



ETHNIC COMMUNITIES' COUNCIL OF VICTORIA INC

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ECCV Response: Multicultural Affairs in Victoria A Discussion Paper for a New Policy

Introduction

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Victorian Multicultural Commission Affairs in response to: "Multicultural Affairs in Victoria: a discussion paper for a new policy".

The ECCV is the state-wide peak advocacy body representing ethno-specific agencies and multicultural organisations. For over 30 years, ECCV has remained the principal liaison point between ethnic communities, government and the wider community in Victoria. ECCV has been a key player in building Victoria as a successful, harmonious and multicultural society.

The ECCV commends the Victorian Government for refreshing the **Valuing Cultural Diversity** policy in response to the current global and domestic policy drivers and emerging demographic trends which pose challenges to the State now and during the next five years.

The ECCV acknowledges that there are several geo-political, cultural and economic realities which must be taken into account in developing a new multicultural policy.

It is agreed that the following factors will exercise considerable influence on policy:

- the experience of an unprecedented era of global mobility;
- the practical economic imperatives which make on-going skilled migration an important measure of addressing skills shortage;
- the ageing population;
- the significant global challenges that are involved in environmental change and the urge to obtain economic security.

It is also agreed that these domestic policy drivers will make Victoria even more diverse. These factors, in turn, will require a multicultural policy that is flexible enough to foster, manage and celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity, while at the same time ensuring that government is able to put in place services that are appropriately attuned to and targeted towards meeting the range of needs contained in that same diverse population.

The ECCV commends the emphasis the Victorian government's multicultural policies place on building up and encouraging a common sense of identity and purpose founded on democratic values and participative practices.

Defining Multiculturalism in the 21st Century

While the ECCV recognises that, in present-day Australia, the term "multiculturalism" is sometimes under challenge, in reality multiculturalism provides people with the freedom and opportunity to preserve and express their cultural and linguistic heritages while simultaneously invoking their rights and responsibilities under Australian laws.

Victoria has shown its commitment to multiculturalism through the enactment of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities which provides a critical foundation for multicultural policies.

The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities is an agreed set of human rights, freedoms and responsibilities protected by law and which extend to every member of the Victorian community. Government departments, public bodies must observe these rights when they create laws, set policies and provide services.

In relation to the topics and questions canvassed in the paper, the ECCV offers the following responses:

Response

Topic – Culture and Identity

Question: How can we better maintain and support the cultural heritage of Victoria's ethnic communities within a framework of social cohesion?

Statistics on CALD

1. According to the 2006 Census, there are 4,932,423 Victorians. Over one million Victorians were born overseas. Overseas born Victorians come from over 230 countries and 70% of these Victorians were born in non-main English speaking countries.

2. According to the 2006 Census, over one million Victorians speak languages other than English at home and over three million Victorians follow over 120 religions.
3. ECCV acknowledges that it is important to maintain and support Victoria's highly diverse linguistic, cultural and religious heritage. The ECCV notes that such maintenance and support is critical for cultural protection, identity formation and that it is conducive to social cohesion.

Domestic Policy Drivers

4. The ECCV acknowledges that the need for ongoing skills migration and increased mobility in a globalising world means more people from CALD backgrounds will come to Victoria.
5. The ECCV acknowledges that Victoria's diversity will increase. The ECCV notes that, as societies become increasingly culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse, identity formation and multiculturalism can be viewed as interlinked. Subsequently, Victorians will have complex, multiple and fluid identities. For instance, CALD communities,¹ and young Victorians in general, do not see themselves necessarily as being part of one culture only, but rather having multiple and fluid identities.
6. The ECCV notes that maintaining cultural and linguistic heritage will not be antithetical to social cohesion as the future will hold increasingly complex and fluid notions of identity for the Victorian community.

Recommended Action for Better Maintenance and Support

7. The ECCV acknowledges that the Victorian Government has done much work to promote community harmony and social cohesion. Such work is apparent in areas like outlawing racial and religious vilification,² promoting inter-faith dialogue and funding advertising programs including 'Just Like You'.³ Work in these areas is critical for supporting linguistic, religious and cultural diversity within a framework of social cohesion.
8. As social cohesion correlates with equity and access, the ECCV notes that increasing diversity, in particular amongst the ageing population, demands different and specifically targeted services that are linguistically and culturally appropriate.

General Recommendations for Linguistic and Cultural Support

¹ Irene Bouzo, 'The Dilemma of Adaptation and Assimilation: a case study of the Temple Society Australia' (unpublished PhD Thesis, 2007, University of New England), 288.

