

A NEW AGENDA FOR MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

DECEMBER 1999

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FOREWORD

Australia occupies a unique intersection of culture, geography, history and economic circumstance. We are blessed with immense natural resources, living in a continent of great physical beauty. We have an educated and skilled workforce, democratic institutions, social harmony and a lifestyle that is the envy of the world.

We approach the new century with great optimism and with a renewed sense of purpose and confidence in our economic strength and way of life.

Australia's cultural diversity is one of our most important attributes as we face the challenges of a rapidly changing world. It has been nourished by our indigenous cultures, early European settlement and successive waves of immigration from all parts of the world. Our democratic values and commitment to a fair go for all underpin Australia's success as a multicultural and cosmopolitan society.

We are an open and tolerant society that promotes the celebration of diversity within the context of a unifying commitment to Australia. Our diversity is a source of competitive advantage, cultural enrichment and social stability.

The Government's response to the National Multicultural Advisory Council's report *Australian multiculturalism for a new century: Towards inclusiveness*, is intended to build on these achievements.

We cannot take what we have achieved for granted. Government policies and programs should be subject to periodic evaluation and renewal to keep them relevant and responsive to changing circumstances. The Government's response has been prepared after extensive consultations with interested groups and it is the fruits of two years of work by the Hon Philip Ruddock MP, Neville Roach and their associates.

On behalf of the Government, I thank them for their outstanding work.

(John Howard)

Message from the Minister

On 20 June 1997 I announced the appointment of a new National Multicultural Advisory Council. Its terms of reference asked the Council to ‘develop a report which recommends on a policy and implementation framework for the next decade that is aimed at ensuring that cultural diversity is a unifying force for Australia’. The Council’s report *Australian multiculturalism for a new century: Towards inclusiveness* was launched by the Prime Minister on 5 May 1999.

In the past 25 years there have been many official reports in relation to immigration and multicultural issues, and I welcome the Council’s report which makes recommendations that build on these previous reports. The report also draws on the public consultation that followed the Council’s December 1997 Issues Paper *Multicultural Australia: The Way Forward*.

I would like to record my appreciation of the work of the Council under the Chairmanship of Mr Neville Roach. The task the Government set for the Council was a very demanding one and the fact that its report has been so positively received is testament to its quality.

The Council’s 32 recommendations signal an evolutionary development of past practice, and I am pleased to say that the Government is able to embrace the essential thrust and main elements of the report. This document contains the Government’s response to each recommendation.

The Government supports the Council’s view that future multicultural policy should emphasise its relevance to all Australians and focus on strategies to maximise the benefits of cultural diversity. These are major and important challenges and are consistent with the overall outcomes the Government is seeking from multicultural policy: enhanced community harmony and achieving benefits from our diversity, in the national interest.

The Government’s plan of action is formulated with these priorities in mind and will be implemented in the years ahead to ensure that our cultural diversity is indeed a unifying force for Australia.

Philip Ruddock
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Reconciliation

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1. MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA

The Commonwealth Government remains committed to multicultural Australia. It has been central to our social, political, cultural and economic growth as a nation over the past fifty years, and is vital to our further development in the new millennium and beyond.

Australia is comprised of people who were born in this country and who have migrated here. Together, we have witnessed many changes in our nation. Our many shared experiences have produced a complex, cosmopolitan society, but together we have met and overcome challenges and striven for harmonious relationships between Australians from all backgrounds.

For its part, the Commonwealth Government has worked to ensure that our cultural diversity and all its implications are appropriately addressed through the development of policies and principles based on tolerance, humanity and mutual respect. A particular commitment by the Government has been to ensure that all Australians have the opportunity to be active and equal participants in Australian society, free to live their lives and maintain their cultural traditions.

But the democratic foundations of our society contain a balance of rights and obligations. The freedom of all Australians in practice is dependent on their abiding by mutual civic obligations. Thus, all Australians are expected to have an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and principles common to Australian society. These are the Constitution, Parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language, the rule of law, tolerance, and equality – including equality of the sexes.

Within this broad framework, each individual and group is welcome to make a contribution to the common good. We do not seek to impose a sameness on all our people. Nor do we seek to discourage the further evolution of the Australian culture which already includes the heritage of Indigenous Australians, our British and Irish settlers, our Australian-grown customs, and those of our more recently-arrived migrant groups. We are, in reality as well as by definition, a multicultural nation.

The term **Australian multiculturalism** summarises the way we address the challenges and opportunities of our cultural diversity. It is a term which recognises and celebrates Australia's cultural diversity. It accepts and respects the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage within an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and values of Australian democracy. It also refers specifically to the strategies, policies and programs that are designed to:

- make our administrative, social and economic infrastructure more responsive to the rights, obligations and needs of our culturally diverse population;
- promote social harmony among the different cultural groups in our society; and
- optimise the benefits of our cultural diversity for all Australians.

The values of Australian multiculturalism form one dimension of the values which make up Australian citizenship which is built on a set of common civic values, rights and obligations that can unify Australians. These include: respect for institutional structures, participation in

support of democracy and its institutions, respect for the law, respect for and tolerance of others' beliefs and practices, individual freedom of association and prime loyalty to Australia's interests.

The shared civic values that underpin Australia's civic identity and citizenship must necessarily reflect the cultural diversity of Australian society. Indeed Australian citizenship has played an important unifying role in the development of Australia's nationhood and the modern multicultural society which has evolved from it.

A strong multicultural framework can provide a firm basis for citizenship, and vice versa. Although Australians are very different as individuals we are unified by our common citizenship.

Multicultural policy also has its roots in Australian culture and contributes to its continuous enhancement and projection on the world stage. Australian culture includes Indigenous Australians, our British and Irish heritage, our Australian-grown customs, and those of our more recently arrived migrant groups as part of a dynamic and interacting set of life patterns. Australians all share a common culture, but every group and individual makes its own unique contribution to it.

For multiculturalism to be a unifying force in our developing nationhood and identity, it needs to be inclusive. It is about and for all Australians; it is not concerned mainly with immigration and minority ethnic communities. Multicultural Australia emphasises the things that unite us as a people – our common membership of the Australian community, our desire for social harmony, the benefits of our diversity and our evolving national character and identity.

In this context, the multicultural framework of our society has broadly benefited Indigenous peoples through its promotion of the integrity of diverse cultures and their harmonious intermingling. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are Australia's original inhabitants - its 'First Peoples'. While, therefore, they provide a foundation for the cultural diversity of the nation, it is appropriate that their distinct needs and rights be reaffirmed and accorded separate consideration.

Australian society has gained breadth and depth through the many benefits of our multicultural population. Our non-discriminatory immigration policy has drawn people from all around the world rather than from any one particular region. We thus have a reservoir of talent, energy, skills and knowledge which facilitates the way we do business with the rest of the world, especially given the reality of modern life and the 'global village'.

