Multicultural Affairs in Victoria: a discussion paper for a new policy

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VICTORIAN multicultural commission

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Part One: Background

Introduction

This discussion paper was commissioned as a first step towards developing a new multicultural affairs whole-of-government policy for the State of Victoria, building on the achievements of the existing policy framework, *Valuing Cultural Diversity*, which was released in 2002.

It is structured into two parts: the first part briefly outlines the background and policy context relating to multiculturalism. The second part identifies key issues for discussion that draw on international and national academic literature, relevant policies and consultations with a number of Victorian community and government organisations.

The purpose of the paper is to present a snapshot of our cultural diversity, review best practice and current thinking regarding multicultural policy and identify seven key issues and challenges for planning for Victoria's future through the lens of multiculturalism.

Definition of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a policy designed to manage, foster and celebrate cultural diversity.

It recognises the diversity of its different cultures within the context of a society that not only respects its members' rights to their culture, faith and identity, but also increases their range of choices as well as contributing to their development and well-being.

This is achieved through equal citizenship, a sense of belonging and tackling material disadvantage among people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background.

There are differing views as to what constitutes a CALD background. The distinguishing features could include, but are not limited to:

● Country of origin;

● Languages spoken at home;

● Family ties;

● Cultural and religious background; and

● Self identification.

There are several key geo-political, cultural and economic realities to be taken into account in developing a new multicultural policy.

1. We are in an era of unprecedented global mobility. By 2050 the number of people migrating worldwide will reach approximately 230 million compared to 75 million over the last four decades (International Organisation for Migration).

2. Practical economic imperatives mean Victoria will become increasingly diverse, and the new multicultural policy must take up this challenge. Ongoing skilled migration is important to assist with addressing skill shortages and issues associated with an ageing Australian population.

3. We live in an era of significant change and challenges in the global arena; economic security and environmental challenges. In times of change and uncertainty nations need a secure and common sense of identity and purpose. Multiculturalism can play an important role in shaping this identity.

The Australian Experience of Multiculturalism

Cultural diversity has always featured as part of the Australian landscape and governments have always grappled with how to manage such diversity to secure economic and social outcomes, whether it be meeting labour needs or facilitating cohesion.

The way that migrant-related cultural diversity and immigration has been managed by Australia's public policies can be grouped into three main evolutionary phases, namely:

● Assimilationism (sometimes referred to as the White Australia Policy) (1900-1965);

● Integrationism (1966-1973); and

● Multiculturalism (1973-).

Multiculturalism as a public policy concept in Australia has been visible for just over three decades.

As a concept and a policy, multiculturalism was a significant shift away from the previous approaches to cultural diversity.

In essence, multicultural policies no longer expect migrants and refugees to either give up their distinctive linguistic, cultural and social characteristics and become indistinguishable from the majority of the population (assimilationism) or if they didn't it was essentially a private matter and not the responsibility of the government or society as a whole (integrationism).

Multicultural policies have provided the freedom and opportunity for people to preserve and express their cultural heritage while simultaneously allowing for equal rights and responsibilities under Australian laws.

Australian governments over the past 30 years have tested a variety of policies and programs to manage and/or promote multiculturalism. Some of these legacies resonate today, however, there is an opportunity to learn and build on the achievements in Victoria.

A Snapshot of Victoria's Cultural Diversity

In considering multiculturalism, it is relevant to note that Victoria is among the fastest-growing states in Australia, and net overseas migration has consistently accounted for more than half of Victoria's population increase.

At the 2006 Census, the total population of Victoria was 4,932,423 persons, and:

- 23.8% (1,173,204) of Victorians were born overseas in more than 230 countries.

- 43.6% (2,152,279) of Victorians were either born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas.

- 72.8% (853,966) of overseas-born Victorians came from non-main English speaking countries.

- 20.4% (1,007,435) of Victorians spoke over 200 languages other than English at home.

- 68.7% (3,390,804) of Victorians followed over 120 religions.

