

Multicultural Australia: the way forward

National Multicultural Advisory Council,
Multicultural Australia: the way forward,
Canberra, Department of Immigration and
Multicultural Affairs, 1997.

An Issues Paper by the National Multicultural Advisory Council

December 1997

Message from the Minister

Australia is a country uniquely defined by its people, its land and its Indigenous inheritance.

We have been able to build upon the richness and strengths of many cultures to create a nation of which we can all be justifiably proud. As we move into the closing years of this century, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that our legacy is one that future generations can build upon to surpass the great achievements of our past.

This is not to say there have been no problems, either in the process of nation building or now, but our traditions of fair play and tolerance have given us a community as diverse in its origins, as it is united in its common humanity. There is no better time to build upon multicultural policy and to make sure that it continues to work in the national interest throughout the coming decades.

The National Multicultural Advisory Council, which I have appointed to advise me on such matters, has produced this issues paper aimed at promoting open, constructive and factual debate on the nature of our multicultural society and the way in which it can be moved forward. Importantly, the Council is keen to ensure that our cultural diversity is understood as a unifying force for all Australians.

The issues paper reminds us that what unites our culturally diverse society is not necessarily a common birthplace, but a common commitment to the things we value as a national community.

I urge you to read it and accept the Council's invitation to make your views known. Your contribution will help to ensure that, as Australia approaches the first centenary of its Federation, we can continue to be proud of our national catch phrase, 'a fair go for all'.

Philip Ruddock
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural
Affairs

Message from the Council Chairman

In June 1997 the Commonwealth Government appointed the current members of the National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMAC). The Council's terms of reference are quoted in full at the end of this document.

The Council's first task is to develop a report to the Government which recommends on a policy and implementation framework for the next decade aimed at ensuring that cultural diversity is a unifying force for Australia. This issues paper has been prepared to initiate a process of community discussion as required by the Council's terms of reference.

Australia has always been a diverse society. Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have many cultures and languages and our migrants have come from all parts of the globe. Even those arriving on the First Fleet comprised not only the ethnic communities of Great Britain and Ireland but several others as well. But it has only been in the past 25 years or so that a pro-active policy and program relating to

our diversity has been developed under the overarching term 'multiculturalism'.

The principles and values underpinning multicultural policy were spelt out very clearly in the 1989 *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*. This bipartisan commitment has continued and was most recently reaffirmed in a resolution passed unanimously by the Commonwealth Parliament on 30 October 1996. Both the *National Agenda* and the resolution are quoted extensively in this paper.

Australia's multicultural policy has arguably been more successful than that of any other diverse society. Recent national opinion polls indicate widespread acknowledgement that it has been beneficial. There has also been international recognition, a recent good example of which was the warm praise given by US President Clinton during his 1996 visit.

On the other hand, we have since early 1996 seen increased questioning and criticism of certain aspects of multiculturalism. Such views have some, albeit minority, support. However, given the Council's primary task to recommend a framework aimed at ensuring that cultural diversity is a unifying force, and the requirement of Council to engage the community in discussion, we welcome all input whether supportive or critical, from individuals or groups, reflecting majority or minority opinion.

Despite the generally acknowledged success of Australia's multiculturalism, there is no room for complacency. We have always had our share of intolerance and in recent times there have been worrying signs of this becoming more overt. The Council is very concerned about this trend and is of the firm opinion that intolerance of any form must not be condoned.

There is also an impression that multicultural policy has been primarily concerned with the needs of migrants, particularly those of a non-English speaking background who have come to Australia in large numbers during the past 50 years. The Council is strongly of the view that such impressions must be satisfactorily

addressed if diversity is to become a unifying force.

We believe that multicultural policy must become more inclusive by embracing and being relevant to all Australians, starting with our Indigenous peoples and extending to all migrants and descendants of migrants, whether they came originally from Great Britain and Ireland - as did the majority - or from the other countries of Europe, or from Asia, the Americas, Africa or our own South Pacific region. It is important that multiculturalism is seen as an achievement we can and should all rightly be proud of, and whose benefits have accrued and will continue to accrue to all Australians, especially our children and future generations.

