

# Report of the Committee of Review of AIMA

Committee of Review of AIMA Committee of Review of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs - Report to the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (Vol 1) Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1983. pp iv and 1-7.

Soon after its election in 1983, the Labor government initiated a review of AIMA in response to the criticism that had been levelled against the Institute; it did however, fully endorse the Institute's own recommendations in the Evaluation of the Galbally Report.

## Terms of Reference for the Committee of Review of AIMA

The review of the operation and administration of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA) is to be made having regard to:

- a) the Government's basic approach to the needs for and functions of public authorities (Labor and Quality of Government Policy Statement of February, 1983 refers);
- b) the Government's immigration and community relations policy statement, which inter alia,
  - i. recognises that Australia is a multicultural society;
  - ii. recognises the right of each ethnic community to retain its culture, language and lifestyle;
  - iii. affirms that all residents should have equal rights and opportunities to achieve total participation in Australian society; and
  - iv. declares that improved community

relations must be positively encouraged.

The Committee of Review of AIMA is to consider and report to the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs within three months of its establishment on:

- a) whether AIMA has been efficient and effective in meeting its statutory objects and functions; and
- b) having regard to the Government's policy, whether any changes in objects, functions or administrative arrangements are desirable.

## Members

- Moss Cass, (Melbourne) Chairman, who was minister for Environment and Conservation from 1972 to 1975 and Minister for the Media in 1975. Subsequently, he was ALP spokesman on Immigration and Ethnic Affairs
- Eva Cox (Sydney/Canberra) a research consultant and formerly Director of the New South Wales Council of Social Service;
- DL Jayasuriya (Perth) Professor and Head of Department of Social Work and Administration, University of Western Australia. He is a former member of the Commonwealth Government's Immigration Advisory Council (1972 - 75);
- Alan Matheson (Melbourne) Ethnic Liaison officer with the ACTU and Chairman of the Australian Council of Churches Commission and Community Relations

# Chapter 1

## Summary of main recommendations

This chapter is a summary of the main recommendations and further details will be found together with cognate or subsidiary proposals in Chapters 8 and 9.

### 1. Transitional arrangements

1.1 The Report of the Committee of Review should be tabled in the Parliament as early as possible and then made available for public discussion. Translations of abstracts of Volume I should be made available in community languages.

1.2 The Council of the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs should not undertake any new projects until the appointment of members due on 20 December 1983.

1.3 The new Council should be directed by the Minister to:

- a) conduct extensive consultations in the community with interested ethnic and other groups and individuals over the period till 30 June 1984, on the Report of the Committee of Review of AIMA;
- b) report to the Minister and the Parliament on the outcome of these consultations before the government determines its response and formulates appropriate legislation;
- c) complete or wind down existing programs in the most appropriate way;
- d) recommend a budget for the financial year 1984/85;
- e) review and assess all the data now held by AIMA and, taking any research contract provisions into account,

arrange for the early public release and dissemination of all data.

1.4 The Minister should direct COPAPS and DIEA to report on the implementation of AIMA recommendations on Galbally programs which might disadvantage service providers.

### 2. Establishing a new body - guiding principles

2.1 AIMA should be replaced by a new independent statutory authority, designated as a 'Commission', located within the portfolio of the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs. The Commission should be accountable to the Parliament through the Minister.

2.2 The legislation establishing the Commission should encompass the following three principles:

- (a) Accountability to Parliament
  - (i) The Commission should be directly accountable, through the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, to the Parliament and the public.
  - (ii) A Standing Committee on Ethnic and Community Relations should be established by resolution of the House of Representatives, which should, in addition to examining all reports from the new Commission and making recommendations for action on any proposals arising from these reports or elsewhere, inquire into and report on matters relating to the circumstances of the ethnic communities and the effect of policies and programs on them as referred to it by resolution of the House or by the Minister.
- (b) Relationship to States/Territories

The Commission, as a national structure, should act with due regard to the interests and concerns of the States/ Territories and involve them

actively in its work. The Commission should relate to the three levels of government including State Ethnic Affairs Commissions and community groups, and be empowered to act as a national co-ordinating body in the field of multicultural affairs.

(c) Participation

Participation of and consultation with the community should be integral elements of all the activities of the Commission.