An Ageing Population

At the 2006 census, of the 674, 913 people aged 65 years or over in Victoria:

- 26% were from a non-main English speaking country; and

- 22% spoke a language other than English at home.

By 2011, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates that:

- 31% of Victoria's population aged 65 or over will be from a non-main English speaking country; and

- 38% of Melbourne's population aged 65 or over will be from a non-main English speaking country.

For further data on Victoria's population diversity, see: *www.culturaldiversity.vic.gov.au*

An Increasingly Diverse Population

The diversity of Victoria's population is increasing at a faster rate than at any time in the state's history. The following, based on the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship settler arrivals database, demonstrates this.

Top 10 countries of birth for settler arrivals with intended state of residence Victoria by financial year

	1986/87	1996/97	2006/07
1	United Kingdom	China (excludes SARs & Taiwan)	India
2	Vietnam	New Zealand	New Zealand
3	New Zealand	United Kingdom	China (excludes SARs & Taiwan)
4	Philippines	Vietnam	United Kingdom
5	Sri Lanka	India	Philippines
6	Malaysia	Former Yugoslavia	Sri Lanka
7	South Africa	Hong Kong (SAR of China)	Vietnam
8	Yugoslavia	Sri Lanka	Malaysia
9	India	Philippines	Sudan
10	Hong Kong	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Afghanistan

* SAR = Special Administrative Region

The Victorian Experience of Multiculturalism

One of Victoria's greatest strengths is its diversity, which is founded on its long experience of migration from all over the globe.

The Premier encapsulated this in his speech at the 2007 Metropolis conference:

"*Migration has brought us a richness and diversity that has made us a much better, stronger community… On top of all of this, Victoria's diversity and flexible skills base have given us an economy that is more diverse, innovative, competitive and globally connected than ever before.*"

Victorian Multicultural Legislation and Policies

Victoria's foremost commitment to multiculturalism is through its legislative framework which serves as a critical foundation for its multicultural policies. The *Multicultural Victoria Act 2004*, recognises the diversity of the people of Victoria and describes Victoria as a 'united community with shared laws, values, aspirations and responsibilities' in which people have the freedom to 'preserve and express their cultural heritage'.

The Act defines the core principles of multiculturalism as being:

- An entitlement to mutual respect and understanding regardless of background;

- A duty on all Victorians to promote and preserve diversity within the context of shared laws, values, aspirations and responsibilities;

- A demonstrated ability of all Victorians to work together to build a positive and progressive future; and

- A responsibility for all Victorians to abide by the State's laws and respect democratic processes.

Additional Victorian legislation that supports, protects and advances multiculturalism includes:

The *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*

The Act aims to promote everyone's right to equal opportunities, to eliminate, as far as possible, discrimination and sexual harassment and to provide redress for people whose rights have been breached.

The *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001*

The purpose of the Act is to provide an avenue of redress for anyone who believes they have been the victim of vilifying behaviour or abuse on the basis of their racial or religious background.

The *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*

Victoria is the first Australian state to enact formal protection of human rights by introducing a Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. The charter aims to ensure human rights are valued and protected within government and the community. In addition to legislation, there are two major Victorian Government policies which influence the nature of multiculturalism in the State and which the new policy will be based on. These are *Growing Victoria Together* (2001, 2005) and *Valuing Cultural Diversity* (2002).

The Growing Victoria Together *policy provides a long term strategic vision for Victoria by balancing a suite of progress measures and actions for:*

- A thriving economy;

- Quality health and education;

- A healthy environment;

- Caring communities; and

- A vibrant democracy.

Valuing Cultural Diversity *is a Victorian Government policy statement that articulates four themes that underpin the successful management of our cultural diversity:*

- Valuing diversity;

- Reducing inequality;

- Encouraging participation; and

- Promoting the social, cultural and economic benefits of cultural diversity to all Victorians.

It is timely to refresh *Valuing Cultural Diversity* given the current global and domestic policy drivers and emerging demographic trends and challenges Victoria is facing now and in the next five years.

Key Feedback from the Consultations

Several organisations were consulted during the preparation of this paper to gain their views on multiculturalism in Victoria.

