



**ethnic  
communities'  
council of  
victoria**

25 May 2007

**ECCV Submission to the Victorian Parliament Electoral Matters  
Committee Inquiry into the conduct of the 2006 Victorian State  
Election**

1. Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) welcomes the opportunity to present a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the conduct of the 2006 Victorian State Election.
2. ECCV was established in 1974 as a voluntary community based organisation. ECCV is now a broadly based, statewide, peak advocacy body representing ethnic and multicultural communities across Victoria. ECCV has a volunteer executive of 19 people representing our member organisations. ECCV has a chairperson, office bearers and full time professional staff running various programs and services. ECCV works for culturally and linguistically appropriate services and access for Victorians from non-English speaking backgrounds and develops policies and strategies in this area.
3. Victoria is a multicultural society populated by people of hundreds of languages and faiths. ECCV strongly supported the Victorian Electoral Commission's (VEC) strategic action plan to enhance voting accessibility for and communication with voters from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. The action plan strongly suggested advertising through ethnic radio and print media, community engagement forums and resources such as CDs and pamphlets in translated languages. ECCV is fully supportive of these initiatives.
4. ECCV's submission focuses on bringing the committee's attention to Victoria's new and emerging communities. Victoria is home to a significant number of humanitarian arrivals from the Horn of Africa, Sudan, Myanmar, Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of these new humanitarian entrants come from war-torn countries and have difficulties settling because of their language skills, cultural shocks, housing and schooling problems and difficulty in gaining employment. Many Horn of African migrants come to Victoria with limited education and English language abilities, which make it difficult for them to fulfil their voting commitments.
5. In response, ECCV, in partnership with the African Think Tank and the Institute of Social Research, Swinburne University is currently running the Commonwealth funded Living in Harmony Project, *the Australia Africa Democracy Project*. The project aims to build guidance in understanding the basic structure and systems of Australian society for Horn of African community members. At a very practical level, it will also ensure that members of these communities who have full citizenship are aware of their voting obligations at election time.

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6. The project consists of four community public forums in Carlton, Ballarat, Dandenong and Flemington exploring the positive and peaceful nature of democracy in Australia. At the conclusion of the project, educational booklets and CDs will be developed, including translations.
7. With regard to learning about voting at the State election, community members from the Carlton forum expressed a strong interest in learning more about the enrolment and voting process and requested for the VEC to conduct more presentations to their respective communities.
8. ECCV recommends for the committee and the VEC to increase funding for new and emerging community languages to develop appropriate communication strategies. Languages that ECCV recommends to be funded that are currently not funded include Bari, Nuer, Tigrigna, Dari (Afghani), Karen (Burma), Chin (Burma) and Farsi (Iranian).
9. In regard to developing more effective strategies to engage with CALD communities during an election, ECCV recommends consideration of employing bilingual workers.
10. Information for CALD and new and emerging communities should be developed in a more straight forward manner with frequent advertisements and information sessions on ethnic television, newspapers and radio. This is because many people from CALD backgrounds may have difficulties expressing themselves in English. They still consider ethnic newspapers and media to be a more important source of information than mainstream media service providers. Other recommendations include having more direct information in translated languages at voting centres. ECCV suggests that research should be undertaken to ensure that subjects for discussion and translations are culturally appropriate.
11. In conclusion, the conduct of future State elections needs to recognise the cultural sensitivity of some of Victoria's CALD communities. ECCV encourages the committee to consult widely and develop appropriate strategies to ensure CALD communities effectively contribute to the democratic process.