

National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia

Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia...Sharing our Future Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1989, pp ix and 1.

The 1989 National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia presented a definition of multiculturalism, and eight goals that government should pursue:

What is Multiculturalism?

In a descriptive sense multicultural is simply a term which describes the cultural and ethnic diversity of contemporary Australia. We are, and will remain, a multicultural society.

As a public policy multiculturalism encompasses government measures designed to respond to that diversity. It plays no part in migrant selection. It is a policy for managing the consequences of cultural diversity in the interests of the individual and society as a whole.

The Commonwealth Government has identified three dimensions of multicultural policy:

- **cultural identity:** the right of all Australians, within carefully defined limits, to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including their language and religion;
- **social justice:** the right of all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity and the removal of barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender or place of birth; and
- **economic efficiency:** the need to maintain, develop and utilise effectively the skills and talents of all Australians, regardless of background.

These dimensions of multiculturalism are expressed in the eight goals articulated in the National Agenda. They apply equally to all Australians, whether Aboriginal, Anglo-Celtic or non-English speaking background; and whether they were born in Australia or overseas.

There are also limits to Australian multiculturalism. These may be summarised as follows:

- multicultural policies are based upon the premise that all Australians should have an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia, to its interests and future first and foremost;
- multicultural policies require 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; and
- multicultural policies impose obligations as well as conferring rights: the right to express one's own culture and beliefs involves reciprocal responsibility to accept the right of others to express their views and values.

As a necessary response to the reality of Australia's cultural diversity, multicultural policies aim to realise a better Australia characterised by an enhanced degree of social justice and economic efficiency.

Eight Goals of Multiculturalism

- 1 All Australians should have a commitment to Australia and share responsibility for furthering our national interests.
- 2 All Australians should be able to enjoy the basic right of freedom of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion or culture.
- 3 All Australians should enjoy equal life chances and have equitable access to and an equitable share of the resources which governments manage on behalf of the community.
- 4 All Australians should have the opportunity fully to participate in society and in the decisions which directly affect them.
- 5 All Australians should be able to develop and make use of their potential for Australia's economic and social development.
- 6 All Australians should have the opportunity to acquire and develop proficiency in English and languages other than English, and to develop cross-cultural understanding.
- 7 All Australians should be able to develop and share their cultural heritage.
- 8 Australian institutions should acknowledge, reflect and respond to the cultural diversity of the Australian community.