Modern communication facilities allow businesses located here to deal with markets and exchanges the world over as well as with customers in the towns and cities of Australia. Likewise, the growth of global media systems allows business arrangements to be conducted from local urban centres by way of the 'electronic super highway', using satellite, cable and other technology.

Products may thus be developed in Australia specifically for markets which may have quite different cultures to our own and marketed through international outlets. In such an environment, businesses which are able to communicate in the languages of their customers

and appreciate their cultural preferences will obviously have a distinct competitive advantage over those that do not.

The Government's Productive Diversity strategy aims to capitalise on the linguistic and cultural skills, business networks and market knowledge of individuals in our diverse population and to remove any impediments to their effective contribution in the workforce. This is to the advantage of all Australians and is yet another example of the benefits of our multicultural policy.

The Government will continue actively to seek opportunities to work in partnership with the private sector to help maximise the economic and social benefits of our diversity. Among other things, the Government has initiated a Productive Diversity Partnership Program, a cooperative venture between the Commonwealth, a group of Australia's foremost business schools and the private sector, including some of Australia's largest and most prominent corporations. Its purpose is to develop curriculum material for business education in both the university and TAFE sectors.

The ultimate goal is to achieve widespread appreciation of the fact that productivity and performance improvements are achievable through diversity management strategies, and that diversity planning should be viewed as an integral part of an organisation's business planning process.

In summary, we have built a social infrastructure of institutions, traditions and processes on our democratic foundation. Cultural diversity is one of our great social, cultural and economic resources. Australian unity in this diversity has been built on such moral values as respect for difference, tolerance and a common commitment to freedom, and an overriding commitment to Australia's national interests. For multicultural Australia to continue to flourish for the good of all Australians, multicultural policies and programs should be built on the foundation of our democratic system, using the following principles:

- **Civic Duty**, which obliges all Australians to support those basic structures and principles of Australian society which guarantee us our freedom and equality and enable diversity in our society to flourish;
- **Cultural Respect**, which, subject to the law, gives all Australians the right to express their own culture and beliefs and obliges them to accept the right of others to do the same;
- **Social Equity**, which entitles all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity so that they are able to contribute to the social, political and economic life of Australia, free from discrimination, including on the grounds of race, culture, religion, language, location, gender or place of birth; and
- **Productive Diversity**, which maximises for all Australians the significant cultural, social and economic dividends arising from the diversity of our population.

Australia's cultural diversity will be a continuing and fundamental strength of our society if the community and institutions base their action and measure their achievements on these four principles.

The Government also believes these principles form a sound basis for workplace diversity planning strategies, both within government and the private sector. Indeed, the Commonwealth Government has taken a leadership role in implementing workplace diversity. For example, 'respecting and valuing the diversity of the workforce by helping to prevent and eliminate discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, sexual preference, age, physical or mental disability, marital status, family responsibilities, pregnancy, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin' is a principle object of the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*.

The private sector faces the same diversity issues in relation to its workforce and clients as the public sector. The Government is itself committed to encouraging a holistic approach to the management of diversity and is keen to work with business to address the common issues.

Such involvement is consistent with the overall aim of the Government's multicultural policy: the achievement of enhanced community harmony and maximum benefits from our diversity, in the national interest. It is also consistent with a Plan of Action the Government has formulated for implementation in the years ahead to ensure that our cultural diversity is indeed a unifying force for Australia.

2. PLAN OF ACTION

To take forward multicultural policy, the Government has adopted a Plan of Action which will put into effect its on-going commitment and involvement in this area.

The Plan includes providing Commonwealth leadership to, and cooperation with, other spheres of government, the private sector and the wider community in relation to diversity management programs, and fostering closer working relationships with these sectors. Among other things, the Government will:

- facilitate partnerships within sectors of Australian government by means of a 'Diversity Australia' home page which will not only act as a coordination point for information of national significance but also facilitate international networking;
- implement a public information and education strategy to raise awareness and understanding of the benefits of Australia's cultural diversity, counter myths and misunderstandings and promote behaviour patterns and attitudes that build community harmony;
- continue to promote the productivity and performance improvements achievable through diversity management strategies including partnerships with the private sector; and
- promote an 'outreach' program to encourage harmonious relationships between people or organisations of different cultural backgrounds.

To assist the Government to develop and implement the Plan of Action which includes consultation, discussion and communication, it will establish a broad-based **Council for Multicultural Australia**. The Council will report to the Prime Minister and to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and be supported by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA). The Council's terms of reference will include:

- assisting the coordination of the Government's multicultural policy and programs within the Commonwealth and in relation to other spheres of government, the private sector and the wider community;
- promoting community relations and harmony, with a particular emphasis on raising awareness and understanding of:
 - the relevance of Australia's multicultural policy for all Australians; and
 - the economic and social benefits of cultural diversity;
- assisting and representing the Minister in dealing with relevant issues affecting the Australian community or representative groups;
- providing advice and reporting on specific matters referred to it by the Minister; and
- reporting annually to the Minister on its activities and achievements.

The Government will work closely with the Council to implement a communication strategy, following an evaluation of the current *Living in Harmony* initiative. Its key objective will be to raise awareness and understanding that cultural diversity is important to all Australians and that its benefits should be maximised in the national interest.

The Government is committed to the enhancing and focussing of Australian multiculturalism to make it inclusive and to ensure that the social, cultural and economic benefits of our diversity are fully maximised in the national interest.

3. RESPONSES TO THE COUNCIL'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The May 1999 report of the National Multicultural Advisory Council *Australian multiculturalism for a new century: Towards inclusiveness* made 32 recommendations to the Government. The Government's response to these recommendations follows.

Recommendation 1

*Australian society has undergone an enormous amount of change in the space of a single generation, and faces more crucial decisions. The Council **recommends** continued government support for Australian multiculturalism as a fundamental requirement and opportunity arising out of the cultural diversity of Australian society, and that this commitment be reflected in all government policies.*

Government Response

Supported. The Government acknowledges that there is an ongoing need to address issues raised by the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia. Consistent with responses to other recommendations, the main emphasis of Commonwealth Government multicultural policies is on achieving community harmony and deriving the benefits of Australia's diversity.

Recommendation 2

*The Council believes that the term ‘multiculturalism’ has served the Australian community well and best describes our positive acceptance of the reality and significance of our cultural diversity and the proactive approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities arising from it. While the term has drawn criticism from some segments of the community, and this is reflected in some of the submissions the Council has received, it believes there is no alternative noun that would work better. Also, any alternative term would soon attract similar criticism from those critical of the term or policy of multiculturalism. For all these reasons the Council **recommends** the retention of the term ‘multiculturalism’.*

Government Response

Supported. The term ‘multicultural’ is an appropriate description of the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australian society and the term ‘multiculturalism’ is an appropriate term to describe the public policies that address the issues raised by that diversity.

