



Attention: Productivity Commission Inquiry Migrant Intake into Australia
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Dear Sir/Madam

Public Inquiry: Migrant Intake into Australia
Australian Multicultural Council Submission – 3 June 2015

The Council is pleased to present this submission in response to the Productivity Commission's invitation to submit responses to their Inquiry on Migrant Intake into Australia.

The Australian Multicultural Council is a ministerially-appointed body which provides advice to the Government on ways to sustain and support socially cohesive communities to ensure that all Australians have the opportunity to participate, engage and contribute to Australian life.

The Council strongly supports the continuation of the Government's current managed migration programme which not only maintains Australia's economic prosperity, but also supports our social cohesion.

Benefits of migration to Australia

Australia has always been culturally and linguistically diverse. Since 1945, Australia has successfully settled 7.5 million people. Today, over a quarter of the Australian population was born overseas and a further one fifth has at least one overseas-born parent. We identify with 300 ancestries and speak nearly as many languages, including indigenous languages. In Sydney alone, 40 per cent of the population speaks a non-English language at home. The 2014 Migration Council Australia Report, *The Economic Impact of Migration*, estimates that by 2050, migration will contribute \$1.6 trillion dollars to the Australian economy. These encouraging forecast figures assume that the Government will maintain a migration programme which looks to fill employment gaps while also encouraging migrants with entrepreneurial experience and skills to create employment opportunities.

Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity has contributed to our global reach into overseas markets and the successful expansion of Australia's trade networks. Despite Australia's growing diversity, our social cohesion and community harmony remain stable. The 2014 Scanlon Foundation National Survey Report, *Mapping Social Cohesion*, revealed that even in the context of rising unemployment and other economic concerns, 58 per cent of respondents indicated that Australia's immigration intake was 'about right' or 'too low'. In the same survey, 85 per cent of respondents agree that diversity has been good for Australia and 60 per cent believe that diversity strengthens the Australian way of life. This finding is further supported by the University of Western Sydney-led *Challenging Racism Project* which reported that 'about 87 per cent of Australians say that they see cultural diversity as a good thing for society'.

Such strong public support for Australia's approach to migration, and the cultural diversity which results, is significantly due to the Government's managed approach to migration which prioritises the capability of the prospective migrant to benefit Australia's economic prosperity, which in turn benefits all Australians.

Alternative methods for migrant intake

The Council is concerned about the possible introduction of a pricing mechanism into migration policy which would move from the current approach which prioritises the long term economic

and social benefits of migration to Australia, to an approach which is both short-term and revenue driven.

Without clear pre-arrival employment arrangements or opportunities, migrants who can afford to purchase visa rights may arrive in Australia without constructive networks or the necessary skills to help them find work. The resulting frustration and disappointment would compound the emotions already experienced by migrants who have left behind personal associations and employment background.

We are also concerned about the removal of family connections ('family reunion') as part of the migration programme. The ability of migrants, particularly Humanitarian entrants, to bring family members to Australia contributes to their successful long term settlement. Migrant family members also contribute to the Australian economy as consumers, employees and, in the case of grandparents, providing informal child care so that both parents can work.

The Council agrees with the concern raised in the Productivity Commission Inquiry paper regarding possible negative consequences of a large cohort of residents with a lower level of rights than the existing Australian population [page 35]. Not only could such discrepancy of entitlements jeopardise community harmony, but it would also contradict Australia's tradition of a 'fair go' for all. Our social stability and equality of opportunity are two attractive pull factors for potential migrants, including those who are looking for opportunities to establish their families in a safe country with clear and equal opportunities for citizenship and upward mobility.

Balance between temporary and permanent immigration

Noting the anticipated growth in temporary migration [Inquiry Paper page 5], the Council supports mechanisms to encourage young people, in particular, who meet the criteria to apply for Permanent Residency and citizenship pathways. This approach would not only fill employment gaps arising from an ageing population, but also encourage the growth of young households and families which increases the demand for goods and services.

To reduce the risk of marginalisation and encourage integration of temporary migrants, the Government may wish to review and revise its approach to settlement and social cohesion to better incorporate the needs and perspectives of this mobile cohort. Resulting programmes should be resourced to be satisfactorily implemented.

The ability to communicate effectively is critical for people to participate in both the workplace and the wider society beyond one's own language group. The Council recognises that some migrants may need Government support to learn English, obtain useful education qualifications and negotiate successful pathways to employment. In particular, Humanitarian entrants benefit from the Government's Settlement Services. Resources for these programmes should at least keep pace with the changing needs of the various client groups who may need support beyond the initial five year period. [refers to issues in the Inquiry Paper page 21].

Conclusion

The Council commends the Productivity Commission for conducting this Inquiry on *Migrant Intake into Australia*. We strongly recommend that the Government continue to manage migration into Australia based primarily on the employment needs of the country and the capability of prospective migrants to fill those needs. We remind the Government that Australia's success in absorbing generations of migrants into the resilient fabric of Australian society is the result of a migration programme based on migrants' skills and capabilities, which have contributed significantly to Australia's continuing prosperity and social stability. Changes to the migration programme which focus more on who can pay rather than who is skilled will jeopardise Australia's continuing economic prosperity and social cohesion.

Yours sincerely

Dr Sev Ozdowski OAM

Chair

3 June 2015