

# Multicultural Australia – The Next Steps: Towards and Beyond 2000

National Multicultural Advisory Council  
Multicultural Australia - The Next Steps:  
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## **A report of the National Multicultural Advisory Council**

### ***Preface***

This report presents the results of the National Multicultural Advisory Council's (the Council) review and update of the 1989 **National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia**. Much work contained in the National Agenda is still in progress. This report is therefore not an attempt to rewrite the National Agenda; but rather six years down the track to evaluate progress in implementing the Recommendations of the National Agenda, and to place before the Government some Recommendations on what the Council believes still needs to be done as we move into the twenty-first century.

In October 1994, the Government requested the Council to undertake this review as one of its first tasks and report its findings by mid-1995. This commissioning of the report reflects the desirability of conducting ongoing evaluation of Government policy and programmes. The subject of multiculturalism is an important one for the Australian community and must be open to public discussion and debate with full community involvement. The National Multicultural Advisory Council comprises people with a diverse range of backgrounds and experience relevant to the terms of reference it was given by the Government. In undertaking its work, Council members also greatly benefited from the input they received from people in the wider community they consulted.

Against this background, the Council has re-examined and then built on the National Agenda. The Council believes this report provides a timely contribution to the further discussion of these important issues and hopes that its deliberations will help inform the debate and become a reference point for future discussion.

Importantly, this report was developed against the backdrop of the High Court's Mabo decision on land rights for Australia's Indigenous peoples, and in midst of the reconciliation process. These developments are of profound importance, not only for a multicultural Australia, but also for the continuing evolution of our national identity. Such considerations have at their heart the very nature of Australian identity. These are issues relevant to all Australians.

Recent years have seen a great deal of discussion about what Australian society might be like in the year 2000 and beyond. The Council believes that in a world of rapid change, new opportunities for obtaining further benefits from our multicultural society will continue to be found, and that we should strive to identify and overcome any remaining impediments to true Access and Equity for all Australians.

The multicultural agenda should keep pace with the contemporary issues facing our society, while remaining firmly based on the fundamental principles reaffirmed in this report. To this end the Council believes that it will be important to repeat this type of update of multicultural policies on a regular basis, possibly every five years. This will also help to galvanise both public focus on, and appropriate policy responses to the important issues that will no doubt continue to emerge in our competitive Australian society.

Two points should be made at the outset. Firstly, multicultural and Indigenous policies have been traditionally viewed separately. Indigenous peoples are a unique group in Australian society and their needs and interests warrant special consideration, especially in view of the application of principles of self-determination. Clearly, this report was written at a time of great change in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in a range of areas, including health and codes of law.

The Council, benefiting in its deliberations from having Indigenous representation, believes it is important for all Australians to work together to achieve an inclusive society which accepts the uniqueness and individuality of all its constituent members. The unique position of Indigenous peoples, their right to self-determination, and the need at times of a distinction between Indigenous and other policies are acknowledged in this report. The Council believes that in working together on areas of common concern and policy overlap, the development of a fair, productive and harmonious society becomes more possible.

Secondly, the Council is mindful of the somewhat different interpretations attached to the term multiculturalism. Some incorrectly see it as a policy for 'ethnics' as opposed to being equally relevant to the Australian-born. For others, the rights which are associated with multicultural principles are often emphasised at the expense of the obligations, which are equally important. Multiculturalism describes not only the cultural and ethnic diversity of contemporary Australia, but it is also a policy for managing diversity for the benefit of all Australians.

On the eve of a new century, we should take stock of our present experience and status as a multicultural society in recognition of the problems being experienced in a number of other countries. While clearly there is still some way to go, much has been achieved in a fairly short space of time. We need to continue to move forward.

The report comprises two volumes. Volume 1 summarises progress in the various areas of multicultural policy set out in the National Agenda, and makes recommendations which aim to meet the demands and opportunities presented by multicultural Australia in the late 1990s. Volume 2 provides a more detailed review of the implementation and performance of measures announced in the National Agenda and the developments since then, as well as providing further detailed background supporting information on these issues.

Some of the recommendations in this report aim at building this sense of pride in our multicultural heritage. Others are aimed at increasing community openness to new and evolving aspects of our identity as a nation. The remainder are aimed at further improvement.