The foundation of multicultural policy is that Australia is a free society. This freedom makes us open and tolerant, with a commitment to equality of opportunity for all our people. Strong as this foundation is, the Council believes that multiculturalism has meant, and needs to mean, much more than this to be a unifying force for Australia. We should build on our proud record of compassion and concern which has made ours a welcoming and caring society.

As a community we have and support certain core values, principles and institutions which, while shared by many countries, have a special 'Australian' quality. These include a 'fair go', mutual respect, egalitarianism, parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, freedom of religion and expression, equality of opportunity irrespective of race, religion, origin, language, gender, physical or mental capacity or social and economic circumstance, and the rejection of bigotry and prejudice. The Council believes these are strong enough to unite Australians from all backgrounds, particularly when one adds the substantial benefits that diversity brings to our quality of life and our economic well-being.

When it prepares its report, the Council's objective will be to advise the Government on policies which will help to maintain an inclusive, cohesive, tolerant and harmonious society while maximising the value we derive from our

diversity and minimising any adverse effects.

This paper provides background information and raises a range of issues for the future. You are invited to consider the issues raised as well as any others you consider appropriate, and provide the Council with any constructive comments you would like to make. We look forward to your contribution, which will help the Council to take due account of a wide range of community views and feelings before advising the Government on a matter of such fundamental importance to Australia.

Neville J. Roach
Chairman

1. Introduction

The National Multicultural Advisory Council's terms of reference reflect continuing Australian government commitment to addressing the reality of Australia's cultural diversity within the framework of national unity. There is recognition that Australia has a long standing and continuing commitment to a pluralist, diverse, democratic society based on freedom, equality of opportunity, tolerance and peace.

As discussed below, 'multiculturalism' has evolved as the dominant bipartisan policy approach to address Australia's cultural diversity since the early 1970s. Since that time significant advances have been made in this area: for example, anti-discrimination laws have been enacted; government programs have become more sensitive to the needs of all clients; society has generally embraced diversity in the arts, our lifestyles and cuisine; and we have begun to use cultural diversity for our economic benefit. We have also begun to appreciate how the existence of people from culturally diverse backgrounds in our society provides bridges to other countries and cultures in an increasingly global community.

While multiculturalism has been a success, this is not to say that the implementation of multicultural policy has been flawless, or that wider community understanding of what the

policy means for our national and individual well-being could not be enhanced.

In this context, now is an appropriate time to reflect on current multicultural policy to identify and overcome any shortcomings and to harness the benefits we derive from our diversity as Australia moves forward to meet the challenges of the next century. This is why the Government has invited the Council to prepare a report. The issues before the Council are very important ones. The broad economic and social changes that have occurred in recent decades have affected every aspect of life: family structures, working arrangements, gender roles, the way we communicate, and the way we do business. As we approach the 2000 Sydney Olympics and the Centenary of Federation we face some nation-defining choices.

This issues paper is designed to promote community discussion and help the Council to obtain views from the community, to assist it in preparing its report.

2. Development of multicultural policies

Australia has always been a society with culturally diverse elements. Prior to permanent European settlement in 1788 there were many Indigenous cultures and customs among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Although most people who came to Australia in the 18th and 19th centuries were from the British Isles, there were others from a variety of backgrounds. The gold rush of the 1850s attracted people from all over the world and many of them settled in this country.

Since World War II, some 5.6 million immigrants from over 150 countries have made Australia their home. Today, around 41 per cent of people living in Australia were born overseas or have a parent born overseas.

During this period successive Australian governments consciously opened up the migration program, progressively, to accept people of any origin.

Large scale migration from widely diversified backgrounds created new policy challenges for Governments and the community

To the extent that government policies impacted on the lives of people of such backgrounds, throughout the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries, such policies had not been inclusive in many respects and in some cases were discriminatory (e.g. the 'White Australia' immigration policy).

During the 1950s and 1960s there was a growing awareness that Government services needed to respond to the growing complexities of community needs, including the needs of large numbers of migrants. In the main these were geared to meet the needs of a clientele that spoke English and understood the Australian way of life. In addition, it was recognised that there was a need for governments to define more clearly ideas about the relationship between the receiving society and newcomers. The prevailing policy of assimilation was increasingly seen as outdated, ineffective and undesirable.