Recommendation 3

*Further, in order to recognise that our implementation of multiculturalism is unique and reflects Australia’s diverse heritage, history, democracy, culture and identity, it **recommends** that the prefix ‘Australian’ be used whenever appropriate.*

Government Response

Supported. The NMAC report rightly stresses the uniquely Australian character of our multicultural experience. The Government acknowledges that our free, democratic system and inherent belief in a *fair go* for all has enabled diversity in many forms to flourish.

Recommendation 4

*The Council **recommends** the adoption of the following definition of Australian multiculturalism:*

Australian multiculturalism is a term which recognises and celebrates Australia’s cultural diversity. It accepts and respects the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage within an overriding commitment to Australia and the basic structures and values of Australian democracy. It also refers to the strategies, policies and programs that are designed to:

- *make our administrative, social and economic infrastructure more responsive to the rights, obligations and needs of our culturally diverse population;*
- *promote social harmony among the different cultural groups in our society;*
- *optimise the benefits of our cultural diversity for all Australians.*

Government Response

Supported. The definition of Australian multiculturalism reflects the Commonwealth Government’s multicultural policies and goals.

Recommendation 5

*The Council **recommends** that the definition of Australian multiculturalism be clearly explained through a communication strategy that is designed to reach as many individuals and groups of the Australian community as possible.*

Government Response

Supported. The Government will adopt a communication strategy (which will be developed following an evaluation of the *Living in Harmony* initiative), designed to promote understanding of Australian multiculturalism, and in doing so, contribute to harmonious community relations in our society.

Recommendation 6

*The Council **recommends** the adoption of the following vision for Australian multiculturalism: ‘a united and harmonious Australia, built on the foundations of our democracy, and developing our continually evolving nationhood by recognising, embracing, valuing and investing in our heritage and cultural diversity’.*

Government Response

Supported. The Government accepts this as an appropriate vision for Australia as a culturally diverse society and agrees that the multicultural policies and programs that flow from the Council’s recommendations are directed towards achieving this vision.

Recommendation 7

*The Council believes there is a close and positive relationship between multiculturalism and the legal status of Australian Citizenship as well as the wider concept of ‘citizenship’ which refers to membership of the Australian community that is enjoyed by Australian Citizens and permanent residents. Australian Citizenship has played an important unifying role in the development of Australia’s nationhood and the modern multicultural society which has evolved with it. The Council believes it is highly desirable for Australian permanent residents to acquire Australian Citizenship when they become eligible to do so, and **recommends** the active promotion of the benefits of Australian Citizenship to encourage its take-up. However, it must be recognised that permanent residents, who are not yet eligible for or have not yet chosen to acquire Australian Citizenship, are nonetheless members of the Australian community and have all the rights and obligations of Australian Citizens except those that arise exclusively from Australian Citizenship.*

Government Response

Supported. The Government supports activities to promote the benefits of Australian Citizenship in order to encourage take-up rates.

Recommendation 8

The Council commends the work of the Discovering Democracy program developed within the Education, Training and Youth Affairs portfolio, which supports civics and citizenship

*education in schools and the wider community. The Council **recommends** that the program be used to reach as many Australians as possible. The Council intends providing input into the future development of this program to ensure that the cultural diversity of our society and its benefits as well as the meaning and value of multiculturalism receive appropriate emphasis.*

Government Response

Supported in principle. The Government supports the *Discovering Democracy* program which helps students to understand the relevance of political and legal systems to everyday life, and develop capacities to participate as informed, reflective and active citizens within their civic communities. The current *Discovering Democracy* program is scheduled to finish in June 2000. A formal evaluation of the program so far is due to be completed by the end of 1999. Any future program would include appropriate emphasis on the meaning and value of multiculturalism.

Recommendation 9

*A strongly expressed view in some of the public submissions from respondents who claim 'Anglo' or 'old Australia' heritage is that multiculturalism is a negative and divisive feature of Australian society, creating disdain for people of Anglo-Celtic origins and denigrating Australian culture by promoting other cultures as more worthy. The Council respects the people expressing these concerns but believes their views reflect an incorrect perception of multiculturalism, pointing to an important communication strategy priority. Australian culture is dynamic. It starts with and retains its links to our total heritage, but is not a fossilised entity which remains static from the time a particular group sets foot on Australian soil. Rather, it is a living, changing and interacting set of life patterns. It has been modified and enhanced by the arrival of many migrant groups. It continues to be developed by the evolution of ideas and customs within Australia and by global influences. The Council **recommends** that any communication strategy highlights the positive and mutually supportive relationship between Australian culture and Australian multiculturalism.*

Government Response

Supported. The Government acknowledges that Australian culture is continually evolving and agrees that multicultural policy has its roots in it and contributes to its continuous enhancement.

It is noted that the Australia Council's Arts for a Multicultural Australia policy recognises the importance of innovative approaches in relation to artistic and cultural practices which reflect the inclusiveness of Australian multiculturalism. Multicultural policies promote a challenging dialogue and, in the long term, encourage and achieve inclusiveness.

Recommendation 10

*Multiculturalism in its inclusive sense is crucial to our developing nationhood and Australian identity. The Council **recommends** that future multicultural policies and strategies give high priority to the notion and promotion of inclusiveness. It is important to correct the misconception that multiculturalism is concerned mainly with immigration and minority ethnic communities. Multiculturalism is about and for all Australians, and it is important that*

it seeks to embrace and be embraced by all Australians. It must be seen as relevant to the interests of all sectors of the Australian community: our original inhabitants, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as all other Australians, whether born here or overseas and whether of English- or non-English-speaking origin.

Government Response

Supported. The Government strongly agrees that multicultural policy is relevant to all Australians and is not just concerned with the needs of migrants from different cultural backgrounds. Multiculturalism should be seen to be in the interests of all sectors of the Australian community.

The Government accepts that inclusiveness is essential for continuing community harmony and will ensure that it will be an important aspect of the planned communication strategy to raise awareness and understanding about the importance of cultural diversity. To be effective, inclusiveness needs to be a two-way process that builds mutual respect, understanding and acceptance, while highlighting the mutual contribution of the host community, which includes Indigenous Australians, and migrants.

Recommendation 11

The Council recommends that the National Council for the Centenary of Federation, with which it has initiated discussions, as well as all government and other bodies in the public, private and community sectors involved in preparations for the Centenary, ensure that the transformation of Australia from a somewhat insular and largely Anglo-Celtic white society to one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, is given the prominence it deserves. The experience and contribution of Australians from all over the world in the course of this transformation should be appropriately celebrated and commemorated in the events and lasting memorials that mark the Centenary. Full advantage should be taken of the outstanding opportunity that the Centenary celebrations provide to highlight the transition of Australian multiculturalism towards the greater inclusiveness recommended by the Council. Additionally, the interest generated by the Centenary should be used to promote educational programs to make all Australians more aware of our cultural heritage starting with Indigenous people to European settlement to modern multicultural Australia, as well as our political history including the development of our democratic system, the creation of the Australian nation in 1901 and the progress leading to the Centenary.