### 3. Objects and functions

The Committee recommends the following objects and functions for the Commission:

#### 3.1 Objects

- a) To promote equity and access for those whom society disadvantages because of their ethnic or cultural differences;
- b) to combat prejudice and discrimination against members of cultural and ethnic minority groups;
- c) to promote understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity, mutual esteem and harmonious relations within the Australian community;
- d) to promote, within a just and cohesive society, the full and equal participation by all residents of Australia, of whatever cultural or ethnic background.

#### 3.2 Functions

In pursuing the above objects, the Commission shall:

- a) report to Parliament through the Minister on requests for advice from the Minister or on other matters requiring legislation and/or other

action;

- b) monitor and report on the social, economic and political impact of legislation, programs and services and examine issues relating to diverse cultural and ethnic groups in Australian society;
- c) liaise, consult and co-operate with, and assist other bodies concerned with multicultural and ethnic affairs;
- d) represent the interests of cultural and ethnic minority groups;
- e) maintain close and continuing contact with trade unions and employer organizations in relation to the work force of non-English-speaking background;
- f) assist the development of ethnic communities to enable them to act as advocates on their own behalf;
- g) initiate, conduct and support community education activities and promote community relations;
- h) encourage, resource and co-ordinate information collection, access and dissemination;
- i) inform the community of the activity and programs of the Commission, by all means of information dissemination, including newsletters, conferences, discussion papers and the media;
- j) determine research needs and priorities, and conduct, fund, co-ordinate and promote relevant research;
- k) facilitate and support the maintenance of the cultural heritage of the Australian community;

- l) undertake any other activity incidental or conducive to the performance of any of the foregoing functions.

3.3 The Commission should give priority to:

- a) activities in research, community education or information dissemination which seek to achieve equity of access and outcomes for the most disadvantaged cultural and ethnic groups including combating racism;
- b) promoting the rights of those whom society disadvantages because of their ethnic or cultural identification;
- c) co-operating with appropriate organizations, including trade unions, to investigate, identify and seek to remedy the exploitation of migrant workers, especially women outworkers.

#### **4. Powers of commission and minister**

4.1 In fulfilling the above objects and functions, the Commission should be empowered to examine and report to Parliament on proposed and current legislation, policies and programs and their differential impact on ethnic groups.

4.2 The Commission should initiate recommendations (with research backing where necessary) on policy relating to any of its objects.

4.3 The legislation should require notice of any requests or specific direction from the government to the Commission to be given in the Parliament by the Minister, and be operative only if the notice has not been withdrawn or rescinded within a specified time, and any requests or directions should be recorded in the Commission's Annual Report.

#### **5. Membership of commission**

5.1 The governing body of the Commission should consist of a number of members

(Commissioners) appointed by the Minister and other members (Commissioners) nominated or elected, and should not exceed 17 persons, details to be determined after consultations.

5.2 Members of the Commission, except the Chief Executive, should hold office for a period of three years and be eligible to serve for one further term. The system of appointment should ensure both continuity and change of membership.

5.3 Formal consultations should be held with representative bodies of Aboriginal people to devise mechanisms by which Aboriginal interests could be represented in the structure of the Commission.

5.4 State/Territory Committees of the Commission should be created and the process of selection/appointment/election of the Commissioners should ensure a direct relationship between the Commission and the State Committees.

5.5 The members of each State Committee should meet at least once a year and there should be regular national meetings of the members of all State Committees, or their representatives, with the Commission.

5.6 Members of the Commission as well as the State Committees should be as representative as possible of the diverse cultural backgrounds of the community. There should also be a balanced representation of ages, sex, occupations, interests and skills. Members should serve in their own right, and not as representatives of any particular group or organization.

5.7 The State Committees, in promoting the objects and functions of the Commission at the State level, should have no executive power in their own right and should not act in the name of the Commission unless specifically empowered to do so by and on behalf of the Commission.

## **6. Management**

6.1 The Commissioners shall manage the affairs of the Commission, which should have the power to delegate any or all of its functions except the power of delegation. It should meet regularly, at least six times a year, and the Commission or its Executive should meet at times in all major cities in Australia.

6.2 An Executive, consisting of the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson and three other Commissioners, should be responsible for the day-to-day affairs of the Commission between meetings.

