



14 December 2015

Migrant Intake into Australia  
Productivity Commission

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Dear Commissioners

The Australian Human Rights Commission ('the Commission') makes this submission to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into the Migration Intake into Australia in response to its Draft Report released in November 2015.

This submission supplements that made by the Commission in June 2015 and relates to the following issues raised in the Draft Report:

- Social cohesion in Australia;
- Supporting acceptance of multiculturalism; and
- Addressing racial discrimination.

### **Social cohesion in Australia**

The Commission supports the Productivity Commission's draft finding 6.1:

There is widespread acceptance by the Australian community of multiculturalism. Successful multiculturalism helps Australia benefit from a diverse immigration intake and assists in maintaining social cohesion by developing respect and trust between the different ethnic groups that make up the Australian community.

As noted in the Commission's first submission, there has been bipartisan acceptance of multiculturalism as official policy since the early 1970s. This is accompanied by strong, general public endorsement of cultural diversity.

The Commission concurs that multiculturalism should be understood as a policy that is concerned with the maintenance of social cohesion and community harmony. It also acknowledges that there is scope for improved data about how migration affects measures of social cohesion (for example, the prevalence of discrimination, perceptions of public safety, and social and economic inequality). Any attempt to measure the impact of migration and related policy responses should take a generational view, acknowledging the inherent difficulties in quantifying such variables.

## Supporting acceptance of multiculturalism

The Commission makes the following response to Information Request 6.2:

Are the current investments to support acceptance of multiculturalism and address racial discrimination effective and efficient? Could governments achieve more by improving coordination and/or improving engagement with community organisations?

The Commission notes that the Australian Government currently provides \$27.3 million for multicultural activities in 2014-15 (down from \$33 million in 2013-14).<sup>1</sup> The Government has incorporated the Diversity and Social Cohesion Program into the multicultural activities of the Department of Social Services' Strengthening Communities Program.

It is open to suggest that existing initiatives that support multiculturalism (Box 6.6 of the Draft Report) could benefit from greater investment and from more strategic coordination across Commonwealth, State, Territory and local governments.

The Commission notes that, at the Commonwealth level, current efforts to address racial discrimination relate to the National Anti-Racism Strategy and the *Racism. It Stops with Me* campaign.

The Commission is responsible for leading the Strategy and campaign, which are initiatives that emerged from the *People of Australia* multicultural policy (2011).<sup>2</sup> Implementation of the Strategy is supported by a partnership which includes the Attorney-General's Department, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, National Congress of Australia's First Peoples and the Australian Multicultural Council. The objectives of the Strategy and campaign include: (1) creating awareness of racism and its effects on individuals and the broader community; (2) identify, promote and build on good practice initiatives to prevent and reduce racism; and (3) empower communities and individuals to take action to prevent and reduce racism and to seek redress when it occurs.

In June 2015, the Commission released the *National Anti-Racism Strategy and Racism. It Stops with Me Summary Evaluation and Future Direction Report* (Summary Evaluation Report), which documented the first three years of the Strategy and campaign.<sup>3</sup> To date, more than 390 organisations have been involved as formal supporters of the campaign. The Summary Evaluation Report found that 84 per cent of supporter organisations felt the campaign has had a positive impact.<sup>4</sup>

The Commission notes that it was initially provided with a budget of \$1.7 million over four years to develop and implement the Strategy. The Summary Evaluation Report noted that while the Commission has been able to do 'a lot with a little', broader reach and systemic change could be achieved with enhanced resourcing of the Strategy and campaign.

In July 2015, the Race Discrimination Commissioner announced the commencement of a second phase of the National Anti-Racism Strategy, incorporating two main themes: combating racism and discrimination; and supporting diversity and inclusion.

## Addressing racial discrimination

In November 2015, the Commission released its *Freedom from Discrimination*.<sup>5</sup> The report documents the activities conducted to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) and it is primarily based on a series of public consultations and research presented at a conference held in February 2015.

The public consultations revealed the persistence of the following forms of racial prejudice and discrimination:

- Discrimination in employment;
- Racial vilification and bigotry; and
- Social exclusion.

The public consultations also revealed a widely shared recognition of the significance of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) in protecting Australians against racial discrimination and vilification. However, the consultations showed that certain sections of the community – particularly newly arrived migrants and young people – lacked awareness about the Act and its operation.

## Conclusions

The Commission believes it remains important to affirm the success of Australian multiculturalism in maintaining social cohesion and community harmony.

## Recommendations

The Commission reiterates the recommendations outlined in its first submission to the Productivity Commission on Migrant Intake into Australia.

The Commission also makes the following additional recommendation in light of the Draft Report:

1. That the Australian government strengthen investments to support the acceptance of multiculturalism and address racial discrimination.

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Budget 2014-2015

<sup>2</sup> The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy

<sup>3</sup> National Anti-Racism Strategy and Racism. It Stops with Me Summary evaluation and Future Direction (2015) Australian Human Rights Commission. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/publications/national-anti-racism-strategy-and-racism-it-stops-me>.

<sup>4</sup> The survey of campaign supporters conducted in 2014 was sent to over 280 organisations and had a response rate of 21 per cent.

<sup>5</sup> Freedom from Discrimination: Report on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Racial Discrimination Act, National Consultation Report (2015), Australian Human Rights Commission. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/publications/freedom-discrimination-report-40th-anniversary-racial>.