



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and Citizenship

The diversity advantage
“Enriching Australia through the well managed entry and settlement of people”

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Introduction

In the words of Malcolm Stevenson Forbes, American publisher and business man, diversity is ‘the art of thinking independently together’.¹ This art is not necessarily easy, but once mastered, the results are obvious.

This Metropolis conference is one example of diversity in action. This week people have gathered in Melbourne from all over the world to exchange ideas and share best practices. By listening to and participating in discussions, I am sure that we will all learn something that will help us improve our work in the future. We each have our own individual thoughts, but today is an opportunity to discuss these together.

Following on from Minister Andrews’ discussion earlier, I will today talk in some detail about migration to Australia and the impact it has had on our society. I will also discuss the role my department plays in creating and promoting diversity within the Australian community and leave you with a few personal thoughts on diversity.

Migration to Australia

But first, some background. Immigration has played a major role in shaping the Australia we live in today. Successive governments have fine-tuned migration policy and programme settings in response to the complex social, economic and other changes impacting on Australia. The programme has operated on a non-discriminatory basis for around four decades, and the use of migration by governments to benefit Australia has been one of the great and enduring success stories of our history.

It is no accident that my department’s purpose is to “Enrich Australia through the well managed entry and settlement of people”. We do this through applying Australia’s laws and the government’s policies to enable and regulate the entry, settlement and integration of people from overseas.

¹ Malcolm Stevenson Forbes, viewed <<http://www.quoteworld.org/quotes/4811>> on 27 September 2007.

We must ensure our procedures are fair and accessible as people move along the journey from visa applicant, to temporary resident or migrant and, for many, to Australian citizenship. We must administer the government's policies efficiently, effectively and to a high ethical standard. At the same time, we must ensure we identify and stop people who have no right of entry into Australia and those would do harm to the Australian community. I believe we are succeeding in our purpose.

Out of Australia's current population of just over 21 million, 45 per cent of us were either born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas. This means that nearly half of the Australian population has very strong links to another country, which is testament to our diversity. Around 6.6 million people have arrived here to settle permanently since October 1945, including a humanitarian and refugee component of more than 690 000 people.

In the immediate post-war years Australia experienced a huge influx of migrants. They came in large numbers from a relatively small number of mainly European countries. Many of you will be familiar with the fact that tens of thousands of people arrived here from the United Kingdom, Greece and Italy, for example, in the decades immediately after WW11.

Since the 1970s, migrants to Australia have come from an increasingly diverse range of countries. In the 2006-07 programme year, people migrated from over 200 countries; the top ten source countries were: the UK, New Zealand, India, China, the Philippines, South Africa, Vietnam, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Sudan.

We now have historically high levels of immigration with planning targets for the 2007-08 year of around 153 000, including about 102 000 principal applicants and their families under the skilled categories and about 13 000 refugee and humanitarian entrants. In this way, migration has provided a sizeable part of the human capital which has made the nation we live in today so successful as an economy, and as a diverse and cohesive society. Our refugee and humanitarian programme is such that Australia ranks, along with the United States and Canada, as one of the top three refugee resettlement countries in the world.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics recently announced that Australia had recorded its largest annual population increase ever.² Net overseas migration contributed 54 per cent to this growth.

And I note the acting executive director of the Australian Treasury's macro-economic group, David Gruen was recently quoted in the Australian Financial Review as saying that while net overseas migration now accounts for about half the nation's population growth, by the year 2047 it is expected to be the source of almost **all** net population growth.³

Promoting social cohesion will, in my view, therefore need to remain a priority into the future.

The advantages of migration and diversity

People migrate to succeed, not to fail; they come in search of a better life for themselves and their children. In turn this creates many economic and social advantages for the Australian community. This is especially apparent in relation to our workforce, where the migration programme can fill positions that are high in demand, but low in supply, in the domestic labour market.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics media release – September 24 2007

³ Australian Financial Review newspaper – September 26 2007 p.9

The skills and talents of a diverse workforce are important in supporting economic growth and helping businesses to forge new domestic and international market opportunities. To create an effective diversity culture, businesses must be able to bring new skills into the organisation and reward the unique contributions people make to the workplace. Through a better understanding of diversity, businesses can create more reflective, innovative and dynamic workplaces, and be more attuned to changing market expectations.

The capacity of business to interact with international markets is also significantly enhanced by the languages and cultural diversity of their staff. A clear benefit of diversity is being able to effectively communicate with businesses that operate in different cultures from our own.

My department, in itself, is a very diverse organisation. Our 7000 staff work in 95 locations, including 1000 staff in 68 overseas posts. Sixty-two per cent of our staff are female, and more than 15 per cent have declared they are from a non-English speaking background. In addition, many staff speak more than one language. I believe this diversity creates an atmosphere which fosters the creation of innovative ideas, as well as enabling us to more easily relate to and communicate with our diverse client-base.

Migrants also contribute to the economy through taxation and spending. Furthermore, their investment aids business and government service expansion as extra goods and services are required. There is also no question that the diversity that new migrants bring, underpins the rich cultural vibrancy of our nation.

I would like to briefly discuss the findings from a report which was commissioned by my department and prepared independently by the University of New England.⁴ The report, titled 'The Social Costs and Benefits of Migration into Australia' was released recently and noted that:

- there is overwhelming evidence that migrants continue to make substantial contributions to Australia's stock of human, social and produced capital;
- migrants participate widely in various aspects of community life, with many established migrant groups helping with the cultural and economic integration of new arrivals; and
- there are social benefits of migration, especially in the longer term.