² Racial and Religious Tolerance Act, 2001. This Act ensures that extremists in the Victorian Community cannot peddle hatred and incite community disharmony.

³ ECCV, 'Strengthening Multicultural Victoria: Victoria State Election Platform', (2006), 7.

9. The ECCV recommends that Victoria continue to support education, advertising and multi-faith initiatives which encourage understanding, acceptance and friendship between different groups within our multicultural society.⁴
10. The ECCV recommends that the teaching of languages other than English (LOTE) continues to be supported and enhanced. LOTE is critical to Victoria's success on many levels. Bilingualism helps drive Australia's economic success in today's global markets. It also helps foster greater cross-cultural understanding and community harmony.⁵

General Recommendations for Religious and Cultural Support

11. The ECCV notes the importance of anti-discrimination legislation for persons from CALD communities. The ECCV recommends that Victoria should continue to enhance and extend this legislation by promoting, for instance, a zero-tolerance approach to racial harassment and discrimination.⁶
12. The ECCV believes that ethnic communities and mainstream communities need to have a greater understanding of their legal rights and responsibilities. The ECCV recommends that Victoria continue to engage Victoria's faith leaders in dialogue, for instance through the Premier's Multifaith Leaders Fora.

Group Specific Recommendations

13. The ECCV notes that in years to come, the migrant population's needs will be closely related to whether an individual is a member of an established migrant community, a refugee and humanitarian community or a new and emerging community. Each of these communities will have specific needs particular to the circumstances of that group. The ECCV notes that this diversity in needs will challenge and continue to challenge a range of policies currently in place.
14. The ECCV notes that CALD communities are often faced with substantial barriers when attempting to obtain appropriate services to deal with mental health and disability issues. The ECCV draws attention to these matters and reiterates the need for access to appropriately designed services.

Established Communities

15. The ECCV notes an ever-increasing and at times dramatic, need for bilingual and multicultural services for the aged and ageing in CALD

⁴ ECCV, 'Strengthening Multicultural Victoria: Victoria State Election Platform (2006), 7.

⁵ Phong Nguyen, 'ECCV Supports Calls for Greater School Languages Effort.' (Media Release, April 17, 2007).

⁶ ECCV, 'Strengthening Multicultural Victoria: Victoria State Election Platform (2006), 7.

communities. This is a fast-growing trend and the ECCV draws attention to the need to accord high priority to enhancing and increasing the supply of culturally and linguistically responsive services for the aged. It is the case that as they age, older members of CALD communities tend to revert to their mother tongue, thus increasing their potential for isolation and dependence. The ECCV recommends the government prioritise appropriate and targeted aged care services policies to cater for these emerging needs.

Refugee Communities

16. Humanitarian entrants have complex and on-going needs on entry to Victoria and require specific and well-designed services in order to permit them to settle into their new country. The ECCV notes that access to appropriate services facilitates and enables successful initial settlement and longer-term social cohesion. The ECCV recommends the maintenance of efforts undertaken so far to put appropriate and targeted settlement services in place.
17. The ECCV recommends the maintenance of support to victims of torture and trauma, the extension of awareness education initiatives to medical and allied health professionals in respect of the particular health needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants, the extension of current initiatives at all levels within the education system – with some considerable emphasis in the early years - to respond to the particular needs of children and young persons of refugee and humanitarian entrant background and specifically those with interrupted schooling should be continued and enhanced.

New and Emerging Communities

18. The ECCV notes that an increasingly diverse society will continually present challenges for Victorian service providers. The ECCV recommends that Victoria continue to update and revise multicultural policies to capture and respond to the realities and exigencies of migration.

Topic - Implementing and Evaluating Multicultural Policy

Question: *What indicators should be used to measure progress in achieving multicultural policy outcomes?*

1. The ECCV acknowledges that measuring the benefits and legacies of multicultural policies and programs is vital to understanding what works.
2. The ECCV recommends that Victoria use whole-of-government and single agency approaches to measure the benefits and impacts of multicultural policy.