Government Response

Supported in principle. The overall objective of the National Council for the Centenary of Federation is to work with State and Territory bodies to ensure broad community and corporate participation in the centenary celebrations. This objective is reflected throughout the National Council's 'Calendar of National Events and Activities' and through various History and Education Grant projects. The aim is to involve all Australians everywhere with events and activities that will take place throughout the whole of 2001. Inclusiveness is a priority.

The National Archives of Australia also has a program of Centenary of Federation projects, developed with other Australian cultural institutions. The National Museum, as a flagship of

the Centenary of Federation, will play a major part in promoting a greater awareness of Australia's history.

The Commonwealth Government recognises the value of history and our Australian heritage as areas of study in schools. Under the *Discovering Democracy* program, the Commonwealth has cemented its commitment to the study of Australian history and civic life by allocating \$18 million over four years (1997-2000) to schools, universities, and adult and community education sectors in all States and Territories. The program is assisting students to understand the history and operations of Australia's system of government and institutions, the principles that support Australian democracy and the values and attitudes that enable citizens to participate in the political process and contribute to civic life.

The Government supports the current links and the development of future activities between the *Discovering Democracy* program and initiatives planned by the National Council for the Centenary of Federation. The Government will also encourage the new Council for Multicultural Australia to establish links with the National Council for the Centenary of Federation.

Recommendation 12

*The Council notes that the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991 ceases to be in force on 1 January 2001. The Council is particularly keen to support the achievements of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation up to and beyond this date. The Council therefore **recommends** that individuals as well as government, private and community organisations commit themselves to carry forward the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation by working to help to improve respect, trust and understanding between Indigenous and other Australians. For its part, the Council is committed to supporting ongoing community education activities, speaker exchanges between community organisations, involvement in cultural activities, the development of joint enterprises or partnerships, and reciprocal membership of community organisations.*

Government Response

Supported. Like NMAC, the Government recognises that the reconciliation process will live beyond the official end date of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) on 31 December 2000. The Government notes that CAR's draft document for reconciliation proposes a declaration for reconciliation and four national strategies to advance reconciliation, one of which is a strategy to sustain the reconciliation process.

The proposed strategy to sustain the reconciliation process includes elements such as promoting knowledge and understanding of Australia's colonisation, celebration of the diversity of origin of Australia's peoples, the establishment of a reconciliation foundation, promotion of local symbols of reconciliation and formal protection for the declaration of reconciliation.

Formal nation-wide consultations on CAR's draft document for reconciliation are taking place from July to December 1999. CAR's final recommendations for a document for reconciliation will be launched on 27 May 2000 at a national event in Sydney. CAR hopes that private and community organisations, individuals and governments will make

commitments to carry out the strategies in its document for reconciliation from May 2000, which will ensure that reconciliation becomes an ongoing reality in the life of the nation.

The Government has supported the consultation process through providing an extra \$2.4 million in funding to CAR until the end of its final term in December 2000. The Government will follow the public discussion with interest and will express its own views at an appropriate time.

Reconciliation is a responsibility for all Australians and the Prime Minister has already urged all members of our society to contribute constructively to the consultation process.

There are many differences between reconciliation and multicultural issues and they must not be inappropriately intertwined. There is, however, also much common ground. The extent to which many of the goals of reconciliation and multicultural policy are achieved is dependent in large measure by the extent to which Australians embrace diversity.

For this reason, the Government supports initiatives of the kind indicated by the Council's report that bring Australians from different backgrounds together and help them to work together for a common good.

Many Commonwealth agencies have active programs and policies that impact directly on Indigenous Australians and reconciliation outcomes.

See also the response to recommendations 10 and 14.

Recommendation 13

*The Council notes that the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has established that 'there is broad community support for a formal reconciliation agreement. A majority of people believes that an agreement would improve relations between Indigenous Australians and the wider community. Strong community support has also been shown for a new Constitutional preamble which would acknowledge the unique status of Indigenous people and their original ownership of this land.' The Council notes that the Government has agreed to hold a referendum on this matter in conjunction with the November 1999 referendum on an Australian Republic. The Council **recommends** that any revision of the preamble of the Australian Constitution incorporates recognition of the diverse backgrounds of the Australian people, including such acknowledgment of the unique status of our Indigenous people.*

Government Response

Supported. The Government considers that reconciliation between Indigenous Australians and the wider Australian community would be enhanced by a broadly agreed document of reconciliation. The Government supports the nation wide consultations taking place between July and November 1999 on the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's draft document for reconciliation.

A proposed law to alter the Constitution to insert a preamble, the Constitution Alteration (Preamble) Act 1999, passed the Parliament on 12 August 1999. A referendum on the proposed preamble was held on 6 November 1999 in conjunction with the referendum on whether Australia should become a republic. The proposed preamble was not approved at the

referendum. It included recognition of the diverse cultural backgrounds of the Australian people and the nation-building contribution of generations of immigrants. It also recognised Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as the nation's first people and honoured them for their deep kinship with their lands and for their ancient and continuing cultures which enrich the life of our country.

Recommendation 14

*The Council **recommends** that future multicultural policies and strategies give high priority to outreach strategies that build bridges of understanding and mutual interest among individuals and groups of different cultural backgrounds, including between groups whose members are drawn from specific ethnic and Indigenous cultures and more general community bodies.*

Government Response

Supported. The Government recognises the need to break down barriers of misunderstanding and prejudice in order to build and sustain a harmonious society that values its diversity. Building on the *Living in Harmony* initiative, the Government will actively promote 'outreach' – the development of relationships between people or organisations of different cultural backgrounds.

The outreach strategy supports both multicultural and Aboriginal reconciliation objectives. It includes Australians from all walks of life, no matter where they live. It will be supported by a network of Australian people, from as many different backgrounds as possible, who can speak with authority about living with cultural diversity.

It is noted that numerous Commonwealth agencies have active outreach strategies in place, including the National Library of Australia and the National Archives of Australia. A National Heritage Places Strategy is also being developed which will list nationally important heritage places. This commitment recognises the importance of conserving our diverse heritage, including migrant heritage places.

See also the response to recommendations 10, 12 and 32.

Recommendation 15

*Because of the pervasive influence of multiculturalism on the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of all Australians, now and in the future, it warrants and demands leadership and positive, proactive support and commitment by political, public service, business and community leaders, educators, the media and individual Australians. Without such leadership, divisive and intolerant views and attitudes can spread to the point where they threaten community harmony, causing significant social and economic stress, and even serious damage. On the other hand, through strong leadership, the benefits of our diversity can be accelerated and maximised, and enjoyed and celebrated by all Australians. While it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that appropriate policies are in place, in the final analysis it is the people who make them work. The Council therefore **recommends** that future multicultural strategies and policies give high priority to raising awareness of the critical importance of leadership, in all walks of life, for the harmony and wellbeing of our culturally diverse society.*

Government Response

Supported. Leadership of the kind envisaged by the Council would contribute to the wellbeing of our culturally diverse society. The Government's plan of action will contribute to raising awareness of the importance of leadership in all walks of life.