They identified a number of factors which contributed to Victoria's achievements in multiculturalism and social cohesion.

These included:

- The history of the State and the size and diversity of its migration over a very long period.

- The extent of its linguistic and cultural diversity.

- Long standing bipartisan support and explicit political leadership for multiculturalism and government investment in multiculturalism.

- The long history of activism at a community level, which has ensured community strengthening and building of social capital.

- The institutions that conscientiously have a multicultural ethos, for example Parliament, the police force, churches and private sector corporations.

Multiculturalism is seen as pivotal in explaining and creating the unique community we have in Victoria.

As one interviewee put it, *"In other places multiculturalism is used as a wedge to divide whereas in Victoria it is used to unite"*.

There is a clear and strong view that cultural diversity has significantly contributed to the economic, cultural and social character of Melbourne and Victoria, and that it makes Victoria a better, more comfortable place to live and work.

It was also noted from the consultation that multiculturalism supports access and equity – to have a socially cohesive society people need to enjoy a general level of wellbeing and need a certain level of basic needs provided for including physical, economic and the right to work.

Overall, the findings from consultations identified that multiculturalism is generally regarded as part of the lived experience of Victorians, particularly in cities and increasingly in regional communities, where multiculturalism is embraced in business, arts, culture and sport.

Part Two: Topics for Discussion

1: Identity and Cultural Heritage

Identity gives us an idea of who we are and how we relate to others. As societies become increasingly culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse, identity formation and multiculturalism can be viewed as being interlinked.

The consultations pointed to the complex nature of identity, particularly with young people who do not see themselves as being part of one culture, but rather having multiple and fluid identities. Multiculturalism does not only mean recognition of someone's individual heritage but also that which individuals can draw from the different cultures to form their own identity. A sense of belonging rests on the ability of individuals to be different and accepted in all forms of public and private life.

Issues of faith are also important in identity formation, and were viewed as a related dimension to multiculturalism.

For example, the Victorian Government has a strong commitment to the value of interfaith engagement and dialogue and promotes social harmony and inclusion through:

- Promoting formal dialogue with Victoria's faith leaders through the Premier's Multifaith Leaders Forums held in 2005 and 2007.

- Establishing a Multifaith Advisory Group that meets quarterly to advice government on issues of relevance to Victoria's faith communities and opportunities for interfaith dialogue.

Another issue is how cultural heritage is defined and protected. A significant challenge is maintaining community languages and cultural heritage across generations, as there is the possibility that integration could lead to CALD communities losing their heritage, languages and identity.

The challenge is to strike a balance between facilitating adaptation in to the Australian mosaic while at the same time maintaining the cultural and linguistic diversity of the community.

Intergenerational issues also emerged for many CALD communities, with some children and teenagers adapting to Australian culture more readily than their parents and grandparents. This can potentially lead to tensions within communities and families, contributing to difficulties in settlement.

It was suggested that the long-term viability of multiculturalism requires ethnic communities to more effectively engage with their young people, including encouraging a new generation of leaders to come to the fore and embrace the contemporary nature of Australian multicultural identity. Consultations noted that although expression of cultural and ethnic identity was allowed (or tolerated), it did not automatically translate to changes or sensitivities in economic, political, legal or other structures within Australian society.

As we live in a globalised world the notions of homeland and work will change. We are moving from a world of permanent residence to one of more transnational existence and identity.

Mobile workers, both skilled and unskilled, will spend different periods living and working in different countries.

Question for consideration:
How can we better maintain and support the cultural heritage of Victoria's ethnic communities within a framework of social cohesion?

2: Implementing and Evaluating Multicultural Policy

Multiculturalism has shown enduring currency as a public policy in Australia for over three decades.

Many proponents hail the relative benefits and legacies of multiculturalism in the social, economic and cultural spheres of our society. Others suggest that multiculturalism is complex and difficult to manage in a globalised world that has contested and conflicting agendas.

But how do we know what value multiculturalism brings to a society?

