

**ECCV Submission
on the conduct of the 2014 Victorian State Election
to the Victorian Parliament's Electoral Matters Committee**

July 2015

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the voice of multicultural Victoria. As the peak body for ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria, we are proud to have been the key advocate for culturally diverse communities in the state since 1974. During this time, we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community.

The ECCV is a member driven organization that advocates and lobbies all levels of government on behalf of multicultural communities in areas such as human rights, access and equity, service improvement, addressing racism and discrimination, community harmony, employment, education and training, health and community services, disability, child protection, law and justice, and arts and culture. We advocate on the issues that are of most concern to our members.

The ECCV is very pleased to have been invited to contribute to the inquiry into the conduct of the 2014 Victorian State Election. The ECCV supports any initiative whose aim is the empowerment of people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD) to exercise their democratic rights.

The ECCV is not able to provide comments on the conduct of the 2014 Victorian State Election but reiterate some of the recommendations it made to the Local Government Electoral Review Panel in 2013.

Involving local government in improving electoral knowledge and civic engagement

Due to the increasing number of people from CALD backgrounds settling in both rural and metropolitan regions, the ECCV believes that it is unrealistic to expect one organisation (the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC)) to be the only entity delivering electoral information in the period leading up to elections¹. In addition, it is of the view that promotion of electoral participation and civic engagement within CALD communities should not just be confined to the months leading up to elections, but instead be conducted on a regular basis, with local governments playing a significant role in this process. We commend the VEC's efforts to enhance CALD communities' engagement in democratic process. However, we would like local governments play a more active role in assisting these communities access electoral information for the following reasons;

- the involvement of local government would enhance information accessibility for CALD communities;
- local government is more accessible to migrant communities and often their first point of contact with government through a range of social programs.

¹ ECCV, *ECCV Submission to the Local Government Electoral Review Panel*, 2013, p. 3-4.

Recommendation 1

That the delivery of electoral information should not be confined to election periods, but instead conducted on a regular basis and in conjunction with other education and community activities provided local governments.

Recommendation 2

That local government plays a more active role in the delivery of electoral information sessions.

Celebrating Democracy Week

Celebrating Democracy Week is an initiative introduced by the Australian Government and primarily focuses on youth's civic engagement and participation in democratic process. It consists of inviting schools around Australia to organise activities that promote democratic principles and values (e.g. conducting debates on issues of concern to young people and wider Australians, holding mock elections and parliaments etc.). The ECCV believes that this initiative is not known to the general public and needs to be widely celebrated as occurs in Canada where a series of activities are organised across Canada to mark the occasion. The support for Democracy has been declining in Australia² and an event like this could reverse the trend, possibly paving the way to opportunities for Australians from all backgrounds to reflect on themes such as 'is voting the only time I can have my voice heard?', 'what it means to be Australian? ECCV envisions benefits in raising the profile of this celebration, as it may trigger interest in elections and political activity in communities, especially culturally diverse communities, potentially leading to increased electoral participation and improving social cohesion.

Recommendation 3

That the profile of Democracy Week be raised and promoted within Victoria.

For more information, please contact Me'ad Assan, Policy Officer on 03 9349 4122 or massan@eccv.org.au

²O'Neill M, *Poll data reveals Australia's waning interest in politics, decline in support for democracy*, Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) Online, 2014 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-08-11/poll-data-reveals-waning-interest-in-politics/5662568>, (accessed 6 July 2015).