Recommendation 16

*The Council believes that the active support of successive governments, irrespective of political persuasion, has been a major factor in the success of multiculturalism in Australia. It is essential that such broad-based political support is maintained because any politicians or parties seeking to form government, or to influence government policy, must ensure that their policies are sensitive to the diverse community they are designed to assist. Failure to do so would be a moral failure, an affront to the strong sense of justice and fair play of the Australian people, and would pose a serious threat to community harmony and the integrity of our democratic system in a culturally diverse society. This is why the Council urges and **recommends** to all responsible political leaders that they not lend support to or confer any political respectability or credibility on individuals or parties that espouse policies that violate the spirit of the Joint Parliamentary Statement of 30 October 1996. There should be no scope for political expediency to override moral principle.*

Government Response

Noted. The Government reaffirms its commitment to the Joint Parliamentary Statement of 30 October 1996.

Recommendation 17

*The Council recognises that adversarial debate is a fundamental component of our Parliamentary system and serves to ensure Government accountability. However, the Council urges all Parliamentary parties throughout Australia, particularly those in Government and Opposition, to seek common ground in relation to multicultural policy and to avoid political point-scoring that would send wrong signals to the community and might damage community harmony. The Council notes that the 1989 National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia enjoyed political consensus and strongly **recommends** that all responsible parties, particularly those in Government and Opposition, work together so that the ongoing development of multiculturalism enjoys a similar consensus.*

Government Response

Noted. Reactions to the NMAC report have indicated that most political parties throughout Australia support Australian multiculturalism.

Recommendation 18

*The Council **recommends** the adoption of the following statement of the foundations and principles of multiculturalism, which incorporates all of the goals and principles of the 1989 National Agenda, but which also reflects the focus that the Council is proposing:*

Australian democracy guarantees us our civic freedoms and our fundamental rights and equality, and it is the institutions of Australian democracy that enable diversity in our society to flourish. Australian society is diverse, encompassing a wealth of cultures, histories and traditions, rural and urban, of Indigenous and all other Australians. The proper functioning of our society requires us to manage the consequences of our cultural diversity in the interest of the individual and society as a whole. This will be achieved, and Australian multiculturalism will be a continuing and fundamental strength of our society, if the Australian people and the institutions of our society base their actions and measure their achievements on the following principles for living with cultural diversity:

- ***Civic Duty:*** *all Australians are obliged to support the basic structures and principles of Australian society – our Constitution, democratic institutions and values – which guarantee us our freedom and equality and enable diversity in our society to flourish;*
- ***Cultural Respect:*** *subject to the law, the right to express one’s own culture and beliefs involves a reciprocal obligation to accept the right of others to do the same;*
- ***Social Equity:*** *all Australians are entitled to equality of treatment and opportunity enabling them to contribute to the social, political and economic life of Australia, free from discrimination on the grounds of race, culture, religion, language, location, gender or place of birth;*
- ***Productive Diversity:*** *the significant cultural, social and economic dividends which arise from the diversity of our population should be maximised for the benefit of all Australians.*

Government Response

Supported. The Government notes that these four principles are drawn largely from those articulated in the 1989 *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, which are, in turn, based on the eight goals identified by the Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs in 1988.

The Government welcomes the further refinement of the 1989 statement into four new principles that more appropriately express the balance of rights and obligations of Australians in living with cultural diversity.

These principles are based on fundamental tenets of Australia’s democratic traditions and reflect the balance of rights and obligations that is so central to these traditions. For instance, our right to be free implies an obligation to grant others the freedom to differ from us, because our freedom in practice requires all Australians to abide by our mutual civic obligations.

As Australians we have equal rights and equal obligations. In accepting that we have fundamental equalities and similarities as human beings and citizens, we acknowledge that a harmonious community must be built on mutual respect.

Given that the Australian population is racially, culturally and socially diverse, the proper functioning of our democratic society requires us to live constructively with this diversity. As individuals we share many concerns and goals, many of which are related to peace and harmony within society.

The crucial challenge for us is that we draw the best from our many cultures, learn the lessons of our many histories and increase understanding that we share a single democracy and have a common future.

Recommendation 19

*The Council **recommends** that these principles be adopted as the basis of an enhanced and refocussed multicultural policy framework, and emphasises that the initiatives recommended in this report are directed to translating these principles into action.*

Government Response

Supported. See response to recommendation 18.

Recommendation 20

*In particular, the Council **recommends** the enhancement and refocussing of multiculturalism by:*

- *highlighting that Australian multiculturalism has been built on the evolving values of Australian democracy and ‘citizenship’;*
- *ensuring that it adequately reflects the balance of rights and obligations expected of all ‘citizens’;*
- *making it inclusive so that it seeks to embrace and be embraced by all sections of the community by:*
 - *acknowledging the contribution of all Australians to the success of our multicultural society, and in particular the heritage of Great Britain and Ireland from which our democracy has evolved;*
 - *stressing the imperative nature and urgency of reconciliation between our Indigenous people and all other Australians;*
 - *promoting acceptance and mutual respect by all Australians of our diverse cultures;*
 - *drawing a clear conceptual distinction between settlement and multicultural strategies;*
- *ensuring that we maximise the social, cultural and economic benefits of our diversity and address any of its weaknesses;*
- *ensuring that the funding of multicultural programs is based on defined criteria and accountability;*
- *seeking political leadership and cross-party support for Australian multiculturalism;*
- *stressing the importance of leadership, in all areas of life, for the harmony and wellbeing of a culturally diverse society.*

Government Response

Supported. The Government notes that this recommendation summarises the Council’s key priorities for enhancing and refocussing multicultural policy, each of which is supported in more detail elsewhere in this response.

Recommendation 21

*The funding directed to Australian multiculturalism is, while not inconsiderable, very much lower than sometimes perceived. This is clear from the Council's analysis of the budget of the Federal Government Department that has primary responsibility for multiculturalism, namely the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. In the Council's view, funding per se is not a central issue, provided justification and accountability standards are met. Emotive arguments about funding can be a distraction from the important questions that such funding aims to address, such as how our undeniably multicultural society should build community harmony and derive the benefits of its diversity. Multicultural programs are, after all, designed in the national interest, and funds should continue to be available to them as an investment. The dividends are a more fair, stable and harmonious society which is also increasingly able to reap economic rewards from the domestic and international opportunities its diversity offers. The Council therefore **recommends** that multiculturalism continues to be developed as an important and distinct priority, in addition to the continuation of settlement programs designed to accommodate the settlement requirements of new migrants.*

Government Response

Supported. The Government acknowledges that there is a perception in some parts of the community that multicultural policies and programs are largely for migrants from non-English speaking countries. It is also acknowledged that multicultural and settlement programs are distinct but interlinked.