By the 1970s 'multiculturalism' had evolved as the dominant policy approach to address Australia's cultural diversity. There have been a number of reports in this area of public policy since then, with the most significant being the 1989 *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*.

The National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia

In 1989, following wide community consultations and with bipartisan political support, the Commonwealth Government produced the *National Agenda*, which defined multiculturalism in the following way:

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 attempts to

manage the consequences of this diversity in the interests of the individual and society as a whole. It plays no part in migrant selection.

The three dimensions of multicultural policy are:

- **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 apply equally to all Australians, whether of 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 a reciprocal responsibility to accept the right of others to express their views and values.

Multicultural policy and programs in practice

The 1989 *National Agenda* established the basis of the current policy framework and has guided

the development of programs that recent governments have put in place to give effect to its principles. It explicitly recognised that contemporary Australian society is culturally and ethnically diverse, and that government should implement programs in response to this diversity in the interests of both the individual and society as a whole. Specific initiatives contained in the *National Agenda* included:

- strategies to improve processes for recognising skills and overseas qualifications held by migrants;
- a community relations campaign to ensure that ethnic diversity goes hand in hand with social cohesion;
- strengthening the Access and Equity Strategy to overcome barriers of language, culture and prejudice experienced by migrants and Indigenous people;
- legislation to establish the Special Broadcasting Service as an independent corporation; and
- improved access to English language education for migrants.

Multicultural policy has always had a major interest in ensuring that mainstream service delivery agencies are able to deal effectively with the needs of migrants as well as their wider client group. The Access and Equity Strategy is the main multicultural program to achieve this objective. The Strategy requires mainstream program providers to assist, for example, clients who cannot speak English to access interpreting services.

Multicultural policy has also taken a strong position in repudiating prejudice and bigotry. It has consistently made the case for tolerance of difference and a 'fair-go', in the interest of all. It asks Australians to have respect for others and for the law and institutions of Australia, as well as the shared democratic values, on which our nation is built.

As part of multicultural policy there have also been initiatives, under the heading of 'Productive Diversity', that are designed to explain and promote the economic benefits that can come from Australia's diversity. These programs aim to improve Australia's overall economic performance.

Migrant settlement programs, which predated multiculturalism by many years, are intended to help recently arrived migrants and refugees to settle in Australia and to participate fully and productively in Australian society as soon as possible. They complement services directed to the wider community and work in parallel with multicultural programs.

Most other services for migrants are delivered by mainstream programs. For instance, when migrants require medical help this is provided under health programs; income support for migrants is provided under social security or labour market programs.

Changing emphases

Multicultural policy has continued to evolve over the past decade. Since the 1989 *National Agenda* there has been a gradual shift in the emphases of the three key areas of multicultural policy set out in the *National Agenda*. These changes have moved the emphasis of multicultural policy from a somewhat migrant-oriented focus to a more inclusive whole-of-community focus.

The emphasis of the **cultural identity** programs has moved from helping migrant communities to maintain their cultural practices to encouraging all Australians to understand each other better and to share their heritage. In recent times there has been a growing awareness, and practice, of the benefits of cultural sharing and understanding. This can be seen, for instance, in many university and TAFE courses on cultural diversity, cross-cultural training courses and the development of diversity plans by business and government.

Programs under the **social justice** area of

multicultural policy initially placed most emphasis on the rights of clients who face language and cultural barriers when seeking services. More recently the emphasis has been on practically addressing the needs of clients that arise from cultural and linguistic factors.

This new perspective is reflected in changes to the Access and Equity Strategy. In 1996 the Strategy was re-focused as a *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*. The main focus of the *Charter* is the acceptance that a diverse client-base has diverse needs and that mainstream service providers ought to be aware of these needs, and act on this awareness. The aim is to respond to the needs of all clients in an open, non-discriminatory way.

The **economic efficiency** area of multicultural policy initially concentrated on the disadvantages that many migrants face in the workplace. These disadvantages are to do with difficulties in the recognition of overseas skills and the language and cultural barriers that migrants can face when looking for a job.

Since the early 1990s the emphasis has moved to looking at the economic benefits that can arise directly from a diverse customer base and work force.