Measuring the benefits and impacts of multicultural polices and programs is vital to understanding what works. A relatively recent trend in public policy has been the adoption of whole-of-government rather than single agency approaches. This is on the basis that a whole-of-government approach can have a greater impact on achieving policy goals. But the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, which is the case with the approach to multiculturalism in Victoria. That is, to have specific legislative, policy and program approaches but also have the objectives integrated into mainstream ideas and concepts.

Challenges for policy implementation could include the following factors for achieving multiculturalism:

- Enabling public ownership of multiculturalism as public policy;

- Embedding the vision of supporting our society's multiculturalism as a core component of government business;

- Measuring the relative benefits and outcomes for the whole community;

- Providing adequate resourcing to support multicultural policy implementation;

- Balancing priorities and policy agendas between state and federal governments; and

- Valuing the role of ethno specific organisations as part of the mainstream service delivery.

Question for consideration:
What indicators should be used to measure progress in achieving multicultural policy outcomes?

3: Community Relations and Promotion of Multiculturalism

The concept of community relations is a legitimate vehicle for promoting positive images of multiculturalism and for tackling cultural and/or religious conflict or discrimination.

The term 'community relations' refers to bridging relationships between different cultural groups, networks and associations.

It aims to increase broader understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity particularly in times of domestic and/or global racial or religious conflict. The literature review and the consultations revealed that in Victoria, the perception of community relations is positive.

However forms of racism and discrimination exist, particularly towards people who are visibly different or who have different spiritual beliefs.

The questions are why, and what can we collectively do about it?

A major issue was the engagement of the broader community and the need to explain changes, to allay fears and to engage the whole community as stakeholders in supporting Victoria's cultural diversity.

The consultations highlighted the need to build understanding of the importance of immigration to our society. For example, in helping to support an ageing population and to secure our economic future. This will in turn build understanding that all of society stands to benefit from a multiculturalism that is not just for a part of the community but for all the community.

Campaigns such as All of Us are testament to how we can make the reality of cultural diversity a norm, not an exception.

A number of issues were identified that could lead to a more social cohesive society:

- Increased awareness and understanding of rights, responsibilities and legal obligations;

- Greater acceptance of divergent views;

- Better information about our diverse population, one that is ageing and more globally mobile then ever before; and

- Greater effort to enable access and participation for those who are most disadvantaged and / or marginalised.

The consultations strongly showed that refugees require specialist attention to resolve their often complex and multiple needs. Multicultural policies will fail if they renege on those who least have the opportunities to get ahead in life. While a focus on food and festivals was regarded as important, there is a need to foster wider community understanding of the deeper meaning of multiculturalism.

As one interviewee stated, *"The aim for multiculturalism is to be a society that feels comfortable with difference personally and institutionally, and we celebrate it not in a superficial way of singing and dancing but we are conscious of being enriched by diversity and become a better society with stronger institutions as a result"*.

The consultation identified that all public institutions have an ethical and moral obligation to redress cultural conflict and divisions, not reinforce it through sensationalist and negative portrayals of segments of our ethnic communities.

The consultations also identified that:

- Schools have an important role in countering prejudice and fostering cultural and religious acceptance;

- Broader community education campaigns were important in facilitating understanding and awareness as well as triggering discussion with peers, friends and family;

- Raising the visibility of cultural diversity through the arts and positive media stories is another way to promote multiculturalism and social cohesion.

Various strategies have been implemented to promote multiculturalism, including broad based campaigns, targeted localised promotional events and indirect harmony messages. However, a whole-of-community approach was deemed to be the most appropriate strategy to effectively create a socially cohesive society as it requires the efforts and involvement of individuals, families, communities and governments.

Question for consideration:
How can we best promote respect and understanding of cultural diversity as well as understanding of the benefits multiculturalism brings to the community?

4: Social and Civic Participation

Participation is a positive expression of our social democracy. By virtue of citizenship, individuals have the right to take part in the life of their community and become involved in decisions that affect their lives. Social and civic participation refers to the involvement of individuals in their social environment through personal networks and/or through organisations. Involvement can take place in settings such as schools, hospitals, the workplace, the ethnic community, the neighbourhood, and regional and national communities (Breton 2003).

