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**ECCV submission
on the
Migration Program for 2012-13 and Beyond
to the
Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

December 2011

2 December 2011

The Assistant Secretary
Migration Planning and Strategies
Department of Immigration and Citizenship
Email: migration.policy@immi.gov.au

Dear Assistant Secretary

Thank you for the opportunity to present a submission to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) on the size, balance and composition of Australia's future migration intake for 2012-2013 and beyond.

Please find attached a submission from the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) in response to the Migration Program Consultation conducted by DIAC. In preparing this submission ECCV has provided input regarding the current immigration trends and related social and economic issues that impact on Australia's multicultural community.

ECCV would appreciate the opportunity to contribute to future consultations regarding Australia's Migration Program and would be pleased to meet to discuss this submission.

Yours sincerely

Joe Caputo JP
Chairperson
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Introduction

1. ECCV is the statewide peak advocacy body representing Victorian ethno-specific agencies and multicultural organisations with a membership of approximately 200 organisations. ECCV advocates to all levels of government in areas such as aged care, discrimination, community harmony, employment, education and training, health and community services and justice issues.
2. ECCV commends DIAC for consulting with the multicultural community sector on the size, balance and composition of Australia's future migration intake.
3. ECCV applauds the Australian Government for providing 185,000 places in the 2011-2012 Migration Program and its positive focus on the skilled migration stream that responds to the labour market needs of the Australian economy. ECCV recognises DIAC's continued efforts to maintain fairness and compassion in Australia's Migration Program.

Size

4. ECCV recognises that migration from predominantly non-English speaking countries has changed the ethnic composition of Australia's population into a productive multicultural population. This should be reflected in the overall composition of the migration program, for example by aligning the size of the family and skilled streams.
5. ECCV notes that, as labour market needs have become a greater focus, the 2011-2012 family migration program (58,850) has not grown proportionately to the skilled stream (125,000). Strong family relationships contribute to the health and wellbeing of the culturally diverse community. It is important that the Migration Program continues to facilitate the entry of family members such as partners or fiancés, dependent children, parents, orphan relatives, aged dependent relatives and carers.

Recommendation 1

That the 2012-13 Migration Program intake level be increased to allow for a more balanced family and skilled migration.

Balance

6. ECCV believes Australia's Migration Program could make a significant contribution to a sustainable population in the future by promoting social capital as well as human capital. Social capital represents people who contribute through volunteering and unpaid care and domestic work. Human capital represents our labour market. It is important to name unpaid work accurately and to recognise the important contribution of culturally diverse stay-at-home partners and non-English speaking older relatives who take on care-giving and grandparenting roles.

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7. ECCV points out that our volunteering resources are increasingly important especially in an economic climate where the Australian population is ageing and culturally diverse. It is predicted that population ageing will create substantial pressure on government spending over the next 40 years, according to the Third Intergenerational Report (2010). In terms of cultural diversity, 40 per cent of Victorians and 19 per cent of Australians over 65 are from a culturally diverse background compared with 11 per cent of the Australian born population. There is value in promoting the family stream of migration to increase the pool of culturally diverse, bilingual volunteers especially in the not-for-profit ethnic aged care sector.

Recommendation 2

That future consideration be given to including higher levels of social capital as well as human capital in migration streams.

Flexible Family Migration

8. ECCV notes that, as Australia is targeting predominantly non-English speaking countries particularly for skilled migration, those cultures have strong family bonds which go beyond just children and partners. ECCV further notes that there are long waiting lists especially in the unsupported category.
9. Family migration supports workforce participation by culturally diverse communities, for example family members provide help with childcare so other members can enter paid employment. It also supports social inclusion aspects of creating sustainable communities.
10. Long distances from homelands make maintaining family connectedness challenging for skilled migrants. Australia is located at a great distance from many source countries. Immigration trends in the last decade indicated a marked intake of settlers from Asia, the Middle-East and Africa, followed by India and China as the second and third largest source countries as well as a predicted future intake from Greece, Germany and UAE. Geographic distance from most of those countries of origin; the cost of long-distance air travel; as well as the shift in the balance away from the family stream in favour of the skilled stream in the last decade, makes visiting homelands and connecting with family almost impossible for some new and emerging communities.
11. Research shows that people from overseas maintain transnational ties with many homelands based on community and family activities. Such ties contribute to a person's wellbeing and happiness. Older relatives may provide support by attending family or religious festivities as well as caring for disabled relatives and young children across the oceans as necessary. An increase and more flexible options in the intake of family members in all categories are desirable. ECCV believes it is still important to provide such entrants with the option to transition to permanent residence.