3. The ECCV positively notes the benefits of having specific legislative, policy and program approaches as well as having the benefits integrated into mainstream ideas and concepts.
4. The ECCV notes that Victoria should particularly measure the impacts and benefits of multicultural policies amongst the ageing CALD communities, refugee communities, new and emerging communities and persons from CALD backgrounds with mental health and disabilities whilst remaining open and responsive to the particular needs of each of these segments of the CALD population.
5. The ECCV acknowledges that challenges to multicultural policy implementation include: enabling public ownership of multiculturalism; embedding the vision of supporting our society's multiculturalism as a core component of government business; measuring the relative benefits and outcomes for the whole community; and providing adequate resources
6. The ECCV notes the need for balancing priorities and policy agendas between local, state and federal governments. The ECCV underlines the importance for all levels of government to recognise the value of ethno-specific organisations as part of the mainstream service delivery.
7. The ECCV recommends that Victoria continues to evaluate progress and challenges encountered in the above mentioned areas. To ensure that evaluation is effective and systematic, consideration should be given to establishing a range of audits to measure the nature, quality and reach of services, programs and initiatives at local and State government levels for CALD communities

Topic - Community Relations and the Promotion of Multiculturalism

Question: How can we best promote respect and understanding of cultural diversity as well as understanding of the benefits multiculturalism brings to the community?

1. The ECCV acknowledges that a focus on developing community relations is a legitimate vehicle for promoting respect and understanding of cultural diversity as well as understanding the benefits that multiculturalism brings to the community.
2. The ECCV notes that the perception of community relations amongst Victorians is generally positive. The ECCV acknowledges the work Victoria has undertaken to ensure that relationships are built between different cultural groups, networks and associations with the aim of increasing broader understanding and acceptance.
3. The ECCV recommends the government continue to support and enhance initiatives such as Harmony Day.

4. The ECCV notes with concern that mainstream media depictions of, for instance, Horn of Africa and Sudanese communities are often sensationalised and counter-productive. These negative depictions can cause particular groups to become isolated and withdrawn and can damage their acceptance within the broader community.
5. The ECCV recommends encouragement of the positive elements of cultural diversity through the arts and media messages and the promotion of public events which are likely to showcase the richness, variety and cohesiveness of the whole Victorian community.

Topic - Social and Civic Participation

Question: How can multicultural policy increase representation and social and civic participation among Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities?

1. The ECCV acknowledges that social and civic participation are equally significant. Each requires individuals to become involved in their social environment through personal networks and/or organisations such as schools, hospitals, health centres, workplaces, ethnic communities, neighbourhoods, regional and national communities. The ECCV also recognises the need to increase the representation of and social and civic participation among CALD communities in all these areas.
2. The ECCV recognises that citizenship confers upon persons the right to participate in the life of their community and to become involved in decisions that govern their lives. As such, citizenship is both a marker of legal status and of membership of a community whose people are held together by bonds of trust and cooperation.
3. The ECCV observes that CALD communities face specific barriers to participation, ranging from language barriers to systemic barriers, such as lack of confidence, lack of experience with social institutions and processes, lack of information/lack of awareness of the issues at hand.
4. The ECCV notes, however, that increased participation is also likely to happen of its own accord. Over time, local government, the Victorian public service and the Parliament of Victoria have all seen increases in representation from the longer-established CALD communities.
5. The ECCV suggests that the particular needs of newer and emerging communities be acknowledged and recommends that government continues to support and expand projects which are designed to provide knowledge and enhance participation amongst a range of groups. In this regard, projects such as the Africa and Democracy Project, which aimed to educate CALD communities about the functioning of Australian democratic government, facilitate African women's uptake of leadership positions and improve the capacity of community organisations to govern

and advocate on their own behalf, should be further encouraged and supported.

6. The ECCV wishes to emphasise the importance of maintaining small grants programs which are capable of addressing particular needs and promoting the visibility and participation of a range of communities. A case in point relates to The Centenary of Women's Suffrage grants program which provided funding to extend the findings of the Australian African Women's Leadership Project by translating into four African languages a booklet on the history of women's suffrage in Victoria.
7. The ECCV notes that the stronger one's involvement is in a community, the greater the strength of a person's sense of belonging and citizenship.
8. The ECCV recommends Victoria enhance and support equity and access for CALD communities by providing appropriate and targeted services. In some instances, services and programs will be best delivered through ethno-specific agencies. The greater challenge is to ensure that all agencies are geared to respond appropriately.

Topic - Institutions and Service Delivery

Question: How can multicultural policy achieve culturally responsive service delivery?

1. The ECCV acknowledges that equity and access to service requires culturally-responsive and culturally-aware service delivery. This is particularly pertinent for regional migration schemes.
2. From 2004 – 2007, the ECCV was pleased to partner with the Victorian State Government and regional communities across Victoria to encourage regional skilled migration throughout the state. The ECCV recommends Victoria continue to enhance and support such services which prepare local communities, migrants themselves and local organisations for a more diverse community.
3. The ECCV recommends that Victoria enhance its support for ethnic communities to access such services by providing sufficient resources to ensure that local service deliverers are not overwhelmed by sharp spikes in the demand for services and avoid burn out.
4. The ECCV observes that cultural, physical, language and psychological and geographical issues also prevent immigrants and refugees from accessing services. The ECCV recommends that immigrants and refugees require more and specifically targeted multicultural policies which address these particular barriers to equity and access.
5. The ECCV agrees that Victoria's institutions must become more culturally competent, especially as the State becomes increasingly diverse. Cultural competence should become a normative measure of

quality in service delivery. ECCV agrees there is a need for a re-working of policies related to the quality, instancing and targeting of cultural competence training.