It is hoped that this **National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia** update will provide the Government with a range of broad recommendations it can consider implementing in order to further enhance the benefits and responsibilities that flow from being an Australian in the twenty-first century. Some of these strategies need to be further developed. Others provide a challenge for change.

For its part, the National Multicultural Advisory Council looks forward to continuing its active involvement in pursuing these issues which are central to the future development of our national aspirations and well-being.

Mick Young  
Chairman  
27 June 1995.

## **Recommendations - A Summary**

### **Recommendation 1**

The Council recommends that, further building on the demonstrated support for multiculturalism, emanating from all the States and Territories in Australia through the Council of Ministers for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, the Commonwealth Government reaffirm its commitment to the principles and the concept of multiculturalism containing both rights and obligations as outlined in the 1989 **National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia** , viz:

- (i) the obligation that all Australians should have an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia, to its interests and future first and foremost;
- (ii) the obligation of all Australians to accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society - the Constitution and the rule of law, tolerance and equality, Parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language, and equality of the sexes;
- (iii) the right of all Australians to equality of life chances, treatment and opportunity including participation in decisions which directly affect them;
- (iv) the right of all Australians to have access to and an equitable share of government resources;
- (v) the right of all Australians to live in a society free from barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender or place of birth;
- (vi) the opportunity for all Australians to acquire and develop proficiency in English and languages other than English, and to develop cross-cultural

understanding;

- (vii) the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including their language and religion (In 1989 the phrase 'within carefully defined limits' was used to qualify the commitment to freedom of expression in relation to cultural heritage. In the Council's view, these limits are adequately defined under other principles which specify the obligations of multiculturalism. The phrase is therefore superfluous and has been deleted.);
- (viii) the obligations to accept that the right to express one's own culture and beliefs involves a reciprocal responsibility to accept the right of others to express their views and values;
- (ix) the need to maintain, develop and utilise effectively the skills and talents of all Australians, regardless of background; and
- (x) the obligation of all institutions to acknowledge, respect and respond to Australia's cultural diversity.

### **Recommendation 2**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth Government seek the Council of Australian Governments' endorsement of these multicultural principles as integral to good public policy and administration across all spheres of government in Australia.

### **Recommendation 3**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth Government undertake a mainstream media information campaign, in conjunction with its State and Territory counterparts, which clearly explains to the Australian community the principles and policies of multiculturalism. This information campaign should be focused around the issues

raised in this report, and should have the following clearly defined goals:

- (i) sensitisation of the Australian community to the benefits for all Australians of multiculturalism;
- (ii) promotion of the principles of multiculturalism as outlined in the 1989 National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia and Recommendation 1 above;
- (iii) greater appreciation of the contribution that different migrant and Indigenous groups have made to our national development; and
- (iv) recognition of the significant contribution that Indigenous Australians have made to our multicultural Australia and their unique status as the first Australians.

#### **Recommendation 4**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth Government encourage further academic and literary exploration of the part played by Indigenous, migrant and refugee experiences in shaping an Australian sense of identity as a people and a nation, and to ensure that the results of this work are incorporated in community discussion and education relating to Australia's national identity. In so doing, relevant organisations such as the Australian Research Council, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and the Office of Multicultural Affairs should include these as priority areas for attention and funding.

#### **Recommendation 5**

The Council recommends that the knowledge and benefits of multicultural principles, and of the evolution of relations between different cultural groups in Australian society, be a key objective of education and that tertiary institutions be encouraged to adopt the same principles in course curriculum. This should

also be included in information and courses on citizenship for migrants. Information on compliance with this recommendation should be provided as a standing report item at meetings of the Council of Ministers for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. Reporting should be in conjunction with the relevant State/Territory education bodies.

#### **Recommendation 6**

The Council recommends that multicultural principles, together with recognition of the unique place of Indigenous peoples, be embodied in any possible revision of the Australian Constitution (for example in a preamble which might set out basic principles and values). Further, in the event of any decision to adopt a new flag, the Council recommends that design instructions incorporate the realities of our culturally diverse, yet inclusive society, reflecting both our Indigenous and immigrant heritage.