The Australian economy is a microcosm of the international marketplace making Australia an excellent test market as well as an ideal location for regional headquarters covering the Asian region. Programs have been developed to promote the use of our linguistic and cultural diversity for the economic benefit of Australia. This has helped to reposition us economically, both in the world and in our region. There are business people from all over the world in Australia and their skills and knowledge of their countries of origin can help us meet the challenges of the global marketplace.

The States, Territories and the wider community

Under Australia's federal system the Commonwealth shares responsibilities for cultural diversity policies and programs with the

States and Territories.

All State and Territory governments have adopted multicultural policies and each has established a government body that deals with multicultural and ethnic issues. In all cases State and Territory multicultural policies are consistent with the principles set out in the *National Agenda*.

State and Territory initiatives address, for example:

- the promotion of social cohesion;
- celebration of a culturally diverse society;
- encouragement of community development;
- multilingual information services;
- cross-cultural awareness training;
- the provision of appropriate services to all sectors of the community; and
- the economic benefits of cultural diversity.

Local government throughout Australia has also introduced many programs that recognise that its clients are a very diverse group.

Within the wider community cultural diversity is often celebrated in Australia, through community based multicultural festivals and similar activities.

Programs and activities flowing from multicultural policy are also evident in the education sector.

Cross-cultural training courses are increasingly used today - for economic as well as social reasons. Companies with a diversity of clients, either in Australia or overseas, understand that they need to communicate properly with them. The tourism industry and education sector that services overseas students are good examples of this.

The need to communicate across cultural lines also explains why educational institutions - schools, universities and institutes of technology - offer many courses today that address cultural diversity.

In this sense, cultural diversity is now a mainstream issue.

Some current views about multicultural policy

Since its introduction 'multiculturalism' has been a subject of discussion, particularly during this past year. There has always been a range of views commonly expressed about multicultural policy - many favourable, some critical. A selection of such views follows. In thinking about them a major challenge is to distil the common ground - especially the agreement about desired outcomes for Australia.

Opinion polls

According to opinion polls, many people welcome the contribution of people from different origins and acknowledge that their contributions have benefited Australia.

For instance, on 3 May 1997, *The Australian* published the findings of a Newspoll survey that asked "has multiculturalism been good or bad?". Very significantly, 78 per cent of respondents considered that multiculturalism had been good. An earlier survey by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, on 5 November 1996, found that 70 per cent of Australians disagreed with the proposition that "multiculturalism should be abolished". An Age poll (AGB McNair on 19 June 1996) found that 61 per cent of respondents agreed with the "policy of multiculturalism adopted by successive Australian governments".

However, opinion polls contain mixed messages. A Saulwick Age poll of 31 May 1994 found that around 65 per cent of Australians considered Australia to be a better place due to having people from many countries here, but 60 per cent considered that migrants should live like the majority, and 63 per cent agreed that migrants should not be criticised for not

mixing. 73 per cent considered Australia to be a tolerant society.

Opinion polls must necessarily be interpreted with care and they are only one indicator of community views, but these findings show some consistent trends.

Areas of general agreement

While there are many views, there seems to be consensus on some issues. Diversity in the cultural aspects of people's lives seems to be generally welcomed by Australians (this includes food, the arts, social interactions, language, and religion).

With around 80 per cent of Australia's trade being with non-English speaking countries, most agree that our diversity can assist Australia's engagement with an increasingly global marketplace.

There is wide agreement that we are all Australians and that our social infrastructure has been developed for the common good.

There is also a widespread acceptance of the right of all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity. Equal opportunity principles are directed at all Australians and not just sectional interests and concerns.

On some issues, such as those discussed below, views seem to be quite polarised.

Social cohesion

Many people view Australia, despite its diversity, as a stable, cohesive and harmonious society. They believe that multiculturalism is an important factor in maintaining social cohesion in Australia. They see multicultural policy as an expression of the quintessential Australian notion of giving everyone a 'fair-go'.

These people say that cultural diversity has greatly contributed to Australia's economic and social sophistication. They view our familiarity with the way people live, how business works

and the nuances of the cultures and languages in other countries as a significant asset for Australia's international and domestic competitiveness.

They point out that multicultural policy has not provided special privileges for certain groups and that eligibility for services is based on individual need.

