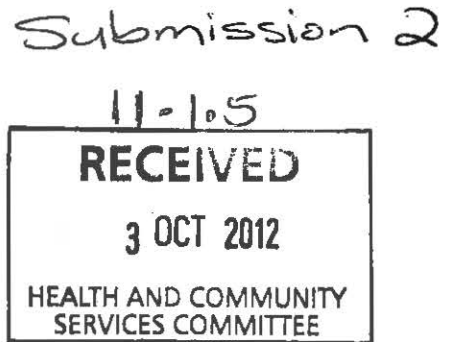


Thursday 27 September 2012

Our ref: CEO/042/180912

Mr Peter Dowling MP
Chair
Health and Community Services Committee
Parliament House
George St
Brisbane QLD 4000



Level 4
1 Little Collins Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
Telephone 03 9938 4000
Facsimile 03 9938 4600

Head Office
GPO Box 4381
Melbourne VIC 3001
ABN 49 056 993 913
www.ames.net.au

Dear Mr Dowling

RE: MULTICULTURAL RECOGNITION BILL 2012

Thank you for your letter of September 19 and the opportunity to comment on the Multicultural Recognition Bill 2012.

AMES has been involved for more than sixty years in the reception, settlement and training of new arrivals to Victoria. Through on-arrival settlement support, English language and literacy training, vocational training and employment services we support more than 40,000 refugees and migrants each year across Victoria. AMES direct relationship with these communities provides us with a unique insight into the settlement experiences of new arrivals; and also of the strengths and skills refugees and migrants have contributed to a successful multicultural Victoria over many years.

A critical aspect of the successful settlement of migrants and refugees is the nature of their initial and early reception in the community. This may be expressed at a personal, individual level, at the local community level, and at a service delivery level. It is also evidenced at the level of Government through the provision of the conditions for a safe and inclusive environment for its citizens.

AMES supports the recognition and promotion of diversity and inclusion, as articulated in the Purposes of the proposed Act. Legislation which promotes and supports the economic, social and cultural aspects of a diverse population sends a positive message to both new arrivals and the broader existing community. AMES believes the legislative basis for the establishment of a Multicultural Charter, Advisory Council and Action Plan strengthens the potential for positive reception and effective longer term settlement of migrants and refugees in the broader community.

Secondly, AMES experience is that participation is the single most important element in achieving successful multiculturalism. While the key to participation for many people is paid employment, participation may take a number of other equally valuable forms such as voluntary work, participating in the local community, participating in sport or other recreational groups or taking a role in school communities. Such participation means people can interact on an individual basis, and have the opportunity to contribute. In this way, opinions based on stereotyping of groups by the media, popular opinion and other sources are counteracted.

The reference to "creating opportunities to encourage participation of people from diverse backgrounds in the cultural, economic, political and social life of Queensland" in the proposed Multicultural Charter directly provides for such participation to be realised. For newly arrived refugees and migrants in particular these opportunities for participation are critical to settlement and acceptance within the community.

The proposed legislation in Queensland is a positive step in furthering the social inclusion agenda across Australia. AMES supports the intent and content of the Multicultural Recognition Bill 2012.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Scarth', written in a cursive style.

Catherine Scarth
CEO AMES