

Submission 009

11.1.5

Received 4-10-12

Health and Community Services Committee



Migration Institute
of Australia

4 October 2012

Mr Peter Dowling, MP
Chair
Health and Community Services Committee
By email: hcsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Dowling,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Health and Community Services Committee in relation to its examination of a *Multicultural Recognition Bill 2012*. Please find attached a submission from the National Office of the Migration Institute of Australia (MIA).

The MIA is the peak body for migration advice professionals, representing more than 2200 Registered Migration Agents (RMAs) across Australia and overseas. The MIA holds interests in all areas of migration policy development and would appreciate the opportunity to contribute to future consultations regarding the Inquiry.

If you wish to discuss or have any questions in relation to this submission, please contact MIA Executive Officer Pallavi Sinha on (02) 9249 9000.

Yours sincerely,



Maureen Horder
Chief Executive Officer
The Migration Institute of Australia

The Migration Institute of Australia (MIA) supports the objectives of the *Multicultural Recognition Bill* (the Bill) to recognise the diversity of the people of Queensland and the valuable contribution of diverse groups to the Queensland community, to promote Queensland as a united, harmonious and inclusive community and to ensure that government services are responsive to that diversity.

The MIA has a keen interest in Government policy and implementation in respect of multiculturalism and believes that it is a key issue for the Government to engage with.

The Institute is a professional body whose vision is for a society where migration to Australia is valued and the professionalism of MIA members is recognised by all stakeholders. Migrants comprise more than 60 percent of the MIA's membership – more than double their representation in Australia's resident population. The Institute has long supported the basic tenets of multiculturalism, such as mutual understanding and respect. MIA Members understand and respect the social, cultural and economic benefits of migration to Australia, and recognise that multiculturalism must be supported and resourced to maximise the positive benefits of migration. Such support must be bipartisan, focussing on beneficial outcomes for members of diverse cultural communities and for Australian society at large.

Australia's multiculturalism initiatives must encourage the individuality and distinctiveness of all of the diverse peoples and cultures within Australia, while ensuring that all are committed to the common good of all Australians. As stated by Prime Minister Julia Gillard,

*"Multiculturalism is not just the ability to maintain our diverse backgrounds and cultures. It is the meeting place of rights and responsibilities ... True multiculturalism includes, not divides."*¹

The contribution of diaspora communities to Australia's relationships with Europe, the UK, Middle East and the immediate Asia-Pacific Region is significant. Migrants and their descendants have a very important role in the development and maintenance of relationships between Australia and its neighbours. The networks and contacts maintained particularly by skilled and business migrants to Australia are of enormous benefit for trade and diplomacy. Another of Australia's strengths in its dealings with other nations is the vast resource of individuals and communities with deep understanding of the cultures of those nations and fluency in their languages. The linguistic diversity of Australia has been frequently remarked upon, and is an asset to be protected, without overlooking the need for all Australians to have the opportunity of increasing their facility in English.

¹ Prime Minister Julia Gillard, Australian Multicultural Council Lecture, Introductory remarks, Parliament House, Canberra, 19 September 2012.

More specific to Queensland, Dr Hossein Adibi, stated that Muslims in Queensland face issues such as perceived and real racism, perceived and real discrimination, lack of access to information on government and community services, employers' attitude to Muslims, lack of relevant training opportunities, and lack of adequate settlement services.² He also cited statistics from the ABS Population Census 2006, that indicate that unemployment among Muslims in the suburbs of South East Brisbane is on average more than twice the rate of non-Muslim unemployment in the same suburbs. Such figures highlight the need for the Queensland Government to address faced by specific cultural groups, through steps such as the introduction of the Bill.

It is the view of the Institute that the Bill is a commendable starting point from which to position multiculturalism on the agenda for social inclusion initiatives, and to bring Queensland into line with other states such as NSW, Victoria and South Australia which have existing principle-based legislation regarding multiculturalism. The Institute submits that the Bill should be taken as a starting point, rather than the definitive answer to the social inclusion of diverse cultures in Australian life. Attention should be given to ascertaining the needs and challenges of Australians of diverse cultural backgrounds, and assisting them to take part in wider Australian culture while maintaining their distinctive cultural and linguistic heritage.

There is a danger that the concept of multiculturalism can limit the potentialities that can come from a society composed of peoples from a multitude of diverse backgrounds and cultures, if it is simply seen as different cultural groups living in harmony together.

When different cultural groups live together in harmony, one of two things may happen:

- (a) People have shifted geographic location, but stay in the same place mentally and culturally, or
- (b) People may adapt and develop, and a process which has been described as 'transculturalism' takes place.

When people "stay in the same place", multiculturalism means little more than tokenistic celebrations of diverse cultures through celebratory days and festivals when we share each other's cuisine, music and dancing. In that sense, multiculturalism at best encourages stereotypes, and at worst encourages divisiveness.

When people adapt and develop, they bring the best of their culture to the new society in which they find themselves, and they, and their new society, become something different, which has elements of each culture, but at the same time is a new culture.

It is not an acquisition of culture or a loss of culture. It is not a co-existence of cultures. It is a convergence or evolution of culture, and it is a personal and social transformation which has occurred throughout the history of human migration.

² Dr Hossein Adibi, Queensland University of Technology, Speech at MIA Migration Conference 2012.

The extent to which Australia has become a society of many different cultures, and maybe becoming a divided society, deserves greater research.

The extent to which Australia should, or could, become a “new” transcultural society, and how that might be achieved, should also be considered by the Committee.

Conclusion

The MIA supports the Bill as a positive step towards recognising and maintaining a regard for and commitment to support multiculturalism. State support for multicultural policies which recognise the value of migration and the cultural diversity it brings to the Australian community and to Australia’s economic development is necessary, for our community to flourish and prosper. Multiculturalism has been demonstrated, when adopted as public policy, as greatly benefitting Australia.