Others are uncomfortable with the term 'multiculturalism', doubt the worth of continuing with it, or feel threatened by it. They see the policy of multiculturalism as contributing to a general sense of uneasiness in the community and a cause of unacceptable separateness within the nation.

These people say that the policy has given undue emphasis to the maintenance of cultural difference and the interests of individual groups rather than those of the Australian community as a whole. They see multiculturalism as a negative and divisive feature of today's Australia.

Further, some have a perception that the policy gives migrants rights and privileges that are not available to other Australians.

Role of Government

There are different views about what the role of government should be in this area.

Some people argue that without settlement and multicultural policies, migrants would become marginalised minorities. For them, multiculturalism is more than recognition of ethnic diversity. They see a need for significant government involvement in a variety of settlement and multicultural programs to encourage full and productive participation by newcomers and other Australians in all aspects of Australian society.

Another school of thought is that government should not support specific multicultural programs for migrants. These people argue that cultural background is not a special feature of human life; it is just one aspect of the private

lives of people and culture cannot be given a special place. They see multicultural policy and programs as giving privileges to non-English speaking Australians. They accept that an individual's language and culture will shape his or her identity, but see this as strictly a private matter.

Shared values

Most acknowledge that diversity is a fact of life in Australia, but there does not appear to be a consensus about what this means for traditional Australian values.

Some say that our traditional values of respect for individual freedoms and giving everyone a 'fair-go' have disposed us to accept differences. In other words, it is our traditional Australian values that underpin multicultural policy and this is why Australians are generally able to accept people whose cultures include different traditions.

Others see Australia being confronted by the dilemma of there not appearing to be a binding commitment that can keep Australians united, no common vision or general conviction about the way ahead. They see diversity as risking a damaging breakdown in the values that Australians share.

The Council acknowledges that there is a range of opinions on multicultural issues. These will be taken into account in its work. The Council believes that discussion of issues needs to be based on factual information; it is particularly important to examine the core values and principles which Australians support and share as a community.

3. Basic principles underlying multicultural policy

The Council believes that our multicultural policy should reflect those Australian core values which are central to Australia's liberal democratic traditions and whose relevance is timeless.

Australia is, above all, a free and open society; its institutions, values and traditions reflect a compassionate concern for the vulnerable in our society and a firm belief that everyone is entitled to a 'fair go'.

The Council believes that these values are rooted deep in our traditions. They are evident in the cultures of the Aboriginal societies which predate European settlement. They are also to be found in the egalitarian ethos which underpinned the development of a liberal democratic Australia in the 19th century. This tradition has helped Australia to attract and to welcome so many migrants.

This openness has also allowed the country to accept and respect the rights of individuals to live by their own religious and cultural beliefs and customs.

The Council believes that this acceptance has helped Australia to develop into a successful multicultural society which, far from being a departure from Australia's traditions, is one of its finest achievements.

But a free society is also, necessarily, governed by law. The Council notes, however, that not all community standards and values are or can be enshrined in legislation. It is also important to recognise that law is not simply a matter of legislation; ultimately it is a matter of morality - of values and standards. Australia is a compassionate and caring society, a society sensitive to the feelings of others. As a society, we must reject prejudice and intolerance in whatever shape, for the good of this country, our social cohesion and the future of our children.

All Australians, regardless of origin, can expect to be treated fairly and equitably. Without this we would not have a harmonious society. These basic principles - freedom and openness - define some common ground. They are, in one sense, timeless but in practice they derive from Australian experience.

There are, of course, boundaries to our freedom.

We have mutual obligations. These were spelt out in the *National Agenda*. Accepting the right to express our own cultural preferences entails the obligation to accept the right of others to do likewise - even when disagreeing with them, provided always that these preferences do not breach the framework of shared values and practices common to all Australians.

On 30 October 1996 the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth Parliament unanimously passed a resolution that expresses some of the principles and boundaries of our society. The resolution provides a good indication of bipartisan support for some core principles. It says:

This House:

- reaffirms its commitment to the right of all Australians to enjoy equal rights and be treated with equal respect regardless of race, colour, creed or origin;
- reaffirms its commitment to maintaining an immigration policy wholly non-discriminatory on grounds of race, colour, creed or origin;
- reaffirms its commitment to the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in the context of redressing their profound social and economic disadvantage;
- reaffirms its commitment to maintain Australia as a culturally diverse, tolerant and open society, united by an overriding commitment to our nation, and its democratic institutions and values; and
- denounces racial intolerance in any form as incompatible with the kind of society we are and want to be.