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12. ECCV is pleased to see that the Partner visa is the largest category under the family stream of the Migration Program, with an increase to 44,450 granted visas in 2010-2011. By Comparison 8,500 Parent visas and 3,450 Child visas have not grown significantly. In 2008-2009 there were 2,500 visas granted in the Other Family category which has dropped to 1,250 in 2010-2011. ECCV would like to see the Australian Migration Program acknowledge and respond to the transnational living reality of Australia's culturally diverse population by increasing the intake of these categories.

Recommendation 3

More flexible and temporary approaches to family migration that support informal transnational networks with the option of transition to permanent residence.

English Language Points Test

13. Currently the points test requires a very high level of English skills. This is not always required of local workers and assessment bodies, particularly in the trades' arena where lower levels of English would be acceptable. In addition family members should not have to comply with unreasonably high levels of English.

Recommendations 4

- i) That family stream applicants be allowed to comply with lower levels of English skills.
- ii) That the English skills level be lowered for some occupations.

Permanent Residence Pathways

14. ECCV has community feedback about underemployment of people from emerging communities, even in the skilled migration sector, which is against the very aims of the program. Whilst we do not want the European guest worker model, the shift in the emphasis on employer sponsored situations creates vulnerability for many workers who depend on those sponsors for their visa as well as for sponsoring them to a transition to permanent residence. There is evidence of exploitation in these situations.
15. ECCV would like to see improved and easier pathways from temporary visas to permanent residence. Citizenship is a key factor in creating social inclusion and participation. Policies relating to both permanent and temporary migration need to develop, particularly in the context of the debate over a sustainable population. The family stream should provide flexible visas that support transnational ties such as caring for the elderly, sick and children. On the other hand the skilled stream should lead to permanent migration and avoid the complexities of guest worker situations.

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Recommendation 5

That the pathways from temporary to permanent migration be strengthened.

SkillSelect

16. ECCV welcomes the introduction of the SkillSelect as a new online skilled migrant selection register that will ensure Australia can select the best and brightest skilled people from a pool of prospective migrants. ECCV applauds such a system designed to select the skilled migrants who will make the optimum economic contribution to Australia and recognises the nation-building benefits of the broader range of skills and attributes that will focus on:

- better English levels
- more extensive skilled employment
- higher level qualifications obtained in Australia and overseas
- better targeted age ranges

It is important that the proposed online system of migration entry operates efficiently and effectively.

Recommendation 6

That the new online system be adequately supported by Information Computer Technology (ICT) resources.

17. ECCV looks forward to faster visa processing under the proposed SkillSelect reforms to ensure that migrants meet the specific needs of the economy and fill gaps in the labour market where and when they exist. As it is a new intake system, ECCV recommends regular reviews of SkillSelect to ascertain whether these reforms will have the desired effect of filling critical shortages in the Australian labour market.

18. ECCV understands that all prospective skilled migrants seeking an independent, family sponsored or state or territory sponsored visa will need to submit an online Expression of Interest (EOI) and then be issued with an invitation in order to lodge a visa application.

19. ECCV supports the new SkillSelect system that would enable prospective skilled migrants seeking employer sponsored visas to submit an EOI even if they have not yet found an employer to sponsor them.

20. ECCV expects that a person making an online EOI would be ranked in accordance with the skilled migration points test to assess a skilled migrant's level of 'human capital' by their age, level of qualifications, English language ability and work experience. It is important that the

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prescribed pass mark for a points tested visa category only represent the minimum standard required. This would ensure that the best applicants in each occupation are identified and selected first.

Recommendation 7

That the SkillSelect process and impact be regularly reviewed with broad-based community consultation.

21. ECCV believes it is important to note that the person who applies to migrate in the skilled stream, is often accompanied by dependent family members rather than other skilled migrants. ECCV has found in the previous years that the majority of places under the Migration Program were allocated to the skilled stream.
22. ECCV acknowledges the value of a streamlined system such as SkillSelect whereby prospective migrants first make an online EOI for skilled migration to Australia and may then be invited by the department to make a skilled migration visa application. ECCV recommends that the numbers of EOIs in the family stream categories be monitored to assess the length of time they stay in the system and on what basis they receive an invitation.

Recommendation 8

That a fair system of migration application be maintained for the family stream in the Migration Program.

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