With regard to cultural diversity, the report states that 'societies with greater cultural diversity stand a better chance of successfully adapting to the rapidly changing environment of this increasingly globalised world'.⁵ As a consequence, leveraging cultural diversity is important to Australia's future.

Chapter 4 of the report on 'Social Capital' concludes that 'most Australians think that immigration has been beneficial and embrace cultural diversity as a routine part of their civic and cultural lives'.⁶ The report concludes that, while the majority of Australians realise that we benefit immensely from cultural diversity, and opposition to immigration has fallen over the past decade, views on the issue remain mixed.⁷

⁴ Carrington, K, McIntoch, A & Walmsley, J (eds.) 2007, *The Social Costs and Benefits of Migration into Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 49

⁶ *ibid.*, p.55

⁷ *ibid.*, p.55

While there is a clear benefit from migration and diversity, the increasing ethno-cultural diversity of Australian society has presented us with a unique set of challenges. And yet, Australia has been and is a relatively cohesive society with few incidents of hostility driven by race or ethnicity.

Has this happened by chance? In my view, it has not. I mentioned earlier that people migrate to succeed, not to fail. This in part accounts for our success as a cohesive society. Migrants want to get on with their lives, achieve their goals and aspirations. In the process they have overwhelmingly left their historical enmities and hostilities at the airport departure lounge when they set out on their journey to Australia. However, targeted programmes, funded by successive governments, have also played a significant role.

Furthermore, while the basic parameters may have changed over time, there has been and continues to be a clear pathway to citizenship and full membership of Australian society.

Settlement Services

There has been a lot written recently about settlement and refugee issues. This financial year Australia again will resettle 13 000 refugees and humanitarian entrants. Every year the demand for refugee places exceeds the places available under the Humanitarian Programme.

All new refugees arriving in Australia face challenges settling in to the Australian way of life. Some find it more difficult to integrate because of pre-migration experiences such as torture and trauma, low levels of education and literacy, and the length of time they have spent in the abject poverty of refugee camps, for example.

To assist with this integration, the Australian Government provides a comprehensive range of settlement services for all newly arrived refugees.

Assistance begins with intensive, on-arrival services provided through the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy, including help finding a home, a package of goods to establish a household, and torture and trauma counselling. This programme is designed to assist clients on a needs basis for the first 6-12 months.

The Settlement Grants Programme is the next level of settlement support, designed to assist clients after the early arrival period to achieve self reliance and participate equitably in the community. Practical assistance like driver education, mentoring projects for new migrants with more established community members (employment or business) and youth sporting activities that encourage integration, are just some examples of the support offered under the programme.

English language tuition is provided under the Adult Migrant English Programme for eligible adult migrants and humanitarian entrants who do not have functional English. Refugees are provided with up to 910 hours of English language tuition designed to equip them with basic language skills. We also offer a national translating and interpreting service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In the 2007-08 Budget the government provided an additional \$209m over 4 years for an initiative to improve settlement outcomes for humanitarian entrants. This includes increased English language tuition for school-aged children, additional torture and trauma counselling and enhanced assistance to humanitarian entrants with exceptional needs.

It is important to help people realise their full potential as active members of the Australian community. In doing this, we are continually looking at ways to improve support for all new arrivals.

Conclusion

The success of our migration programmes, which have brought significant diversity to our community, is measured by the undeniable economic, cultural and societal benefits, and the low prevalence of social divisions and tensions.

However, it is essential that we continue to ensure our programmes support social cohesion, diversity and integration. This will be even more relevant in the future as migration levels increasingly contribute to our population growth.

A detailed, well-managed migration programme has many advantages - economic, social and cultural. In today's increasingly globalised world, I believe Australia's cultural diversity will ensure we can successfully adapt and remain competitive in the global market.

It is a salient point to recall that two of our last three Australians of the Year – Dr Fiona Wood AM and Professor Ian Frazer – were born overseas. Indeed, in 2005, when Dr Wood was named Australian of the Year, two of our other award winners were also born overseas; our Young Australian of the Year, Mr Khoa Do, and our Senior Australian of the Year, Mr Antonio Milhinhos. All four are now proud Australians contributing to our nation's future.

Australia has more Nobel Prize winners per capita than any other country. They were born in places like Traralgon, Kalgoorlie, the Atherton Tablelands and Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. But also places like Cumberland and London in the United Kingdom, and Leipzig in Germany.

I am proud to live in one of the world's oldest democracies, a society which values respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, freedom of religion, and commitment to the rule of law. In a parliamentary democracy that provides for equality of men and women, a country that has a spirit of egalitarianism and that embraces mutual respect, tolerance, fair play, compassion for those in need, and pursuit of the public good. A country whose earliest inhabitants have been here for tens of thousands of years, and whose millions of modern settlers have arrived as migrants since 1788.

Australia is a country where English is the national language, which provides a common bond for us all. We are a country where migrants have come from all around the world, and who have settled and integrated successfully to help form our diverse, modern, confident, and peaceful society.

I can only conclude that a well managed migration programme directly administered by government, combined with a range of carefully thought out and targeted programmes, has directly contributed to the positive outcomes we see today in Australia. And, I believe, this will continue into the future.