#### **Recommendation 7**

The Council recommends that civics education and citizenship, in their wider meaning, be considered core aspects of any discussion of national identity, the Centenary of Federation, the Republic, and other such initiatives.

#### **Recommendation 8**

The Council recommends that multicultural policy remain a distinctive area of government policy formulation and focus, so that cultural diversity becomes a way of life in public institutions and decision-making processes, whether in industry or the wider community. Consideration should be given to providing a mechanism for systematic reporting to Parliament (both Federal and State/Territory) on multicultural policies in the form of Ethnic Affairs Policy Statements.

#### **Recommendation 9**

The Council welcomes the active promotion of Australian citizenship in the community. The

Council also notes the Joint Standing Committee on Migration recommendation to allow Australian citizens to acquire dual citizenship. The Council believes the amendment of Section 17 of the **Australian Citizenship Act 1948** to allow dual citizenship is desirable.

#### **Recommendation 10**

All Australian citizens should be able to hold public office and accordingly, the Council recommends that this be addressed in any public discussions on revision to the Constitution.

#### **Recommendation 11**

The Council recommends that all Commonwealth Government agencies develop equal employment opportunity principles and strategies for achieving a more multicultural Australian Public Service, especially at middle and senior management levels, which better reflects Australia's culturally diverse population. This should include an examination of practices such as target-setting, as used by the Australia Council and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

#### **Recommendation 12**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth Government seek the agreement of the Council of Australian Governments to take cultural diversity into account in appointments to advisory bodies and government positions in all areas of public sector management. The Council further recommends that each level of government develop registers of suitably qualified people from ethnic and Indigenous communities to support this initiative. A mechanism for monitoring and reporting should be established.

#### **Recommendation 13**

The Council recommends that a Select Committee of Parliament be established to consider options for achieving greater

representation of Australia's Indigenous peoples in Parliament. In this context, the Council was cognisant of the proposal by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation for further consultation and discussion of the feasibility of reserving seats in Parliament for Indigenous peoples.

#### **Recommendation 14**

The Council recommends that the Special Broadcasting Service and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation be required to report explicitly in their Annual Reports or in a statement tabled in Parliament of efforts and progress made in meeting their charters. In particular, such reports to Parliament should specify the extent to which Australian cultural diversity is reflected in their programming, and on employment opportunities and outcomes for people from non-English speaking and Indigenous backgrounds.

#### **Recommendation 15**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth Government examine ways of encouraging commercial broadcasters to reflect in all aspects of their programming the realities of our diverse multicultural society.

#### **Recommendation 16**

The Council recommends that the Australian Broadcasting Authority, in conjunction with the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Department of Communications and the Arts and other relevant agencies, examine:

- (i) the coverage of multicultural issues in the media and communications courses offered by educational institutions;
- (ii) options for enhancing media employment opportunities for suitably qualified people from non-English speaking and Indigenous backgrounds;
- (iii) the establishment of a mechanism to monitor the employment, both on and

off screen and air, of people from non-English speaking and Indigenous backgrounds;

- (iv) options for improving the mainstream media's servicing of a multicultural community; and
- (v) the outcomes of commercial broadcasters' Codes of Practice in achieving their stated multicultural policy objectives.

#### **Recommendation 17**

The Council recommends that the Office of Multicultural Affairs, in conjunction with the Australian Broadcasting Authority, convene a working party of relevant broadcasting agencies to examine the advantages and disadvantages of the development of narrow and broad band broadcasting services for achieving multicultural policy objectives. The working party should recommend strategies to capitalise on the potential advantages as well as to overcome potential problems.

#### **Recommendation 18**

The Council recommends that the profound importance of the information technology revolution be factored into developments in multicultural policies and vice versa. Further work needs to be undertaken to ensure that the skills and opportunities provided by a multicultural society are fully utilised; and that conversely people from non-English speaking backgrounds are not disadvantaged in its introduction. To this end, these issues should be considered by the Commonwealth Government in the context of the work of the National Information Services Council.