The Government will continue to develop and fund multicultural policies and programs as distinct from settlement policies and programs, consistent with public interest and accountability criteria.

Recommendation 22

While the Council believes that vigorous promotion of multicultural strategies in all areas of public policy is justified and should continue, it fully accepts that all funding emanating from such strategies should be subject to the same scrutiny as all government programs. It proposes that the main criteria by which the merits of funding for multicultural programs are assessed should be:

- **Need** - subject to the eligibility criteria for each program, where an individual or a group has a need arising out of ethnicity or other cultural difference it ought to be met, just as all other special needs are met within our democratic social infrastructure;
- **Benefit to Australia** - where it can be demonstrated that addressing a problem or exploiting the advantages of cultural diversity provides an economic, social or cultural benefit to Australia. This is consistent with government funding of programs in other areas designed to produce beneficial outcomes for Australia;
- **Social justice and equity** - all programs should be adjusted to address disadvantage or loss of entitlement arising out of ethnicity or cultural differences, just as other forms of disadvantage suffered by individuals or groups relative to other Australians are addressed.

The Council recommends that proposals for new multicultural initiatives, as well as for the renewal of existing ones, are assessed against one or more of the above criteria. This will ensure that all multicultural programs are justified on objective grounds, effectively answering unfounded criticism and leading to increased public support for Australian multiculturalism.

Government Response

Supported. The Government agrees that these criteria for public accountability are appropriate and timely.

The Government considers, however, that there is some duplication in the ‘need’ and ‘social justice and equity’ criteria, and has decided to merge them into a new criterion called ‘need and social equity’. The two resultant criteria are:

- **Need and Social Equity** - subject to the eligibility criteria and within budgetary constraints for each program, where an individual or a group has a need (including suffering disadvantage or loss of entitlement) arising out of ethnicity or other cultural difference it ought to be addressed, just as all other special needs are addressed within our social infrastructure;
- **Benefit to Australia** - where it can be demonstrated that addressing a problem or utilising the advantages of cultural diversity provides an economic, social or cultural benefit to Australia. This is consistent with government funding of programs in other areas designed to produce beneficial outcomes for Australia.

The application of these criteria will be within the context of the Government’s outcomes and outputs framework, with particular reference to the whole-of-Government outcome set out in the Immigration and Multicultural Affairs portfolio of ‘Australia, enriched through the entry and settlement of people, valuing its citizenship and appreciating its cultural diversity’.

It is noted that funded organisations are required to observe the principles of the Government’s *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*.

Recommendation 23

The Council notes that the success of Australia’s culturally diverse society can contribute significantly to Australia’s image in the promotion of our strategic international interests. With this objective in mind we must ensure that opportunities to project a positive image of Australia internationally must not be missed. Particular attention needs to be paid to the Sydney 2000 and Paralympic Games. Australia’s selection to host these most prestigious of all events was significantly influenced by the strong promotion of our cultural diversity, with special emphasis on our Indigenous communities and the contribution of migrants from all over the world. The Council is also urging the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) to ensure involvement and representation of Australia’s Indigenous and multicultural population at all appropriate levels of influence within the SOCOG organisation. This will encourage our culturally diverse communities who helped to win the Games to continue their contribution in the lead up to the running of the Games and related activities. It will also ensure that the special language, religious, food and other social and cultural requirements of Australians and overseas visitors are well provided for, enabling people of all origins and cultures to share in the enjoyment of the Games. The Council

strongly recommends that all bodies responsible for planning and running the Games ensure that Australia fully lives up to the culturally diverse image we previously highlighted. Australia's Indigenous and ethnic communities need to be appropriately represented in all planning and management processes, to encourage their continued contribution and give them a genuine opportunity to share in the enjoyment of the Games and related activities.

Government Response

Noted. The Government recognises that showcasing our cultural diversity here and overseas played an important part in securing the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games for Australia. The Government also recognises that the Commonwealth and New South Wales Governments, the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games and the Sydney Paralympic Organising Committee need to continue showcasing this cultural diversity in the lead-up to and during the Games in order to leverage the maximum long-term benefits for this country from the staging of the Games. Commonwealth Departments and agencies such as the Australian Trade Commission, Australian Tourist Commission and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade already place a high priority on this matter through their programs aimed at promoting Australia's interests overseas in the lead-up to the Games.

Recommendation 24

Advisory bodies, boards, executive management teams and ministries, whether in the private, public or community sector, are generally not sufficiently representative of the cultural diversity of the communities they are meant to lead, to manage, to serve, to sell to, to buy from and to work with. Acceleration of the use of our culturally diverse people will not occur if it is left entirely to market forces. A more proactive approach is necessary. This should be considered not only for equity reasons, but because it makes good business sense. It should not mean the denial of merit but rather the expansion of merit criteria to include the value of diversity. This is based on the principle that diverse boards, advisory bodies, workforces, public and private sector management teams, law enforcement agencies, Parliaments and governments are all likely to be more successful than ones where all members look and think the same. The Council urges all organisations to seek diversity at all levels to better represent the community or clientele they serve. The Council recommends that the Australian Government in particular, but other levels of government as well, provide leadership by example in this important area by increasing diversity, particularly on advisory bodies and boards, management and workforces involved in the delivery of services and community contact.

Government Response

Supported. It is essential that advisory bodies and boards, management and workforces involved in the delivery of services and community contact are fully attuned to the needs and interests of the diverse communities they serve. One very effective way of achieving this is to have diverse membership, as outlined in the 'communication' principle of the Government's *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*.

The Government has set up the *Select* register, a database of suitably qualified Australians from diverse backgrounds who are willing to serve on such bodies. Usage of *Select* does not involve quotas; the intention is to draw decision makers' attention to the presence of qualified people whose claims are considered on merit, along with other candidates.

Recommendation 25

*The Council notes that research undertaken in 1998 for the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs indicates that significant opportunities exist for the development and promotion of productive diversity. The Council **recommends** that future multicultural policy give high priority to initiatives in education and training that promote productive diversity principles and develop the skills needed to maximise the diversity dividend. This could be done in the first instance in business education and training in both the university and TAFE sectors and, where applicable, through partnerships between business educators and the business community. These principles and skills could also be given priority through the activities of relevant Commonwealth funding agencies and through direct advocacy with business.*

Government Response

Supported. The Government will continue to actively seek opportunities to work in partnership with the private sector to help maximise the economic and social benefits of our diversity.

The Government believes that it is best left to employees and employers to determine their own management priorities and practices in accordance with the particular circumstances of their own workplaces. However, the Government is keen to encourage and assist business with respect to the maximisation of the diversity dividend as a means of both increasing the wellbeing of potentially disadvantaged groups, and of securing economic growth through increased productivity and competitiveness.

Research undertaken in 1998 by the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs *Diversity and Dollars* found a high philosophical commitment in Australian business to principles of managing diversity, but little by way of practical workplace diversity policies.