The Council welcomes this resolution as an important statement of principle, entirely consistent with Australia's traditions, and most fundamental moral commitments.

Even during vigorous public debate about these and other similar issues that has occurred in

Australia over the past year, opinion polls and research show that Australians are generally proud of their country and view it as the best place in the world to live.

We see ourselves as a generally cohesive society and wish this to continue to be so. Social cohesion is about diversity within a common structure. It acknowledges that we are all bound by community standards, and that we each have a part to play in the maintenance of these standards. It is not about uniformity, but unity in diversity.

4. Why accept these principles?

While there are different views in the community about the overall issue of multiculturalism, the Council believes that multicultural principles and practices, as outlined above, have served Australia well. These values, for example freedom and compassion for others, are considered to be the basis for building a cohesive multicultural society for the future.

In addition, there are real and tangible benefits that cultural diversity provides. Diversity can enhance Australia's ability to compete and market ourselves globally and therefore add to economic growth, employment and our standard of living. Many migrants coming to Australia from all corners of the world bring with them a wealth of different languages and cultural understandings. They also link Australia into a wealth of business and personal contacts in countries where we want to do business.

For example, Australia has significant advantages in terms of economic opportunities in Asia which would not have been readily available if Australia had remained a closed society. A harmonious and cohesive society together with cultural and linguistic skills facilitates Australia's attraction as a tourist destination and as an education export country.

There are also social and cultural benefits which add significantly to the culture and quality of

our lifestyles, and interactions between individuals and groups domestically and internationally.

The Council believes that we should never underestimate the greatness of our accomplishment in building a tolerant, inclusive and diverse society of which we can all be proud. This accomplishment has not occurred by accident. It is built on Australia's traditional values and active government policies for managing diversity in the interests of all Australians.

There has been international and national acknowledgment of Australia's good record of social cohesion. The Council considers that this significant achievement should be celebrated by all Australians. We have further opportunities to build on this record in the year 2000 when Australia hosts the Olympic Games when, with the eyes of the world upon us, we can showcase Australia as a successful multicultural society.

To maintain this we need a vision of an Australian society marked by positive acceptance of diverse people and ideas; a society which believes that cosmopolitan diversity enriches national life; a civil society that strengthens us as we redefine our role with the South-East Asia and Pacific region and the world.

5. Challenges

The Council recognises that Australia is, and will remain, a culturally diverse society and that this diversity can continue to be a positive force in our society. It is in this spirit that we join all those who plead for a true and lasting reconciliation with Indigenous Australians. The Council believes that until such reconciliation is achieved, Australia will be a diminished nation.

The Council considers the issues raised by this issues paper to be very important for multicultural policy to the year 2000 and beyond. It acknowledges, however, that some issues could benefit from further discussion and would welcome constructive comments on any matters you believe are relevant.

Previous sections of this paper identified a number of issues about which the Council would like to receive your input.

Specifically, the Council would like to know your views on the questions posed below, but please feel free to address any other issues that you feel are relevant.

- Should governments have active policies on cultural diversity?
- What role should Australian political and community leaders play in this area?
- How can the role of institutions of Australian democracy be best acknowledged in any multicultural policies?
- How can the achievements of earlier generations of Australians be best acknowledged in any multicultural policies?
- How can policies promoting diversity embrace Indigenous culture and assist in the process of national reconciliation?
- How can multiculturalism become more inclusive or made more relevant to all Australians? How can it be a unifying force for Australia?
- What should be the shared values underpinning our social cohesion (see Section 3)?
- Are the principles, goals and dimensions of the 1989 *National Agenda* still relevant for a future policy and implementation framework?
- What does multiculturalism mean to you?
- Is multiculturalism an appropriate term to describe a policy for managing cultural diversity, or has it outlived its usefulness? If the latter, what alternative term would you suggest?
- Has multiculturalism as a policy been successful? Has it had blemishes? How could

these be overcome?

- How can the benefits of cultural diversity be maximised? How can all Australians be best made aware of these benefits?