#### **Recommendation 19**

The Council recommends that the Department of Environment, Sport and Territories, in conjunction with the Australian Sports Commission and the Office of Multicultural Affairs, continue to monitor the participation

rate of all elements of our multicultural society to ensure that no artificial barriers have been created, and that all groups have equal access to sports. Furthermore, the Council recommends that the Commonwealth Government ensure that sports funding and promotion take full cognisance of Australia's culturally diverse character.

#### **Recommendation 20**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments implement without further delay a national scheme for the registration of interpreters, including an endorsement system for specialist interpreters and translators, and uniform national legislation ensuring a right to an interpreter.

#### **Recommendation 21**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth Government establish a mechanism for consulting with end-users and relevant stakeholders on the operation of the Translating and Interpreting Service. In so doing, the Government should monitor and report on the adequacy and accessibility of services to clients, and through the Council of Ministers for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, ensure that common standards are adopted across the Commonwealth and States/Territories.

#### **Recommendation 22**

The Council commends the Commonwealth Government for introducing legislation aimed at preventing racial hatred likely to lead to violence against individuals or groups (based on their race, colour, national or ethnic origin).

#### **Recommendation 23**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments increase funding for school and community-based education programmes aimed at eliminating racism.

### **Recommendation 24**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth Government make the elimination of racism in sport a primary objective in its national sports policy, and supports the current strategy by the Government for sporting bodies to include the elimination of racism in their codes of conduct.

### **Recommendation 25**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth Government ensure that the Council of Australian Governments and other national ministerial councils implement arrangements which commit all spheres of government to Access and Equity principles and practices, and that Commonwealth funding be dependent upon this outcome. Further, the Council recommends that the Council of Ministers for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, in conjunction with the Australian Local Government Association, continue to develop national standards for Access and Equity, and agree to a national system for monitoring implementation of Access and Equity measures which includes the issue of collection and use of ethnicity data, and the production of an annual 'state of the nation' review of Access and Equity performance.

### **Recommendation 26**

In view of developments in media and communications technology, the Council recommends that the Commonwealth Government, through the Ministerial Committee on Government Information and Advertising or a working party of representatives from the main service delivery agencies, examine ways to use this new technology to make information on government services more accessible to every Australian home and community centre.

### **Recommendation 27**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth and State/Territory

governments make a more concerted effort to ensure disaggregated data is collected on a range of specific groups so that their needs are accordingly addressed. Such groups should include small immigrant communities, women, youth, the elderly, refugees and remote area communities.

### **Recommendation 28**

The Council encourages the removal of restrictive practices in the professions in Australia, a core component of which is the recognition of overseas qualifications. It recommends that Commonwealth and State/Territory employment, education, training and youth ministers initiate a public inquiry into the processes by which professional bodies assess and register overseas-trained Australian residents, with the aim of identifying and removing uncompetitive and inequitable practices.

### **Recommendation 29**

The Council recommends that the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition and Trades Recognition Australia, in conjunction with relevant higher education authorities, examine options for using new forms of information technology and international education services to facilitate recognition processes.

### **Recommendation 30**

The Council recommends that Commonwealth and State/Territory employment, education, training and youth ministers implement a 'one-stop-shop' approach to recognition processes and seek, wherever appropriate, the cooperation of relevant private sector and professional bodies.

### **Recommendation 31**

The Council recommends that the Department of Employment, Education and Training, in conjunction with the Office of Multicultural Affairs and relevant higher education, industry and management associations, ensure that

productive diversity principles are incorporated in management training throughout Australia.

### **Recommendation 32**

The Council recommends that Commonwealth and State/Territory employment, education, training and youth ministers continue to implement a national strategy for ensuring the effective use of the skills of overseas-trained Australians. Key objectives in the strategy would be an improvement in employer attitudes towards the overseas-trained and enhanced linkages between overseas skills recognition processes, labour market programmes and vocational training and experience.

### **Recommendation 33**

The Council recommends that the achievement of Access and Equity targets be a criterion in allocation of resources for vocational education and training by the Australian National Training Authority, and that the authority ensure data is collected which will enable such assessments to be made. Further, the Council recommends that the Australian National Training Authority, in conjunction with other relevant government agencies and union and industry bodies, initiate an education programme for all employees, especially new arrivals and employees from non-English speaking countries, explaining the aims of national training reforms and the importance of ongoing vocational education and training.