A strong sense of citizenship and belonging is essential for an effective democracy. Citizenship is not just a legal status but a sense of a community of people who are bound together by trust, and cooperation, and who feel like they belong together.

The strength of a person's sense of belonging and citizenship is determined by her or his interaction with the community. When this is absent, citizens become alienated from society and withdraw from engagement

with the community. The acceptance of multiculturalism is closely linked with a sense of belonging, citizenship and identity.

There is considerable evidence about the barriers to participation in civic and social life by culturally diverse communities ranging from: a lack of confidence or experience with social institutions and processes to lack of information or lack of awareness of the issues at hand; from language barriers to systemic barriers.

The consultations revealed that opportunities to engage and make social connections were seen as a major issue both for migrant communities and the broader community, and between newly arrived and established communities.

Concerns were also raised about ensuring appropriate infrastructure, such as ethno-specific community centres, and adequate access to private and public services and facilities. The consultations found direct support for community-led initiatives, such as language schools, social clubs, women's groups and networks of interest was also deemed as an essential ingredient of building confidence in a multicultural society.

The consultations highlighted that appropriate representation of CALD communities in societal structures and key decision making processes was a key determinant in the success of a culturally diverse society. As one participant put it, *"In five years we will be a Victoria where everyone has opportunity access, faces on street are reflected in Parliament and board rooms and institutions and universities"*.

Question for consideration:
How can multicultural policy increase representation and social and civic participation among Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities?

5: Institutions, Service Delivery and Cultural Competence

There is almost universal acceptance that working across cultures competently is essential to providing services. Not doing so can lead to the exclusion of culturally diverse communities. Cultural competence is when organisations accept and respect differences among and within different groups; continually assess their policies and practices regarding culture and expand cultural knowledge and resources; and adapt service models in order to better meet the needs of different ethnic groups. (Cross et al 1983).

Many ethno specific organisations, networks and associations not only support individuals and families, but also build social cohesion, enhance equity, address the needs of disadvantaged groups and achieve systemic change. Settlement services provide support for the integration of migrants and refugee entrants into a new way of life.

However, the consultations found that more resources and recognition of this effort is required to avoid burn out and strengthen the capacity of ethnic communities to purchase and deliver services, particularly in times of greatest need. Studies indicate that immigrants and refugees may face barriers to accessing services and resources as part of their settlement due to cultural, physical, language, psychological and geographical issues.

It was widely recognised that as our population becomes more diverse, our institutions need to become culturally competent. Many expressed the view in the consultations that making Victorian institutions culturally competent should be a key focus of the multicultural policy.

Cultural competence should be regarded as a measure of quality in service delivery, not just an-add on. It should be normal practice in an integrated way like occupational health and safety. In this way, cultural competency will allow service providers to meet the needs of whoever the new arrival communities are in the future.

The need for policy around cultural competence training was identified as a gap, and that greater investment and support is required for developing a culturally competent workforce. This is a particularly urgent issue in relation to the ageing CALD population.

Question for consideration:
How can multicultural policy achieve culturally responsive service delivery?

6: The geography of multiculturalism

The planning and use of public spaces and facilities is an important spatial consideration in the development of social cohesion. The physical arrangements and accessibility of public resources like parks, hospitals, schools and even art galleries can influence the way people interact and experience cultural diversity, and in turn, influence their attitudes towards multiculturalism. Consistency in social planning that recognises difference and diversity in the built form as well as public spaces provides an expression of divergent cultural heritage, identity and belonging. The Victorian Government's investment in Cultural Precincts in the CBD of Melbourne signifies the essence of this approach.

Urban planning and design plays a critical role in shaping our lived experience of neighbourhoods, towns and cities. In Victoria how we balance increasing population diversity with planning for retail precincts, public spaces, gardens, community facilities, and streetscapes through the lens of multiculturalism is a significant challenge.

The consultations noted that regional Victoria is the frontier of community adaptation and resettlement.