The Government considers it to be in the national interest to manage workplace diversity factors as effectively as possible. It has, therefore, facilitated processes of sharing experiences and expertise with a view to developing Australian best practice models. For example, it has initiated a Productive Diversity Partnership Program, a cooperative venture between the Commonwealth, a group of Australia's foremost business schools and the private sector, including some of Australia's largest and most prominent corporations. Its purpose is to develop curriculum material for business education in both the university and TAFE sectors.

This is being done in the first instance by investigating practical workplace diversity issues within participating companies with a view to stimulating discussion and developing resources to assist diversity management and understanding of the issues.

The resource development phase is being undertaken primarily by business education professionals, but is being driven by the practical needs of business. The Government recognises the benefits to business of putting diversity strategies, including equal employment opportunity, firmly in the context of good business practice, and integrating EEO and diversity into more general human resource management and business strategies. Disparate

approaches are unlikely to yield the best results for business or for those people to whom EEO policies and practices most apply.

The findings of the resource development phase are to be reported at a Diversity 2000 conference to be held in November 2000. The outcomes of the conference will then be further developed into practical curriculum material and management tools for use throughout the university and TAFE sectors.

In part to address the need to share experiences and expertise, the Government will develop a Productive Diversity home page, in consultation with all levels of government, education and industry. The home page will hold, or provide access to, valuable information and advice for managers and service providers.

The ultimate goal is to maximise the economic benefits offered to Australian society by responding to its diversity by producing material that is recognised as world best practice for the management of workplace diversity.

This would be evident by diversity education becoming embedded within business and management tertiary curricula in Australia, diversity planning being viewed as an integral part of an organisation's business planning process and the general availability of business data that illustrates the productivity and performance improvements achievable through diversity management strategies.

The widespread achievement of these outcomes could be significant evidence of equally widespread voluntary compliance with various equal opportunity requirements.

See also recommendation 27.

Recommendation 26

*The Australian Public Service (APS) has a very diverse workforce and the Council is pleased to note that this is recognised in the Public Service Bill 1997 at Section 10, which defines the values which provide the philosophical underpinnings for the Bill. The Council notes, however, that these values acknowledge that APS employees have diverse backgrounds, but do not specifically acknowledge that the Commonwealth Government's clients also have diverse backgrounds. The Council considers that adding such an acknowledgment to the APS values would make the Australian Public Service an exemplar of best practice in managing human diversity (not just cultural diversity) in both its workforce and clients. It would also provide an ideal legislative basis for the Client Service Charters that all departments are required to have. The Council therefore **recommends** that the APS values be modified to acknowledge that the Commonwealth Government's clients have diverse backgrounds which need to be addressed in the development and delivery of services to them.*

Government Response

Supported. The *Public Service Act 1999* (the Act) which was passed by Parliament on 20 October 1999 includes a list of specific APS Values, formerly in Public Service Regulations, that set out the standards of integrity, professionalism and behaviour that the Government, Parliament and the community expect from the APS. The Act also requires APS agency heads to uphold and promote the APS Values, while the APS Code of Conduct,

also set out in the Act, requires all employees to uphold the Values. The Public Service Commissioner is required to provide, in the annual State of the Service Report, an evaluation of the extent to which agencies have upheld and incorporated the Values.

In light of the Council's recommendations, the Government has amended the APS Value relating to client service and has included this in the Act. Section 10(1)(g) is now as follows:

the APS delivers services fairly, effectively, impartially and courteously to the Australian public **and is sensitive to the diversity of the Australian public;**

in recognition of the diverse backgrounds of the Commonwealth's clients. In order to demonstrate that they have upheld and promoted this Value, agency heads are accountable for having systems in place to ensure that client service arrangements took appropriate account of client diversity.

Section 10 of the Act also includes the APS Value covering diversity in the workplace:

the APS provides a workplace which is free from discrimination and recognises and utilises the diversity of the Australian community it serves;

and section 18 of the Act requires agency heads to establish a workplace diversity program to assist in giving effect to the APS Values. These sections give legislative effect to the workplace diversity model in APS employment, which has previously been implemented and managed through administrative means. The workplace diversity model encompasses but goes beyond the EEO concept of rectifying disadvantage by focussing on the positive contributions that a diverse workforce can make to organisational effectiveness, business goals and morale.

The APS approach to diversity therefore includes both its workforce and its clients. The Government believes that there is likely to be a strong link between the effective utilisation of diversity in the workplace and effective client service to a diverse community, and is keen to encourage a holistic approach to the management of diversity. Given this holistic approach to diversity, the Government is reviewing the different reporting responsibilities for access and equity (by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs), client service charters (by the Department of Finance and Administration) and workplace diversity (by the Public Service Commissioner). This review will take into account the differing functions and responsibilities of these agencies, the varying accountability obligations on which the reports are based, the varying aims and coverage of the reports and the differing interests of stakeholders in them.

See also recommendations 24 and 27.

Recommendation 27

*The Council further **recommends** that private and community sector organisations consider how the APS values and the principles of the Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society might be relevant to their diversity management and planning processes, and develop similar charters appropriate to their specific environment and the needs of their constituents, customers and employees.*

Government Response

Noted. The Government cannot be prescriptive about charters or programs for the private sector. However, where benefit can be derived from adapting the principles of a government program to a company's operations, this ought to be pursued. See also recommendation 25.

Recommendation 28

*English is Australia's national language. Because it is a significant unifying influence and the ability to speak English is fundamental to full participation in Australian society, there would appear to be virtually no disagreement in the community about the importance of English language skills. The importance of English language proficiency has recently increased significantly because English has become the defacto standard for business and Internet communications throughout the world. Accordingly, the Council fully supports, and strongly **recommends** the continuation of, the high priority that has been given for many years to English language tuition for adult migrants.*

Government Response

Supported. The Government will continue the high priority that has been given for many years to English language tuition for adult migrants.

For instance, the Adult Migrant English Program gives migrants and humanitarian entrants free access to 510 hours of English language training soon after their arrival in Australia. The Workplace English Language and Literacy Program provides funding to employers to support the training of workers in vocational skills integrated with English language and literacy skills, that are sufficient to enable them to meet the demands of their current and future employment and training needs. The Advanced English for Migrants Program provides advanced level English language assistance to help job seekers to gain employment or enter vocational courses or other post-secondary institutions.

Recommendation 29

*In a multicultural society such as ours, proficiency in a language other than English is more than desirable; it can be a business or social imperative. If we are to engage the global marketplace and derive maximum benefit from it, Australia must maintain expertise in languages other than English, particularly the major languages of our region and the world. It is therefore very important that teaching languages other than English continues to be a priority and that the value of a multilingual community be better appreciated. The Commonwealth's specific priorities for funding languages other than English include the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS) Strategy and two language elements – Community Languages and Priority Languages. The Council fully endorses all these language programs, and **recommends** their continuation.*

Government Response

Supported. The Government will continue the high priority that has been given for many years to teaching languages other than English. The Commonwealth funds three elements of the school languages program - the National Asian Languages and Studies in Australian Schools (NALSAS), Priority Languages and Community Languages.