### **Recommendation 34**

The Council recommends that Commonwealth and State/Territory industrial relations ministers, in conjunction with union and employer bodies, initiate a national inquiry into the nature and conditions of the 'unofficial' labour market, and develop a national approach to address the needs of participants in this market.

### **Recommendation 35**

The Council recommends that improving the ability of all Australians to read, write and speak English be, unequivocally, the pre-eminent

objective of national language policy.

### **Recommendation 36**

The Council recommends that Commonwealth and State/Territory employment, education, training and youth ministers implement arrangements to monitor, on an ongoing basis, levels of English language and literacy in the Australian community as a basis for informed policy formulation.

### **Recommendation 37**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments, in the context of the National Collaborative Adult English Language and Literacy Strategy, act urgently to address unmet needs in English language and literacy provision. In particular, governments should support ethnic community organisations in identifying and responding to the language needs of their own communities.

### **Recommendation 38**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth Government in conjunction with State/Territory education departments undertake research on the profile of English as a second language needs in the school system. These findings should be used to assess the adequacy and utilisation of resources, and develop strategies in the school system to respond to the English as a second language needs of school students.

### **Recommendation 39**

The Council recommends that the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments expand support for workplace-based English language and literacy training. Further, the Council recommends that the Australian National Training Authority, in conjunction with State/Territory governments and the industry sector, ensure language and literacy and vocational training are integrated in the design and implementation of



State/Territory and relevant industry training profiles, and performance measures introduced against which progress can be measured.

#### **Recommendation 40**

The Council welcomes the decision of the Council of Australian Governments to implement a National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools Strategy and recommends that the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments continue to support the learning of community languages other than English as well as Asian languages.

#### **Recommendation 41**

The Council recommends that the Department of Employment, Education and Training support the States and Territories in developing resource material for schools which will enhance literacy in the cultures which comprise Australia's multicultural heritage, including the heritage of Indigenous Australians. Further, State and Territory governments should ensure that strategies to enhance cultural literacy are integrated with strategies for developing key competencies in general and vocational education and training.

#### **Recommendation 42**

The Council recommends that the Department of Employment, Education and Training, in conjunction with the Office of Multicultural Affairs, assess the progress which has been made by tertiary institutions in incorporating cultural literacy in professional disciplines. The Council further recommends that the Commonwealth Government consider funding institutions for the purpose of adapting programmes to make them culturally relevant.

#### **Recommendation 43**

The Council recommends that the Office of Multicultural Affairs facilitate the preparation of user-friendly educational documents based on the themes of this report for distribution to the general public, including community, sporting,

religious and school-based groups.

#### **Recommendation 44**

The Council believes that the natural corollary of Australia being a multicultural society is the need for our arts policies, programmes and companies to equally reflect, and indeed celebrate, our cultural diversity. The Council recommends that this reality be recognised in all future arts statements (whether made by Commonwealth, State/Territory or local governments); and be fully incorporated in the preparation and implementation of all major events reflecting on our national identity and on the Centenary of Federation and the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

#### **Recommendation 45**

The Council recommends that the Department of Employment, Education and Training, in consultation with the Office of Multicultural Affairs and relevant bodies such as the Australia Council and the Australian Film Commission:

- (i) examine options for monitoring the acceptance of students from non-English speaking and Indigenous backgrounds in arts training institutions funded by the Commonwealth Government; and
- (ii) develop a mechanism for monitoring the level of employment of Indigenous and non-English speaking background Australians in all aspects of the arts funded by the Commonwealth Government.

#### **Recommendation 46**

The Council recommends that the Department of Communications and the Arts, in conjunction with the Office of Multicultural Affairs and relevant Commonwealth and State/Territory bodies, review progress in implementing the 1991 **Plan for Cultural Heritage Institutions to Reflect Australia's Cultural Diversity** and develop and implement

a national strategy for the public presentation of Australia's multicultural history in the years to 2001.

**Recommendation 47**

The Council recommends that an important part of the National Museum of Australia should be a standing exhibition on the history of migration. The Council further recommends that there should also be a major travelling component designed to bring out to the Australian community the important contribution that Indigenous Australians and the successive waves of migrants have made to Australia's development.