6. ECCV also acknowledges that there is a need for more investment and support to develop a culturally competent workforce especially in regard to the care of and provision for an ageing CALD population.
7. The ECCV notes that as society becomes more diverse, the challenges to maintain cultural competence will become almost equally diverse. The ECCV observes that such circumstances will require an on-going awareness, together with an ability for consistent re-assessment and re-framing of policy and practice.

Topic – The Geography of Multiculturalism

Question: How can urban planning and infrastructure policy meet the needs of Victoria's multicultural population?

1. The ECCV acknowledges that public spaces enable social interaction but the context within which community members meet, for instance in schools, parks or hospitals, will determine the nature of social interaction.
2. The ECCV agrees that Victoria's multicultural population has diverse and specific needs. The ECCV recommends that Victoria provide specifically targeted and culturally appropriate urban planning and infrastructure policy.
3. The ECCV supports government investment in cultural precincts, for example those in Melbourne's CBD. The ECCV, however, draws attention to the need for areas to remain mixed and not exclusive.
4. The ECCV notes that there is value in cross-cultural encounters. Schools are the best example of a public space where diversity can be said and seen to be the norm. The ECCV recommends Victoria maintain diversity in schools and communities and enhance and support the development of events where cross cultural encounters can most naturally take place. Such a focus in urban planning and infrastructure policy will support social inclusion and meet the needs of increasingly complex and fluid multiple identities.
5. The ECCV notes the success of regional settlement partnership programs, such as the Regional Migration Incentive Fund (RMIF). The ECCV recommends Victoria replicate these programs. The ECCV notes, however, that enhanced support is need at a range of levels. For instance, there is a need to examine infrastructure support such as housing availability and affordability, the receptiveness of local schools and community organisations and the availability of longer-term employment for skilled and unskilled migrants. The ECCV notes that

certain communities also require on-going English training programs in order to facilitate access to employment and social inclusion.

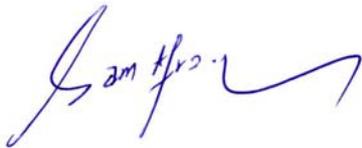
6. The ECCV recommends that Victoria continue these programs but undertake essential planning work prior to settlement.

Topic – Economic Drivers: using cultural diversity for competitive advantage

Question: *How can we better enhance our competitive economic edge through our cultural, linguistic and religious diversity?*

1. The ECCV acknowledges the recruitment of global companies and individual workers will simultaneously increase economic competitiveness create and create a demand for a more culturally and linguistically competent state.
2. The ECCV notes that refugees and migrants from non-main English speaking countries are an untapped resource. Through the qualifications and skills they bring with them, these population groups continue to make major contributions to Australia's stock of human capital. The ECCV recommends that Victoria look to this pool of human capital in order to enhance and develop its economic capacity and global competitiveness through cross cultural competence and linguistic capacity.
3. The ECCV notes research evidence which demonstrates that education is crucial for future economic prosperity. Young people need the right skills and knowledge to function effectively and competitively in an information-rich world.
4. Education is critical to both understand and address emerging environmental challenges. Education is fundamental to the development of social cohesion because it gives students the skills to relate their own values with the experience of others. It is a key driver – possibly the single most important one - for delivering equality of opportunity. It is also an important contributor to the spiritual, moral, cultural and physical development of young people, as well as their intellectual development.
5. The ECCV considers that the learning of LOTE in schools and beyond can only improve the State's competitive edge. The ECCV believes that languages should be taught for well-established reasons:
 - cultural insight;

- intellectual development;
 - curiosity and exposure to literature and history; and
 - the development of trade, national security, tourism and cultural diplomacy.
6. The ECCV notes the degree of excellence that characterises the Victorian education system and particularly the rigour which is embedded in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards. The ECCV notes positively the incentive available within the Victorian University Entrance (VTAC) system which provides a 10% bonus on a student's entry score if she or he has successfully completed the study of a LOTE at Year 12 level.
 7. The ECCV recommends that students in Victorian schools study languages for most of their compulsory schooling and that language study should be common at university level.



Sam Afra
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