The NALSAS Strategy is a collaborative initiative between the Commonwealth, States and Territories. Through NALSAS the Commonwealth funds school education jurisdictions to enhance and expand the provision of four Asian languages - Chinese (Mandarin), Indonesian, Japanese and Korean - and studies of Asia across the curriculum. The Strategy aims to improve Australia's capacity and preparedness to interact internationally, in particular, with key Asian economies.

In the 1999-2000 Budget the Commonwealth announced a further \$90 m in funding for NALSAS to the end of 2002. Funding for Priority Languages and Community Languages is an ongoing commitment.

It is also noted that the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) has extensive radio and television broadcasts in languages other than English. SBS Radio broadcasts 650 hours of programming each week in 68 languages. SBS television policy is that half of scheduled programming will be in languages other than English, which requires hundreds of hours of subtitling in some sixty languages.

The Government recognises the economic opportunities created by the rich pool of language resources that already exist in Australia's multicultural society and will continue to promote their full utilisation.

Recommendation 30

*A primary role for government is to provide political and moral leadership to ensure that there is widespread community acceptance and support for a proactive approach to multicultural policy. All government policies and programs, not just those that have a specific multicultural objective, must take into account the diversity that permeates our society. In the Council's view, the best vehicle for the Australian Government to demonstrate both leadership and commitment, and to ensure that multicultural principles are applied consistently and effectively across all departments, is through the establishment of an independent central agency responsible for the oversight of the Government's multicultural program. The Council **recommends** the formation of a central coordinating agency, responsible to the Prime Minister or a Cabinet Minister, to help formulate and implement the Australian Government's multicultural policies and to coordinate them with the initiatives of other levels of government and the wider community.*

Government Response

Supported in principle. The Government will establish a Council for Multicultural Australia to provide advice to the Government on multicultural policy, including to promote better understanding and practical application of the policy, so as to ensure that Australia's cultural diversity is a productive and unifying force in our society.

The Council will report to the Prime Minister and to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs and work with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) to meet the stated objectives. Secretariat support for the Council will be provided by Multicultural Affairs Branch within DIMA.

Part 1: Draft Terms of Reference

The Council for Multicultural Australia will:

- (i) assist the Government in developing and implementing a practical plan of action (which will include an active program of consultation, discussion and communication) to ensure that Australia's cultural diversity is a productive and unifying force in our society;
- (ii) assist the coordination of the Government's multicultural policy and programs within the Commonwealth and in relation to other levels of government, the private sector and the wider community;
- (iii) promote community relations and harmony, with a particular emphasis on raising awareness and understanding of:
 - the relevance of Australia's multicultural policy for all Australians; and
 - the economic and social benefits of cultural diversity;
- (iv) assist and represent the Minister in dealing with relevant issues affecting the Australian community or representative groups;
- (v) provide advice and report on specific matters referred to it by the Minister;
- (vi) report annually to the Minister on the Council's activities and achievements.

In carrying out its work, the Council undertakes appropriate activities, including to:

- consult stakeholders;
- hold seminars, workshops and/or conferences;
- undertake activities to clearly explain the definition and principles of Australian multiculturalism and its practical applications; and
- facilitate liaison between government and the community.

Part 2: Membership, Meetings and Committees

Membership

The Council will be appointed by the Government and will consist of up to 15 members, including a Chairperson, drawn from a cross-section of the Australian community.

The membership must be representative of the cultural diversity of the Australian community and must have a reasonable gender balance. The Chairperson is expected to spend substantial time on the job.

Meetings

The Chairperson is to convene about 4 meetings of the Council annually, and other Council and Committee meetings as are necessary for the efficient performance of the Council's functions. A majority of the members constitutes a quorum.

Term of Office

Members will be appointed for a three-year term and are eligible for re-appointment.

Remuneration and Allowances

The Chairperson and members will be paid sitting fees.

Part 3: Miscellaneous

Council Secretariat

The Council's secretariat will be located in the Immigration and Multicultural Affairs portfolio.

Contracts

The Council is not authorised to enter into contracts.

Evaluation of Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the Council's performance will be evaluated during the early part of the third year of its term. Based on the findings of this evaluation the Council will either have its functions confirmed or varied and continued for a further three years, or it will be wound up.

Recommendation 31

*Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments have enacted a number of policies and programs that promote or complement multiculturalism. The Council considers it essential that, where appropriate, linkages are developed and maintained between these initiatives. The Council **recommends** that the proposed agency be given responsibility to promote cooperation between Commonwealth, State and Territory agencies in relation to multiculturalism. It must also have clear and strong administrative linkages to other relevant bodies such as the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, the Australian Citizenship Council and other agencies concerned with different aspects of human diversity.*

Government Response

Supported. This will provide another means of achieving better coordination in relation to multicultural policy across all levels of government. It will complement the work of the Council of Ministers for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. It is also noted that DIMA currently has responsibility for maintaining appropriate links to relevant bodies such as the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and the Australian Citizenship Council.

To assist with the ready exchange of information between all levels of government, and to make it available to the general community, the Commonwealth will establish a 'Diversity Australia' home page. While the Government will look to the Council for Multicultural Australia for advice about the home page, and items from all levels of government could be included, it will be used for information of national significance.

The Diversity Australia home page will also be used as a tool to facilitate international networking. It will have an important role to play in projecting Australian multiculturalism overseas, as well as a means of gathering information about the practices in other countries that could be used to inform policy development in Australia.

Recommendation 32

*The Council considers that community harmony will be enhanced if the concerns of critics of multiculturalism are treated seriously and responded to constructively even though they represent a minority. The Council believes that much of the concern about Australian multiculturalism stems from lack of information or misunderstanding about it. The Council believes that it is particularly important to communicate what multiculturalism means because of the inclusive approach to multicultural policy being recommended by this report. We are all Australians and, while racially, culturally and socially diverse, we have fundamental equalities and similarities as individual people. The Council **recommends** that the agency described above take responsibility for developing and implementing the communication strategy both immediately and on an ongoing basis. An important element of communication is that to be truly effective it needs to be a two-way process. It is therefore essential that the communication strategy involve an active program of consultation and discussion, as well as other means of gaining feedback from the community to ensure that the development of Australian multiculturalism always takes such input into account.*

Government Response

Supported. Given the importance of community-wide understanding of the principles of Australian multiculturalism, the Commonwealth will work closely with the Council for Multicultural Australia to implement a communication strategy, following an evaluation of the *Living in Harmony* initiative. Its key objective will be to raise awareness and understanding that cultural diversity is important to all Australians and that it is in the national interest to maximise the benefits of Australia's cultural diversity. This will include countering myths and misunderstandings and promoting behaviour patterns and attitudes that build community harmony.