

Submission Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia

1. The role of multiculturalism in the Federal Government's social inclusion agenda; and

The Federal Government's social inclusion agenda aims to provide opportunities for all Australians regardless of their cultural, religious or socio-economic status. Cultural diversity should be viewed as a resource that strengthens the cohesion and stability of Australian society. In order for social inclusion to shift from an idea to a genuine attitude and set of social practices, Australians must embrace cultural diversity in its varied forms.

2. The contribution of diaspora communities to Australia's relationships with Europe, the UK, Middle East and the immediate Asia-Pacific Region.

Diaspora communities play an important role in assisting migrants to re-home on arrival to Australia. On arrival to new country, migrants do not simply replace their birth culture with the culture of their host society. Rather, they weave elements of their birth culture into their new life by maintaining links to their home country and often to a diaspora. Diasporas provide a source of identity and community to migrants as well as playing an important political role. Many diaspora movements are linked to political and social movements in Europe, the UK, Middle East and the Asia-Pacific Region. Think, for example, of the involvement of the Tamil diaspora in domestic conflict in Sri Lanka, or the role of both the Palestinian and the Jewish diasporas in Arab-Israeli relations in the Middle East. It is vital that the Australian government attempts to understand the political aspirations and grievances of diaspora movements in order to strengthen our relationship with other regions. Migrants in Australia should be actively encouraged to maintain links with the diaspora and to involve themselves in the politics of their home country. This is not mutually exclusive to being an active member of Australian society and identifying as part of the Australian nation.

3. Innovative ideas for settlement programs for new migrants, including refugees, that support their full participation and integration into the broader Australian society; and

There are a wide range of approaches to settlement, ranging from programs that aim to assimilate migrants to programs that encourage migrants to preserve their cultural difference and articulate a sense of identity and community that differs from the dominant national identity. In order to feel secure and establish a sense of home in Australia, migrants must be able to express their cultural identity and identify as a part of one or more communities. Consequently, settlement programs should focus on providing migrants with social and economic opportunities however, assimilation should not be a prerequisite for participation.

Settlement programs should aim to provide migrants with the tools they need to build social capital and participate in the public sphere. Migrants should be actively supported to use social media to raise their profile of their cultural group and to canvass issues that affect them. Community radio, for example, provides an excellent example of a form of media that is accessible to a wide range of people. Radio programs can be broadcast in any language and they provide a forum for cultural minorities to express their culture and creativity as well as to discuss and debate important political issues.

4. Incentives to promote long term settlement patterns that achieve greater social and economic benefits for Australian society as a whole.

The history of migration to Australia highlights the important contribution that migrants have made to the strength of our economy and society. Migrants will continue to have a

long term positive impact, provided that they are welcomed and that their contributed is recognised at an official level and at the level of the everyday.

Currently, there are strong incentives in place to encourage people to move to Australia for work, study or to reunite with family and kin. However, to encourage long term settlement, political authorities at a federal, state and local level need to be proactive in promoting cultural difference. This could include a more active education campaign to enhance understanding of the benefits of migration and raise cultural and religious awareness in public places such as workplaces, schools and community facilities. In addition, public spaces should be created in which different cultural groups are encouraged to meet and exchange view and vales. Forums such as National Multicultural and Indigenous Youth Media Conference provide a great opportunity for cultural groups who do not have access to conventional political channels to engage in dialogue. It is only in this environment that interdependence and respect can be fostered between different cultural communities. This provides the strongest incentive for individuals to stay in Australia.