6.3 The Commission should be required, by legislation, to have:

- a) a regular system of efficiency and effectiveness audits;
- b) equal opportunity programs, including affirmative action;
- c) employee participation;
- d) annual reports, along the lines of those recommended by the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Government Operations;
- e) program budgeting;
- f) forward financial programming on a five-year basis;
- g) forward operational plans included in its annual report.

6.4 The Commission should have the power under its Act to receive endowments, bequests and other grants from benefactors, and have the power to disperse those funds in appropriate ways such as the establishment of scholarships, research and travel awards and the like.

## **7. Chief executive**

7.1 The Chief Executive should be a full-time statutory office-holder appointed according to standard selection procedures and with qualifications appropriate for a statutory authority concerned with multicultural affairs.

7.2 The Minister should designate the Chief Executive as either the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of the Commission. The Chief Executive should hold office for five years with the possibility of re-appointment for a further two years.

7.3 Whichever of the two positions of Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson is not designated as the Chief Executive, should be part-time and filled either by the Commission electing one of its number, or by the Minister appointing one of the Commissioners or some other person.

7.4 The Chief Executive should have the powers of a Permanent Head under the Public Service Act 1922 in relation to the staff employed by and subject to the approval of the Commission.

7.5 The Chief Executive should be subject to the direction of the Commission.

## **8. Committees**

8.1 The Commission shall have the power to appoint Committees, covering community education, research, etc. The legislation should specify the manner of appointment, mode of operation and their accountability, and the Commission shall delegate the necessary powers to enable them to perform the specific tasks and activities assigned within the objects and functions of the Act.

8.2 Each Committee should be chaired by a Commissioner and should have the power to co-opt, subject to the approval of the Commission. The Chief Executive should be an ex-officio member of each Committee.

## **9. Community education**

9.1 The Commission should promote, co-operate with and resource the involvement of ethnic and other community groups in community education.

9.2 The Commission should disseminate information to the community on ethnic and multicultural affairs through educational activities such as seminars, lectures and conferences.

9.3 The Commission should develop expertise in community education and community relations by employing appropriate staff, and endeavour to co-operate and share resources with other groups to develop effective programs.

9.4 The Commission should collaborate with appropriate federal, state and non-government organizations in developing the most effective structure and responsibilities for community education and community relations programs.

9.5 The Commission should operate a grants program as a means of actively supporting, encouraging and resourcing community groups and organizations engaged in combating prejudice, discrimination and racism in the workplace and in the community.

## **10. Information**

10.1 The Commission should serve as a national clearing house on ethnic and multicultural affairs by establishing amongst other activities, a computerised national information collection/dissemination network linking existing networks and by providing support for easily accessible local information/resource centres.

10.2 The library/documentation service of the Commission should be widely available to scholars and members of the community interested in research in ethnic affairs and it should include an Australia-wide register of research in progress and completed.

## **11. Cultural heritage**

11.1 The Commission should encourage and support local, state and national organizations (State libraries and museums, the Museum of Australia) to ensure that such repositories reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community, but where appropriate, community initiatives in the development of ethnic archives should also be encouraged and facilitated.

11.2 The Commission should be represented on the controlling bodies of relevant public authorities, such as the Museum of Australia, the Australia Council and the Australian Heritage Commission.

## **12. Research**

12.1 The Commission should conduct a research grants program and offer consultancy support to community groups. It should initiate and facilitate research relevant to the achievement of its objects, by undertaking, or calling tenders for research.

12.2 There should be a Research Advisory Committee consisting of experts in the field of ethnic research and other members of the community interested in promoting such research. The research program should be determined by the Commission in conjunction with its Research Advisory Committee and should be relevant to the Commission's priorities.

12.3 The Commission's internal research staff should be the minimum required for viability of a research unit necessary to underpin the work of the Commission, and the Research Advisory Committee should have staff qualified to provide consultancy support to community groups.

12.4 Each research project initiated or promoted by the Commission should be supervised by its own project advisory committee appointed by the Research Advisory Committee and there should be strict guidelines for funding,

monitoring, supervision and rights of ownership of data.

12.5 The Commission should provide funding for action research or demonstration projects. Further development of these projects should be the responsibility of appropriate government departments or agencies.