

Response to Australia's Inaugural Social Cohesion Statement (the Statement)

AMES Australia Knowledge Centre

April 30, 2021

AMES Australia (AMES) acknowledges the importance of having a Social Cohesion statement and welcomes the obvious commitment of government to social cohesion and multiculturalism. We take this opportunity to further contribute to providing input into the inaugural Social Cohesion Statement. As a starting point AMES considers that:

1. the **context** for the Statement needs to be clearly articulated including understanding the purpose, who the Statement is targeting, and how the Statement is to be implemented and measured/judged as successful or impactful.
2. the Statement needs to be **simplified** – this will have greater potential to resonate with, and engage, the target audience/s.
3. the **language** of the Statement **must foster inclusiveness**.

AMES work is guided by our vision of 'full participation for all in a cohesive and diverse society' and is focused on maximising the economic and social participation of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and promoting and celebrating the benefits of migration to Australia.

The following core principles which inform our vision, reflect our value proposition, and underpin social cohesion may provide a further or different lens for framing the Statement:

- Value the key underpinnings of a liberal democracy - freedom, equal opportunity, individual rights and responsibilities together with valuing mutual respect, tolerance and diversity.
- Respect Australia's first peoples and acknowledge that Australia is their homeland.
- Create environments that are safe, secure and cohesive, that address discrimination, promote gender equity and respect the rights of children.
- Create environments that support every individual to reach their full potential.
- Increase economic inclusion for all through equal access to skills development, education and training, work opportunities and fair pay.
- Promote a shared means of communication to connect and engage people and communities and facilitate social participation, connection, and inclusion.

Within this context the following table responds to each section of the draft Statement; provides a comment on the section; and offers alternative wording aligned to each section for consideration.

Draft Statement sections	Comment	Alternative wording
Preamble / introduction Social cohesion is Australia's national asset - Australia is the world's most successful multicultural society. Our social cohesion, shared values and national unity have made us the strong and prosperous liberal democracy that we are today. And we all share the responsibility to keep it that way. Our national identity is based on our shared values - our commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and individual freedoms underpinned by mutual respect and tolerance. We embrace a 'fair go' for all, and look out	The overall Statement could be simplified to 2 – 3 sentences drawing particularly on the second paragraph.	<i>Australia is a prosperous and safe multicultural country. Australia's national identity is built around core civic values of democracy, freedom, equal opportunity, the rule of law, individual rights and responsibilities. We value mutual respect, tolerance and diversity that contribute to a strong, cohesive and resilient society.</i>

Draft Statement sections	Comment	Alternative wording
for each other in times of need. We also prize Australia's reputation as a safe and peaceful country, and are proud that it is one of the reasons people are drawn to the Australian way of life.		
Cohesion begins in our communities – Social cohesion is about working together to make our towns, suburbs and local communities great places to live. This is demonstrated by the many stories of communities and individuals helping one another during recent bushfires and the COVID pandemic.	Propose emphasis on people rather than the abstract concept of place/geography.	<i>Cohesion begins in our communities – Social cohesion is about working together to support equal opportunity for every individual to reach their full potential, reducing disparities in social and economic outcomes for all Australians and contributing to individual wellbeing, strong communities, a stable society and our economic prosperity.</i>
A culturally and religiously diverse nation – Our inclusive national identity welcomes peoples of all cultures and religions. Within the overarching framework of Australia's democracy and laws, our multicultural and multi-faith society is a strength and supports our vibrant society and economic prosperity.	Religion is one aspect of culture. Having no faith does not lessen a person's value in society.	<i>Social cohesion means valuing the wellbeing of all members of our society, fighting exclusion and marginalization, creating a sense of belonging and promoting trust. Australia is the homeland of Indigenous peoples; and it is also the home of people from many nations, races, religions and ethnic groups.</i>
Australian citizenship is our common bond – Citizenship is a core element of our national identity and democracy. Whether acquired at birth or as a new citizen - Australian citizenship represents full and formal membership of the Australian community. We value the rights and responsibilities of Citizenship.	Australian citizenship is not available to all and others do not seek formal citizenship status. Propose removing 'Australian citizenship is our common bond ...' and replace with eg. Australia's national identity is built on democracy, respect for diversity, rights and responsibilities	NB: this alternative wording from the first section also covers this section - therefore reducing the overall words and potentially making this redundant. <i>Australia is a prosperous and safe multicultural country. Australia's national identity is built around core civic values of democracy, freedom, equal opportunity, the rule of law, individual rights and responsibilities. We value mutual respect, tolerance and diversity that contribute to a strong, cohesive and resilient society.</i>
The English language as a unifying force – English language proficiency is a key contributor to better education and employment outcomes and social participation levels. It helps to provide an overall sense of belonging, and knowledge of English provides access to a diversity of news and information sources.	Propose that this statement be rethought. As currently written, it represents a narrowness and exclusivity that may undermine diversity.	<i>English is our national language. A shared means of communicating promotes shared understanding of community values, connects diverse cultures and facilitates the social and economic participation of all who live in our community.</i>

For more information, please contact
Catherine Scarth
AMES Australia Chief Executive Officer
E: scarthc@ames.net.au