As immigrants and refugees increasingly settle in rural and regional areas, their experience of community life is influenced by their surroundings as much as other circumstances that affect their decisions to stay or leave.

Planning settlement that takes into account places of worship and the need to access essential goods and services, will contribute to positive outcomes for all.

The Federal Government is primarily responsible for settlement services. However, a partnership approach that involves the three tiers of government, non-government organisations and the community is required to meet the ongoing needs of immigrants.

The consultations identified the issue of cross-cultural interaction opportunities, as these are influenced by factors such as the placement of housing and ethno-specific facilities. Opportunities for cross-cultural encounter as well as services for particular groups pose a challenge.

Housing affordability is another consideration and challenge, that is not limited to ethnic communities but can affect their sense of belonging and economic participation.

Opportunities for planning housing developments on the fringe of metropolitan Melbourne or in regional locations in Victoria that embrace social planning, multiculturalism and population diversity are likely to generate positive benefits for liveable communities.

Question for consideration:
How can urban planning and infrastructure policy meet the needs of Victoria's multicultural population?

7: Economic drivers: using cultural diversity for competitive advantage

Migration has played a major role in the development of the State, from migrant workers on the goldfields to post-Second World War migrant workers to the present.

Migrants and refugees have made and continue to make major contributions to Australia's stock of human capital through the qualifications and skills that they bring with them. In essence, economic imperatives have been the overwhelming driver for the development of our multicultural diversity. And this driver will continue to exert its influence in the future, given an ageing population and the need for a skilled and educated workforce to boost global competitiveness. Not surprisingly, immigration continues to play a critical role in driving development in Victoria.

Today, one in four migrants to Australia is settling in Victoria, where:

- Approximately one in two small businesses are either owned by overseas-born or second-generation Victorians; and

- One in five students attending a Victorian University last year was an international student.

In recent years, both the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments have placed a strong emphasis on directing skilled migrants to rural and regional Victoria, in line with both economic and population strategies. As a result, Victoria's share of Australia's skilled migrants has increased from 17.6% in 1998-99 to 26.8% in 2006-07.

Further, there is a strong link between Victoria increasing the economic benefits of migration, for example by recruiting global companies and individual workers, and being a culturally diverse state.

Victoria's reputation as a culturally diverse and inclusive society is an advantage as the state competes for globally mobile labour and businesses that are increasingly transnational rather than permanently based in one location. The economic dividend that can be secured from diversity by using the cultural and linguistic skills and know-how in a workforce to improve exports is known as 'productive diversity'.

However, despite a significant body of literature demonstrating that the successful management of workplace diversity can be directly linked to increased profitability for business and industry, it would appear many businesses and organisations have not adopted the concept systematically in order to fully realise these benefits.

The economic benefits of multiculturalism can also be seen in relation to tourism. For example, the Australian tourist market of 25-40 year olds is looking for lifestyle experiences rather than sites, and is choosing Melbourne because of its cultural diversity. Food and wine festivals in regional areas are very important for regional tourism, leading to regional growth and development through high visitation and industry and employment.

These festivals are often multicultural based. For example, Avoca has the Bocce festival, King Valley has the Gnocchi festival and Daylesford has a Swiss-Italian festival.

Some of the policy issues and challenges that were identified by those consulted included:

(i) Job readiness and training;

(ii) Responsibility of employers;

(iii) The most effective means of utilising the rich linguistic diversity and global diasporic social networks that exist in the State;

(iv) How to better capitalise on immigrant entrepreneurship;

(v) Underemployment, job seeking and skills recognition;

(vi) International students' contribution to both the economy and networking opportunities for the future;

(vii) Alleviating the economic hardship of newly arrived refugees and migrants; and

(viii) Tourism: Victoria's cultural diversity offers advantages in developing the tourist market.

Finally, economic issues cannot be considered in isolation as there is a clear connection between the economic to the social and cultural. While economics are almost always the imperative to change, social and cultural changes flow on accordingly.

Question for consideration:
How can we better enhance our competitive economic edge through our cultural, linguistic and religious diversity?

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