6. How to provide input

Please feel free to write to the Council at the following address:

The Chairman
National Multicultural Advisory
Council
PO Box 25
Belconnen ACT 2617

To have input to the Council's deliberations in time for its report to the Government, your views will need to be received by the end of February 1998.

If you would like to receive further copies of this issues paper, call the council's information line: 1800-650-269. Alternatively this document is available from the Internet address: <http://www.immi.gov.au>

7. NMAC Terms of Reference

The Council will advise the Minister on policies for further enhancing Australia's unique culturally and linguistically diverse society. The Council will:

1. Develop a report to the Minister which recommends on a policy and implementation framework for the next decade, that is aimed at ensuring that cultural diversity is a unifying force for Australia. The report should:
 - (a) articulate the guiding principles and unifying values that underpin the policy; and
 - (b) identify elements of a policy framework and implementation strategy (including any impediments in the current policy framework and nomenclature) which will contribute to

broad community support for, and understanding of, these principles and values; and enhancing national unity through acceptance by Australians of both the diversity and the common structures of Australia.

2. Consider and provide advice to the Minister on the policy implications of Australia's linguistic and cultural diversity in significant forthcoming events including the Centenary of Federation and the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

3. Provide advice and report on other specific matters referred to it by the Minister.

In carrying out its work the Council will:

(a) take account of the Joint Parliamentary Statement of 30 October 1996 that:

This House:

- reaffirms its commitment to the right of all Australians to enjoy equal rights and be treated with equal respect regardless of race, colour, creed or origin;
- reaffirms its commitment to maintaining an immigration policy wholly non-discriminatory on grounds of race, colour, creed or origin;
- reaffirms its commitment to the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in the context of redressing their profound social and economic disadvantage;
- reaffirms its commitment to maintain Australia as a culturally diverse, tolerant and open society, united by an overriding commitment to our nation, and its democratic institutions and values; and
- denounces racial intolerance in any form as incompatible with the kind of society we are and want to be.

(b) take account of the context emerging

from wider Government directions, priorities and policies, including commitments to:

- seek a socially cohesive, tolerant and harmonious nation united by common values, goals and aspirations;
 - advance the interests of the wider community, and hence the national interest, as distinct from the special interests of sectional groups;
 - individual choice and responsibility as integral to public policymaking in Australia;
 - fair, open and competitive markets that support both economic and social needs; and
 - work with community groups to develop the great strengths which derive from the diversity of languages and cultures in Australian society, and to reaffirm the strength of the unifying values that Australians share.
- (c) note that the values/principles underpinning current multicultural policy as articulated in the 1989 *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* retain their importance;

The Council may wish to consider the application of those values/principles in the context of changing circumstances. It is noted that a great deal has been achieved under policies and programs that have been built on those values/principles. These policies and programs include access and equity, anti-racism education, English language services, settlement services and those relating to the benefits of cultural and linguistic diversity. The challenge is to ensure that policies adapt to meet new or changing priorities, without jeopardising existing achievements. The application of those values/principles should aim to consolidate these achievements, but should not be constrained by the perspectives of previous policy.

- (d) take account of recent reports that deal with cultural diversity issues, including the 1995 National Multicultural Advisory Council report *Multicultural Australia: the Next Steps, Towards and Beyond 2000*;
- (e) engage the community in discussion, particularly at the local community level, to ensure effective input to policy development and a better understanding by Australians of how diversity within a common structure can enhance national unity; and
- (f) keep the Minister informed of progress, particularly in relation to any major developments.

Members of the National Multicultural Advisory Council

Mr Neville Roach (Chairman)

Mr Randolph Alwis

Mr Iftikhar A. Chaudhry

Bishop David Cremin

Ms Ann Duffield *

Mr Angelo Hatsatouris OAM

Dr Chandran Kukathas

Ms Peggy Lau-Flux

Dr Colin Rubenstein

Ms Evelyn Scott

Dr My-Van Tran OAM

Ms Agnes Whiten

Dr Peter Wong AM

Emeritus Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki AO CBE

*until 24 November 1997

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs operates a national telephone inquiry line on 131 881, for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia. Overseas, please contact your nearest Australian mission.

©1997 Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA), Australia.