wide range of industries including mining, offshore oil and gas production, pastoralism, tourism and tropical horticulture. With a population growth rate of 1.68% in 2018 - the slowest of any capital city in Australia - migrants fill skill shortage gaps in these key industries and contribute to the local and regional economy.

City of Darwin's recently launched strategic plan outlines the key strategic actions we will take to foster a strong, connected community, with pride in our cultural identity, for example, the development of a City of Darwin Multicultural Framework and implementation of the City of Darwin Access and Inclusion Plan.

Darwin is the best-placed city in Australia to welcome and support migrants to country and the focus of our Council is to continue to invest to make Darwin an attractive and liveable place for both residents and visitors.

Kon Vatskalis
Lord Mayor

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